E-Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences (EHASS)
ISSN – Online 2720-7722 | Print 2821-8949
Volume 7 Issue 10 2026 pp 3043 - 3057
Available online at: https://noyam.org/journals/ehass/
DOI: https://doi.org/10.38159/ehass.20267109

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The Picture of a Genocidaire: A Comparative Political Approach

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ABSTRACT

On December 29th, 2023, South Africa opened a case of Genocide against Israel at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in response to the state of Israel's destruction of the Palestinian territory of Gaza. The Israeli Government would label the charge as baseless despite overwhelming evidence that civilians have been targeted on purpose. As the evidence mounted, various accusations of crimes against humanity and war crimes were levelled at Israel. In this study, the author sought to examine how one may prove the accusation of genocide; an extremely difficult task, especially in a conflict riddled with ethnic and religious divisions, superpower geopolitics, high and often misconstrued media coverage, as well as international legal jurisprudence, which is heavily politicized. In most cases, the passage of time determines whether scholars certify an event as genocide. In this research, the author deploys a comparative political methodology to ascertain, through historical examples, whether Israel's war on Gaza constitutes genocide. Overall, the author reveals that proving genocide is fraught with difficulties; however, there are similar behaviours and traits that a *genocidaire* deploys, which will ultimately show that South Africa's case of genocide is credible, with merit, and valid. The research contributes to decolonial theory by shifting the voice of reason from the monopoly of the West to the Global South.

Keywords: Gaza, Israel, Historiography of Genocide.

INTRODUCTION

On October 7th, 2023, Hamas and several other Palestinian national militant organizations launched an attack against Israel, which resulted in the death of an estimated 1,200 people, mostly civilians. The Israeli response was a full-scale invasion of Gaza. As the atrocities and crimes against humanity became apparent in the invasion, South Africa formally lodged a case of genocide against Israel at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on December 29th, 2023. As a supporter of the Palestinian struggle,[1] South Africa argued that Israel violated the 1948 Genocide Convention, a policy established in the aftermath of World War 2's Holocaust.[2] Israel countered, calling South Africa's charge baseless and accusing the country of functioning as the legal arm of Hamas. Israel would further maintain that its

[1] The first democratic president of South Africa President Nelson Mandela (1930-2013) would state that South Africa's freedom would mean nothing without the liberation of Palestine. He would also state "The temptation is to speak in muffled tones about the rights of the people of Palestine. Having achieved our own freedom, we can fall into the trap of washing our hands of difficulties that others face. Yet we would be less than human if we did so". On another occasion Mandela called the Palestinian struggle 'the greatest moral issue of our time'. South Africa's Foreign Policy is heavily influenced by the legacy of Mandela, who was one of the few persons to be referred to as a 'Statesman'.

[2] DIRCO (Department of International Relations & Co-Operation), "South Africa Delivers Evidence of Israel Genocide to ICJ ," 2024.

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PUBLICATION HISTORY - Received: 28th January, 2026 | Accepted: 2nd July, 2026 | Published: 11th November, 2026.
TO CITE THIS ARTICLE – Pillay, Anton M. "The Picture of a Genocidaire: A Comparative Political Approach." *E-Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences* 7, no.10 (2026): 3043 - 3057. https://doi.org/10.38159/ehass.20267109
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military operations in Gaza are acts of self-defence, not genocide, and argued that the case of South Africa distorts international law.[3] Prime Minister Netanyahu would call the claims 'hypocrisy on steroids'.[4]

Although many states found South Africa's case to be premature in December 2023, over time, the case gained merit and credibility as the atrocities became more prevalent, widespread, and visibly systematic. In March 2024, for example, the United Nations (UN) declared that Israel was using starvation as a weapon of war. This followed claims that Israel was making use of humanitarian language to 'guide' Palestinians into safe zones only to target them with air strikes. In July 2024, Khatib et al. estimated that up to 186,000 people could have died in Gaza's obliteration.[5] In a speech to the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in September 2024, South African President Cyril Ramaphosa reiterated his country's stance, saying, "The violence the Palestinian people are subjected to is a grim continuation of more than half a century of apartheid that has been perpetrated against Palestinians by Israel".[6] The Presidents of Colombia, Senegal, and Chile would use the same platform to condemn Israel's tactics.

For Israel and its pro-war proponents, the war is justified, follows the rules of engagement, is a 'war on terror', and a war of self-defence. These sentiments were visible in a July 2024 speech at the US Congress by Israeli Prime Minister (PM) Benjamin Netanyahu, who opened with the phrase "It's a clash between barbarism and civilization". He compared the October 7th Hamas attack to 9/11, saying "proportionately, compared to our population size, that's like twenty 9/11s in one day." Netanyahu denied the brutality of the offensive, describing it as rumour, saying, "that's why despite all the lies you've heard, the war in Gaza has one of the lowest ratios of combatants to non-combatant casualties in the history of urban warfare."[7]

This pro-Israeli narrative is the complete opposite of the Palestinian reality of obliteration. In such a polarized conflict, how is it possible to analyse the accusation of genocide?[8] Must historians wait till the dust settles before certifying it? Must court cases take years to sift through the evidence before coming to a verdict? Answering these questions is not a straightforward task, as noted by Luft, who highlighted how genocide research is always fraught with complex questions of moral right and wrong, truth and fiction, and various interpretations of what happened.[9] According to Israeli Professor Raz Seagal, knowledge of genocides is being weaponized and distorted.[10] Added to this complexity is the fact that media evidence might not suffice in the disinformation age, where one event can be translated into multiple stories.[11] Furthermore, powerful AI can create fake footage, plant inflammatory ideas, and create false narratives that are manufactured into misinformation. From a legal perspective of proving guilt, the accusation of genocide should be backed up with an official document, policy, or signature that specifically calls for the extermination of a population group. This notion was put forward by Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo in a speech at the UN in 2002, when he implied that because no article or document called for 'genocide' in Darfur, Sudan, the existence of such is hard to prove. While the President was not defending genocide, he was pointing out the legality of *actus reus*.

Considering the difficulties in proving genocide, this paper uses a comparative political approach to examine tactics and strategies from previous genocides, to compare them with tactics and strategies

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[3] There is a growing body of research challenging the validity of international law arguing instead that international law is simply Western institutional architecture. UJ Visiting Professor Alex Mazyaev has argued this.

[4] R.A. Abushamala, "Israeli Premier Accuses South Africa of 'Hypocrisy,'" AA, January 11, 2024, https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/israeli-premier-accuses-south-africa-of-hypocrisy-as-icj-hears-gaza-genocide-case/3106599.

[5] Rasha Khatib, Martin McKee, and Salim Yusuf, "Counting the Dead in Gaza: Difficult but Essential," *The Lancet* 404, no. 10449 (2024): 237–38.

[6] C. Ramaphosa, "Address to the Nation on the Palestinian Situation [Speech Transcript] " (Republic of South Africa: The Presidency, 2023).https://www.thepresidency.gov.za/speeches/address-nation-palestinian-situation%2C-21-november-2023.

[7] Benjamin Netanyahu, "Statement on ICC Prosecutor's Applications for Arrest Warrants [Press Conference]" (State of Israel: Prime Minister's Office, 2024).

[8] Even within South Africa, the Democratic Alliance (DA), the country's largest opposition party, was at odds with the Genocide charge made by the ruling African National Congress (ANC).

[9] Aliza Luft, "Three Stories and Three Questions about Participation in Genocide," *Journal of Perpetrator Research* 3, no. 1 (May 5, 2020): 196–206, https://doi.org/10.21039/jpr.3.1.37.

[10] C. Hedges, *Neo-Holocaust Deniers* (The Chris Hedges Report Podcast, 2025).

[11] See Herman and Chomsky's Propaganda Model which explains how propaganda and systemic biases function in corporate mass media.

evident in Israel's 2023 war on Gaza. This comparative analysis, which distinguishes salient features of genocidal behaviour in prior conflicts to assess a present conflict, could help to create criteria for the identification of genocide in the future.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

The term *genocide* is a relatively new word. In 1944, Raphael Lemkin (1900-1959), a Polish lawyer of Jewish origins, sought to describe Nazi policies of systematic murder and formed the word 'genocide' by combining *geno-*, from the Greek word for race or tribe, with *-cide*, from the Latin word for killing.[12] In proposing this new term, Lemkin "had in mind a coordinated and deliberate plan of different actions aiming at the destruction of the lives of national groups, intending to annihilate the groups".[13]

Synonymous with the phrase 'ethnic cleansing', genocide is larger in scale, sustained, and a deliberate attempt to eradicate a certain group of people. There are specific racial and ethnic tones in genocidal killing that differentiate it from a large-scale massacre. The United Nations Genocide Convention (1948) listed any of the five acts below committed with the "intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group." [14]

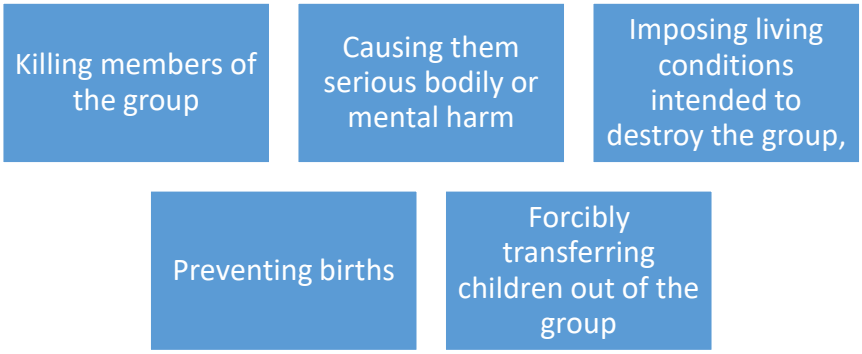


Figure 1: Five Points of Genocide

Almost three months after South Africa lodged its genocide accusation, on March 27, 2024, the UN released a report entitled '*Anatomy of a Genocide'* which described the Gaza situation. The report documented three out of five clear indications that Israel committed genocide. The report described:

> "The overwhelming nature and scale of Israel's assault and the destructive conditions of life it has inflicted reveal an intent to physically destroy Palestinians as a group. With more than 70 percent of the recorded deaths being women and children, and Israel failing to prove that the remaining 30 percent are Hamas fighters, the case for genocide is apparent".[15]

The report's lead author, Francesca P. Albanese, insisted that the 'genocide of Palestinians' was an escalatory stage of a long-standing 'settler colonial process of erasure.' This term is instrumental to understanding genocide.[16] The German Empire exterminated the Ovaherero/Namaqua natives to make way for German settlers; Native Americans (USA) were decimated to make way for European settlers;

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[12] R. Lemkin, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe* (Foundations of the War of Law Series, 1944).

[13] George M. Weisz, "Starvation Genocide and the Triumph of Raphael Lemkin," *Rambam Maimonides Medical Journal* 13, no. 2 (April 26, 2022): e0013, https://doi.org/10.5041/RMMJ.10466.

[14] United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), "Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide," 1951.

[15] F. Albanese, "Anatomy of a Genocide: Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in the Palestinian Territories Occupied since 1967* (A/HRC/55/73, Advance Unedited Version)," United Nations Human Rights Council, 2024, https://reliefweb.int/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/anatomy-genocide-report-special-rapporteur-situation-human-rights-palestinian-territories-occupied-1967-francesca-albanese-ahrc5573-advance-unedited-version.

[16] To Fanon, the colonial subject is 'dehumanized' by colonialism to such an extent that 'it turns him into an animal' (Fanon, 1963: 42). It then becomes natural for the colonizer to deploy violence in the colonial context, because the dehumanized colonial subject will not respond to anything else. A colony is defined as a country or area under the full or partial political control of another country and occupied by settlers from that country. The term colonization refers strictly to migration, for example, to settler colonies in South Africa or New Zealand, trading posts, and plantations, while colonialism deals with this, along with ruling the existing indigenous peoples of styled "new territories". Colonialism is the establishment of a colony in one territory by a political power from another territory, and the subsequent maintenance, expansion, and exploitation of that colony.

British settlers legally hunted Australian Aboriginals, and areas of the Sudetenland and Poland were targeted by the Nazis for population replacement. Even within the Rwandan genocide, the idea that the Tutsis originated from Ethiopia and were a foreign colonial force played a major role in their *othering*. Regarding Israel, I first speculated that Israel was a settler colony of the US in 2017.[17]

That paper argued that Israel is a colony of the US, given the way the country serves as an outpost of US FP in the region. While it is anti-Semitic to suggest that Israelis or Jewish people puppeteer world domination,[18] the realist scholars Mearsheimer and Walt published a paper arguing that pro-Jewish lobbies have successfully shifted US Foreign Policy in a pro-Israeli direction.[19] In the 2023-2025 war in Gaza, almost 10% of Israel's war deaths were Americans.[20] The relationship between the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) and America is so intertwined that when an American IDF soldier was killed in Gaza, President Biden called the family of the slain to express that he was devastated and outraged.

Since 1972, the US has vetoed any UN resolution calling out or condemning Israel at the UN.[21] In December 2023, when the UN put forward a resolution calling for a ceasefire in Gaza, US UN Ambassador Robert Wood vetoed the would-be resolution. On November 20th, 2024, the US again vetoed a resolution calling for the "immediate, unconditional, and permanent" ceasefire in Gaza. The United States' use of its veto power at the UN led Mearsheimer to call the US "the de facto enabler of Israeli expansion in the occupied territories."[22] In 2004, President Bush announced that Israel would not have to return all the territories that it occupied in 1967 and that Palestinian refugees would not be allowed to return but would have to resettle elsewhere. President Trump's ambassador to Israel, Amb. David M. Friedman, an outspoken supporter of settler groups, cast doubt on the notion of a two-state solution. The Ambassador has repeatedly stated that Israeli settlements were not illegal and supports Israel's annexation of portions of the West Bank.[23]

Although the debate over whether Israel is a colony is inexhaustible, the basic premise that a settler colony will indefinitely seek to annex new territory by any means necessary is the start of any genocidal intent. To help navigate the complexities of ascertaining genocide, the research will use the French term *Genocidaire* to personify the individual, party, government, or idea that advocates, engages in, supports, or defends the mass killing of a population group. This term is suitable for this research because the word does not differentiate between mass killers and those who propose mass killing. Indeed, for a genocide to happen, there must be the architects who propose the killing and provide the backing ideology, and those who do the actual killing. The term is also suitable for the research's goal of painting a picture of the *Genocidaire* by analysing the common traits, behaviours, tactics, and strategies that they indulge in.

METHODOLOGY

The researcher examined historical genocides to find similarities with which to assess the Israeli war in Gaza (2023-2025). In painting a picture of a *Genocidaire*, the research will show the common traits, behaviours, and tactics that Genocidaires deploy. Interestingly, all genocidaires have much in common, as the research shows. The title of this paper is a homage to the fictional classic, *The Picture of Dorian Gray,* by Oscar Wilde. In a way, the fictional Gray denied his crimes, ignored his vices, and refused to acknowledge his immorality, which, as is shown, is what all *Genocidaires* do.

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[17] The ties between the US and Israel runs deep, with the 'colony' being the biggest recipient of US foreign aid in history receiving approximately $251.2 billion since 1959 (AP and TOI 2024). Between 2019 and 2023, the US accounted for 69% of Israel's weapons imports (SIPRI 2023): In a speech in 2024, US President Joe Biden would state "The security of Israel and the United States is inextricably tied". US Vice President Kamala Harris would also state "I am unequivocal and unwavering in my commitment to Israel's Defence and its right to defend itself.

[18] M. Shain, *Antisemitism. (*South Africa: Bowerdean Publishing Co. Ltd, 1997).

[19] John J Mearsheimer and Stephen M Walt, *The Israel Lobby and US Foreign Policy* (Macmillan, 2007).

[20] Under the US Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) Section 349 (a)(3), a US citizen can forfeit nationality if he/she serves in a foreign military. However, the many Americans in the IDF has never been a topic of tension.

[21] In 1987 the UNGA passed a resolution that all members states should combat 'terrorism wherever and by whomever it is committed'. Only two states voted against it, the United States and Israel.

[22] J. J Mearsheimer, "Israel-Hamas War: American Political Scientist John Mearsheimer Interview [Video Interview]," CNA, 2023. https://www.channelnewsasia.com/watch/israel-hamas-war-american-political-scientist-john-mearsheimer-interview-3801316.The United States has used its Veto power almost 50 times to block UN Resolutions on Israel.

[23] P Bergen, "Jared Kushner's Middle East Fantasy Explodes" (CNN, 2021).

DISCUSSION

What makes a *Geoncidaire*?

The most common trait that *Genocidaires* share is their denial of the crime. Perpetrators of genocide "tend to resort to lying and self-deception about what they have done".[24] Denial or abnegation is a psychological defence mechanism postulated by Sigmund Freud "in which a person is faced with a fact that is too uncomfortable to accept and rejects it instead, insisting that it is not true despite overwhelming evidence."[25] In denial, mass killers wear masks, an act which is so convincing to the wearer that society at large might not recognize the true identity behind the mask.[26] This psychoticism can be seen in the cases of serial killers such as Denis Rader, Ted Bundy, and John Wayne Gacy, whose intimate partners were unaware of their crimes. While not *Genocidaires* per se, the idea lingers that mass killers can repress their consciences to various degrees of success.

In Turkey, the Armenian genocide is a contentious issue to this day, with denial playing an important role in the interpretation of the events. On the Turkish side of history, there was no mass killing, and instead, the accepted history is that Armenians in the Ottoman Empire were resettled for military reasons. The deniers claim that the death toll is exaggerated or attribute the deaths to other factors such as purported civil war, disease, bad weather, rogue local officials, or bands of Kurds and outlaws. Suny summarizes the denial as "there was no genocide, and the Armenians were to blame for it".[27] Turkey's *Igdir Genocide Memorial and Museum* not only denies that Turkey committed genocide but promulgates the view that it was Armenians who were the *Genocidaires*. Marchand et al. called the monument 'the ultimate caricature of the Turkish government's policy of denying the genocide by rewriting history and transforming victims into guilty parties.'[28]

Denial is also apparent in Germany's genocide of the Ovaherero and Namaqua in German Southwest Africa (1904-05). In 2003, on a visit to Windhoek, German Foreign Minister Joseph Fischer said there would be no apology that might give grounds for reparations. It was only in March 2021 that Germany officially described the massacres as genocide.

In Australia, *the Colonial Frontier Massacres Project* found at least 270 frontier massacres over 140 years, as part of a "state-sanctioned and organized pogrom to eradicate Aboriginal people".[29] In most of the language used to describe that history, the connotations of denial are prevalent. William Stanner, an anthropologist, described a national 'cult of forgetfulness' while a 1927 Royal Commission lamented the 'conspiracy of silence'.[30] In 1846, writing home to England, Henry Meyrick wrote:

> "No wild beast of the forest was ever hunted down with such unsparing perseverance as they are. Men, women and children are shot whenever they can be met with … I have protested against it at every station I have been in Gippsland, in the strongest language, but these things are kept very secret as the penalty would certainly be hanging."[31]

Meyrick's letter does follow the broader narrative of denial: of all the attacks documented, colonialists were found guilty and punished only once.[32] Denial can also be seen in scholarly work that minimized the effects of massacres and instead argued that the Aboriginals died out because of their inability to adapt to a changing environment. Kociumbas asserts:

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[24] Leonard S. Newman and Ralph Erber, "EpilogueSocial Psychologists Confront the Holocaust," in *Understanding GenocideThe Social Psychology of the Holocaust* (Oxford University Press, 2002), 325–45, https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195133622.003.0015.

[25] Sigmund Freud, "Negation," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* , ed. James Strachey, vol. 19 (Hogarth Press, 1959), 235–-39.

[26] Horror movies have familiarized popular culture with the image that 'the weirdo wears a mask'. In his analysis of masks, Malone (2019) states 'The mask acts as a barrier, a wall not only between us and him, but between us and understanding'.

[27] Ronald Grigor Suny, "They Can Live in the Desert but Nowhere Else: A History of the Armenian Genocide," 2015.

[28] Laure Marchand, Guillaume Perrier, and Debbie Blythe, *Turkey and the Armenian Ghost: On the Trail of the Genocide* (McGill-Queen's Press-MQUP, 2015).

[29] Lorena Allam and Nick Evershed, "The Killing Times: The Massacres of Aboriginal People Australia Must Confront," *The Guardian* 3 (2019): 1–7.

[30] For more on this see 'Collective Amnesia'.

[31] H. Meyrick, "Letter to His Mother," in *The Destruction of Aboriginal Society: Aboriginal Policy and Practice*, ed. C.D. Rowley, vol. 1 (Australian National University Press., 1846), 179.

[32] In the aftermath of the Myall Creek killings in 1838.

> "By dwelling on smallpox and other infectious diseases as faceless killers, colonialists and historians directed attention away from more overtly murderous acts. In particular, the 1789 epidemic laid the foundation for the notion that Aboriginal people were not killed outright, but, owing to their own personal weaknesses and cultural flaws, sadly just 'faded away.' It was as if smallpox was nothing more than the first stage in the tragic but necessary workings of evolutionary law, annihilating all species slow to adapt."[33]

While openly advocating and engaging in exterminating indigenous people, the settlers and their descendants were also arguing that "indigenous society was not destroyed by the Europeans but collapsed under the weight of its own pathologies."[34] Moses would further say that white Australians have 'contrived to excuse themselves.'[35]

The denial of Australian genocide has persisted right into the contemporary era. Monuments such as Angus McMillan celebrating *Genocidaires* are still protected by councils across Australia. McMillan (1810-1865) was a Scottish-born explorer who led several of the Gippsland massacres of the Gunai people. In July 1843 at Warrigal Creek, McMillan and his Highland Brigade surrounded a large group of Gunaikurnai people and shot between 60 and 150 men, women and children.[36] The 2003 film *Rabbit-Proof Fence,* which dramatized the forced transfer of Aboriginal children and the programme to whiten the black Aboriginal gene, was met with contempt and disdain by many Australians. Eric Abetz, Special Minister of State, whose great-uncle was an SS officer and German ambassador to Vichy France, published a leaflet criticizing the film's portrayal of the treatment of Aboriginals, and demanded an apology from the filmmakers.[37]

At the Nuremberg tribunal, *Holocaust* architects like Franz von Papen, Joachim von Ribbentrop, and Konstantin von Neurath denied that their actions were genocidal. Hermann Göring declared himself to be 'in the sense of the indictment, not guilty.' The Nazi propagandist Julius Streicher, who built a media powerhouse on publicizing hatred, complained that all the judges at Nuremberg were Jews. Streicher would claim to know nothing of the concentration camps in which he had previously encouraged populations to be sent. Adolf Eichmann, who stood trial in Tel Aviv, reiterated that he was following orders as a dutiful soldier does. In a letter to the Israeli President in 1962, he wrote:

> "There is a need to draw a line between the leaders responsible and the people like me forced to serve as mere instruments in the hands of the leaders…. I was not a responsible leader, and as such, do not feel myself guilty."[38]

Similarly, convicted 1994 *Genocidaire* Valerie Bemeriki[39], who publicized violence, would in her defence claim that she was merely acting under the pressure of her employer. In the Balkan crises of the 1990s, denial was a prominent feature amongst the leaders responsible for the mass killings and ethnic cleansing. Slobodan Milosevic, former president of Serbia and Yugoslavia, called his war crimes tribunal an evil and hostile attack. On his charge sheet, Milosevic was charged with the deportation of approximately 800,000 Kosovo Albanian civilians, 170,000 Croat and non-Serbian civilians, and the widespread killing of Bosnian Muslims. Radovan Karadzic, who was found guilty of genocide and crimes against humanity, insisted that his trial was 'a court of NATO.' Radko Mladić, the Serb Commander who was part of a criminal enterprise to eliminate Bosnian Muslims, claimed, 'this is all

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[33] Jan Kociumbas, "Genocide and Modernity in Colonial Australia, 1788-1850," 2004.

[34] Colonial violence besides being extraordinarily brutal was cunning. Decolonial thinker Ngugi Wa Thiongo retold the story of how a Kenyan servant who, after being caught riding a horse, was beaten so badly as punishment that he died. His supposed final words 'I now die' , absolved the perpetrators of the crime, as the three words deflected guilt onto the victim.

[35] A. Dirk Moses, "Genocide and Holocaust Consciousness in Australia," *History Compass* 1, no. 1 (January 21, 2003), https://doi.org/10.1111/1478-0542.028; Mable Kelebogile Kgosi, Moses Makgato, and Nhlelehle Meskien Skosana, "Teachers' Views on the Application of Educational Technologies in the Classroom: A Case of Selected Tshwane West Secondary Schools in Gauteng," *Journal of Curriculum Studies Research* 5, no. 2 (2023): 151–66.

[36] C O'Mahoney, *The Scottish Explorer Who Became the Butcher of Gippsland* (The Guardian, 2019).

[37] Director Phillip Noyce suggested that instead the government should apologize to the numerous Indigenous people affected by the removal policy.

[38] C. Farmer, *They Were Just Following Orders* (University College London, 2021).

[39] Was a talk show host on *Radio Television Libre des Mille Collines*

lies' at his trial. Mladić was filmed telling Muslim males that they would be safely transported out of Srebrenica, only for them to be executed.[40] In 2017, after being found guilty of a war crimes charge, one defendant announced, "Judges, Slobodan Praljak is not a war criminal. With disdain, I reject your verdict."[41] In protest, he then committed suicide by drinking a vial of cyanide poison. Praljak oversaw the *Dretelj* concentration camp and led pogroms to ethnically cleanse non-Croats from certain areas of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

At the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), defence attorneys Christopher Black and Peter Erlinder believed the denial narratives of their clients, claiming that the convicted perpetrators were political prisoners and victims of an international Western conspiracy.[42] Edward S. Herman and David Peterson would publish extensively, claiming the accepted history of the genocide was based on "a complex of interwoven lies".[43] They downplayed the organizing capabilities of the Rwandan State, denied Hutu Power, and claimed the state was incapable of planning or managing genocide.

Regarding Israel's war on Gaza, denial is a prominent feature. This is where violence is acknowledged but is recast as something other than genocide. For example, several surgeons reported on the high occurrence of child casualties with sniper fire wounds.[44] These deaths are denied as purposely targeted and instead are allocated as collateral damage, even though the victims had been hit in the head. In the chaos of denial, events are twisted to deny genocidal death tolls, and instead, it is *the other* who has genocidal intent. This is evident in Netanyahu's 2024 speech to the US Congress in which he said, "In the Middle East, Iran is virtually behind all the terrorism, all the turmoil, all the chaos, all the killing." This rhetoric is described in Albanese's Genocide report as "an obscene inversion of reality".[45]

After publication of Albanese's report, Israel's High Commission in Geneva 'utterly rejected the report', describing it as "simply an extension of a campaign seeking to undermine the very establishment of the Jewish state."[46] When the Israeli UN ambassador Gilad Erdan was relieved of duty in 2024, in his final speech at the UN, he called his country 'the most moral in the world…we are the vanguard of civilization'. The denial can be surreal at times. At a meeting between Trump and Netanyahu in July 2025, the Israeli PM handed President Trump a letter stating his intention to nominate Trump for the Nobel Peace Prize.

In denial, a second prominent *Genocidaire* trait emerges: atrocious behaviour.[47] This phrase refers to the way *Genocidaires* deploy sadistic, inhumane, and brutal forms of violence against their targets in the aim of ending a genealogy. Thus, to the *Genocidaire*, exterminating males will not suffice. If women and children are left behind, this could lead to interbreeding between the settlers and natives, which would 'dilute' the purity of the colonialist cause. While settlers would prefer a separate and distinct native population as a source of cheap labour, if the native population refuses subjugation, the *Genocidaire* will target women and children for total extermination. In spaces where land is limited, deporting a population away might not suffice, and thus, *Genocidaires* become extremely atrocious.[48]

One atrocious but effective method to target the vulnerable is by manipulating food and water. *Genocidaires* are fond of this tactic because it is cheaper (saves ammunition and deploying troops), less strenuous (murdering people in the thousands is a very laborious task), and allows the G*enocidaire* to

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[40] David Hearst, *Israel's Alliance with Europe's Fascists Is the Greatest Threat to Jewish People Middle East Eye* (The University of Western Australia, 2024).

[41] S Praljak, "Final Statement before the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) [Court Transcript] " (United Nations International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals (IRMCT) , 2017).

[42] Helen M Hintjens and Jos van Oijen, "Elementary Forms of Collective Denial: The 1994 Rwanda Genocide," *Genocide Studies International* 13, no. 2 (2019): 146–67.

[43] E. S. Herman and D. Peterson, *The Politics of Genocide, Part 2: Ian Black and the Language of Oppression* (Electric Politics, 2011).

[44] Dr Mark Perlmutter (France24 2024), Dr Fozia Alvi (Mcgreal 2024), and Dr Irgan Galaria (Galaria 2024)

[45] Albanese, "Anatomy of a Genocide: Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in the Palestinian Territories Occupied since 1967* (A/HRC/55/73, Advance Unedited Version)."

[46] Permanent Mission of Israel to the United Nations in Geneva., "Israeli Response to the Anatomy of a Genocide Report by the UN Special Rapporteur [Press Statement]," 2024.

[47] Leonard S. Newman, *Confronting Humanity at Its Worst: Social Psychological Perspectives on Genocide* (Oxford University Press, 2019). Newman used the term 'atrocious behaviour'.

[48] In the mind of the genocidaire, resources are always limited and cannot be shared. Australia and North America are vast and expansive, yet native populations were still decimated by being driven to inarable lands.

deny responsibility ('it was famine not genocide', 'it was the weather not genocide', 'the crops failed that season', 'there was too much rain'). The manipulation of food and water as a form of collective punishment is a feature of every genocide. In 2018, the UN officially adopted a resolution that specifically recognized starvation and food insecurity, among other acts, as illicit acts of warfare. It is worth noting here that in 2021, the United States and Israel were the only two nations to vote against a resolution of the UN General Assembly that affirms access to food as a fundamental human right. In 2025, both nations again voted against making food a human right.[49]

During the 19th century and right up until the 1930s, British settlers not only prohibited Aboriginal people from accessing waterholes but also poisoned food and water to massacre scores of them.[50] Typically, poisoned food and drink would be given to Aboriginal people or left out in the open where they could find it. In the 1860s, poisoned flour was given to the South Ballina clan of Nyangbal people, leaving 150 adults dead. In 1908, in Western Australia, eight Aboriginal people died after ingesting poison near Leonora. Explorer William Carr-Boyd described those killed as dirty, lazy, thieving human wolves who "got something more to eat than they bargained for."[51]

The German Empire in Namibia also used collective punishment to great effect. In August 1904, German General Lothar von Trotha drove the rebelling Ovaherero into the desert of Omaheke, where the majority died of dehydration and starvation. Many of the water holes in that area were purposely poisoned. In October that year, the Nama people suffered a similar fate for refusing to be conquered. Soldiers were given orders to shoot any man, woman, or child who wanted to flee the desert.

Suny's history of the Armenian Genocide, entitled '*They can live in the desert but nowhere else*', underlines the point of hindering access to food and water. In a study by Shirinian, he found that the Ottoman Empire during the period of 1915 to 1923 used forced starvation extensively against the Armenians.[52]

In Nazi Germany, the first act of collective punishment began with '*Jude Verboten*' signs above butcheries, grocery stores, and bakeries. According to Bruaas, *Der Hungerplan* was a pivotal framework in the Nazi genocide.[53] Marshal von Rundstedt at the Wehrmacht Academy in 1943 was quoted as saying that 'organized underfeeding…is better than machine guns.' In a diary entry by Hans Frank, the Nazi Governor of occupied Poland, he wrote, 'That we sentence 1.2 million Jews to die of hunger should be noted only marginally.' As documented by Bruaas, 'many who died in the gas chambers or during transport were already emaciated'.[54]

In North America, the American bison were intentionally slaughtered to starve Native Americans.[55] President Ulysses S. Grant saw the destruction of Buffalo as a solution to the country's 'Indian Problem'. Within the space of 100 years, the Native American population dwindled from a high of 50 million to 7 million. Today, most reservations are on barren lands or deserts where growing crops or rearing livestock is difficult.[56]

Regarding Israel, the country has a history of deploying collective punishment. In 2010, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) described how "The whole of Gaza's civilian population is being punished for acts for which they bear no responsibility. The closure, therefore, constitutes a collective punishment imposed in clear violation of Israel's obligations under international humanitarian law."[57] The investigation led by South African judge Richard Goldstone also stated that

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[49] K. Alam, *Gaza Aid Blockade Foretold: Only US and Israel Voted against UN Move to Make Food a Human Right* (TRT World, 2025).
[50] N. Sentance, *Genocide in Australia* (Australian Museum, 2022).
[51] Raymond Evans, "A History of Queensland," 2007.
[52] George N Shirinian, "Starvation and Its Political Use in the Armenian Genocide," *Genocide Studies International* 11, no. 1 (2017): 8–37.
[53] M Bruaas, "Hitler's Hunger Plan," *Nobel Peace Center Website*, 2021.
[54] Bruaas, "Hitler's Hunger Plan."
[55] J Weston Phippen, "Kill Every Buffalo You Can! Every Buffalo Dead Is an Indian Gone," *The Atlantic* 13 (2016).
[56] Just a point of reference regarding systematic institutionalized violence, Native Americans have the highest suicide rate amongst different ethnic groups in the US, and the rates of substance abuse among Native Americans are generally much higher than those of the general U.S. population (Kaliszewski 2022). Similarly, in Australia, alcoholism disproportionately affects indigenous people more (Unnikrishnan 2023). While suicide rates for non-Indigenous Australians stabilised at 11.8 per 100,000 people, the rate for Indigenous Australians surged to 30.8 (Gartner 2024).
[57] BBC, *ICRC Says Israel's Gaza Blockade Breaks Law* (BBC, 2010).

Israeli operations "were carefully planned in all their phases as a deliberately disproportionate attack designed to punish, humiliate and terrorize a civilian population". In 2016, *Amnesty International* also reported on the various collective punishment measures in the city of Hebron.

In the 2023 war in Gaza, several institutional bodies highlighted a targeted starvation campaign. In December 2023, the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) reported that catastrophic food insecurity was imminent in Gaza. On December 18th, 2023, *Human Rights Watch* mentioned starvation being used as a weapon of war in Gaza. The *Anatomy of Genocide* report also documented how Israel had destroyed or severely damaged agricultural land. On July 31st, 2025, the IDF destroyed the Seed Multiplication Unit of the Union of Agricultural Work Committees Seed Bank. The pattern of Israeli destruction of the protection of local biodiversity and food sovereignty is alarming. During the 2024 harvest, the IDF destroyed 3100 olive trees in the West Bank.

In March 2024, the IPC released an updated report on food availability and food access. The report documented that only 10-15% of the food needs in terms of kilocalories were entering the northern part of Gaza between January and February 2024. Regarding food access, as of February 5th, 2024, there were no reports that food trucks were able to discharge in Gaza City. According to an *Al Jazeera* report, 31% of children under the age of 2 are suffering from acute malnutrition, a percentage that has doubled since January. Access to clean water was also very limited. In 2025, Gaza's health ministry said that people were dying from malnutrition at an alarming rate.

Israeli airstrikes also targeted several food relief centres. On April 1st, 2024, a *World Central Kitchen Convoy* was hit by an airstrike. Despite the trucks being clearly marked and moving through a supposed 'humanitarian corridor', the convoy was hit multiple times. The *Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention and Human Security* noted the growing number of reports of Israel luring civilians with fake messages about food deliveries only to target the queues with airstrikes. *France24* reported on the IDF practice of dropping explosives disguised as canned food in Gaza (Bahl 2024). Between May and July 2025, over 1000 Palestinians seeking food were killed by Israeli forces.

In prosecutor Karim Khan's ICC arrest warrant for Israeli PM Netanyahu and Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant, one of the specific crimes listed includes 'starvation of civilians as a method of warfare'. The World Health Organization (WHO) chief, Tedros Adhanom, stated in June 2024 that a significant proportion of Gaza's population is now facing catastrophic hunger and famine-like conditions. He also claimed that 8000 children under the age of 5 were diagnosed and treated for acute malnutrition in Gaza (*Al Jazeera* (b) Jun 2024). In July 2024, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees declared that famine had spread throughout the Gaza Strip.[58] In October 2024, UN Special Rapporteur Michael Fakhri lamented how Israel was able to starve 2.3 million Palestinians in Gaza so quickly. In typically denialist fashion, Netanyahu countered, stating:

> "The prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) has shamefully accused Israel of deliberately starving the people of Gaza. This is utter, complete nonsense. It is a complete fabrication. Israel has enabled more than 40,000 aid trucks to enter Gaza. That's half a million tons of food, and that's more than 3,000 calories for every man, woman and child in Gaza."[59]

In July 2025, Netanyahu claimed that there is 'no policy of starvation in Gaza and there is no starvation in Gaza'. Denial and atrocious behaviour go hand in hand. Moving on, a third behaviour of the *Genocidaire* is making *killing palatable*. This is a drawn-out process that requires strategy, propaganda, and leadership techniques. The main technique in this regard is the careful manipulation of rhetoric and publicizing hateful propaganda to dehumanize *the other.* In this paradigm, violence becomes less aversive and less morally reprehensible, resulting in 'palatable killing.' Palatable killing is when an action or proposal to kill becomes acceptable or satisfactory to the masses. In every genocide, *the other* is cast as vermin, cockroaches, rats, snakes, savages, barbarians, or *untermenschen*. This dehumanization is a mechanism of moral disengagement that allows the *Genocidaire* to preserve a positive image of themselves while carrying out harm to others. Hannah Arendt, who survived the holocaust, reflected on this in her *banality of evil* theory, which explained how genocide can be

[58] United Nations Human Rights Commission (UNHRC), "UN Experts Declare Famine Has Spread throughout Gaza ," 2024.
[59] Netanyahu, "Statement on ICC Prosecutor's Applications for Arrest Warrants [Press Conference]."

committed by ordinary people who accept the premises of their state and participate in its policies without deep reflection on the moral implications.[60] There is a sense of ordinariness here where *Genocidaires* can be seemingly normal individuals rather than fanatics. They may not have a monstrous or inherently evil nature; instead, they may simply follow orders or adhere to societal norms or be coerced under peer pressure ('We were just following orders').

According to Gebert, the preparatory period for the genocide, the one that precedes the actual murder, is one in which the institutions of a normal, functioning state and civil society are being used to prepare the murder.[61] That is, for a genocide to be successful, the *Genocidaire* must transform normal citizens into killers. Browning retells the history of the Reserve Police Battalion 101 of the city of Hamburg.

> The battalion, in the summer of 1942, around the small Polish town of *Jozefow*, massacred some 25000 Jews. This was not the *Gestapo*, or *SS,* or even *Wehrmacht* who engaged in the killing, but middle-aged gentlemen, aged 45 and up, too old to be drafted.[62]

The above scenario speaks to how participating in massacres becomes a 'civic duty'. The systems that enforce compliance can lead to people committing acts that they might not consider under different circumstances. This reflects how social and political factors can normalize extreme behaviour. Here, the conformity to social norms can turn 'neighbours into killers'.[63]

This phenomenon was apparent in Rwanda, where the number of ordinary citizens were mobilized to participate in the killings. Valerie Bemeriki of *Radio Television Libre des Mille Collines* instructed her listeners to "not kill those cockroaches with a bullet; cut them to pieces with a machete". The rationale behind this is that, though every citizen might not have gun training, in an agriculturally based society, most homes have agricultural implements. Effectively, killing becomes accessible to everyone. In making killing palatable, this further acts as a method to weed out 'the moderates' who do not participate in the killings. Consequently, when discussing the death toll of the Rwandan genocide, 'moderate Hutus' are always included in the death toll. The *Interahamwe,* which initially began as a youth movement, attests to the 'preparatory period of the genocide'. *Interahamwe* leader Jerry Kajuga defended his role in the genocide, arguing that Tutsis were responsible for trying to take power. He stated, 'we defended ourselves. Even 11-year-old children came with grenades. That is why there were bodies at the roadblocks'.[64]

In Southwest Africa, Australia, and North America, there were coordinated campaigns to garner public support and compliance in the effort to make killing palatable. In all three cases, settler ideologies like the Doctrine of Discovery[65] or the Doctrine of *terra nullis*[66] were used.[67] One missionary based in Southwest Africa wrote,

> "The Germans are filled with fearful hate. I must really call it a blood thirst against the Hereros. One hears nothing but talk of 'cleaning up,' 'executing,' 'shooting down to the last man,' 'no pardon,' etc."[68]

In Australia, settlers and different levels of government collaborated to erase the presence of Aboriginals between 1900 and 1940.[69] In North America, Christian nationalism helped to spearhead Manifest Destiny (See image below).

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[60] H. Arendt, *On Violence* (Penguin. , 1970).
[61] K. Gebert, *The Banality of Genocide* (Humanity in Action, 2011).
[62] Christopher R. Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*, 1992.
[63] Individuals may become detached from the moral weight of their actions, rationalizing them as part of their duties or responsibilities, often under bureaucratic structures.
[64] Linsey Hilsum, "The Rainy Season," *Granta* 125 (2013): 7–34.
[65] Established in a series of 15th-century papal bulls (official edicts that carry the full weight of church and papal authority), the Doctrine claims that European civilization and western Christianity are superior to all other cultures, races, and religions (Jones 2023).
[66] According to the Namibian Statistics Agency in 2018, white Namibians owned 70% of the agricultural land. The report further noted that out of some 250 farms under foreign ownership, most were held by Germans (*Aljazeera* 2 October 2018). Another statistic from 2023 reveals that 53% of private agricultural land in Namibia is owned by people of German descent (Llana, Chu, and Freeman 2023).
[67] Sven Lindqvist and Sarah Death, *Terra Nullius: A Journey through No One's Land*, *(No Title)* (New York, NY: New Press, 2007).
[68] Robert Gaudi, *African Kaiser: General Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck and the Great War in Africa, 1914-1918* (Penguin, 2017).
[69] Anna Haebich, "' Clearing the Wheat Belt' Erasing the Indigenous Presence in the Southwest of Western Australia" (Berghahn Books, 2004).



Figure 2: Mural of Manifest Destiny. Source: Anton M. Pillay, Chicago, USA, 2018

In reference to Israel's war on Gaza, with the help of its Western allies such as the US, UK, and Germany, killing has become palatable.[70] In February 2024, Bezalel Smotrich, the Israeli Finance Minister, called for the Palestinian village of Huwara to be 'erased' and 'wiped out'. Smotrich also said that starving 2 million people in Gaza might be justified and moral.[71] Israeli Minister for Heritage, Amihai Eliyahu, suggested that dropping a nuclear bomb on the Gaza Strip was a possibility. As a prominent settler activist, Eliyahu advocates for the creation of "sterile" zones in the West Bank free of Palestinians. In October 2024, a former White House Advisor, Mathew Brodsky, and former Director of Policy at the Jewish Policy Centre tweeted that "Israel should carpet bomb the Irish area and then drop Napalm over it." In a poll published in the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz*, conducted amongst Jewish Israelis, almost 50% of respondents supported the killing of all Palestinians in Gaza.[72]

The American media has played an influential role in making killing palatable. A *New York Times* piece published in October 2023 said, "If Gaza is the open-air prison that so many of Israel's critics allege, it's not because Israelis are capriciously cruel but because too many of its residents pose a mortal risk." A *Wall Street Journal* editorial dated October 7th wrote that Israel is in a "rough neighbourhood". Three weeks into the Israeli offensive, the *Washington Post* refuted calls for peace and even the idea that Israel should "limit its response". Furthermore, it argued that if Israel agreed to a ceasefire at that point, it "would be tantamount to rewarding aggression and inviting more of it in the future".

A fourth behaviour of the *Genocidaire* is its extreme intolerance towards opposition. Although there are different degrees to how political opposition is not tolerated, the *Genocidaire,* in dehumanizing its target, refuses to recognize the point of view or case of the target. Instead, there is a total belief in the virtue and righteousness of their cause and the constant equating of factual objections with treason. Genocidaires rely on myths to propagate their discourses, and myth-busting is not tolerated. While silencing opposition is a multifaceted approach, one element involves creating mobs to stifle opposing voices.

[70] Pro-Israeli language has long been a cornerstone of Israeli discourse. Responding to the 2014 murder of three Israeli teenagers kidnapped near the settlement of Alon Shvut, Israeli professor Mordechai Kedar said, "The only thing that can deter terrorists, like those who kidnapped the children and killed them, is the knowledge that their sister or their mother will be raped." Israeli historian Benny Morris would describe the Arab world as barbarian and in need of being caged.

[71] Times of Israel (TOI), *Smotrich: It May Be 'Justified' to Starve 2 Million Gazans, but World Won't Let Us* (Times of Israel, 2024).

[72] O. Jones, *Half of Israelis Support Exterminating All Palestinians* (Owen Jones News, 2025).To the question 'Do you support the claim that the IDF in conquering an enemy city, should act in a manner similar to the way the Israelites did when they conquered Jericho under the leadership of Joshua, i.e. to kill all its inhabitants?', 47% of all respondents answered in the affirmative.

Throughout the history of Genocide, 'lynch mobs' played an active role in supporting the cause of the *Genocidaire*. Hitler's Brown Shirts stood outside Jewish stores, intimidating would-be customers. In Cambodia, the Khmer Rouge evacuated cities, sending evacuees to assigned villages. On arrival, the evacuees were required to write a brief autobiographical essay. The essay's content would be used to determine their fate. During the Balkan crises of the early 1990s, the ruling elite deployed death squads who wore unaffiliated army fatigues to kill with impunity. In Rwanda, the ruling elite created the *Interahamwe*, who were trained secretly and armed by the Rwandan National Army. This militia played a key role in supporting and turning the ruling ideology of extermination into practice.

In Israel's war on Gaza, the silencing of opposing voices is systematic. Israel banned *Al-Jazeera* from reporting in Israel or Gaza from the start of the war. Within the first 10 weeks of the Israeli war on Gaza, 68 journalists were killed, making it the most journalists killed in a single year in one location.[73] As of July 2024, at least 158 media workers have been killed since October 7th (Al Jazeera, July 6th, 2024).[74] A year and a month later, the UN reported that 242 journalists were killed in Gaza. In September 2024, the IDF stormed an Al-Jazeera station in the West Bank, forcing it to close down. The situation is highly reminiscent (coincidentally) of the US bombing of Al-Jazeera's office in Kabul within weeks of their invasion in 2001 and the bombing of Al-Jazeera's office in Baghdad, two days before US forces invaded in 2003.

The IDF have deliberately targeted Palestinian journalists. Hassan Hamad received several messages and calls from Israeli officers asking him to stop reporting. When he did not comply, he was killed. Shireen Abu Akleh was also a prominent reporter who reported on Palestinian struggles over her career and was shot in the head while covering an Israeli raid in a refugee camp. Palestinian popular social media users have also been killed in alarming numbers, raising questions about whether they were deliberately targeted for telling their story.

Israel's allies have played a role in the silencing of opposition. The social media platform *X* banned Iran's leader, Ali Khamenei's Hebrew-language account a day after its launch. American movie-streaming platform *Netflix* removed thirty-one of the thirty-two films from the section titled 'Palestinian stories' in October 2024.[75] New York University (NYU) also banned any protest against Israel across its global campuses. By banning opposition and silencing its critics, the Genocidaire can carry out his/her mission undisturbed.

The Picture of a Genocidaire

Noam Chomsky would, in 2023, call Israel's war on Palestinians the 'last phase of European colonization'. In the *Anatomy of a Genocide* report as well, a key phrase is the 'settler colonial process of erasure'. This term is key to understanding genocide. Settler colonialism has no intention of being democratic, of providing rights and privileges to the natives, or of developing a community built on equality. Instead, it revolves around the desire for new territory and expansion.

Almost every genocide, at its core, begins as a tension over resources, which gradually develops into a strategy to terminate *the other*. In terminating *the other*, the premise is that there will be bountiful resources for the oppressed or chosen people. This is the *Genocidaires'* main motivation. Thus, ideologies play a pivotal role in emphasizing that the utopian state can become a reality soon, with *the other* removed. Here, myth, religion, greed, and inhumanity emerge to justify the elimination of *the other*.

The main behavioural patterns that *Genocidaires* share are:

- Denial
- Atrocious behaviour (collective punishment)
- Making killing palatable
- Silencing opposition

[73] Reuters, *Gaza War 'Most Dangerous Ever' for Journalists, Says Rights Group*, 2023.
[74] Aljazeera (b)., Five Journalist Killed as Israel Steps up Bombardment across Gaza (Aljazeera, 2024).
[75] Culturicide is the eradication and destruction of archives, libraries, museums, and cultural structures of nations or ethnic groups.

In a way, the *Genocidaire* resembles the fictional Dorian Gray. Gray walks the world upright, proud, and portrays a genuine innocence. However, the reality is seen in the hidden portrait, which is vile and monstrous. Both the *Genocidaire* and Gray deny their sins and self-justify their violence. Gray, who is dishonourable, cruel, and narcissistic, is like the *Genocidaire* who disengages from morality and commits or urges the killing of entire population groups. Thus, in painting a picture of the *Genocidaire*, one might look to the portrait of Dorian Gray.

CONCLUSION

All *Genocidaires* appear to use the same formula to commit their crimes. As this paper showed, there are certain traits, behaviours, and tactics that are common in a *Genocidaires* repertoire. In examining Israel's war on Gaza, there are clear similarities between past genocides and the one Israel is committing. There are two key points to take from this. One is that genocide is not necessarily a mysterious or historical event. It is never as complicated as made out by those in defence of it. Genocide can happen in broad daylight in the view of thousands of cameras. Second, supranational institutional bodies are proving how powerless they are. Like the League of Nations before it, the United Nations has shown itself to be a complacent actor.

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