

Editorial

Radical Philosophy Collective

The destruction of the means necessary to sustain life takes many forms. But while the numbers of those maimed and killed in Gaza fail to represent by themselves the scale of devastation, they do bear repeating. At the time of writing, they include over 40,000 recorded Palestinians killed by the Israeli military forces (of whom more than 15,000 are children) and many thousands more people maimed or wounded. No-one yet knows how many bodies remain buried under the 40 million tons of rubble that now litter Gaza's landscape, the result of some 70,000 tons of high explosives. As Rasha Khatib, Martin McKee and Salim Yusuf recently argued in the *Lancet*, the actual death toll may well surpass 186,000 once it accounts for 'indirect deaths' caused by other elements of Israeli strategy – the deliberate encouragement of famine and disease via near-total restrictions on aid, medical supplies, water and food. Virtually the entire population of Gaza has been displaced, often several times over.

No set of numbers alone, of course, can measure the wider human suffering and environmental devastation. Yet, at the same time, a different set of numbers was quickly fixed and defined, in scale, date and implications, on 7 October 2023 and thereafter. According to the most recent Israeli records, Hamas-led militants took 251 hostages and killed 1,139 people: 373 were members of the security forces, 71 were foreign nationals and 695 were Israeli civilians, including 36 children. On that day Israel also killed 1,609 of the assailants and captured another 200 (who joined the many thousands of Palestinians already crowded into Israeli jails). Searching questions have been asked about Israel's representation of these events, and about the role its own military played in them, but these questions have had little impact on the discourse of the dominant. Some motives for the attack were claimed by its leadership, others were attributed to it, but its classification as terrorism was automatic and unequivocal, as was justification of Israel's response as an exercise in counter-terrorism and self-defence.

Characterisation of Israel's assault poses particular challenges given this political consensus. Did it begin abruptly on 8 October? Or did it continue, with unprecedented intensity, a long-running campaign that has all too many precedents? Did it begin with the bombings that responded to the Unity Intifada of May 2021? With the sniper attacks that literally shot the legs out from under the Great March of Return in 2018? With the aerial bombardments of 2014? Or of 2012? Of 2008-9? Should we include Israeli responses to the first and second intifadas? The conquests of 1967? The original ethnic cleansings of 1948? The Balfour declaration that began this hundred years' war? Even more troubling is the most obvious and most consistently evaded question that looms over this whole history of violence: when and how, if ever, might it end?

The sheer scale and range of the kinds of violence inflicted on Palestinians over recent

years has generated a set of new terms that try to describe their specificities: ecocide, urbicide, educide and scholasticide, to name a few. The term scholasticide, coined by Karma Nabulsi after the 2009 Israeli assault on Gaza, refers to the long-running assaults on Palestinian educational institutions that have been a routine component of Israel's occupation since the Nakba. In April 2024, UN analysts expressed grave concern over the destruction of Gaza's education system, noting that the arrests, detention and targeted killings of teachers, students and staff amount to its systematic obliteration. As of early July, to cite a summary compiled by a branch of the UK's University and College Union, 'at least 95 university professors, and hundreds of school teachers and educators have been killed by Israeli forces in Gaza; all 12 universities in Gaza have been damaged or destroyed, along with well over 300 hundred schools and colleges, as well as cultural centres, archives, libraries, and museums.'

Established in 1978, the independent Islamic University of Gaza (IUG) was the first degree-awarding body to be set up in the Gaza strip, with eleven faculties including Medicine, Nursing, Engineering, Law, Education and Arts. Israel bombed it six times in December 2008, and again in August 2014. The scholar, professor, poet and activist Refaat Alareer reflected on the 2014 bombing in an essay he published two years ago.

[W]hy would Israel bomb a university? Some say Israel attacked the IUG just to punish its twenty thousand students or to push Palestinians to despair. While that is true, to me IUG's only danger to the Israeli occupation and its apartheid regime is that it is the most important place in Gaza to develop students' minds as indestructible weapons. Knowledge is Israel's worst enemy. Awareness is Israel's most hated and feared foe. That's why Israel bombs a university: it wants to kill openness and determination to refuse living under injustice and racism.

In the 2014 attacks, Israeli bombs also killed Alareer's brother along with six other members of his family. Following appearances on the BBC, ABC News and *Democracy Now!* to discuss the 7 October attacks, on 6 December 2023, Alareer himself was killed by a carefully targeted Israeli airstrike, along with his sister, brother and four of their children. His eldest daughter, her husband and their newborn child were subsequently killed by another Israeli airstrike on 26 April 2024. In December 2023, IUG's president, physics professor Sufian Tayeh, was killed along with his family in an Israeli strike on Jabalia refugee camp. The main buildings of IUG were all destroyed by massive airstrikes just four days after 7 October. The whole of Israa University's main campus was flattened by the Israeli military in a single operation on 15 January 2024. Alareer's final poem 'If I Must Die' has become a point of reference at pro-Palestinian rallies all over the world.

If scholasticide is a relatively new entry in the terminology of destruction, the generic term that best describes the violence in Gaza is of course perfectly familiar. According to the 1948 UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, any accusation of genocide must be able to demonstrate an 'intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such.' As any prosecutor knows, proof of intention is usually the most difficult part of any genocide case. Surveying the declared intentions of Israeli leaders in the aftermath of 7 October, however, the Israeli genocide scholar Raz Segal immediately recognised that their response should be classified as a 'text-book case of genocide'. Many hundreds of qualified scholars and lawyers have repeatedly confirmed his assessment. As the South African government prepared its landmark case at the International Court of Justice in January 2024, it could draw on a compilation of hundreds

of declarations of intent made by government ministers, state officials, legislators, military leaders, and so on, gathered by the group Law for Palestine. Defence Minister Yoav Gallant, for instance, repeatedly announced that ‘I have removed all restraints’ and promised ‘no electricity, no food, no water, no fuel [...]. We are fighting human animals and we are acting accordingly.’ ‘We will eliminate everything.’

As the legal arguments at and around the ICJ continue, the body count increases by the hour. The ICJ’s provisional measures ruling of January 2024, that Israel’s conduct in Gaza constitutes a ‘plausible risk’ of genocide, quickly became both touchstone and catalyst for dozens of legal actions, policy briefs and activist demands. The fact that further provisional measures were sought in May 2024, however, points to the futility of international legal proceedings in the face of what remains the most basic fact of the situation, a fact sanctioned by this very legal order itself: the impunity of Israel and its allies. The post-war international legal and political system – which since its inception has either been ignored or manipulated by powerful states and their clients to justify whatever actions they might want to take – is not so much being torn to shreds as being superseded altogether.

Meanwhile the international legal principles that might inform critical discussion of the events of 7 October, or Palestinian resistance in general, have effectively been erased from political memory. The additional protocols adopted in 1977 to supplement the Geneva Conventions of 1949 extended their scope to include ‘armed conflicts in which peoples are fighting against colonial domination and alien occupation and against racist régimes in the exercise of their right of self-determination’ (article 1, section 4); and in 1982, the UN General Assembly’s resolution 37/43 further confirmed ‘the legitimacy of the struggle of peoples for independence, territorial integrity, national unity and liberation from colonial and foreign domination and foreign occupation by all available means, including armed struggle.’ The right to resist occupation with the use of force was recently reaffirmed in the opinion of Justice Hilary Charlesworth in the ICJ’s advisory opinion of 19 June 2024, which considered the legality of Israel’s occupation of Gaza, Jerusalem and the West Bank. The ICJ found Israel’s occupation of the Palestinian Territories, recognised by the Court as a contiguous territory, to be unequivocally illegal on multiple bases of international law, and one which must end immediately. Whether this ruling becomes part of the political arsenal to achieve some form of Palestinian liberation, or suffers the same fate as so many previous UN Resolutions on the same, remains to be seen and acted upon.

In his opening remarks at the UN COP28 climate summit, Colombian President Gustavo Petro warned that ‘What we are seeing in Gaza is a rehearsal of the future.’ The Israeli genocide offers one vision of the future, but, despite ongoing censorship of so many educational, political and cultural institutions and violence against protestors, the resurgence of a global solidarity movement proposes another. This movement is a refusal of what the war on Gaza portends, and a total rejection of the impunity that has emboldened Israel and its allies to pursue their course of annihilation. In Palestinian steadfastness, the global solidarity protests, the student encampments, dissenting discourse and direct actions and demonstrations of all kinds, lies the articulation and enactment of a politics and ethics that, as Samera Esmeir describes, seek to ‘say and think a life beyond what settler colonialism has made’.