

PALESTINIANS GENOCIDE IN THE TIME OF MODERN ENLIGHTENMENT

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Abstract

This article critically examines the paradox of still ongoing genocidal violence against the Palestinian people at a time when the world is supposed to operate on human rights, legal norms, and ethical governance. It can draw from historical events, legal definitions, and scholarly concepts to discuss how Israel's policies based on settler colonialism, implemented through military occupation, systemic displacement, and cultural erasure, have caused the general clamour to refer to these actions as apartheid, ethnic cleansing, and genocide. This analysis puts these realities within the failure of international law and institutions, the complicity of liberal democracies, and how Western media dehumanizes Palestinian resistance. Furthermore, the paper criticizes the partial enforcement of the so-called rules-based order and emphasizes why digital resistance and grassroots advocacy could serve as a response to information war. Finally, the article ends by stating that justice, Palestinians' restitution and freedom, although moral imperatives, are also the benchmarks of the global ethic of the post-Enlightenment era.

Keywords: *Palestine, Genocide, Israeli occupation, settler colonialism, Human rights, Modern Enlightenment, Apartheid, International law, Media bias, Global accountability, BDS movement, Ethical responsibility, Gaza, West Bank, United Nations*

Introduction

The coexistence of systematic violence against the Palestinian nation in a time regarded for phenomenal human rights, international law, and improvements in global communication constitutes a moral and intellectual paradox. In the modern world, dignity, equality, and justice are principles we endeavour to practice through declarations, curricula, and institutions of our universities and diplomacy. Still, such ideals flourish rhetorically as the campaign of dispossession, dehumanization, and violence against Palestinians continues, and in a more prolonged manner, targeting Palestinians, in particular in the Gaza Strip and occupied West Bank. This contradiction between the lofty promises of Enlightenment and the brutal realities on the ground demands urgent scrutiny.

An accurate frame for this discussion has been set by defining the term 'genocide.' As per United Nations (1948), genocide is defined as acts committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national,

ethnic, racial, or religious group¹. This means killing members, causing serious bodily or mental harm, and deliberately imposing conditions designed to leave it physically unable to govern itself. These legal criteria also reach beyond simply battlefield deaths and include a series of elimination by bombs, blockades, or yet more overt policies of systemic marginalization.

Likewise, modern Enlightenment is the post-World War II global mode of thought in which human rights, self-determination, and international cooperation are paramount. It was to be, as it is now lauded, a moral turning point, the rejection of colonialism, fascism, and suicidal racial supremacy, and rooted in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1948) and subsequent legal instruments, such as the Geneva Conventions². The timing is also an era of technological advances that have exposed more than ever before information, atrocities, and pleas for justice.

However, these developments have done nothing to address the Palestinian struggle for survival and sovereignty by the powers that still maintain their stand for global justice. Impunity continues in the form of dispossessing land, refusing to grant statehood, and targeting civilian infrastructure. Therefore, this article contends that the Palestinian genocide—ongoing in one way or another is not only a humanitarian crisis but also an ethical indictment of the global order. It would seem that the Enlightenment project is incomplete when people can be erased systematically in the face of an “enlightened” world.

Historical Background

Under thorough investigation, the layered history of colonialism, shifts and colonial military occupation of settlers is part of the roots of this persistent tragedy due to the Zionist Project, geopolitical changes of the 20th century and its intersections. The origin of the conflict was the emergence of the Zionist movement at the end of the 19th century, with the aim of creating a Jewish homeland in Palestinian (historical) territory, where the native Arabs were already inhabited³. Initially, European political and nationalist movements were World War I ally with the interests of the British Empire. As stated in Pappé (2006), the 1917 Balfour Declaration states the British support for establishing Palestinian Palatini as a Jewish nation's home, regardless of the political rights of non-jegical champions. And it allowed Jews to hike and buy on the land. The resistance in Arabic was strengthened, leading to uncertainty in the 1920s and 1930s. However, the most transformative event was in 1948 when Israel was described. During this period (often called a Nakba or catastrophe by Palestinians), more than 750,000 Palestinians were either violently removed from their homes or fled their homes, over 500 villages

¹ William R Pruitt, and William R Pruitt, "What Is Genocide?," *An Introduction to the Criminology of Genocide* (2021).

² Tatah Mentan, *Sustained Terrorism on Africa: A Study of Slave-Is, Colonialism, Neocolonialism, and Globalism* (African Books Collective, 2022).

³ M Omer Farooq Saeed, *Historical Palestinian Conflict, Ottomans, Zionism, and the Religious Formation of Israel* (Al-NASR, 2023).

were destroyed, and numerous municipalities were wiped out from the map⁴. These were not random actions during the war, but actions to develop a majority of Jews in demographics and Middle Eastern fields. Since then it has been returned to Egypt, but the West Bank and Gaza are in violation of Israel's control (UN Security Council 242, 1967).

It was also the beginning of a new phase of dispossession built on the construction of illegal settlements, imposition of military law, and the fragmentation of Palestinian geography and society.

All these developments lie within the logic of settler colonialism. They are a part of War and Weather, a settler colonial structure, not an event⁵. War and Weather seek not just to govern the native but to replace the native. In addition to displacing Palestinians, Israel's policies of land seizure, home demolitions, and settlement expansion have sought to erase Palestinians' cultural and historical claims to the land. Cultural genocide involves denying residents basic civil and national rights in addition to trying to rewrite history and controlling the narrative.

In addition, the character of Israeli control turned to a complex military regime. This involves a severe blockade from 2007 in Gaza that rendered the territory into an open-air prison and the West Bank compartmentalized into enclaves ringed by settlements, walls, and checkpoints⁶. Durverger also notes that the Israeli military almost entirely controls movement, resources, and life in general, reinforcing a system of domination and subjugation that has lasted for decades.

Contemporary Realities

Today, Palestine is defined by a worsening occupation, persistent and systemic violence, and humanitarian calamity, which contradict the post-Enlightenment ideals of justice, human dignity, and self-determination. On the contrary, international legal frameworks and diplomatic discourse urging for peace and human rights coexisted with Israel's inhumane policies against Palestinians that are embedded with structural oppression and, more often than not, continue to receive more negative reactions, such as being denounced as apartheid and possibly genocide⁷.

Gaza: Blockade and Siege

Israel has enforced a stringent blockade by land, air, and sea on the Gaza Strip, which is inhabited by more than two million Palestinians., the large majority of whom are refugees, since 2007⁸. Instead, though, the blockade has been presented by Israel as a means of preventing Hamas, but rather has been likened by the United Nations (United Nations OCHA, 2020) to a 'collective punishment.' In the healthcare system, Gaza is near collapse, unemployment is more than 40 percent, and clean water and electricity are virtually out of reach. Border control, imports, exports, and even caloric

⁴ Joseph Choonara, "A Second Nakba?," *International Socialism* 181 (2024).

⁵ Lorenzo Veracini, *The World Turned inside Out: Settler Colonialism as a Political Idea* (Verso Books, 2021).

⁶ Ashjan Ajour, "Unveiling the Colonial Violence of Space in the Gaza Genocide," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* (2025).

⁷ Tor Krever et al., "On International Law and Gaza: Critical Reflections," *London review of international law* 12, no. 2 (2024).

⁸ Neve Gordon, and Muna Haddad, "The Road to Famine in Gaza," *The New York Review of Books* 1 (2024).

intake models are controlled by Israel, whereby the population is under siege (UNRWA, 2022).

West Bank: Settlements and Apartheid Infrastructure

In violation of international law, Israeli settlements on the West Bank, Palestinian and national plots encounter unconnected enclaves. In 2023, over 700,000 settlers lived in the West Bank and East Jerusalem⁹. The construction of a matrix from bypass roads, apartheid walls and military control points has limited Palestine movements and access to arable land, education and healthcare. Such infrastructure functions for security purposes and is also an instrument of control and demographic engineering (Yesh Din, 2020).

Displacement and the Refugee Crisis

According to UNRWA (2022), more than 5.9 million Palestinian refugees are registered with the UNRWA, many of whom live in overcrowded camps in Gaza, the West Bank, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. Still, they remain stateless. They are denied their right of return, as written in UN Resolution 194. There are also regular house demolitions and evictions enforced under discriminatory zoning laws in East Jerusalem and Area C of the West Bank, forced displacement in cycles.

The Israelis have been accused dozens of times of targeting civilians, medical facilities, and journalists—crimes against international humanitarian law. The loss of numerous civilians, including a significant number of children, was documented when thousands of civilians were killed during repeated military operations in Gaza, such as in 2014 and 2021¹⁰. Shireen Abu Akleh, a veteran al Jazeera correspondent, was shot while wearing press gear, underscoring the risks journalists face in their line of work.

Technological Domination and Surveillance

Palestinians are targeted by Israel using highly advanced means like drones, AI-powered facial recognition, and cyber surveillance technologies like Pegasus spyware, etc. In addition to using these technologies for intelligence gathering, they are used for psychological warfare and social control¹¹.

For instance, biometric databases and AI put in use at checkpoints have transformed occupied Palestine into a dystopian surveillance state.

Case Studies

- **2014 Gaza War (Operation Protective Edge):** In 51 days, over 2,100 Palestinians, mostly civilians, were killed. Shuja'iyya flattened entire neighborhoods¹².
- **2021 Sheikh Jarrah and Al-Aqsa Clashes:** Nationwide protests broke out following the forced removal of Palestinian families from Sheikh Jarrah,

⁹ Amir Reicher, "Between Two Messiahs: An Ethnography of Settler-Colonizers in the West Bank" (City University of New York, 2023).

¹⁰ Beheshta Harghandiwal, "Impact of the Humanitarian Crisis in Gaza on Children's Health: Evidence and Recommendations for Mitigation," *Global Public Health* 20, no. 1 (2025).

¹¹ Yang Pachankis, "Mass Surveillance, Behavioural Control, and Psychological Coercion: The Moral Ethical Risks in Commercial Devices," *Computer Science & Information Technology* 12, no. 13 (2022).

¹² Fintan Drury, *Catastrophe: Nakba II* (Merrion Press, 2025).

which was succeeded by violent incursions at Al Aqsa Mosque on the most sacred night of Ramadan, the Islamic holy month, and another series of airstrikes on Gaza.

- **2023–2024 Gaza Bombardments:** The level of destruction is unprecedented, and whole city blocks are gone, with numbers rising over 30,000 Palestinians reported killed by early 2024. The places struck included hospitals, schools, and UN shelters, worsening the humanitarian catastrophe¹³.

These patterns of attack are not random acts of war; they are the sustained policy of subjugation. When considered in its entirety, this presents a strong argument; together, they fulfill certain elements of the genocide definition, particularly the intention to partially eliminate a national group, as outlined by the UN.

Modern Enlightenment and Global Hypocrisy

This was the transformative vision of humans that the Enlightenment era gave rise to based on reason, equality, liberty, and universal human rights. Its philosophical legacy gave rise to modern democratic principles, the establishment of legal systems, and international human rights charters. Internationally, the principles were established Following World War II, significant developments such as the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, the Geneva Conventions, and the creation of entities like the United Nations and the International Criminal Court, among others, took place.¹⁴ The objective of these advancements was to ensure that the world would remain vigilant in preventing widespread acts of violence.

In reality, however, these ideals are hollow when compared to the plight of the Palestinian people.

One area of particular contradiction to these Enlightenment ideals and Western policy is the United States and European Union's continued unbroken support of Israel when Israel violates international law. Subsidized by over \$3.8 billion every year from the United States¹⁵, Israel's largest military backer — over \$3 billion of which goes toward defense systems and weaponry used repeatedly to batter Gaza — upped its military aid by approximately \$10 billion in 2020¹⁶. The war crimes, regardless of documented evidence of targeting of civilians, hospitals, and press personnel (Amnesty International, 2022), are constantly supported. Meanwhile, Palestinian narratives are consistently censored from mainstream media and digital platforms. Palestinian content has been repeatedly removed or suppressed through social media companies' guise of 'hate speech' or 'community standard' while allowing inflammatory or dehumanizing content against Palestinians to spread. Expressions of solidarity through movements such as Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) have also been criminalized as antisemitic by Western

¹³ Ilan Pappé, *A Very Short History of the Israel–Palestine Conflict* (Simon and Schuster, 2024).

¹⁴ Fadiyah Sami Al-Khasawneh, "Principles of Human Rights in the Light of International Law-Study of the Jordanian Situation in Accordance with International Standards," *JL Pol'y & Globalization* 121 (2022).

¹⁵ Tariq Dana, "Death Dealers: Dynamics of Israel's Permanent War Economy," *Capital & Class* (2024).

¹⁶ James L Gelvin, *The Contemporary Middle East in an Age of Upheaval* (Stanford University Press, 2021).

governments, even though they endorse non-violent resistance traditions and international law¹⁷.

However, this selective moral compass carries across to the paralysis of international legal institutions. In fact, in the UN's Security Council, the U.S. alone has vetoed over 40 resolutions targeting Israel, which also resulted in Israel's immunity from international consequences¹⁸. Although at the International Criminal Court (ICC), investigations into Israeli war crimes have been repeatedly postponed or politically prevented (Al-Haq, 2021), it is clear that geopolitics outweighs justice.

But the most damning of them all is the invocation of this so-called 'rules-based international order,' a term that Western nation-states love to use as a disparaging arrow to aim at their adversaries. However, if Israel breaches international law by illegal settlements, apartheid policies, or indiscriminate bombing campaigns, the same powers do not apply the rules with the same consistency. This renders legal and moral order overtly selective and undermines the legitimacy of Enlightenment values and the credibility of the institutions put in place to protect the values.

The prevalence of the Enlightenment in Palestine was not only a failure of ideas but also one of tools. One of the last settler colonial regimes of the modern era has coopted the same moral vocabulary that, just a generation ago, was held to offer the means of ending colonialism and genocide. This form of hypocrisy is not merely theoretical because the consequences of this hypocrisy are that millions have their human dignity, freedom, and even life deprived of them.

Media, Propaganda, and Information Warfare

In modern war, just as in contemporary business, the essence of command is command over information. Nearly everything about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is fought with missiles and bulldozers: the stories, the headlines, the hashtags¹⁹. How media lights, particularly in the West, have shaped public awareness about the nature of power relations between the Israeli state and the Palestinians, often distorting them and facilitating boycotts to exclude voices of the Palestinian society.

Palestinian resistance is arbitrarily and consistently described as terrorism in mainstream Western media while indicting Israeli military actions as 'retaliation' or 'self-defense.' This imbalance overlooks the reality of occupation and systemic oppression. Words such as "clashes" or "conflict" negate the asymmetry of nuclear power on one side against a stateless, colonized people²⁰. This further eradicating the Palestinian suffering from the current dominant narratives without a historical framing deepens global apathy toward their plight.

¹⁷ Ronnie Fraser, and Lola Fraser, "Challenging the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (Bds) Movement," *Challenging the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions(BDS) Movement* (2023).

¹⁸ Middle East Eye, "The 49 Times the Us Used Veto Power against Un Resolutions on Israel," Middle East Eye, 2024, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/49-times-us-has-used-veto-power-against-un-resolutions-israel>.

¹⁹ Nouredine Miladi, and Aaya Miladi, "Digital Media and the War of Narratives in Reporting the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict," *Global Media Coverage of the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict: Reporting the Sheikh Jarrah Evictions*. London: IB Tauris (2023).

²⁰ Kolette Abigail Young, "The Illusion of Multilateralism: How Bilateral Deals and Un Failures Shaped the Arab-Israeli Conflict and International Law (1947-1973)" (University of Colorado at Denver, 2024).

Only after dehumanization can the justification of continued violence begin. Oftentimes, Western outlets have depicted Palestinians as irrational, violent, inherently anti-Semitic, or through other orientalist and Islamophobic tropes²¹. This allows our narrative architecture of public tolerance toward large-scale civilian casualties by proffering the Palestinian death with unfortunate but inevitable byproducts of security.

This further compounds the digitized form of censorship and the suppression of algorithms. For example, Meta (Facebook and Instagram), Twitter (now X), and TikTok have been many times accused of silencing Palestinian content, removing posts on Israeli aggression, or shadow-banning hashtags such as #SaveSheikhJarrah or #FreePalestine²². Often, these suppressions happen in conjunction with Israeli cyber units and under the guise of ‘anti-terrorism’ or ‘content moderation’ policies.

In response, Palestinian citizen journalists and digital activists exploit mobile phones, livestreams, and grassroots networks to avoid taking their claims to mainstream media and reporting these realities as they unfold from the ground. From social media, a battle of testimony and resistance has erupted, and figures such as Mohammed El-Kurd, Mona El-Kurd, and countless other nameless activists have appeared²³. Their struggle has caught the world’s attention and changed how we talk about things, even breaking the mainstream media’s monopoly over the truth.

Even with red tape, this digital resistance has been key in making use of war crimes, combatting propaganda, and asking for global liability in a world where silence has always been a powerful ally.

Ethical, Legal, and Academic Discourse

The discourse on Palestine has become an ethical, legal, and academic issue. Ilhan Pappé, Rashid Khalidi, Noura Erakat, and other leading scholars have lent their names to framing the Israeli policies not as a conventional military conflict²⁴ but as the colonial, ethnic cleansing, and increasingly genocidal policies they endeavor to be.

As Ilan Pappé discusses in his 2006 work, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, the 1948 Nakba was not a byproduct of war but a planned campaign to depopulate Palestine of its indigenous Arab population²⁵. Rashid Khalidi (2020), in *The Hundred Years’ War on Palestine*, situates the conflict within a long arc of imperial and colonial domination. However, Noura Erakat (2019) in *Justice for Some* shows how international law has been wielded to solidify Israeli control over Palestinian people and deny them the rights guaranteed by the law.

²¹ Melissa F Weiner, "Palestinian Erasure and Dehumanization in Introductory Sociology Texts," *Critical Sociology* 49, no. 6 (2023).

²² Youssra Hamdan, "Wartime Influencers: Palestinian Citizen Journalism on Instagram during the War on Gaza 2023-2024" (2024).

²³ Sophia Maria Kelsch, "Digital Resistance: #Savesheikhjarrah and the Role of Palestinian Activism on Social Media" (ISCTE-Instituto Universitario de Lisboa (Portugal), 2022).

²⁴ Sahar F Aziz, "Presumptively Antisemitic: Islamophobic Tropes in the Palestine Israel Discourse," *Rutgers Center for Security, Race and Rights, Rutgers Law School Research Paper* (2023).

²⁵ Nour Albobali, *Restoring Palestinian Histories: A Qualitative Account of the History of Sources and the Nakba* (2024).

For several years, various legal and academic circles have been consumed by a raging debate over the proper terminology. Even though some would claim that ‘ethnic cleansing’ or ‘apartheid’ better describe Israel’s plans to isolate, steal land, and expel people, the continued violence, particularly in Gaza, does fit the legal definition of genocide contained in the United Nations Convention²⁶. The UN (1948) claims that this emphasizes the intent, systemic dehumanization, and purpose to humiliate the survivors to force them to become extinct, thus strengthening the genocide argument. This ethical failure is compounded by so many liberal institutions in the Global North speaking with their chins covered by their palm but remaining silent or complicit. Due to this fear, prestigious universities, rights organizations, and mainstream intellectuals tend to avoid or dilute criticism of Israel. Such silence also furthers atrocities and offers evidence of the moral bankruptcy of institutions that presume to defend universal human rights.

Yet, resistance continues from international civil society actors, the international grassroots activists, legal scholars, and moral voices of the south. Movements for boycott, divestment, and sanctions (BDS), engagement with justice at the International Criminal Court, and solidarity from decolonial movements around the world represent a growing ethical imperative to contend with injustice wherever it is situated and, significantly, whether it is masked under democratic culture or security paradigms.

Conclusion and Call to Action

The Palestinian people continue to suffer in an abomination which, more than ever before, exposes a profound contradiction in the world as we have it today. Given the spread of norms for the protection of human rights, international law, and global information access, why can genocide continue to take place? The Palestinian question represents a paradox in the key of a population that is systematically driven from its land, denigrated, and subjected to exterminatory violence on the one hand and an international community avowing justice, dignity, and the sanctity of life on the other.

The cost of global silence and complicity is counted in just Palestinian lives lost, but it is also being paid in the foundations of the post-World War II world order corroding. Such is the hollow promise of Enlightenment when liberal democracies arm an apartheid regime, international institutions deny or delay accountability, and intellectuals rationalize and obscure oppression. According to Judith Butler (2020), “Nonviolence cannot be an abstract principle if it is to have any effect; it must have regard for structures of domination.” Failing to do so in Palestine also debases the credibility of every legal and moral framework that claims to prevent genocide.

Now, we need not outrage for reputation but global accountability. Full and unhindered investigations of violations of international law by the International Criminal Court, robust support for grassroots movements

²⁶ Jay Sekulow, and Robert Ash, "Why Allegations That Israel Is An'apartheid'state Are False under International Law," *Available at SSRN 4343950* (2023).

such as BDS, and political means of holding systemic violence states accountable and keeping them isolated must also be used in this respect²⁷. It is also about moral courage to break the silence about the oppressor's deed and to stand in solidarity with the oppressed by institutions, scholars, artists, and journalists.

So, suppose there is any struggle for justice for Palestinians. In that case, it is not a peripheral geopolitical question but a defining test of the moral integrity of all of us in this global village. To legitimize the international human rights project, justice restitution and liberation for the Palestinian people are not abstract ideals. Drawing on the words of Edward Said (1999), "There is nothing fixed in history, and justice can be delayed but not denied forever. It now falls to the world to decide if it will continue to allow injustice or it must at last fight it... and finally achieve Enlightenment in fact, not words.

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