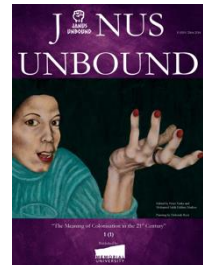


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On Zionism, Palestinian Liberation, and the Power of Language

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Selective Histories of Colonialism

When European powers held their infamous Berlin Conference in 1885, during which they agreed to divide the African continent among themselves, they did not employ such terms as enslavement, illegal seizure, exploitation, or genocide. Instead, they made references to “instructing the natives,” “bringing home to them the blessings of civilization,” and encouraging “the maintenance of peace (and) the development of civilization” (General Act 1885). Similarly, when Britain and France received Mandates from the League of Nations in the 1920s to serve as the supposed caretakers of their colonies in Africa and the Middle East, there was hardly any reference in the language of these Mandates to British and French geopolitical interests in serving this role; instead, many positive references asserted the need for allowing colonized countries access to their “own schools for the education of (their) own members in (their) own language,” among many other misleading claims (League of Nations 1922).

Utilizing positive language to frame horrific historical events is a core element in the historical discourses of colonialism and neocolonialism. According to this twisted but instrumental language, the United States invaded Afghanistan in 2001 to, allegedly, eradicate terrorism and then invaded Iraq in 2003, to export democracy to the Arabs (Encarnación 2005). The same logic has been applied to many other geographic spaces before and after the genocidal wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Every war, so it seemed, was motivated by pure intentions—democracy, human rights, women’s liberation, freedom of speech, global security, and so on.

Similar to its main benefactor, the United States, Israel, too, has proven particularly efficient in the application of language to justify its protracted siege and bloody onslaughts in the Gaza Strip, military occupation, and apartheid in the West Bank and East Jerusalem (Human Rights Watch 2021). Not once since its creation on the ruins of Palestinian villages in 1948—a catastrophic event known by Palestinians as the *Nakba*—has Israel ever accepted any moral responsibility for its actions. According to Israel, every act of ethnic cleansing,

every war, every massacre, and every expression of racism and apartheid had some kind of logical, legal, and even moral justification (Pappé 2006).

This article focuses mainly on the use of language in the case of Israeli colonialism and occupation of Palestine, with a particular emphasis on how Israel's Zionist ideology has invented its unique phraseology to ensure the story of its founding is always told from a political and historical discourse that is sympathetic to the Israeli cause. Finally, the article argues for the need of Palestinians to challenge the Zionist discourse and eventually claim their own narrative as part of their ongoing struggle for liberation and, ultimately, decolonization.

In May 2013, the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* obtained a document from the Israeli State Archives: GL-18/17028. The document is a rare primary source that testifies to the logic through which the post-*Nakba* Israeli political and historical modus operandi was formed. Explaining the significance of its find, *Haaretz* reported:

The Israeli censor's observant eye had missed file number GL-18/17028 in the State Archives. Most files relating to the 1948 Palestinian exodus remain sealed in the Israeli archives, despite the fact that their period as classified files—according to Israeli law—expired long ago. (Hazkani 2013)

Most official State documents concerning the massacres, rapes, and wanton destruction continue to be classified as Top Secret, making it extremely difficult for Israel's own historians to unveil the truth—of which Palestinians are already aware—to the Israeli public (Morris 2019). This particular file was an exception:

By the end of the 1950s, Ben-Gurion had reached the conclusion that the events of 1948 would be at the forefront of Israel's diplomatic struggle, in particular the struggle against the Palestinian national movement. If the Palestinians had been expelled from their land, as they had maintained already in 1948, the international community would view their claim to return to their homeland as justified. However, Ben-Gurion believed, if it turned out that they had left 'by choice,' having been persuaded by their leaders that it was best to depart temporarily and return after the Arab victory, the world community would be less supportive of their claim. (Hazkani 2013)

The story goes on to explain how Ben Gurion, with the help of Israel's top historians and researchers, fabricated a narrative that would eventually serve as Israel's everlasting retort to the accusation that Israel was founded upon ethnically cleansed Palestinian land. Only one example, GL-18/17028, shows how Israel's official language concerning political and historical contexts is the culmination of a centralized strategy—and, also tellingly, how the "Middle East's only democracy" is, in fact, one of the most controlled societies regarding freedom of information and speech in the region, particularly when such freedoms contradict the official censor's narrative on Palestine and Israel.

Little has changed since those early days when Israel laboured to concoct a romanticized, albeit fabricated, story of its own birth. The historical forgery persists, and will continue for as long as Israel remains a racially structured apartheid state, and as long as the Israeli military occupation remains in place.

Following in Ben Gurion's footsteps, Israel's longest-serving Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, excelled in the field of rhetorical manipulation and historical forgery as well. In June 2017, Netanyahu participated in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), held in the Liberian capital of Monrovia. There, too, the Israeli leader found it critical to rewrite history. He had no choice, as Israel is the representation of the very enemy in Africa's anti-colonial past and present. "Africa and Israel share a natural affinity," Netanyahu claimed in his speech, explaining: "We have, in many ways, similar histories. Your nations toiled under foreign rule. You experienced horrific wars and slaughters. This is very much our history" (Benjamin Netanyahu Official Site 2017).

In this ahistorical Israeli discourse, the Israelis replace the Palestinian natives as the indigenous people of Palestine; Zionism becomes an anti-colonial national movement; and, the colonial power becomes the oppressed colonized people. Following this rationale, it would be safe to argue that, in essence, the entirety of Israel's official historical trajectory follows the same historical falsehood: a self-tailored and convenient logic.

The Dominant Israeli-Zionist Narrative

Israeli colonialism is not unique in history, and the Palestinian anti-colonial struggle is an essential part of complex, costly, and inspiring historical battles for liberation and collective self-assertion. Colonial wars of exploitation and anti-colonial wars of liberation are also, themselves, situated in a larger historical context of class struggle that is relevant to each and every society, regardless of time and place.

In socio-economic struggles, too, language use is paramount to the control of power. In "The German Ideology," Marx and Engels write that "the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e., the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force." They go on to assert that "the class which has the means of material production at its disposal has control at the same time over the means of mental production" and conclude with "the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it" (Marx and Engels 1998, 67). These ideas inform the concept of cultural hegemony, which originated with Antonio Gramsci and "refers to domination or rule maintained through ideological or cultural means. It is usually achieved through social institutions, which allow those in power to strongly influence the values, norms, ideas, expectations, worldview and behavior of the rest of society" (Cole 2020).

One of the main fields where this hegemony is directly observed is the domain of political and state discourse, whether in general (as in the degree of importance that certain words or phrases are assigned and given power over others), or in the particular (as in the choice of words and expressions that become instrumental to the dissemination of the political perspective of dominant powers). For example, the US war on Iraq was almost entirely discussed in mainstream media and society using specific parameters and keywords imposed by the official US discourse. Thus the constant emphasis on the "war on terror," the "spreading of democracy," the "protection of human rights," and so on (Harmon, Muenchen 2009). Guided by the same reasoning

and intentions, in the Israeli case, we tend to use Israeli military code names when referring to the various wars on Gaza. We speak of Operation Protective Edge to refer to the Israeli war on Gaza in 2014 (IDF.il 2021), while largely unaware of the fact that Palestinians, too, had names of their own to delineate such violent events. Protective Edge, for Palestinians, is “Eaten Straw” (Al-Zaytouna 2014): in Arabic, *al-ʿAsf al-Maʿkool*. The Israeli code name used the adjective “Protective” to accentuate its habitual emphasis on its own “security;” Palestinians used a Quranic reference from the short *surah*, or chapter, called “The Elephant” (Quran). The Palestinian Arabic reference highlights that their resistance carries a deep historical and spiritual meaning, which also helps appeal to a larger global Arab and Muslim audience. By embracing the first term and ignoring the other, we, though often unwittingly, accept the Israeli logic and reject the Palestinian one.

This controlling rhetoric is particularly pronounced in the so-called “Palestinian-Israeli conflict.” The Zionist movement has, undoubtedly, succeeded in penetrating mainstream political discourse in the West, offering its own colonial discourse as the dominant one for the ongoing, so-called “conflict.” Indeed, even before the creation of Israel atop the ruins of Palestinian towns and villages, Zionism has relied on two fundamental elements to sustain and expand its colonial ambitions: first, the material (the systematic violence, land grab, ethnic cleansing, construction of “Jewish-only” roads and settlements, etc.), and second, the intangible (mostly concerned with the construction of narratives, linking, as a matter of course, the Jewish people to the “land of Israel,” while erasing Palestinians as, at best, nomadic people with no past, no identity, and no roots in their own historic homeland). The famous statement by former Israeli Prime Minister, Golda Meir, in June 1969, that “there was no such thing as Palestinians,” remains one of the most glaring examples of the above assertion. Meir brazenly asserts: “It was not as if there was a Palestinian people in Palestine and we came and threw them out and took their country away from them. They did not exist” (Meir 1969).

Language matters and it matters most in this particular “conflict” because, without appropriate definitions, colonizers often evade accountability, as Israel has, thus far. Thanks to its allies and supporters in western capitals, mainstream media, and academia, Tel Aviv has, to some extent, succeeded in rebranding itself from being a military occupier and an apartheid regime to an “oasis of democracy” (Handlin 2021), if not, supposedly, “the only democracy in the Middle East” (Yinon 2020). Concurrently, it has always rebranded its enemies, the Palestinians, from being a nation fighting for its freedom, to an anti-Semitic people determined to destroy Israel.

In his essay, “Permission to Narrate,” the late Palestinian historian Edward Said highlights the unconditional mainstream embrace of the Zionist narrative and the demonization, or erasure, of the Palestinian version of history altogether. His essay, published in February 1984, was written within the context of the post-Israeli invasion of Lebanon and the horrific massacre of Sabra and Shatila two years earlier:

The political question of moment is why, rather than fundamentally altering the Western view of Israel, the events of the summer of 1982 have been

accommodated in all but a few places in the public realm to the view that prevailed before those events: that since Israel is in effect a civilized, democratic country constitutively incapable of barbaric practices against Palestinians and other non-Jews, its invasion of Lebanon was *ipso facto* justified. (Said 1984, 28)

And by that same erroneous logic, the Palestinian perspective is also shunned as if irrelevant, immaterial, and an infringement on Israeli and, by extension, Western political and historical sensibilities:

The Palestinian narrative has never been officially admitted to Israeli history, except as that of ‘non-Jews,’ whose inert presence in Palestine was a nuisance to be ignored or expelled. With the exception of a small and marginal group of Israelis, most of Israel has, as a result, not found it difficult to get over the story of the Lebanese war and its subsequent horrors. (Said 1984, 33)

The obvious inequity between the Zionist and Palestinian discourses in mainstream western media is often highlighted by US intellectual Noam Chomsky, with reference to the narratives and rhetoric used by Western media to present—or, rather, misrepresent—its perception of “facts” related to the Israeli invasion of Lebanon.

When a PLO terrorist group took Israeli teen-age members of a paramilitary (*Gadna*) group hostage at Ma’alot, that was rightly denounced as a vicious criminal act. Since then, it has become virtually the symbol of the inhuman barbarism of the ‘two-legged beasts.’ But when Israeli troops cart off the Palestinian male population from 15 to 60 (along with many thousands of Lebanese) to concentration camps, treating them in a manner to which we return, that is ignored, and the few timid queries are almost drowned in the applause—to which we also return—for Israel’s display of humanitarian zeal and moral perfection, while aid is increased in honor of this achievement. It is a scene that should give Americans pause, and lead them to raise some questions about themselves. (Chomsky 1999, 382)

Still, this is not a discussion that is concerned with journalistic integrity, per se, or the need for greater “balance” in reporting, but in the unconditional embrace of Israel’s own colonialism in Palestine by former colonial and current neocolonial powers in the West, and the accompanying discourse that is used to rationalize, justify, and defend this ongoing colonialism. Identifying the issue as such would render the platitudes moot, however sincere, of the need for more journalistic “balance” in understanding the “Palestinian-Israeli conflict.” Even if that coveted balance is finally achieved, the rapport between Western and Israeli colonialism is unlikely to be entirely severed, as the language used by Israel to describe its military occupation and justify its colonialism, military occupation, and apartheid in Palestine is akin to the very language used by the US in Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Iraq, and the language scrupulously chosen by colonial Britain, France, and other European powers to explain their colonial intrigues in much of the southern hemisphere.

Alas, our understanding of history is not shaped by mere demonstrable facts or truths, but largely by our own emphasis of what “facts” matter most and, as

in the case of Israel, the creation and fabrication of new “facts.” The colonized, too, have their own “facts” and unique interpretation of their history, but when their voices are completely removed from any discussion, the only “side” (thus, “facts”) that matter is the self-serving narrative of the colonizer. Said is once again on point:

Facts do not at all speak for themselves, but require a socially acceptable narrative to absorb, sustain and circulate them. Such a narrative has to have a beginning and an end: in the Palestinian case, a homeland for the resolution of its exile since 1948. (Said 1984, 34)

For Palestinians to assert their own truths, facts, and interpretation, they must rationally carry out two simultaneous acts: first, dismantle the system of hegemonic discourse established by settler-colonial Zionist ideology and sustained by Israel’s Western benefactors; and, second, offer their own narratives situated in their own history, culture, and political priorities as the only alternative to the ever hegemonic, dominant, and, ultimately, fallacious Israeli colonial discourse.

Language and Its Discontents

On 25 May 2021 famous American actor, Mark Ruffalo, tweeted an apology for suggesting, in an earlier post, that Israel is committing “genocide” in Gaza:

I have reflected & wanted to apologize for posts during the recent Israel/Hamas fighting that suggested Israel is committing ‘genocide.’ It’s not accurate, it’s inflammatory, disrespectful & is being used to justify antisemitism here & abroad. Now is the time to avoid hyperbole. (@Ruffalo 2021)

But were Ruffalo’s earlier assessments, indeed, “not accurate” or “inflammatory and disrespectful”? And, does equating Israel’s war on besieged, impoverished Gaza with genocide fit into the classification of “hyperbole”? To address these questions is to delve into the very heart of the language politics of the anti-colonial Palestinian struggle.

Ruffalo’s apology was unnecessary, since his earlier, accurate depiction of the nature of Israel’s behavior in occupied Palestine was consistent with the demonstrable, often tragic, reality on the ground, and the legal framework that has, with equal consistency, depicted this reality. The 1948 United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide Article 2, for example, offers what has, since then, become the internationally-accepted legal definition of genocide:

Any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, such as (a) Killing members of the group; (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part. (UN Convention 1948)

But does this apply to Israel? In its description of Israel’s 10-21 May 2021 war on Gaza, the Geneva-based human rights group, Euro-Med Monitor, reported:

The Israeli forces directly targeted 31 extended families. In 21 cases, the homes of these families were bombed while their residents were inside. These raids resulted in the killing of 98 civilians, including 44 children and 28 women. Among the victims were a man and his wife and children, mothers and their children, or child siblings. There were seven mothers who were killed along with four or three of their children. The bombing of these homes and buildings came without any warning despite the Israeli forces' knowledge that civilians were inside. (Euro-Mediterranean 2021)

According to estimates by the Palestinian Ministry of Health, by the end of the war over 250 Palestinians had been killed and nearly 2,000 were wounded (Euro-Mediterranean 2021). Though tragic, this number is relatively small compared to the casualties of previous wars. For example, in the 51-day Israeli war on Gaza in the summer of 2014, over 2,200 Palestinians were killed and over 17,000 were wounded (Baroud 2017). Similarly, entire families, like the 25-member Abu Jame family in Khan Younis, also perished (Amnesty International 2021). The same logic can be applied to the killing of over 300 unarmed protesters at the fence separating besieged Gaza from Israel, between March 2018 and December 2019. Moreover, the siege and utter isolation of over two million Palestinians in Gaza since 2006-07, which has resulted in numerous tragedies, is an act of collective punishment that also deserves the designation of genocide (UN 2018).

But one need not be a legal expert to point at evidence of a strong case of Israeli genocide in Palestine. Equally damning is the language of violence and genocide that inundates past and current Israeli discourse. For example, current Israeli Prime Minister, Naftali Bennett, who has also served in the role of Defense Minister in past governments, stated: "I've killed lots of Arabs in my life—and there's no problem with that" (Bennett 2013). The ease with which Palestinians can be killed without consequences for their killers has preceded the foundation of Israel itself, and continues to mar the country's political discourse to this day. Indeed, the language of genocide has always been a major facet accompanying Zionist colonialism. Palestine, according to early Zionist ideologues, was "a land with no people" for "a people with no land" (Nashef 2016). These colonists, in their own understanding of history, were never "illegal settlers" but "Jewish returnees" to their "ancestral homeland" who, through hard work and perseverance, managed to "make the desert bloom" and, in order to defend themselves against the "hordes of Arabs" they needed to build an "invincible army" as they, supposedly, did (Roberts et al. 2021).

"Conflict" and its inaccurate insinuations, like the term "dispute"—as in the "disputed East Jerusalem"—are equally problematic. It should be obvious that besieged, occupied, and colonized people do not engage in a "conflict" with their occupiers and that their ancestral homeland should not be a subject of "dispute" (France 2017). Moreover, a "dispute" happens when two parties have possibly compelling claims to an issue. When Palestinian families of East Jerusalem are being forced out of their homes, which are, in turn, handed over to Jewish extremists, the term "dispute" cannot be applicable in any way (Action Aid 2021). The extremists are violent colonists and the Palestinians are colonized victims who are fighting to retain their legal and moral rights to their homes and

land. The international community, despite its failure at aiding the rightful Palestinian struggle for justice, says so (UN, 2021).

“Conflict” is not just a generic term but a dangerous one, too. Aside from absolving the aggressor—in this case, Israel—it leaves all matters open to interpretation. Since US audiences, for example, are indoctrinated to love Israel and to have a negative view of Arabs and Muslims, allying with Israel in its “conflict” with the Palestinians, who are Arab and Muslim in the majority, becomes the only rational option (Khan et al. 2012).

Approximately 78% of the total size of historic Palestine was colonized by Zionist militias, later Israel, in 1947-48. The remainder, approximately 22%, was militarily occupied and colonized by Israel in 1967. Since then, a slow but decisive process of colonization—what Israel refers to as “annexation”—has taken place. The process of usurping Palestine required the use of extreme violence, state-sanctioned apartheid, and what Israeli historian, Ilan Pappé (2014), calls “incremental genocide.” From the perspective of international law, these processes of colonization, occupation, and violence are the pillars of what the United Nations insists on framing as an “illegal Israeli occupation” (UN 1999). The UN does not use such terms as “dispute” to condemn the illegal settlements in occupied Palestine. However, the insistence of mainstream media and academia to make such noncommittal and often confusing references (to conflict, dispute, etc.) serves the Israeli narrative well, as it allows Tel Aviv to mask its violent colonial action as if it is something else entirely: something to be disputed, argued, and even justified.

The discussion can be expanded to include a plethora of other misleading terms. For example, the phrase “peace process” was coined by American diplomats decades ago. It was put to use throughout the mid- and late 1970s when then-US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger laboured to broker a deal between Egypt and Israel in the hope of fragmenting the Arab political front and, eventually, sidelining Cairo entirely from the “Arab-Israeli conflict.” Alas, he succeeded (Satloff 2018).

Kissinger’s logic proved vital for Israel as the “process” did not aim at achieving justice according to the fixed criterion that had been delineated by the UN for years. There were no frames of reference any more. If any existed, they were Washington’s political priorities which, historically, almost entirely mirrored Israel’s priorities. Despite the obvious American bias, the US bestowed upon itself the undeserved title of “the honest peace broker” (Hatuqa 2018). This approach was used successfully in the run-up to the Camp David Accords in 1978 (Carter 2020). One of the Accords’ greatest achievements is that the so-called “Arab-Israeli conflict” was then replaced with the so-called “Palestinian-Israeli conflict.”

Tried and true, the “peace process” was used again in 1993, resulting in the Oslo Accords between Israel and the leaders of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). For nearly three decades, the US continued to tout its self-proclaimed credentials as a peacemaker despite the fact that it pumped three to four billion dollars of annual aid to Israel, most of it military (and continues to do so) (Baker et al. 2016).

As far as Palestinians are concerned, they have little to show. No actual peace was ever achieved; no justice was obtained; not an inch of Palestinian land was

returned; and, not a single Palestinian refugee was allowed home. However, US and European officials and a massive corporate media apparatus continued to talk of a “peace process” with little regard to the fact that the “peace process” brought nothing but war and destruction for Palestine, and allowed Israel to continue its illegal appropriation and colonization of Palestinian land.

But the “peace process” introduced more than death, mayhem, and normalization of land theft in Palestine. It also wrought its own register of linguistic phrases and terms, which remains in effect to this day. Practically speaking, the “peace process” lexicon divided Palestinians into “moderates” and “extremists.” The “moderates” believe in the US-led “peace process,” “peace negotiations,” and are ready to make “painful compromises” in order to obtain that coveted “peace.” On the other hand, the “extremists” are “Iran-backed,” a politically “radical” bunch that use violent “terrorism” to satisfy their “dark” political agendas (*Times of Israel* 2021).

But is this the case? Since the signing of the Oslo Accords, many sectors of Palestinian society, including Muslims and Christians, Islamists and secularists, and notably socialists, resisted the unwarranted political “compromises” undertaken by their leadership, which they perceived to be a betrayal of Palestinians’ basic rights. Meanwhile, the “moderates” have largely ruled over Palestinians with no democratic mandate. This small, but well-funded group introduced a culture of political and financial corruption (Simons 2021), arguably unprecedented in Palestine’s modern history. They applied torture against Palestinian political dissidents as a matter of course (Human Rights Watch, Palestine 2019). Not only did Washington say little to criticize the “moderate” Palestinian Authority (PA)’s dismal human rights record, but it also urged the PA to carry out more crackdowns on those who “incite violence” and their “terrorist infrastructure.”

Correspondingly, terms such as “resistance”—*muqawama*—were slowly but carefully extricated from the Palestinian national discourse. The term “liberation,” too, was perceived to be confrontational and hostile. Instead, such concepts as “state-building”—championed by a Washington favorite, former Palestinian Prime Minister, Salam Fayyad, and others—began taking hold in the post-Oslo-years (UN 2019). The fact that Palestine was still an occupied country and that “state-building” can only be achieved once “liberation” was first secured, did not seem to matter to the “donor countries.” The priority of these countries—mainly US allies who adhered to American political maxims in the Middle East—was to maintain the illusion of the “peace process” and to ensure “security coordination” between PA police and the Israeli army carried on uninterrupted (I24 News 2020). The so-called “security coordination,” of course, refers to the US-funded joint Israeli-PA efforts at cracking down on Palestinian resistance, apprehending Palestinian political dissidents and ensuring the safety of the illegal Jewish settlements, or colonies, in the occupied West Bank (Rahman 2021).

Other terms that can be constructive and positive within certain contexts, were also applied to the Palestinian situation, but in erroneous and misleading ways. The word “democracy,” for example, was constantly featured in the new Oslo language. Of course, it was not intended to serve its actual meaning. Instead, it was the embellishment of making the illusion of the “peace process”

complete. This became obvious in January 2006, when the Palestinian party Fatah, which has monopolized the PA since its inception in 1994, lost the popular vote to the Islamic party, Hamas (Jeffery 2006). The latter is one of several other Palestinian groups that have rejected the Oslo Accords. Their participation in the legislative elections in 2006 took many by surprise, as the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) was itself a product of Oslo. Their victory in the elections, which was classified as democratic and transparent by international monitoring groups (Gov.info 2006), threw a wrench in the US-Israeli-PA political calculations.

Amazingly, the group that has long been perceived by Israel and its allies as “extremist” and “terrorist” became the elected leaders of Palestine. The Oslo language spin doctors had to go to work fast in order for them to thwart the first genuine exercise of Palestinian democracy and to ensure a successful return to the status quo, even if this meant that the fate of the Palestinian people remains in the hands of unelected, undemocratic leaders.

Meanwhile, Hamas’ stronghold, the Gaza Strip, had to be taught a lesson. Thus, the siege imposed on the impoverished region since the revelation of the 2006 elections results (OCHA 2020). The siege on Gaza has little to do with Hamas’ rockets or Israel’s “security” needs, Israel’s right to “defend itself,” or its well-intentioned attempt at destroying Gaza’s “terrorist infrastructure.” While, indeed, Hamas’ popularity in Gaza is unmatched anywhere else in Palestine, Fatah, too, has a powerful constituency there. Moreover, the Palestinian resistance in the Strip is not championed by Hamas alone, but also by other ideologically different political groups, including the Islamic Jihad, the socialist Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), and other socialist and secular parties (TRT 2021).

Yet, misrepresenting the “conflict” as a “war” between Israel and Hamas is crucial to Israeli propaganda, which has managed to equate Hamas with militant groups throughout the Middle East even as far as Afghanistan. However, Hamas is not ISIS, Al-Qaeda, or the Taliban. In fact, none of these groups are similar in any way. Hamas is a political actor that operates within a largely Palestinian political context. But what does Israel have to gain from mischaracterizing the Palestinian resistance in Gaza? Aside from satisfying its propaganda campaign of erroneously linking Hamas to anti-American Islamic groups, it also dehumanizes the Palestinian people entirely and presents Israel as a partner in the US-led global “war on terror.” In this manufactured reality, Israel’s rightwing, religious, and ultranationalist politicians assume the role of the dedicated US allies, the defenders of western civilization, and the saviors of humanity itself. Considering these supposed great moral challenges at hand, the violent language and action of Israeli leaders can then be discreetly swept under the rug where all is forgiven or forgotten. This is precisely how “genocide” can be twisted and rebranded as “self-defense.” Within this carefully molded discourse the term “colonialism,” the most relevant and accurate of all terms, is, unsurprisingly, nowhere to be found.

Reclamation

Discourses of Palestine and Israel—the selection of terminology, phrases, historical references—are part of a larger narrative war resulting from Israeli colonialism, military occupation, and apartheid in Palestine. Whereas the Israeli and pro-Israeli narratives constantly attempt to whitewash and apologize for colonialism, the Palestinian narrative is a direct expression of an ongoing attempt at confronting and exposing Zionist settler-colonialism.

The historical support of Israel by mainstream media, which is a direct expression of official Western support of Israel and its Zionist ideology, has, over time, created a suite of hegemonic rhetorical flourishes that facilitate the domination of Zionist culture and politics over all matters concerning Palestine and the Palestinian people. To counter and to, ultimately, end the Israeli dominance over the Palestine/Israel discourse, Palestinians are left with the massive task of presenting their own unified, cohesive, and comprehensive narrative, not as a counter-narrative but as a self-possessed and independent narrative of its own. Only by defeating the Zionist hegemony over what is essentially a colonial discourse, will Palestinians finally be able to free language from the confines of intentional misrepresentation and manipulation and, ultimately, free their own land as well.

Biography

Ramzy Baroud is a journalist and the editor of *The Palestine Chronicle*. He is the author of five books. His latest is *These Chains Will Be Broken: Palestinian Stories of Struggle and Defiance in Israeli Prisons* (Clarity Press, 2020). Dr. Baroud is a Non-resident Senior Research Fellow at the Center for Islam and Global Affairs (CIGA) and also at the Afro-Middle East Center (AMEC). His website is www.ramzybaroud.net.

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