

# UNVEILING ISRAEL'S MORAL CLAIMS: TRUTH AND WESTERN COLLABORATION

Written for POL S 101: Introduction to Politics

By Dina Aissiou

**ABSTRACT** This paper will critically examine the prevailing narrative of Israel's self-proclaimed innocence that dominates Western discourse, often reinforced through censorship and selective publications. In doing so, it uncovers the evident disparity between Israel's proclaimed ethical standing and the documented instances of severe human rights violations against the Palestinian population, including Apartheid and the suppression of Palestinian voices. This paper will also shed light on the inconsistent reactions of Western media by contrasting responses to Israel's human rights abuses with those directed towards other nations committing similar atrocities. By unravelling these discrepancies, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the ethical dimensions surrounding the Palestinian occupation and questions the portrayal of Israel's actions and their reception in the global media landscape.

Author's note: This was written in honor of Palestinian civilians suffering the ongoing genocide inflicted by Israel on the Gaza Strip and neighboring villages since October 7, 2023. More than 32000 Palestinians, 1/3rd being children, as of March 27th, 2024, have been murdered.

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Israel has long presented itself as a paragon of ethical conduct, championing the image of "the world's most moral army" (Netanyahu 2021) and vehemently refuting accusations of committing "real war crimes" (Prime Minister of Israel 2021). Beneath this well-crafted picture, though, increasing evidence shows a troubling truth marked by frequent severe violations of Palestinian human rights (Jiménez 2023). This discussion will focus on outlining the practice of Apartheid implemented by Israel, particularly medical Apartheid and the deliberate stifling of Palestinian existence and voices. Additionally, it will explore the contrasting reactions of Western media, shedding light on a notable inconsistency between their tolerant accounts of Israel and their more stringent portrayals of countries such as Russia for similar allegations of misconduct.

Israel's actions in Gaza contradict their claims of moral conduct, evidenced by the ongoing assertions of Apartheid-like policies imposed on Palestinians. The term 'Apartheid' finds its roots in the Afrikaans language, signifying "the state of being apart" and historically represents systemic discrimination and segregation in South Africa (Barhoush and Amon 2023). A fundamental element of Apartheid in Israel's conduct is the blockade imposed on Gaza in 2007, severely restricting the movement of people and goods. The blockade has turned Gaza into a vast "human cage" (Butt and Butt 2016) holding 2.2 million human beings with little chance of escape (OCHA 2023; Butt and Butt 2016).

Israeli limitations placed on Palestinian mobility because of the blockade have significantly impacted their daily lives, hindering Gazans from visiting family members, finding

employment, accessing healthcare, and even obtaining education within the West Bank and beyond (Jiménez 2023). Khalid and Anam Butt have done valuable research in this area and found that those who wish to escape the Gaza Strip will be met with a large, fenced, concrete wall that separates Palestinians from each other and the world, sometimes referred to as the Iron Wall (2016). This wall, running along the northern and eastern borders, is controlled by irregular on-duty pillboxes equipped with high-tech cameras and "remote controlled machine guns", in addition to "trigger-happy soldiers" (166). Moreover, Israel's blockade has prevented many agricultural, fishing, and manufacturing industries from being able to market their products abroad or even within the West Bank and Gaza, forcing many factories to downsize and/or stop operations altogether. Crucial industries like construction, which is vital for economic recovery and post-war reconstruction, also face substantial limitations on imported materials, resulting in acute shortages and restricted accessibility.

Consequently, more than 16, 200 families are forced to live with "relatives, in shelters or in makeshift accommodation amid the rubble of their damaged or destroyed homes" (Butt and Butt 2016, 166). This is the reason why the rubble of many bombarded homes and buildings in Gaza remains unchanged since the day they were destroyed, even years later. The lack of available equipment hinders any efforts for aid or reconstruction (Butt and Butt 2016, 161; Martin 2021, 23:58-24:07).

Human Rights Watch later investigated the blockade, stating that the "Palestinians in Gaza have been trapped in what is effectively an open-air prison" (Human Rights Watch 2022). Israel continues to attempt to justify its horrific actions by citing "security concerns" (Human Rights Watch 2014), despite the large majority of those who are suffering this humanitarian crisis being civilians.

As mentioned previously, blockades are a core component of Apartheid, violating several international human rights laws and conventions. Among the human rights that the Palestinian Apartheid violates are protection against racial discrimination; access to adequate food, medical care, education, and opportunities for economic growth (Carey, Gibey, and Poe 2010). These violations have resulted in Palestinians living in Gaza -- or any occupied territory -- being treated as second-class citizens in their own country (Yiftachel 2023). One facet of the ongoing general Apartheid is medical Apartheid, a term used to describe a system of discriminatory laws and practices that cause apparent disparities in health care quality and accessibility (Barhoush and Amon 2023). Medical Apartheid imposed by Israel further removes Palestinians from human rights and systematically plummets them into an even worse situation (Yiftachel 2023; Butt and Butt 2016). For example, continuing to the present day but especially between 1976 and 1994, Palestinians were required to obtain "approval from Israel's General Secret Services to establish medical clinics" (Barhoush and Amon 2023), a condition that made the Palestinians dependent on the Israeli healthcare system and hindered the Palestinian Ministry of Health's efforts to create an independent Palestinian healthcare system following 1994 (Barhoush and Amon 2023).

An example of the Ministry's intended initiatives would be the establishment of medical clinics in the West bank, specifically within Area C, a section "where most Israeli settlements are located, [and where] Israel maintains full control" (Barhoush and Amon 2023). Palestinians need permits to build infrastructure, including medical facilities, subjecting them to the discretion of Israeli authorities (Barhoush and Amon 2023). Additionally, Palestinians also need referrals to travel outside the Gaza strip for health-related

purposes, such as requiring chemotherapy, radiotherapy and/or surgeries. These approvals of referrals depend entirely on the GSS and can be accepted, delayed, or denied. As a result, many often succumb to their illnesses while waiting for approval (World Health Organization 2017a). In August 2017, 423 patients needed to undergo security interrogations to have their health permits approved. 10% were approved, 3% were denied, and 87% were delayed with no communication of their potential hospital appointments (World Health Organization 2017b). Yousef Zourub, a 22-year-old Palestinian from Rafah who was suffering from Gaucher's disease, had his application delayed three separate times before he succumbed to his illness (World Health Organization 2017b).

Moreover, a more recent illustration of medical Apartheid is Israel's purposeful exclusion of around 5 million Palestinians from their COVID-19 vaccination programs based on religion and ethnicity (Barhoush and Amon 2023). This discrimination is particularly noticeable in the West Bank, where Israeli settlers have access to Israeli vaccines but Palestinians residing in the same area do not (Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East 2021). In addition to the clear discrimination, Al-Haq, a Palestinian rights group, reported that the Israeli military conducted numerous operations targeting several Palestinian field clinics offering free COVID-19 testing, either resulting in their closure or confiscation of medical equipment (2020). Despite both the Israeli and Palestinian populations being under the responsibility and control of the Israeli government, their health systems are segregated and unequal. Amnesty International referred to this ethnic discrimination as "institutional discrimination" (Amnesty 2021), especially when taking into consideration the pride Israel held for becoming "a world leader in vaccinating

against Covid-19" in October of 2021 (Amnesty 2021; Kershner 2021).

These cases highlight where oppression lies and who holds power – especially when blatant human rights breaches are openly committed without accountability (Barhoush and Amon 2023; Carey, Gibney, and Poe 2010). Presenting such violence in the media is critical to how the international community will react. Israel has often violently targeted the healthcare system and its workers, exemplified by an incident on November 3rd, 2023. The Globe and Mail reported as apparent fact that Israel targeted an ambulance with "Hamas militants" (Reuters 2023), excusing its war crime by dehumanizing Palestinians and diminishing the audience's ability to empathize with their humanity and suffering. Human Rights Watch later investigated and showed no evidence of the ambulance being used for military purposes; instead, it was used to safely transport injured people to hospitals (Human Rights Watch 2023).

In contrast, while discussing a parallel situation in Ukraine, the Globe and Mail explicitly condemned Russia's assault on paramedics (Vanderklippe 2022), focusing on their activities instead of their affiliation and perceived status in war. It included interviews with eyewitnesses, aiming to evoke empathy from readers. The blatant hypocrisy highlights the compliance of Western media in allowing Israel's Apartheid-like policies to go disregarded by the international community.

Secondly, Israel's depiction as a democratic and fair state which values Human Rights starkly contradicts its silencing of Palestinian voices. The essence of human rights lies in the "right to equal protection against discrimination, freedom from arbitrary arrest, detention or exile [and the] freedom of thought" (Carey, Gibney, and Poe 2010, 9). However, Israel's conduct consistently curtails Palestinian narratives and experiences through

various means, including the purposeful suppression of Palestinian voices by tampering with the education system, the targeting of Palestinian Journalists, and the systemic bombing of Palestinian houses and news buildings (Jiménez 2023). One illustration of Israel's attempt to erase Palestinian identity is Israel's imposition of educational restrictions in East Jerusalem, distorting Palestinian history and culture through manipulation of materials in school textbooks. Many of their high school textbooks often normalize and justify the marginalized status of Palestinians -- sometimes failing to mention the existence of Palestinians altogether (Jiménez 2023; Pinson 2019). In contrast, Human Rights Watch reports details of the systematic stifling of dissent among Palestinians, supported by evidence of crackdowns on peaceful protests, arbitrary arrest of activists, and criticism of media coverage that silences Palestinians speaking out against injustice and severe discrimination (Human Rights Watch 2021). One instance of such premeditated action took place in 2022, when Israel purposefully classified six Palestinian rights organizations as terrorist organizations, hoping to deflect attention from their efforts and prevent Palestinian advocacy from reaching the international community (McKernan 2022).

Finally, the way the Western world portrays Israel's crimes against Palestinians is conflicting. For example, when the Palestinian journalist Shireen Abu Aqleh was intentionally shot by the Israeli Defense Forces (Tahhan 2022), the *Globe and Mail* conveyed this event as an unfortunate but accidental attack on an Al-Jazeera reporter who was "covering the latest arrest operation launched by the Israeli military amid deadly Arab attacks in Israel" when she was unintentionally shot. Removing pathos from the reported story, like what has happened in this example, erases human-to-human connection, and thus produces no need to empathize and demand justice. This allows

Israel to continue its attack against Palestinian stories without international protest. In contrast, the *Globe and Mail* article about Victoria Amelia, a Ukrainian journalist who "documented Russian war crimes" and was killed by a Russian missile, included a rich history about her childhood background and interests, allowing readers to connect to her on a personal level and empathize with her death (The Associated Press 2023). The example mentioned previously amplifies Makau Mutua's model of Human Rights and its definition in the West, with Israel showing the Palestinians as helpless nameless strangers suffering under the consequences of the savage Arabs from whom they are being rescued by Israel (Barhoush and Amon 2023). A nation breaches the fundamental principles of protecting human rights when it systematically silences an oppressed and marginalized group of people through means of suppression and murder (Tögel 2021). The Western world's choice of display for such atrocities enables Israel to carry on with its crimes with little to no punishments.

Israel's actions stand in stark contrast to their claims of moral conduct, as evidenced by two glaring examples analyzed in this paper: the existence of Apartheid, extending to medical Apartheid, and the purposeful suppression and subversion of Palestinian voices. Ethical norms are flagrantly broken by the discriminatory policies denying Palestinians access to basic human needs, such as healthcare, under the pretense of security. Additionally, the Israeli government's persistent marginalization and repression of Palestinian viewpoints not only restricts freedom of speech but also upholds an unfair power dynamic. The complicity of Western media, failing to scrutinize Israel's actions critically and instead perpetuating biased narratives, grants Israel a pass to persist in its behavior with minimal consequences. As we strive for a more equitable and righteous future, it is imperative to confront these inconsistencies in Israel's moral claims and hold it accountable for its actions.

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