From 'War on Terror' to War on Palestine: Torture, Political Imagination and the Animality of War

Salman Hussain[1]

Abstract: This paper examines 'viral atrocities' of the Israeli soldiers in the war on Gaza (2023-ongoing), and suggests examining the 'political imagination' (Kahn 2007) lurking behind these violent transgressions. Making parallels with the U.S. 'war on terror', it further suggests that both cases show that behind all acts of political violence, including torture, there lies an imaginary that first de-humanizes 'the enemy' and frames them as 'torturable populations'.

Debates over the legal definition of torture generate important questions about human rights, international law, and the conduct of war, but they limit our analytical and ethical horizons. These efforts bracket off torture as an 'individual pathology' or a 'legal violation' and do not consider the broader political and historical context in which it is practiced, justified, as well as recognised as torture or escape recognition as such. When we acknowledge and analyze torture as a 'political phenomenon', only then can see how the violent transgressions that constitute torture create and nurture 'political meaning' about oneself, the others and the nature and the use of violence against those others.

Introduction

A recent essay in *Sapiens* examining "viral atrocities" posted by the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) soldiers on social media suggests that these visuals of war 'reframe' the excessive violence of the IDF against Palestinians as evidence of their victory in the war (Goodfriend 2024). Short videos and photographs of IDF soldiers blowing up Palestinian homes, violating privacy during enforced absences, and mocking intimate and domestic Palestinian lives began circulating on platforms like TikTok and Telegram soon after the IDF entered Gaza, following Hamas' attack on Israeli settlements, civilians, and military targets outside Gaza on October 7th, 2023.[2] Foregrounding Palestinian humiliation, these visuals ranged from images of hooded and stripped Palestinian detainees [3] to IDF soldiers gleefully loading shells into cannons and blasting apartment buildings[4], as well as displaying lingerie found in Palestinian homes.[5] These images, later verified by independent news agencies, framed the destruction and brutality of Israel's war on Gaza as a playful adventure aimed at restoring the honor of the Israeli nation by degrading the Palestinian dead, displaced, and captured. The "deep feelings" among Israelis that had led to the Israeli military response, as bluntly stated by an Israeli political scientist and war strategist, were of "outrage, humiliation, and a tremendous desire for revenge", and the IDF soldiers were "not free of feelings of revenge" (Gat 2024).

In the photographs and videos posted by IDF soldiers on social media platforms, Palestinian men, blindfolded and stripped to their underwear, sit in rows on the side of the road, squat in a football stadium[6] and are lugged in a military truck[7]. Many appear disoriented with their

heads bowed.[8] Hundreds of men of all ages rest themselves on their heels and haunches amidst
the rubble of their own homes and neighborhoods. In her commentary on these images, Sophia
Goodfriend suggests that Israeli soldiers displayed these visuals as their "war trophies" (2024),
shared as evidence of a war not lost on October 7th, but won on the streets of Gaza in the hu-
miliation, the subduing of the Palestinians in their own homes, streets, and intimate places. In
the past wars (1948 and 1967) as well, Israeli soldiers took photographic trophies home which
captured Israel's victory amidst Palestinian rubble (Goodfriend 2024; Azoulay 2011 and Stein
2021, cited in Goodfriend 2024). Goodfriend argues that these new images, their imaginal and
imagined victories, add to the existing archive of War in Israel (2024). Internationally, human
rights organizations and legal experts have condemned these images as (evidence of) war crimes.[9]

As a form of reporting, documenting, and witnessing war, visual journalism has played a cru-
cial role in documenting crimes committed in war. Photographs taken by journalists have served
as evidence in the International Criminal Court (ICC), such as in the genocide case against for-
mer Serb President Radovan Karadžić.[10] In a similar vein, South Africa has presented visuals
recorded and shared by IDF soldiers as evidence of alleged genocide in its case against Israel at
the International Court of Justice (ICJ). Images of war have long shaped public opinion, often
prompting moral arguments and legal justifications for the violence inflicted. A recent example
is the torture committed by the U.S. military during its 'war on terror'.

When images of detainees in U.S.-occupied prisons in Iraq and elsewhere leaked to the media
and torture allegations surfaced, U.S. officials justified practices like waterboarding as necessary
for extracting information on terror plots and networks (Cole 2009). The dehumanization of terror
suspects by U.S. military and intelligence forces was justified as a tactical necessity, despite being
based on a portrayal of 'Muslim terrorists' in dehumanizing and morally reprehensible terms. In
contrast, IDF soldiers openly display their digital 'trophies' of war, taking pride in humiliating
Palestinians for the Israeli public. This intent to degrade overrides any moral imperative for
secrecy or legal justification. The excesses of Israel's war on Palestine—characterized by blatant
violence, instrumental and non-instrumental degradation, and humiliation—have even surpassed
those of the U.S. war on terror. While deeply disturbing, the overt excesses of IDF soldiers—their
apparent enjoyment in carrying out and publicizing these acts, along with the impunity they enjoy
in committing war crimes—demonstrate how the threshold for committing and tolerating cruelty,
both within modern democracies and in their dealings with perceived enemies, has been raised
once again.

Tracing continuities between the U.S. war on terror and Israel's war on Gaza exposes striking
parallels in their neo-imperial and settler-colonial violence. Both conflicts exemplify Achille Mbe-
mbe's (2019) necropolitical regimes of colonial modernity—systems that normalize and weaponize
racialized dispossession through modern warfare. This comparison underscores two dimensions of
such violence: first, the entanglement of hyperlegal power (N.Hussain 2007), biopolitics (Foucault
2004[1979]), and necropolitics (Mbembe 2019); and second, the fusion of war with racialized iden-
tity. In both contexts, state rhetoric dehumanizes the enemy as morally abject, justifying their
eradication. Integral to this process is the spectacle of state terror—a performative cruelty that
naturalizes violence against racialized Others.

Civilians, Combatants, or Unlawful Combatants?

Building on Michel Foucault's concept of biopower as the power that discursively feeds on "the politics of life" (Foucault 2004[1979], 77), Achille Mbembe critiques the traditional understanding of sovereignty which is based on law, consensus, and public reason. He argues that this framework fails to capture colonial and postcolonial forms of power. For Mbembe, the fusion of biopolitical, necropolitical, and disciplinary powers in the late colonial period allowed modern colonial states, and their historical predecessors like the U.S. and Israel, to dominate populations with absolute control (Mbembe 2019, 82).

Necropower, as Mbembe defines it, refers to the state's control over life and death through dispossession, violence, and the exclusion of certain populations from legal protections—effectively rendering them expendable. Mbembe argues that contemporary mass populations are subjected to necropower which seeks to annihilate its enemies, turning them into "living dead" (2019, 92). Palestine, in this framework, serves as an example of a "late modern colonial occupation," where these intersecting powers come to a head (2019, 82). While Mbembe's theory highlights how entire populations can become "the target of the sovereign" (2019, 82), it's important to note that law does not disappear in these spaces of exception. Instead, it manifests through mechanisms like lawfare (Weizman 2009) and hyperlegality (N. Hussain 2007), where legal frameworks both establish and legitimize these systems of control.

At the height of the 'war on terror', when images of hooded, stripped, and sexually exploited detainees at Abu-Ghraib prison in Iraq appeared in the media (around 2003-4), they evoked a strong moral reaction as these images revealed that U.S. military was indeed engaged in torture[11]. International human rights organizations, like Amnesty and Human Rights Watch (The Road to Abu Ghraib 2004), unequivocally condemned those practices as torture. Detainees were often stripped naked, blindfolded and/or hooded, exposed to loud music, put in stress positions, and deprived of sleep during 'interrogation' – an umbrella term that covered "in-processing" and vetting of all those who were captured by the U.S. and its allies in Afghanistan and Iraq (Fair 2016; Mackey and Miller 2004). Detainees deemed worthy of further interrogation were then transported to Guantanamo Bay, according to the interrogators who worked at Abu-Ghraib in Iraq and at Bagram Airbase in Afghanistan (Fair 2016; Mackey and Miller 2004).

According to the report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967 (released on 28 August 2023), Palestinian detainees too have experienced "torture and cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment include[ing] sexual assaults; being hooded and blindfolded, forced to stand for long hours, tied to a chair in painful positions, deprived of sleep and food, or exposed to loud music for long hours; and being punished with solitary confinement" (*South Africa vs. Israel 2023, 24*).[12] Although the Israeli government and military dismissed these allegations outright, the U.S. response to the moral revulsion the images from Abu-Ghraib provoked was that they depicted the despicable actions of a few rogue ('bad apples') military personnel.[13] A U.S. Senate inquiry later found out the systematic nature of these kinds of abuse and violations but stopped short of calling, or describing, the abuse and violations of detainees by the CIA as torture (Senate Report 2014).

The images from Abu-Gharib were also war trophies – Iraqi bodies as trophies of war as well as their objectification as visual trophies of war – collected by bored U.S. soldiers stationed miles away from the thrill and the adrenaline of the 'real' war being played out in the streets of Fallujah and in other Sunni-d0minated areas, still then resisting American occupation of Iraq.

Playful, yet grotesque, these images nonetheless revealed where torture typically and allegedly occurs: dark sites, unholy prisons, in close quarters under a shadowy a chain of command. They lacked the aura of war that accompanied the images of Palestinian detainees in Gaza in 2023-24, also stripped and blindfolded, but sitting amidst the debris of their own homes. These images were mostly captured by Israeli reservists and shared on their social media accounts. Verified and re-published by established mainstream media[14], they evoked concern – not torture, however – even from the skeptics of Palestinian claims of victimhood and suffering.

The Israeli government cast a shadow over the legal status of detainees detained in neighborhood sweeps in areas declared 'no-go zones' by the IDF and how they ought to be treated – as a 'combatant' or as a 'civilian'. Mainstream media was complicit in conflating the Palestinian civilian with the armed Palestinian fighter. According to NBC News:

> "We're talking about military aged men who were discovered in areas that civilians
> were supposed to have evacuated," Israeli government spokesman Eylon Levy said . . .
> He said that "now those individuals will be questioned and we will work out who
> indeed was a terrorist." Levy added that it was "important to remember" that the
> IDF has been engaging in close quarter combat in the area with Hamas fighters who
> he said "have been deliberately disguising themselves as civilians and operating from
> within not just civilian areas, but civilian buildings."
>
> (Talzman, Britton, and Abdelkader 2023)

As I discuss below, the conflation between civilian and (unlawful) combatant became more pronounced in the U.S. war on terror. Instead of viewing it as an exercise of sovereignty, where certain populations are excluded from legal protection and reduced to bare life (Agamben 1998), legal scholar Nasser Hussain questioned this dichotomy. He argued that, in fact, the U.S. war on terror operated under a regime of "hyperlegality" (2007, 514), where the boundaries between law and sovereignty were more fluid than theorists like Mbembe and Agamben suggest.

Eyal Weizman describes this legal maneuver as "constructive blurring" of humanitarian legal categories by the IDF in the occupied Palestinian territories (Weizman 2007, 8). By obscuring distinctions between civilians and combatants, the IDF casts ambiguity over the legal status of Palestinian men detained en masse. This ambiguity, Weizman contends, enables the military to frame detainees as potential "disguised combatants," thereby designating them as "unlawful combatants." Under the international law of armed conflict, such a classification denies these individuals protections granted to either uniformed combatants or civilians under the Geneva Conventions (Finkelstein 2012).

Since October 7th, the IDF have framed their conduct as compliant with international law to reinforce claims that they remain "a moral army" (Got 2024). In a *Haaretz* op-ed, security scholar Azar Gat asserts that Israel has "met its humanitarian obligations under international law" by warning civilians to evacuate combat zones, opening humanitarian corridors, and employing advanced technology to communicate evacuation orders (Got 2024). These assertions, however, stand in tension with critical analyses of the IDF's legal strategies. Eyal Weizman, for instance, interrogates the 'humanizing of war' by Israeli forces—a process linking military innovation, humanitarian rhetoric, and legal frameworks. He describes this as "lawfare" (2010, 13), the instrumentalization of international law to legitimize violence rather than constrain it. Far from mitigating harm, Weizman argues, the IDF's reliance on legal interpretations has amplified

Palestinian suffering by expanding the "elastic limits of the law" (2010, 24).

For example, during previous Gaza offensives, Weizman argues, IDF legal advisors reinterpreted international humanitarian law (IHL) to justify tactics such as mass warnings via pamphlets, phone calls, and loudspeakers. While ostensibly protective, these warnings functioned as a legal mechanism: Palestinians who remained in targeted areas were reclassified as "voluntary human shields" or "combatants," stripping them of civilian protections under IHL. Simultaneously, their homes became permissible military targets (Weizman 2010, 22). This reclassification, Weizman contends, allowed the IDF to operate in a "grey zone" at the margins of legality, stretching legal boundaries to legitimize destruction (2010, 24).

Such legal ambiguity, I suggest, deliberately blurs distinctions between civilian and combatant, legitimate and illegitimate target, ultimately reinforcing a narrative of collective Palestinian responsibility for Hamas' October 7th attacks. In the Israeli political imagination, this blurring rationalizes collective punishment—a violation of international law—by framing Gaza's civilian population as complicit and thus "deserving" of systemic retaliation.

The erosion of distinctions between civilian, combatant, and unlawful combatant fueled debates over the U.S. government's reliance on drones and other methods of extrajudicial killing during the later stages of the 'war on terror' under President Barack Obama. The ambiguity surrounding 'suspected terrorists' enabled a policy of remote, bureaucratized violence, circumventing both international law and domestic accountability. In *Targeted Killings: Law and Morality in an Asymmetrical World*, U.S. Army Colonel Mark Maxwell, a staff judge advocate, outlines the traditional binary of "civilian" and "combatant" under international humanitarian law (2012, 47–48). However, he notes that Israel and the United States have introduced a third, contentious category: the "unlawful combatant"—a designation lacking universal recognition under the Geneva Conventions. This category, Maxwell argues, permits disproportionate lethal force against individuals stripped of the protections granted to lawful combatants (2012, 46–47).

The legal rationale for this distinction hinges on concealment. Nonstate actors or insurgents, unlike state-aligned combatants, are deemed "unlawful" because they obscure their intentions, preparations, and identities (McMahan 2012, 139). The *U.S. Army's Counterinsurgency Manual* too reinforces this logic, framing insurgents as adversaries who "hide among the people" and engage in "deceptive" tactics rather than "open and honorable" warfare (2007[2006], 52). Thus, the "unlawful combatant" label rests on the absence of visible markers—uniforms, overt weaponry, and declared intent—that traditionally legitimate state violence under International Humanitarian Law. By conflating clandestine tactics with illegality, this framework legitimizes asymmetrical state violence while criminalizing resistance.

The neighborhood sweeps in which Palestinian men were detained by the IDF in its military assaults were similar to the mass arrests and detentions U.S. military forces and its allied militias carried out in their counterinsurgencies in Iraq and Afghanistan, where they regularly detained 'men of fighting age' from 'hostile' local communities without charge under the suspicion of being an enemy combatant, abettor, or a collaborator – slippery categories with deadly consequences (Khalili 2013; Robben 2010). Even though NBC reported that some of those who appeared in the images captured by IDF soldiers in Gaza were identified by their relatives and were later released, thousands of Palestinians have disappeared under the 'administrative detention' of the Israeli state as 'security' detainees[15] – a category of detention or internment that has continued from colonial into postcolonial times.[16]

Humiliation, Torture, and Occupation

Like all colonial and occupying powers, the Israeli military is haunted by the figure of the Palestinian resistance fighter, allegedly disguised as a civilian, in a political context where an entire population is a suspected reservoir of resistance to the occupation. From the perspective of the IDF and its allies in the West, detaining and humiliating Palestinians en masse by stripping and blindfolding them then appears as a standard counterinsurgency tactic as there are no "uninvolved" civilians in Gaza (Got 2024).

The U.S. military too stripped and blindfolded alleged 'enemy combatants' and other suspects extrajudicially detained during its occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan. In an industrial manner – reminiscent of modern bureaucratic indifference to human suffering and dignity – all detainees were stripped and numbered and some even power-washed as part of their "in-processing" at Kandahar and Bagram Airbase detention centers, before being sent off to Guantanamo Bay or other dark sites for further interrogation (McKay and Miller 2004, 84-85). In their memoirs – some confessional while others filled with jingoistic nationalism – the former U.S. military interrogators disclosed how these men were stripped and numbered (2004, 4-5). They witnessed many of them "naked" except "for the burlap sack" on their heads (2004, 7). Stripping detainees, however, was not considered torture; rather, it was seen as a routine military detention and processing practice. These interrogators went to great lengths to show how closely they followed the Army's interrogation manual and the guidelines set by international conventions on torture.

Stripping, as an act of humiliation, exemplifies the exercise of absolute power over detainees. In carceral and "prison-like" contexts, this ritual operates both physically and symbolically, as Erving Goffman (1961) theorized in *Asylums*. Goffman frames stripping as a dehumanizing component of institutional "processing," arguing that "physical nakedness" marks a liminal state—a rupture between the detainee's former identity and their coerced assimilation into the institutional order (1961, 18).

The act of dispossession—even of clothing—constitutes an assault on the self. Such rituals, Goffman writes, are "forms of disengagement and defilement" that destabilize the individual's "prior conception of self" (1961, 35). Upon entering a total institution, detainees arrive with identities shaped by social recognition. Yet, through humiliations, degradations, and profanations of self, the institution systematically strips away this social scaffolding, isolating them from "significant others" who once affirmed their humanity (1961, 14). In this way, stripping transcends mere physical exposure; it becomes a weapon of symbolic annihilation.

For decades, Palestinians, in Gaza and the West Bank, have lived under a regime of cartographic terror or in a spatial "matrix of control": "Several isolated Palestinian cantons, each around a major city, with connections controlled by Israel" and access in and out of their own areas controlled through check points and permits (Weizman 2007, 81). The collective degradation of Palestinians by the IDF following the attacks of October 7th, 2023 thus took place in a historical matrix of Israeli state power, constituted of various forms of violence: siege warfare and surveillance, total institutional control, and 'playful' terror.

Stripping detainees of clothing is not universally classified as torture under international law, nor is blindfolding or hooding explicitly defined as such in isolation. However, their legal status hinges on context and intent. According to the *International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT 2011)*, blindfolding alone is not strictly categorized as torture unless paired with

other coercive interrogation methods. Crucially, the *United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture (UNVFVT)* underscores that torture requires the deliberate infliction of severe physical or mental pain or suffering (UNVFVT 2011, 4). This intentionality—alongside the perpetrator's purpose (e.g., intimidation, punishment, or extracting information)—determines whether an act meets the threshold of torture. Thus, while blindfolding may not inherently constitute torture, its use to psychologically disorient, degrade, or terrorize detainees—particularly when prolonged or systematic—could qualify as cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment (CIDT) or even torture under international law, depending on severity and intent.

Establishing the intent behind torture in warfare is fraught with legal and epistemological challenges, particularly when states frame violence as an existential struggle against an enemy deemed irreconcilable (Kahn 2008). International law traditionally confines the legitimate use of force to uniformed combatants—state-sanctioned actors whose violence is theoretically regulated by principles of proportionality and necessity. Within this framework, torture is dismissed as an "excess," an aberration excluded from the codified norms governing conflict between sovereign states.

This state-centric conception of war, however, bears the imprint of Eurocentric legal history. In his analysis of 'the partisan', Carl Schmitt traces how 18th- and 19th-century European international law confined warfare to a "purely state" affair, premised on a "classical, fixed concept of the political" (2007 [1963], 49). Schmitt praises this framework for its supposed "renunciation of the criminalization of the opponent"—a relativization of enmity that rejected "absolute enmity" (2007, 90). Yet his analysis glaringly omits how this "renunciation" applied only to conflicts between European states, which recognized one another as juridical equals. Beyond Europe, in the colonies, violence operated under a different logic.

Achille Mbembe (2019) argues that European democracies externalized the "originary violence" foundational to their modernity—displacing it onto "nonplaces" like colonies, plantations, and camps (2019, 27). This spatial and racial bifurcation, Mbembe contends, allowed the brutality of colonial occupation to persist under the guise of racial hierarchy, while European interstate conflicts were sanitized through legal norms. The result was not merely the racialization of warfare but the entanglement of state violence with the very construction of national identity.

Focusing on this form of modern power, which thrives on the intersection of collective violence and identity, allows us to interrogate—both as a matter of intent and as "expressions of intent" in modern wars or violent conflicts (South Africa vs. Israel 2023, 59)[17] —the political imagination that nation-states use to define their enemies. This imagination not only underpins but also sustains the means and meanings of organizing and mobilizing state violence against the 'others'. The dehumanization of the 'other'—which begins in the realm of political imagination, long before it manifests in physical forms like stripping and hooding—precedes their actual, physical dehumanization.

In this case, it is evident in the language used by powerful political figures in the Israeli government and civil society to describe Palestinians living in Gaza following Hamas' attack[18]. The most troubling and alarming aspect of these violations is how this language finds an anchor in the actions of Israeli reservists, mobilized and recruited from Israeli society. Together, they trace a path that began on October 7th, 2023, a path that lifted moral restraints and pushed legal boundaries, enabling the Israeli military's use of force against Palestinians as a form of collective punishment.[19]

Hamas is to ISIS What ISIS is to Al-Qaeda

Following the Hamas attack on October 7th, many U.S. and Israeli politicians and public commentators quickly equated Hamas with ISIS (the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria), a militant offshoot or remnant of Al-Qaeda in the Levant (Federman 2023)[20]. This was a fundamentally incorrect equivalence between a militant, mobile group (operative across borders of Iraq, Syria, Libya, and even with a reach up to Afghanistan and Pakistan) and a political, static/locally rooted organization with a militant wing (born under conditions of occupation and settler colonialism). This hasty equivalence de-historicized these two different forms of political-militant organizing.[21] Following the ideological precedents set up during the war on terror, this equivalence performed further and important ideological labor: as 'terrorists', Al-Qaeda, ISIS, as well as Hamas and their supporters, so argued Israeli political and military authorities, were not protected by stipulations of international law regarding combatants and civilians in war. The atrocities they had committed against civilians had been so morally abhorrent that because of their actions, they had placed themselves outside of the protection of international law. Put differently, the 'terrorist' acts (of ISIS, Al-Qaeda as well as Hamas) were not legitimate acts of political resistance, they were "evil" only and, thus, they must be dealt with without legal and moral restraints reserved for conflicts among 'civilized' states (Selected Speeches 58).

In his first speech after the 9/11 attacks, U.S. President George W. Bush, had unequivocally called the 9/11 attackers 'evil' and their actions as extreme acts of 'cruelty'. How he imputed such moral meaning to attackers' actions and intentions and the legal implications for all those who were now seen aligned with or abetting them would continue to dominate the American public sphere throughout the so-called war on terror. A similar Manichean political imagination is at work in the language and statements of Israeli political and military figures and public commentators in their response to Hamas' attack. South Africa has submitted a comprehensive record of these statements at ICJ in its case against Israel for committing a genocide of Palestinians in Gaza.[22]

President Bush declared the hijackers as "instruments of evil who died in vain", and "behind them is a cult of evil which seeks to harm the innocent and thrives on human suffering. ... Theirs is the worst kind of violence, pure malice" (Selected Speeches, 80).[23] Addressing cadets at West Point a year after the 9/11 attacks, Bush returned to reiterate the moral meaning of the U.S. led war on terror for a new a cadre of sacrificial subjects, willing to kill others as well as sacrifice themselves: "We are in a conflict between good and evil, and America will call evil by its name ... And we will lead the world in opposing it" (Selected Speeches, 129, 30)[24].

For President Bush, the war on terror carried the same meanings for Americans who, post 9/11, were willing to sacrifice their lives fighting terrorism and the states that allegedly supported them. Quoting a solider in Iraq in his 'address to the nation' in 2007, Bush claimed: "Brandon volunteered for the National Guard and was killed while serving in Baghdad ... His wife, Audrey, says that Brandon felt called to serve and knew what he was fighting for. And his parents ... wrote me this: "We believe this is a war of good and evil and we must win even if it cost the life of our own son" (Selected Speeches, 494)[25].

For the U.S. military 'interrogators' who worked on the captured and the detained men at Abu-Ghraib and Bagram prisons, it was the evil intentions of these men, the detainees, that needed to be uncovered. Their 'interrogations' were aimed at unlocking the minds of the "worst of the worst" (Mackey and Miller 2004, 84). For them, "the principal dangers" facing the U.S.

were not militaries and states, but rather "individuals and [their] intentions" (McKay and Miller 2004, xxii).

Terrorism, according to Bush and his neo-conservative circle, was a moral and an existential threat to the U.S. and its allies, like Israel. In his address to the Knesset (the Israeli parliament) in 2008, Bush clearly laid out the moral and legal standing of 'terrorists' and 'extremists' for the Israeli audiences and the existential stakes of the war against them. For both Israel and the U.S., he said:

> The fight against terror and extremism is ... a clash of visions, a great ideological struggle. On the one side are those who defend the ideals of justice and dignity with the power of reason and truth. This struggle is waged with the technology of the 21st century, but at its core it is an ancient battle between good and evil ... In truth, the men who carry out these savage acts ... *they reserve a special hatred for the most ardent defenders of liberty, including Americans and Israelis ... Some seem to believe that we should negotiate with the terrorists and radicals, as if some ingenious argument will persuade them they have been wrong all along ... We have an obligation to call this what it is — the false comfort of appeasement, which has been repeatedly discredited by history ... Israel's population may be just over 7 million. But when you confront terror and evil, you are 307 million strong, because the United States of America stands with you ... Al Qaeda and Hezbollah and Hamas will be defeated.*
> (Selected Speeches, 560-562, emphasis added)

There could be no compromise or dialogue with the terrorists, and what was morally and ethically demanded (by the states of the 'civilized West') was their total defeat. Having declared Hamas as *their* existential threat, Israeli politicians and analysts have aligned with American necropolitical perspective, candidly calling for its (Hamas') complete destruction. Azar Gat says:

> I am among those who believe that the challenge is existential, even if not in the sense of facing a coalition of Arab countries as in the past. If Israel cannot achieve the declared goals of the war – the destruction of Hamas as a semi-state military organization with a massive military infrastructure that controls Gaza ... we have no future in the Middle East. Without removing the threat and restoring deterrence ... every bush-league terrorist in the Middle East could make our lives a living hell.
> (Haaretz 2024)

Israel has adopted tactics similar to those employed by the U.S. during its "war on terrorism," including heavy bombardment of civilian areas, indefinite detention of Palestinians labeled as "security detainees," enforced disappearances, torture, and systemic humiliation of captives. These practices not only mirror historical U.S. counterterrorism strategies but also raise serious questions about Israel's adherence to international legal standards of proportionality and necessity in the use of force.

'Human Animals' and the Animality of War

If evil was the key trope deployed by President Bush in describing the attackers on September 11th, 2001, Israeli political figures justified Israel's unrestrained assault on Gaza and the collective punishment of Palestinians by equating them to 'animals'. Though an ambiguous category, implying that cruelty toward non-human life forms (and by extension, 'human animals') is justified because of their non-humanness, it signified more: Palestinians could simply collectively

be stripped of all protections afforded by international law of war and of human rights. And
stripped they were, literally, as in the images captured by and shared by IDF soldiers, but also
symbolically in the political imagination of war.

On October 9th, 2023, two days after the attack, Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant announcing a "complete siege on Gaza", stated, "there will be no electricity, no food, no water, no
fuel, everything will be closed. We are fighting against human animals, and we are acting accordingly"[26]. All "restraints" on the conduct of war were therefore off: "We will eliminate everything",
he said.[27] The notion of Palestinian animality will become the (im)moral prism through which
Israel will justify its relentless and indiscriminate war against Palestinians in Gaza. Also on October 9th, in a video statement addressed to Hamas and Gaza residents, published by COGAT's
(Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories) official channel, Major General Ghassan
Alian equating Hamas with ISIS warned in Arabic: "Hamas became ISIS and the citizens of Gaza
are celebrating instead of being horrified. Human animals are dealt with accordingly. Israel has
imposed a total blockade on Gaza, no electricity, no water, just damage. You wanted hell, you
will get hell".[28]

Outside of Israel, the ferocity of the Israeli assault on Gaza was justified by reminding the
"Western world" of the Palestinian animality lurking behind Hamas attacks. The Israeli ambassador to Germany Ron Prosor called on "the Western world" to stand with Israel in its fight
against the "blood thirsty animals" of Hamas."[29] He could have also added: as the Western world
did in the U.S-led war on terror.

In his statements to the Israeli military, parliament, and public after the October 9th attacks,
Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu infused the trope of Palestinian animality with theological and biblical imagery of light, darkness, and total destruction—echoing President Bush's
political theology of Islamic terrorism. On October 16th, 2023, in an address to the Knesset, he
described the Israeli war on Gaza as "a struggle between the children of light and the children of
darkness, between humanity and the law of the jungle".[30] He would return to this "dehumanising
theme" numerous times (see *South Africa v. Israel*, 60).

Feeding the nationalist imagination of ordinary Israelis—particularly IDF soldiers and reservists mobilized for the military operation in Gaza—Netanyahu's provocations encouraged them
to frame Hamas' attack on Israel and the Israeli response within an imaginary of violence against
the Biblical enemies of Israel. On October 28th, 2023, as the Israeli military prepared for an
attack on Gaza, Netanyahu "invoked the Biblical story of the total destruction of Amalek[31] by
the Israelites" and said, "you must remember what Amalek has done to you, says our Holy Bible.
And we do remember".[32] In a letter sent to Israeli soldiers and officers on November 3rd, he again
referred to Amalek.[33]

The Amalekites have long been portrayed as existential enemies or threats to the Jewish collective, reappearing whenever politically expedient. Gili Kugler, a Biblical Studies scholar, argues
that "the biblical image of Amalek has left a particularly lasting impression on the Jewish-religious
imagination" and "which even today uses the name Amalek to point to entities that must be persecuted and destroyed" (Kugler 2023, 2). The key point Kugler highlights is that the image of
Amalek, in its (a)historicity and symbolism, facilitates the imagining of the total annihilation of
Israel's enemies.

The discourse of Biblical vengeance was not just pressed down upon the IDF soldiers from the
top Israeli leadership, it was anchored and rooted in the militaristic imagination of the soldiers

and commanders on the ground. In a video clip posted online, on 21 December 2023, Yair Ben David, a Commander of the 2908th Battalion of the IDF said: "the Israeli army had "entered Beit Hanoun and did there as Shimon and Levi did in Nablus," and that "[t]he entire Gaza should resemble Beit Hanoun", referring to the city in northern Gaza which has been entirely devastated by the Israeli army.[34]. In a video posted on X on December 7th, 2023 by Israeli journalist Yinon Magal, Israeli soldiers sang, danced, and chanted for the occupation of Gaza and to "wipe off the seed of Amalek", saying there are no "innocent civilians" in Gaza.[35]

The theme of Palestinians bearing collective responsibility for Hamas' attack—thereby blurring the distinction between Palestinian civilians and armed fighters and justifying collective punishment by blockade—was established early in the Israeli political imagination of war. On October 12th, 2023, Israeli President Isaac Herzog declared: "an entire nation out there that is responsible. *It's not true this rhetoric about civilians not aware not involved* ... [W]e will fight until we break their backbone."[36] Itamar Ben-Gvir, Israeli Minister for National Security, clearly laying out the government's position in a televised address, stated: "when we say that Hamas should be destroyed, it also means those who celebrate, those who support, and those who hand out candy — they're all terrorists, and they should also be destroyed."[37] On November 1st, 2023, the Israeli Minister of Heritage, Amichai Eliyah, said: "there is no such thing as uninvolved civilians in Gaza".[38] Israeli Army Reservist Major General, former Head of the Israeli National Security Council, and adviser to the Defence Minister, Giora Eiland, repeatedly emphasized that there should be no distinction made between Hamas combatants and Palestinian civilians. He stated: "Who are the 'poor' women of Gaza? They are all the mothers, sisters or wives of Hamas murderers ... they are part of the infrastructure that supports the organization ... After all, severe epidemics in the south of the Gaza Strip will bring victory closer . . . It is precisely its civil collapse that will bring the end of the war closer."[39] Even for 'moderate' Israeli political commentators and war strategists, the blocking of aid was "understandable [because] in the wake of October 7 and the taking of the hostages, the idea that Israel will allow the delivery of food to Gazans, who were recorded celebrating the massacre – the necessary term 'uninvolved' is inherently ambivalent – was unacceptable to the Israeli public ... [T]hese food deliveries ... feed Hamas and sustain its war effort" (Got 2024).

All civic, social, and military roles are conflated within the discourse of collective responsibility. Palestinians are first recast as imaginary or historical adversaries, only to revert to 'real' enemies—now stripped of political agency and reduced to animalistic tropes, their resistance against occupation erased. This rhetoric of Biblical vengeance, coupled with indiscriminate military destruction in Gaza, fueled a pervasive war imaginary. It entrenched itself deeply within Israeli civil society, enabling total mobilization for war.

War's political imaginary thrives on recursive temporalities: historical enemies are reanimated as eternal threats, while war heroes and their 'glorious' conquests are nostalgically fetishized. This dialectic of fear and nostalgia—central to what Derrida (1994) termed 'hauntology'—obscures the material violence of the present by collapsing past and future into a legitimizing myth. A veteran of the Dier Yassin massacre in the 1948 Nakba thus encouraged the IDF reservists to eliminate Palestinians without distinction and collect their own trophies of war as he had done so in *his* war against the Palestinians decades ago. On October 11th, 2023, as 95-year-old Israeli army reservist Ezra Yachin was driven around in IDF uniform, he boasted the morale of the reservists by saying, and this was broadcasted live on social media:

> Be triumphant and finish them off and don't leave anyone behind. Erase the memory
> of them. Erase them, their families, mothers and children. These animals can no
> longer live . . . Every Jew with a weapon should go out and kill them. If you have an

> Arab neighbour, don't wait, go to his home and shoot him . . . We want to invade,
> not like before, we want to enter and destroy what's in front of us, and destroy houses,
> then destroy the one after it. With all of our forces, complete destruction, enter and
> destroy. As you can see, we will witness things we've never dreamed of. Let them
> drop bombs on them and erase them.[40]

Ezra Yachin was echoing what was already openly and publicly demanded in the Israeli media and civil society: the destruction of Palestinians lives in Gaza as all Palestinians were held responsible for Hamas' attack on Israel on October 7th. The Israeli media has called for Gaza to be "erase[d]",[41] to be "turned into a "slaughterhouse",[42] repeatedly claiming that "[t]here are no innocents... There is no population. There are 2.5 million terrorists".[43].

The widespread tolerance for genocidal rhetoric—amplified through public platforms, media coverage, and even celebration—reveals that calls to eradicate Palestinians and annihilate Gaza extend far beyond Israel's right-wing fringe. These discourses, when mainstreamed, reflect a societal consensus that normalizes eliminationist violence. Equally alarming are the atrocities committed by IDF soldiers, many of whom are reservists drawn from civilian life. Their actions—invading homes, humiliating and torturing Palestinians, and circulating digital trophies of war—are not mere individual transgressions but enactments of a political imaginary that frames Palestinians as existential threats deserving of annihilation. This imaginary resurrects historical tropes of Jewish persecution, conflating contemporary Palestinians with ancient enemies bent on 'destroying the Israelites.'

Central to this logic is the dehumanization of Palestinians as animalistic—a racist construct that justifies state violence as a form of 'civilizational defense' (Baker 2024). By reducing Palestinians to subhuman status, the IDF's brutality is recast as a moral duty, obscuring the asymmetrical horrors of occupation and siege. The viral circulation of soldiers' trophy videos further entrenches this dehumanization, transforming atrocities into spectacles of national pride. Such acts are not aberrations but symptoms of a militarized society where violence against the racialized Other is valorized as both necessity and virtue.

Conclusion

In his analysis of torture during the U.S. war on terror, Paul Kahn frames it as a political phenomenon, arguing that state violence and terror produce "political meaning" (Kahn 2008, 4) tied to collective identity, the dehumanization of others, and the rationalization of violence against "torturable" populations (Jefferson 2024). This perspective challenges reductive frameworks that reduce torture to an "individual pathology" or a "legal violation" (Kahn 2008, 4). By focusing narrowly on legalistic critiques, scholars risk overlooking systemic forms of collective degradation—such as the hooding and stripping of civilians—that aim not merely to inflict pain but to humiliate. These acts degrade not only the immediate victim but also those who perceive the victim as a symbol of their own political identity (Kahn 2008, 11).

Kahn's insights resonate with critiques of colonial violence. "Racial humiliation" was at the core of the "colonial configuration of power" (Guru 2010, 4), and as Achille Mbembe has argued, it was tied to how colonial modernity and state terror shaped a new "cultural sensibility . . . in which killing the enemy of the state [was] an extension of play" (2019, 73). This shift transformed violence into an intimate, ritualized practice, where cruelty was stripped of its shock value and embedded into everyday power dynamics (Nandy 1983). Colonial violence thus evolved

from exceptional brutality to a routine, almost ceremonial assertion of dominance. The boundary between "play" and "terror" dissolved, as inflicting suffering became a means for colonizers to perform racial superiority and consolidate control.

To understand the joy exhibited by IDF soldiers (or U.S. soldiers at Abu Ghraib) in degrading Palestinians or Iraqis—capturing, sharing, and celebrating these acts as trophies of war—we must then analyze the political imagination at work. This imagination dehumanizes Palestinians, rendering them incommensurate with the Israeli self as equal political adversaries and frames them as "imperfect victims" at the thresholds of international humanitarian law (Hussain 2022, 92). By denying Palestinians the right to resist the occupation of their land, the Israeli war machine dehumanizes them, framing them as 'animals' devoid of political identity and agency. This portrayal justifies their total elimination from the contested, shared—albeit uneven—space of politics and violence.

The political imagination that sanctions these dehumanizing practices is not simply a reflection of individual militaristic actions; it is embedded within the very fabric of state violence. The widespread acceptance of violence, the framing of populations as subhuman, and the legal and moral justifications for their extermination or subjugation reflect a breakdown of the boundary between state power and the sovereign authority to determine life and death. This "biopolitical" logic, which merges legal frameworks with violent practices, produces a system in which not only are lives expendable, but they are also systematically rendered outside the realm of human rights and moral accountability. This shift in how violence is both perceived and enacted—where killing becomes less about protecting sovereignty or territory and more about reinforcing a racial and political order—suggests a profound reimagining of power and control in the modern world, one that resonates deeply with the colonial and settler-colonial violence that Mbembe and others have described.

Acknowledgements

References

Agamben, Giorgio. 1998. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Translated by Daniel Heller-Roazen. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Amnesty International. 2023. "Israel/OPT: Horrifying cases of torture and degrading treatment of Palestinian detainees amid spike in arbitrary arrests". *Amnesty International*, November 8th. https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/11/israel-opt-horrifying-cases-of-torture-and-degrading-treatment-of-palestinian-detainees-amid-spike-in-arbitrary-arrests/.

Ansari, Milena and Bill Van Esveld. 2024. "Israeli Lawmakers Try to Block Torture Prosecutions". *Human Rights Watch*, July 31st. https://www.hrw.org/news/2 024/07/31/israeli-lawmakers-try-block-torture-prosecutions.

Azoulay, Ariella. 2011. "Declaring the State of Israel: Declaring a State of War". *Critical Inquiry* 37:2: 265-285.

Baker, Gerar. 2024. "Israel Defends Itself—and May Save Western Civilization". Opinion, *Wall Street Journal*, September 30th. https://www.wsj.com/opinio n/israel-defends-itself-and-may-save-western-civilization-war-mideast-natio nal-security-8606ec52.

Brody, Reed. 2004. "The Road to Abu Ghraib". *Human Rights Watch*, July 30th. https://www.hrw.org/report/2004/06/09/road-abu-ghraib.

Cole, David. 2009. *The Torture Memos*. New York: The New Press.

Derrida, Jacques. 1994. *Specters of Marx, the state of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, & the New International*. Translated by Peggy Kamuf. London: Routledge.

Fair, Eric. 2016. *Consequence: A Memoir*. New York: Henry Holt and Company.

Federman, Josef. 2023. "Israel likens Hamas to the Islamic State group. But the comparison misses the mark in key ways". *APNews*, November 29th. https: //apnews.com/article/israel-hamas-gaza-war-islamic-state-group-29e59446a 42d077323a3a216127c4978.

Finkelstein, Claire, Jens David Olin and Andrew Altman, eds. 2012. *Targeted Killings: Law and Morality in an Asymmetrical World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Foucault, Michel. 2004 [1979]. *The birth of biopolitics: lectures at the College de France, 1978– 79*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Goffman, Irving. 1961. *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates*. New York: Doubleday.

Goodfriend, Sophia. 2024. "The Viral Atrocities Posted by Israeli Soldiers." *Sapiens*, March 20th. https://www.sapiens.org/culture/israeli-soldiers-gaza-war-atroc ities-images/.

Greenberg, Karen and Josuha L. Dratel, eds. 2004. *The Torture Papers: The Road to Abu- Gharib*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hafetz, Michael. 2011. *Habeas Corpus after 9/11: Confronting America's New Global Detention System*. New York: New York University Press.

Hajjar, Lisa. 2012. *Torture: A Sociology of Violence and Human Rights*. New York: Routledge.

Hussain, Nasser. 2007. "Hyperlegality'. *New Criminal Law Review*, (10)4: 514–531.

Hussain, Salman. 2022. "Witnessing "Imperfect Victims": (In)culpability, Collabora- tion, and the "Suffering Subject"". *American Ethnologist*, 49(1): 92-103.

Hussain, Salman. 2019. "Violence, Law and the Archive: How 'Dossiers of Memory' Challenge Enforced Disappearances in the War on Terror in Pakistan". *POLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review*. 42(1): 53-67.

International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT). 2011. 'Statement on Hooding, International Forensic Expert Group". *Torture*, 21(3). Online. https://irct.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/IFEG-Statement-on-Hooding.pdf.

Jefferson, Andrew M. 2024. "Deciphering and Detoxifying Torturing Societies and Torturable Populations: Towards an Inhibitive Manifesto". *Transcience: A Journal of Global Studies*, 15(1). Online. https://www2.hu-berlin.de/transcience/Vol15_No1_S4_S21.pdf.

Kahn, Paul. 2008. *Sacred Violence: Torture, Terror, and Sovereignty*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Khalili, Laleh. 2013. *Time in the Shadows: Confinement in Counterinsurgencies*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Mackay, Chris and Greg Miller. 2004. *The Interrogators: Inside the Secret War Against Al-Qaeda*. New York: Warner Books.

Mann, Gregory. 2009. "What was *Indigénat*? The "Empire of Law' in French West Africa". *Journal of African History*, 50: 331-53.

McKernan, Bethan. 2024. "'Deep moral deterioration' being normalised in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict". *The Guardian*, July 30th. https://www.theguardian.com/world/article/2024/jul/30/deep-moral-deterioration-is-being-normalised-in-the-israeli-palestinian-conflict.

Muir, Sarah. 2021. *Routine Crisis: An Ethnography of Disillusion*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Robben, Antonius C.G.M. (ed.). 2010. "Mimesis in a War Among the People: What Argentina's Dirty War Reveals About Counterinsurgency in Iraq". In *Iraq at a Distance: What Anthropologists Can Teach Us About the War*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Schmitt, Carl. 1996 [1932]. *The Concept of the Political*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Schmitt, Carl. 1962. *Theory of the partisan*. New York: Telos Press.

South Africa v. Israel. 2023. Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip. International Court of Justice. https://www.un.org/unispal/document/icj-ps6mar2024/#:~:text=On%2029%20December%202023%2C%20South,Palestinians%20in%20the%20Gaza%20Strip.

Stein, Rebbeca L. 2021. *Screen Shots: State Violence on Camera in Israel and Palestine*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Talzman, Yulia, Bianca Britton, and Rima Abdelbaker. 2023. "Stripped, Blindfolded
        and 'Humiliated': Images Show Dozens of Palestinian Men Detained by Israeli
        Forces in Gaza". *NBC News*, December 8th. https://www.nbcnews.com/news
        /world/israel-hamas-war-images-palestinians-stripped-blindfolded-gaza-rcna1
        28685.

The White House Archives. 2001-2008. *Selected Speeches of President George W.
        Bush 2001 – 2008.* Washington D.C.: White House Archives. https://george
        wbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/infocus/bushrecord/documents/Selected_Spe
        eches_George_W_Bush.pdf

United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture (UNVFVT). 2011. *Interpreta-
        tion of Torture in the Light of the Practice and Jurisprudence of International
        Bodies.* Geneva: UNVFVT https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Docum
        ents/Issues/Torture/UNVFVT/Interpretation_torture_2011_EN.pdf.

United States Army and Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual. 2007. *U.S.
        Army Field Manual No. 3-24 Marine Corps Warfighting Publication.* No. 3-
        33.5. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

United States Senate Select Committee on Intelligence. 2014. "Report of the Senate
        Select Committee on Intelligence Committee Study of the Central Intelligence
        Agency's Detention and Interrogation Program". 113th Cong., 2d sess. S. Rep.
        113-288. https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/publications/
        CRPT-113srpt288.pdf.

Weizman, Eyal. 2010. "Legislative Attack". *Theory, Culture and Society* 27(6):11–32.
        http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0263276410380937.

Weizman, Eyal. 2007. *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation.* London:
        Verso.

Notes

[1]Salman Hussain is a Postdoctoral Fellow at York University, Canada. His research explores themes of political violence, terror, human rights activism, and social movements, with a focus on how gender, sexuality, and reparative justice intersect in these contexts. His ethnographic work on political violence investigates human rights advocacy against state-sponsored "disappearances" in the post-9/11 era in Pakistan.

[2]According to various sources, 695 Israeli civilians, 373 security forces personnel, and 71 foreigners died in Hamas attack, while around 35000 Palestinian civilians have died in Israel's retaliatory war on Gaza from October 2023 to the writing of this paper in May 2024.

[3]See: https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/8/video-photos-appear-to-show-detainees-stripped-to-underwear-in-gaza and see figures 1-4 below.

[4]See https://twitter.com/MiddleEastMnt/status/1748293036256411776

[5]See figures 5 and 6.

[6]UN OCHA, Hostilities in the Gaza Strip and Israel — Flash Update #77 (26 December 2023),https://www.ochaopt.org/content/hostilities-gaza-strip-and-israel-flash-update-77; Quds News Network, @QudsNen, Tweet (4:02 pm, December 25, 2023), https://twitter.com/QudsNen/status/1739315746163859606. See also: https://www.cnn.com/2023/12/27/middleeast/gaza-children-detained-idf-video/index.html

[7]See figures 1-4.

[8]See figure 7

[9]See e.g., Amnesty International's report: Damning evidence of war crimes as Israeli attacks wipe out entire families in Gaza. https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/10/damning-evidence-of-war-crimes-as-israeli-attacks-wipe-out-entire-families-in-gaza/

[10] https://archive.nytimes.com/lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/04/02/photography-in-the-docket-as-evidence/

[11] See below for photographs from Abu-Ghraib prison.

[12] See figures 7 and 8 which evoked allegations of torture of Palestinian detainees by the IDF soldiers.

[13] Phillip Sands, 2007. 'It Was Top Down, Stupid: The Bush administration's "bad apples" theory goes sour'. https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2008/06/the-bush-administration-s-bad-apples-theory-turns-rotten.html

[14] See BBC February 9th, 20024: Israeli soldier videos from Gaza could breach international law, experts say. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-68249962

[15] According to Hamoked, an Israel based human rights organization, "As of May 2024 Israel holds 2,072 sentenced prisoners, 2,727 remand detainees and 3,424 administrative detainees held without trial. Israel also holds 865 people as "unlawful combatants". https://hamoked.org/prisoners-charts.php

[16] See Mann 2009.

[17] I draw from this case below, particularly the statements of Israeli politicians and military officials that South Africa has included in its application.

[18] Methodologically, language is a crucial tool for interrogating how "particular modes of historical consciousness and dispositions toward ... action" are produced (Muir 2021, 9).

[19] Journalist Bethan McKernan writes that 'Deep moral deterioration' [is] being normalised in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict' (The Guardian, 2024). HRW too reports 'Israeli Lawmakers Try to Block Torture Prosecutions' of IDF soldiers (HRW 2024).

[20] Also known as ISIL: The Islamic State of Syria and the Levant.

[21] Even international law allows certain legal protections for 'partisans' who conceal their weapons and intentions to harm uniformed soldiers (Schmitt 1962).

[22] See: https://www.icj-cij.org/case/192

[23] Selected Speeches, Department of Defense Service of Remembrance at the Pentagon, Arlington, Virginia.

[24] Selected Speeches, West Point Commencement United States Military Academy West Point, New York June 1.

[25] Address to the Nation on the Way Forward in Iraq the Oval Office Washington, D.C. September 13.

[26] Al Jazeera English, https://twitter.com/AJEnglish/status/1711376122674303191?s=20

[27] Ariel Harmoni, Ministry of Defense, Kipa News, 10 October 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l9wx7e4u-xM. Translation in "Israeli Defense Minister Warns Hamas 'Will Regret' Deadly Attacks", Bloomberg Quicktake (10 October 2023), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vtjHcnNB0E8. Bill Hutchinson, "Bombarded by Israeli airstrikes, conditions in Gaza grow more dire as power goes out", ABC News (12 October 2023), https://abcnews.go.com/International/bombarded-israeli-airstrikes-conditions-gaza-grow-direpower/story?id=103899193\#:~:text=The\%20airstrikes\%20were\%20launched\%20by,have\%20been\%20hit\%20in\%20Gaza.

[28] Video address by Ghassan Alian, 10 October 2023, https://www.youtube.com/shorts/5a0EWv-o7mE COGAT-MOD Channel.

[29] Politico, Oct. 12th: https://www.politico.eu/article/ron-prosor-israel-evoy-hamas-animals-must-be-destroyed/

[30] Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Press Release: Excerpt from PM Netanyahu's remarks at the opening of the Winter Assembly of the 25th Knesset's Second Session, 16 October 2023, https://www.gov.il/en/departments/news/excerpt-from-pmnetanyahu-s-remarks-at-the-opening-of-the-knesset-s-winter-assembly-16-oct-2023.

[31] "Amalekite, member of an ancient nomadic tribe, or collection of tribes, described in the Old Testament as relentless enemies of Israel, even though they were closely related to Ephraim, one of the 12 tribes of Israel. The district over which they ranged was south of Judah and probably extended into northern Arabia. The Amalekites harassed the Hebrews during their Exodus from Egypt and attacked them at Rephidim near Mount Sinai, where they were defeated by Joshua. They were among the nomadic raiders defeated by Gideon and were condemned to annihilation by Samuel. Their final defeat occurred in the time of Hezekiah" (Britannica Online: https://www.britannica.com/topic/Amalekites).

[32] Address by the Prime Minister of Israel, 28 October 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lIPkoDk6isc. Translation in, "Israel-Hamas war: 'We will fight and we will win', says Benjamin Netanyahu", Sky News (28 October 2023), https://news.sky.com/video/israel-hamas-war-we-will-fight-and-we-will-win-says-benjamin-netanyahu-12995212.

[33] Prime Minister's Office in Hebrew, @IsraeliPM_heb, Tweet (November 3, 2023), https://twitter.com/IsraeliPM_heb/status/1720406463972004198. "Remember what Amalek did to you."

[34] Yair Ben David, Commander in the 2908th Battalion, statement, 20 December 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NK8ZnGKspeI. Translation in "War on Gaza: Israeli commander vows to flatten 'entire' Gaza Strip", Middle East Eye (21 December 2023), https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/war-gaza-israeli-commander-vowsflatten-entire-gaza-strip

[35] Yinon Magal, @YinonMagal, Tweet (7 December 2023) https://twitter.com/YinonMagal/status/1732652279461757102. Translation by Middle East Eye, @MiddleEastEye, Tweet (1:30 pm, December 8, 2023) https://twitter.com/MiddleEastEye/status/1733116719668113618.

[36] President of the State of Israel, @Isaac_Herzog, Tweet (October 15, 2023), https://twitter.com/Isaac_Herzog/status/1713661051986678189. (emphasis added)

[37]Interview with Itamar Ben-Gvir on Channel 12, 11 November 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2y
Rl-cc-D3w. Translated by Quds News Network, @QudsNen, Tweet (November 12, 2023), https://twitter.com/Qu
dsNen/status/1723784790682358189.

[38]Gili Cohen, Dov Gil-Har, Itay Blumenthal, Sulieman Masvidan, "Minister Amichai Eliyahu: Atomic bomb on
Gaza? This is one of the possibilities", Kan (5 November 2023), https://www.kan.org.il/content/kan-news/po
litic/596470/. Translation in "Far-right minister: Nuking Gaza is an option, population should 'go to Ireland or
deserts'", The Times of Israel (5 November 2023), https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/far-right-minis
ter-nuking-gaza-is-an-optionpopulation-should-go-to-ireland-or-deserts/.

[39]Giora Eiland, "Let's not be intimidated by the world", Yedioth Ahronoth (print) (19 November 2023), in
Bezalel Smotrich, Minister of Finance, Chairman of the Religious Zionist Party, @bezalelsm, Tweet (November
19, 2023), https://twitter.com/bezalelsm/status/1726198721946480911. Translation by Talula Sha, Tweet (19
November 2023), https://twitter.com/TalulaSha/status/1726267178201362438.

[40]Bazz News, @1717Bazz, Tweet (October 11, 2023), https://twitter.com/1717Bazz/status/1712176168823107
986. Translation by Middle East Eye, @MiddleEastEye, Tweet (October 13, 2023), https://twitter.com/Middle
EastEye/status/1712918166437806294.

[41]Interview with Eyal Golan on Now 14, 15 October 2023: Now 14, @Now14Israel, Tweet (October 15, 2023),
https://twitter.com/Now14Israel/status/1713531211300167928.

[42]David Mizrahy Verthaim, @dverthaim, Tweet (October 7, 2023), https://twitter.com/dverthaim/status/171
0684531114602891.

[43]Interview with Eliyahu Yossain on Now 14 Israel, 29 October 2023: Now 14, @Now14Israel, Tweet (9:32 pm,
October 29, 2023), https://twitter.com/Now14Israel/status/1718742747455053922. Translated by Ahmed Eldin,
Instagram Post (30 October 2023) https://www.instagram.com/reel/CzB77tJrjtW/

Figures

Figure 1. Source: NBC News, December 8th, 2023.
https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/israel-hamas-war-images-palestinians-stripped-blindfo
lded-gaza-rcna128685

Figure 2. Source: Commondreams.org. February 13th, 2024.
https://www.commondreams.org/news/gaza-torture

Figure 3. Source: BBC News, February 9th, 2024.
https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-68249962

Figure 4. Source: The Guardian, March 5th, 2024.
https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/mar/05/gazan-detainees-beaten-and-sexually-assau
lted-at-israeli-detention-centres-un-report-claims

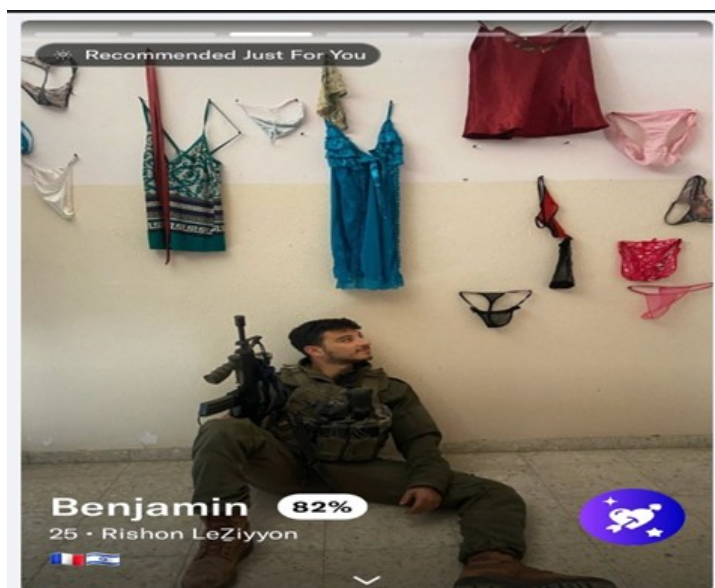**Figure 5.** Source: X (Formerly Twitter) February 12th, 2024.
https://twitter.com/NaheedMustafa/status/1757096681256956265

Figure 6. Source: X (Formerly Twitter) February 12th, 2024.
https://twitter.com/NaheedMustafa/status/1757096681256956265

Figure 7. Source: Euromedmonitor.org, October 31st, 2023.
https://euromedmonitor.org/en/article/5906/Egregious-acts-of-torture,-abuse-committed-by-I
sraeli-army-against-Palestinian-civilians-in-the-West-Bank

Figure 8. Source: BBC News, February 9th, 2024.
https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-68249962

Abu-Ghraib Prison Abuse and Torture

Source: All images below are from Salon.com.
https://web.archive.org/web/20060705205641/http://www.salon.com/news/abu_ghraib/2006/03/14/chapter_4/index.html