

René Lindner

Journey to the Holy Land

On Zionism, Propaganda, and the Lessons from
German History. A Travel Report.

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Preface

“Great is the truth, but still greater, from a practical point of view is silence about truth.”
— A. Huxley.

“Israel is not the Jewish state; it has nothing to do with Judaism or Jewishness.” —
Rabbi Y. Shapiro.

There are events that split the timeline into a before and an after, signaling the end of an era and leaving only uncertainty ahead. The Hamas attack and Israel's retaliation against civilians mark such a turning point. The hope that the world had learned from the Second World War has proven to be an illusion.

The Israeli Air Force has dropped more than 80,000 tons of explosives on Gaza since collective punishment began. More bombs have fallen on this densely populated area than fell on Hamburg, Dresden, and London combined during the entirety of the Second World War.

It is not the first time a state has used its army for the collective punishment of a civilian population. For example, after attacks by the FLN in Algeria, the French military killed 10,000 people as retaliation, aiming to suppress resistance through widespread violence. Likewise, colonial powers often deployed their armies against civilians to punish local populations for uprisings, using collective punishment to maintain control. These historical cases, though each has distinct features, illustrate patterns of state action that inform understanding of the current situation in Gaza.

This campaign is unique in that it unfolds under global real-time observation. Video clips from Gaza broadcast the effects of policies rooted in 19th-century notions of collective punishment. The immediate visibility of these actions merges past strategies with present technology in a way that is both grotesque and historically resonant.

We now live in a time that forces us not to believe our own eyes just to preserve our sanity. We live in a time in which a German journalist, on behalf of a "quality" media outlet, tries to fluster the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in Gaza with pedantic questions during a press conference. She is presenting her report. It is titled "Anatomy of a Genocide." The German journalist demands further documents, written evidence, so he can really be sure that what is happening in Gaza actually constitutes genocide.

Because only if the German government has it in black and white — “We, the Israeli government, are now going to commit a genocide according to the definition of the Genocide Convention” — only then would it be prepared to acknowledge that a despicable crime is taking place in Palestine.

This kind of argument is reminiscent of the British historical revisionist and Holocaust denier David Irving, who exploited the absence of written proof that Hitler explicitly ordered the mass destruction of "unworthy" life to cast doubt on whether the Holocaust actually happened.

The strange new era we live in is a time of bitter historical ironies. A term coined by Raphael Lemkin — a Jewish thinker and Holocaust survivor — meant to help prevent genocides, is being reduced by a member of the people responsible for the Holocaust to an object of semantic fencing.

His aim is to distract from the real issue, so as to allow the state of the descendants of the Holocaust's victims to continue killing. The government of the country that has inscribed "Never Again" on its banners considers this part of its *raison d'état*.

This is the point at which all satire becomes superfluous, and, consistent with that, during a German-government-backed genocide, Jan Böhmermann busies himself with the state of highway bridges and the stigmatization of "long Covid" patients.

The German government's support for the mass killing of men, women, and children in Gaza makes clear that the 'culture of remembrance' was likely never intended to prevent Germans from dehumanizing another group of people once again.

Robert Habeck's statement, quoted on the ZDF website, that Hamas bears responsibility for "this, yes, also terrible suffering happening in the Gaza Strip," is a good example of how this dehumanization manifests itself linguistically.

For Palestinians, the 'yes, also terrible suffering' just 'happens.' Israelis are killed by Hamas; perpetrators and victims are clearly named. But the mass killing of Palestinian civilians just happens. The guilty party is not named; only Hamas is blamed.

It is a perverse logic. It is the logic of the gangster who, out of revenge, murders the entire family of his adversary and considers himself justified in doing so. It is the logic that the "civilized" West attributes to the "barbaric" terrorists of Hamas.

It seems as though invoking the memory of the crimes of the Third Reich has served above all to establish a morally cleansed German identity — an identity characterized by a particular readiness to acknowledge guilt for the Holocaust, without, however, drawing the right conclusion from that acknowledgment.

We find ourselves on unknown terrain, in a strange new world in which we have shifted attention from ending the mass killing of thousands and the starvation of a population to a debate about the definition of a concept. We must apparently all agree that it constitutes a genocide; only then is the mass killing in Gaza reprehensible.

It is interesting how different things were 20 years ago. Back then, the images from Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq caused a global scandal. The outrage was worldwide and led to consequences — at least for lower-level perpetrators.

The Mask Shatters

Mistreatment in Abu Ghraib seems mild compared to Gaza's carnage. Today, an Israeli prison guard who tortured Palestinians is seen as a folk hero. A member of Netanyahu's party said on camera in parliament that he supports rectal rape of terrorists.

The West's humanitarian mask, especially that of the United States, began slipping long ago. Now it has shattered. The illusion of being 'the good guys' blinds us to the reasons and feelings of those we dehumanize, kill, and starve.

My essay, 'Journey to the Holy Land,' aims to avoid propaganda and understand Palestine's reality. It began as research, but true judgment required going there in person.

Many Germans likely feel the same way. I hope 'Journey to the Holy Land' encourages you to travel to the country whose well-being is Germany's *raison d'état*.

As a young man, I wrote for a German newspaper. Later, for financial reasons, I switched to writing 'corporate propaganda. I wrote articles that sounded like journalism but weren't. I learned that lies are only a part of propaganda. Suppressing information is more important. Propaganda works mainly by shaping what is seen and what is ignored.

This journey is also the culmination of research I began twenty years ago during my political science studies at the London School of Economics, but which I later lost sight of. At the time I was just glad to have the degree behind me. The topics interested me, but I wasn't an activist. What mattered to me most was padding my résumé with an "LSE" degree.

I held the idiotic but, at the time, widely shared view that the decisive political battles had already been fought and that one could focus entirely on one's own life. The Cold War was over, the good guys had won. There seemed no need to concern oneself with the bigger picture anymore. In 2025, 20 years later, I find the attitude of my country's government toward the Israeli mass killing of civilians in Gaza shameful, and I want to do something.

I can help inform the German public about the conflict and its background. Much of what I have read in German media on the subject is of poor quality. Many authors do not regard Palestinian civilians as full human beings and refuse to place events such as October 7th in context.

German journalist Richard C. Schneider's commentary on the release of four Israeli hostages on June 9, 2024, published in "Der Spiegel," is a good example of this kind of journalism. Schneider is a successful journalist, longtime head of ARD's Tel Aviv studio, and a co-founder of the Berlin PEN Club.

On June 8, 2024, an Israeli army special commando freed four Israeli hostages from the densely populated "al-Nuseirat" refugee camp in the Gaza Strip. It was an extremely bloody operation, in which more than 200 Palestinians lost their lives.

Even Voice of America — the media organization directly funded by the U.S. government, a relic of the Cold War and not suspected of any sympathy for " Hamas " — chose the following headline: " Israel Rescues 4 Hostages, Kills 200 Palestinians in Accompanying Attack ."

The Spiegel editorial team gave Schneider's text this headline: " The Day Israel Weeps with Joy . " He begins his commentary with these sentences: " Yesterday it was back again, this united Israel. This Israel feels like one big family . " It is such moments, Schneider continues, " that make Israelis perceive that they are a community of fate, that they are all actually ' in the same boat ' together. And above all, that every soldier, or now every hostage, is the child of all Israelis ."

In Hebrew, Schneider notes, people address one another by first name, which turns strangers into acquaintances, and he lets his readers share in the ecstatic feeling of connection: " The video in which the wife of (hostage) Shlomi Ziv speaks to her husband for the first time is also shown repeatedly. She is sitting in the car, apparently on her way to him, and both are crying, calling out over each other, how much they love each other. There is no shame in Israel about sharing such intimate moments with everyone, since everyone feels the same ."

Schneider ends the article with a reminder of October 7th, the day " when Hamas was able to carry out the largest massacre of Jews since the Holocaust on Israeli territory . " He does not mention the more than 200 dead Palestinians with a single word.

There is no doubt that many of the Palestinians killed were not Hamas fighters. Voice of America quotes the Israeli general in charge, who gives a lower figure for the Palestinian dead, but even he says: " I don't know how many of the Palestinian casualties were terrorists . " How would people here react if so many uninvolved German civilians were killed during a hostage-rescue operation?

What Robert Jensen — now an emeritus professor of journalism at the University of Texas at Austin — said during a conference on the American media industry applies in many respects to his German counterparts as well: " American journalists are entangled in symbiotic relationships with the powerful. Rather than being independent and critical, journalists are generally dependent on political decision-makers and unwilling to ask the crucial, critical questions. Rather than observing the game of power, most journalists are part of the game ."

I do not have to adhere to the written and unwritten rules of the journalistic profession; I do not have to worry about access to important interview partners; I do not have to worry about length requirements or the preferences and political views of the

responsible editor. The only criteria that interest me in writing this text are clarity, thoroughness, and accuracy.

Where the CDU Is Right

As is so often the case, the facts are not hidden away in secret archives known only to a select inner circle. They are freely available — in books, reports, and newspaper articles. It is possible to form a judgment without speaking Hebrew or Arabic and without having written a dissertation on the Middle East conflict. It takes some time and effort, but it is possible — especially for the many millions of Germans who are fluent in English and can afford to spend thousands of euros traveling every year.

“The Federal Republic of Germany bears a special historical responsibility due to the crimes of the National Socialist regime of violence and tyranny,” writes the CDU in its draft bill to amend the Criminal Code for combating antisemitism, terror, hatred, and incitement. I can only agree with the CDU. The German government bears a special historical responsibility, and it is shameful that it does not live up to this responsibility.

Countless books have already been written on this subject. My goal was to keep the text as short as possible and publish it online as a free resource with links to sources. It still turned out to be more than 100 pages. Despite extensive research, I found that I was only fully certain of my judgment after I had been to East Jerusalem and the West Bank myself.

I have been following the media in England and the USA for many years. There, voices that receive little attention in Germany are heard — such as Palestinian author Rashid Khalidi, Israeli historian Ilan Pappé, and Israeli journalist Gideon Levy. What they have to say reaches the German public far too rarely. It was important to me to give German readers access to these authors and their ideas.

The gap between the critical reporting in English-language media — including Israeli publications that publish partly in English, such as “Haaretz” and “+972” — and the German media is enormous. Editors at German newspapers are certainly capable of reading articles written in English and could therefore research the facts described there further and make them accessible to German readers. Why this does not happen is an interesting question but attempting to answer it would go beyond the scope of this introduction.

To close this gap, I have also compiled many facts from extensive English-language reports by organizations such as the UN and Human Rights Watch, making them accessible in a more compact format and in German.

Another focus of this essay is an analysis of the nationalist ideology of Zionism, because in Germany, outside of universities, hardly anyone has an accurate idea of

what it is, and many Germans believe that Zionism is religiously motivated and arose only as a reaction to the Holocaust.

I hope this text helps you form your own judgment. But don't take my word for it unquestioningly. Especially on this topic, it is advisable to remain skeptical and go to the sources. I have compiled all sources not directly linked in the text in a folder, which you will also find on the website.

Tel Aviv — Shlomo's gray hair falls to the back of his neck; he wears his reading glasses on a chain around his neck. He was sitting with other regulars at an outdoor table of the Russian restaurant across from my hotel in Tel Aviv. He came over to sit at my table after learning that I am German. It is a beautiful, warm evening, a pleasant change from the cold that greeted me that morning as I made my way from Düsseldorf to Amsterdam airport. It is the first day of my first trip to Israel.

Shlomo is originally from Russia and was a professional boxer. He is a confident, open-minded guy, and like all the Israelis I come into contact with, he seems to harbor no resentment toward Germans — quite the contrary. After ending his active career, he was one of the trainers of Israeli boxer Hagar Shmoulefeld Finer, who lost a world championship bout against Regina Halmich in Karlsruhe in 2007. Shlomo shows me a short video of the fight on his phone.

Afterward, we chatted for a few more minutes. He tells me that the hotel where I will be spending the first two nights in Israel still houses families who were evacuated after the Hamas attack on October 7, 2023. I said goodbye to him and went to my hotel room. The encounter with Shlomo will be the first of many encounters with Israelis during this trip. Precisely because these encounters are so pleasant, friendly, and harmless, they often feel surreal and unsettling.

The Reduction to Group Membership

I know that a large majority of Jewish Israelis support the carnage in the Gaza Strip. Moral outrage is a dangerous emotion that can easily turn into self-righteous anger, making one arrogant and manipulable. I often think of a sentence I heard Norman Finkelstein — son of Holocaust survivors and author of the book *Gaza: An Inquest into Its Martyrdom* — say in an interview: “I am not on the side of the Palestinians; I am not on the side of the Israelis. I am on the side of truth and justice.”

I can only agree with him. Tribal thinking, the reduction of individuals to their group membership, and blind loyalty perpetuate the problem. The conflict in Palestine is not a football match. It is not about hanging one of the two flags in your living room. It is about approaching the ideals of truth and justice and distancing oneself from one's tribal instincts.

Controlling the Outrage

That was the greatest challenge during my stay in Israel, and it is a great challenge in writing this text. It is exhausting but possible to keep one's moral outrage in check and to be guided not by emotions but by reason, and to face the facts.

I use publicly accessible places such as the “Eretz Israel” and “Palmach” museums as anchor points to make the analysis more concrete and easier to understand. This also gives every reader the opportunity to verify my descriptions themselves. I made the

decision to focus on Zionism because too little is reported about it in Germany and because the Israeli government, guided by Zionist ideology, is committing a genocide.

This does not mean that I deny the existence of Palestinian nationalism or glorify the terrorist tactics of the Palestinian resistance. I cannot imagine committing such acts. However, I also cannot imagine having been violently expelled from my homeland and being treated as a second-class human being by the perpetrators for my entire life.

I cannot imagine having witnessed, as a nine-year-old, the arbitrary execution of my uncle by the Israeli army, as Hamas co-founder Abdel Aziz al-Rantisi did. I cannot imagine having to spend my life in a refugee camp and repeatedly being the victim of airstrikes by the occupying power's army, as happens to the Palestinians in Gaza at regular intervals.

The Israeli Air Force bombed the Gaza Strip in 2008, 2012, and 2014. Between 2008 and 2014, 44 people in Israel were killed in rocket and mortar attacks from Gaza, including 30 civilians and 14 soldiers. The Israeli operation "Protective Edge" in 2014, according to UNRWA, cost the lives of more than 2,000 Palestinians. The Israelis have a name for these punitive expeditions. They call them: "Mowing the lawn."

I cannot imagine what it is like to have to endure so much suffering and injustice, but I am certain that most people who must endure such experiences will not choose to turn the other cheek. Oppression breeds resistance. The religion of the victims is irrelevant.

The Ideal of Objectivity

An important step toward approaching the ideal of objectivity is to introduce a clear, as neutral as possible definition of the term "terrorism." The academic discussion of the definition of terrorism is extensive, and the scholarly community has so far failed to reach a universally accepted definition of the term. A report by the Bundestag's scientific service states the following: "A universally valid and accepted definition of terrorism cannot be found. There exist different perspectives on the matter. In particular, the boundary between the terms terrorism and freedom struggle is often fluid." [2](#)

In this essay, I will use the clear, easily understood definition from the Cambridge Dictionary: "The use of violence for political purposes." According to this logic, terrorism is a tactic for achieving a goal, for which nonviolent means can also be employed.

The term originated in Russia. The first modern terrorists were Russian anarchists who used violence to resist the brutal oppression of Tsarist rule. The story of the trial of the Russian terrorist Vera Zasulich illustrates that the term "terrorist" has not always carried a negative connotation.

On January 24, 1878, Vera Zasulich shot General Fyodor Trepov, the governor of St. Petersburg, in retaliation for the torture of the tsarist regime's many political prisoners. Trepov was wounded in the attack, while Zasulich was arrested and put on trial. Asked

why she hadn't fired again to finish the job, she replied: "I am a terrorist, not a murderer!" After proudly identifying herself as a terrorist, Vera Zasulich was acquitted by the court in St. Petersburg, to the delight of much of Russian society.

Approaching the ideal of objectivity also means acknowledging that a whole range of political movements have used terrorist tactics, including Nelson Mandela's ANC, the French Resistance, the liberation movements in Ireland and Algeria, and the Zionists in Palestine. The use of terrorist tactics can be successful — one could argue, for instance, that the Zionist terrorist group Irgun's attack on British headquarters at the King David Hotel in Jerusalem prompted the British to withdraw from Palestine more quickly, enabling the founding of the state at a favorable moment. More than 90 people were killed in the July 1946 bombing.

Similar to Zionism, Palestinian nationalism has gone through various phases. The religious component was not always in the foreground; the ideology of "Fatah," the most influential Palestinian resistance organization of the 1960s and 1970s, was a secular nationalism, and the "Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine" (PFLP), founded by Christian Palestinians, defines itself explicitly as an organization committed to Marxist-Leninist principles.

Current support for Hamas in Gaza thus does not reflect a passionate popular enthusiasm for an Islamic theocracy, but rather stems from the failure of its secular predecessors.

The Duty to Face the Facts

Zionism and Palestinian nationalism share an important commonality: they arose, at least in part, as reactions to injustices suffered. Zionism emerged as a reaction to the antisemitic pogroms in Russia in the late nineteenth century; Palestinian nationalism emerged as a reaction to British rule in Palestine and the Zionist colonial project.

In Gaza and the West Bank, a technologically heavily armed occupying army — financed and supported by the United States, the richest and most powerful state in the history of humanity — faces a guerrilla group that possesses no heavy weapons. This guerrilla group is supported by Iran, a regional power that does not yet possess nuclear weapons and therefore has only limited deterrent potential. In Washington, bizarre but high-ranking and influential figures such as Republican Senator Lindsey Graham have been demanding for years that the USA should do Netanyahu's bidding and "neutralize" Iran.

Iran, the regional power, is accused by the American superpower and Israel, its satellite in the Middle East, of wanting to rule the world and impose Sharia law on humanity. This sounds like the plot of a bad James Bond film, and yet it is a story that convinces many, especially in the United States of America.

Hamas is a movement that, much like Nelson Mandela's ANC (African National Congress), has both a civilian and a military component. The "Qassam Brigades," the military arm of Hamas, is a locally operating guerrilla force.

Here is a description from a report for the Australian Parliament. The Australian government stands firmly on the side of Israel and is not suspected of any sympathy for Hamas: "As the military arm of Hamas, the goals of the Brigades are subordinate to the general political goals of Hamas. Their essential goal is the unification of Israel and the Palestinian territories under Islamic rule — a goal that entails the destruction of Israel as a political entity. Due to the imbalance between the military resources of Israel and Hamas, the Brigades employ terrorist tactics to defeat Israel. Best known are their suicide bombings, which they refer to as the 'F-16' of the Palestinian people. The Brigades have never indicated any intention to carry out attacks outside of Israel and the Palestinian territories or to target countries other than Israel." [3](#)

For the al-Qassam guerrillas, Islam serves the function of a legitimizing myth — much as Marxism did for the Vietnamese revolutionaries, and much as Judaism does for the Zionists — with the difference that, unlike the Zionist leadership elite, Hamas fighters probably do actually believe in God. The claim that Hamas is a globally operating terrorist group in the style of ISIS is absurd.

It is a grotesque caricature, a mixture of the imagery of *MAD* magazine and that of the Nazi propaganda magazine *Der Stürmer*. This grotesque caricature should be easy to see through, yet its absurdity goes unnoticed in the current climate of narrowing discourse to a battle between good and evil. These are the facts that anyone who makes a serious attempt to understand the problem must face.

Everyone Can Form a Judgment

I traveled to Israel to complete my research. I wanted to understand why the majority of the Israeli population supports the massacre of the Palestinian civilian population, and how it is possible that freeing the hostages through a prisoner exchange is not the government's top priority. According to one survey, 39% of Israelis consider the military campaign in Gaza appropriate, while 34% say it doesn't go far enough.

The journey to the Holy Land is the strangest trip of my life: a short city trip, two cities in six days. A trip like the many I have taken before. It involves practical, trivial things: the weather, restaurants, hotel prices/location, transportation, sights, museum opening hours, etc. At the same time, it is a journey to a country whose army, with the support of the majority of its population, is currently committing a genocide.

In this, the Israeli government is supported by the German government — with weapons, ammunition, and diplomatic cover. I am not unbiased and objective — no one can be. Impartiality and objectivity are ideals I can only aspire to. I can only attempt to become aware of my bias in favor of the weaker party, in favor of the victims of the

longest occupation in modern history, so as not to be guided solely by emotions but to critically reflect on my position.

The decisive prerequisite for approaching the ideal of objectivity is to clearly distinguish between personal sympathy and rational analysis. Personally, for example, I find all monotheistic religions deeply suspect, and I am not of the opinion that Islam is a religion of peace, although such passages can be found in the Quran.

However, I generally consider the significance of religious and ideological constructs as motivators for human behavior to be overestimated. The cognitive faculties of humans — that is, imagination and logical thinking — are not in themselves motivating for action. Emotions determine *that* something is done; the mind determines *how* it is done. Ideological constructs are not the cause of human behavior, but they can be more or less harmful. They can either keep the destructive tendencies of humans in check or amplify them.

Since humans apparently tend, for evolutionary reasons, to idealize their own group and demonize other groups, glorifying nationalist ideologies such as Zionism is particularly dangerous. One example: The Vietnamese did not wage a war of liberation because books by Marx and Lenin happened to fall into their hands. They resisted the injustice of colonization and, among other things, used Marxist ideology as a legitimizing myth.

They also referenced the American Declaration of Independence and even quoted it verbatim in the Vietnamese Declaration of Independence of 1945. The Vietnam War was not about a competition between two ideologies, but about pride, retribution, self-determination, and power.

The same applies to the situation in Palestine. The attempt to define the problem as a conflict between two religions is particularly absurd in this case, because modern Zionism is not a religious current of Judaism, but rather a utopian nationalism that arose in the nineteenth century as a reaction to humiliating experiences of its founding thinkers.

It is exhausting to approach the ideal of objectivity while the carnage that began as revenge for October 7th has been taking place before the eyes of the world for more than half a year. No one disputes that a mass murder of gigantic proportions is taking place, that the Israeli army is deploying tanks and the air force against the civilian population, and systematically destroying houses, schools, universities, and hospitals.

Putting a Tank in the Garage

In simplified terms, two camps can be observed in Germany: The camp of those who consider the carnage as a reaction to October 7th to be justified, because its victims are barbaric terrorists and their sympathizers, women and children included.

The reaction of a German test reader to a draft of my essay clearly expresses the attitude of this camp: “If I were Israeli, I certainly would not believe in the ‘live and let live’ promise, but would keep my M16 in my hand, and after October 7, 2023 (the day the Palestinians committed a mass murder of Israelis), I would probably have not just one M16, but ten, and a tank in the garage as well.”

The test reader wrote this comment after reading more than 20 pages in which I describe the background of the attack of October 7, 2023, and from which it should be clear that it is absurd to claim it was an unprovoked, purely antisemitically motivated pogrom. Reaching someone like this test reader with rational arguments is obviously not possible.

Cognitive Blockade

Ideological blindness, fueled by strong emotions and the dehumanization of Arabs and Muslims internalized over many years, evidently renders people blind and unable to absorb facts whose acknowledgment would require questioning their own worldview. Dichotomous thinking — the division of the world into “good guys” and “bad guys,” the good own group and the evil foreign group — causes a kind of cognitive disability.

Similar to how, on an individual level, the grandiose self-overestimation of a narcissist ensures that she is constantly searching for confirmation of her fragile castle in the air and her reality testing fails to function, the collective illusion of moral superiority apparently prepares the ground for an attitude shaped by resentment that actively resists acknowledging the humanity of the Other and would rather “put another tank in the garage.”

I have the hope of reaching the other camp: the Germans who refuse to dehumanize the Palestinians, who have preserved their humanity and intuitively know that what is happening in Gaza is a crime of the century.

Victims as Part of the Abstraction

At the time of my arrival in Tel Aviv, in February 2024, more than 30,000 Palestinians had fallen victim to the Israeli retaliatory campaign, more than half of them women and children; another 70,000 had been injured, and no one knows how many bodies remain buried under the rubble. 30,000 dead, 70,000 injured — these are horrifying numbers, but precisely this concentration on numbers instead of individual fates in reporting on Palestinians is part of the problem.

This contrast becomes particularly clear in the reporting on October 7th and the subsequent genocide. Palestinian intellectual and activist Hanan Ashrawi puts it this way: “Take, for example, an Israeli soldier who is on Palestinian territory, shoots Palestinians, and is then injured or killed. Immediately, you become aware of the full extent of his humanity. You go to his funeral and see his grieving mother, wife, or child.

You learn his name, his hopes, his dreams, where he came from, and so on. At the same time, hundreds and thousands of Palestinians were killed. And you never learn their names. You never see a funeral.

You don't witness the family's grief. You don't know that these children, probably many of them, were shot in their own homes and backyards or on their way to school. It doesn't matter. They become part of the abstraction. You know: '400 Palestinians killed,' that's it, it's a number."

The quote comes from the transcript of a 2004 panel discussion in the USA. Nothing has changed since then; only the numbers of the dead and wounded have continued to rise.

The Story of Hind

To counteract this effect and give a face to the Palestinian victims, I tell here the story of the Palestinian girl Hind Rajab and her family, standing in for the thousands of Palestinian children murdered by the Israeli army. In January 2024, five-year-old Hind tried to escape the horror together with her family. Their flight from Gaza City ended abruptly when an Israeli tank opened fire on their vehicle. Hind's aunt, uncle, and three cousins were killed instantly; only Hind and her fifteen-year-old cousin, Layan Hamadeh, survived the initial attack.

Frightened and injured, Layan picked up the phone and contacted the Palestine Red Crescent Society (PRCS). "They're shooting at us. The tank is right next to us," she reported through tears. During the call, Layan was hit by further shots and died. Hind, now alone, picked up the phone and pleaded: "I'm so scared, please come. Get me out of here." For three hours, she remained in the destroyed vehicle while the PRCS desperately tried to organize a safe rescue.



Hind Rajab

Despite intensive efforts and coordination with Israeli authorities, the PRCS rescue team itself became a target while attempting to reach Hind. Twelve days later, after the withdrawal of Israeli troops, Hind's family found the vehicle. The windows were shattered, the body riddled with bullets. Hind lay dead beside her relatives. Nearby, they discovered the destroyed ambulance; the two paramedics, Yusuf al-Zeino and Ahmed al-Madhoun, had also been killed. Hind had also spoken by phone with her cousin, Mohammed Hamada, while waiting for rescue.

The 28-year-old described the phone call in an interview with the *Guardian*: "Hind said: 'Please help me. Please come and save us. Save me.' She told me she was injured in the leg. I was crying because I couldn't do anything, and I think my whole family was in the same situation. My wife said to her: 'Sweetheart, don't be afraid, God loves you and He will take care of you.' And she just answered 'OK.' I think Hind was braver than all of us put together."

South Africa's Intervention

At the time of my arrival in Tel Aviv, the document that South Africa filed with the International Court of Justice was publicly available. That it was specifically the South African government that chose to accuse Israel of genocide carries particular significance: the two countries were long-standing allies. Israel maintained close,

though discreet, relations with South Africa during the apartheid era. The two states engaged in intensive military cooperation and numerous economic ties.

The problem with proving genocide is that the intent of the perpetrators must be demonstrated. In the case of the genocide committed by Israel in the Gaza Strip, the ultimate written proof — the explicit order for genocide — is still missing. Nevertheless, proving genocide is possible. Demonstrating genocide without explicit written orders is based on the careful collection of witness statements, forensic evidence, and circumstantial evidence.

In the case of Srebrenica, for example, the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) analyzed the targeted killing of more than 8,000 Bosnian Muslims. In addition to witness statements and forensic examinations of mass graves, the court relied on intercepted communications and military documents to establish the perpetrators' intent. In "Prosecutor v. Radislav Krstić," General Krstić was convicted of aiding and abetting genocide, with the systematic nature of the crimes and the targeted annihilation of a group making the proof of genocide possible.

These examples show that genocide can be proven even without direct written evidence through comprehensive chains of evidence. The Srebrenica genocide occurred in 1995. General Krstić was arrested in 1998 and indicted in 2000. These proceedings are time-consuming, and the Palestinian civilians in Gaza do not have time. What is already available are statements by Israeli decision-makers that clearly and unambiguously express the intent to carry out collective punishment and to starve the population of Gaza.

Here are some excerpts from South Africa's petition: In an address to the Knesset, the Israeli Parliament, on October 16, 2023, Benjamin Netanyahu described the situation as "a battle between the children of light and the children of darkness, between humanity and the law of the jungle."

The Israeli Prime Minister returned to the theme in his Christmas message, declaring: "We are dealing with monsters, monsters who murdered children before the eyes of their parents. This is not only Israel's battle against these barbarians; it is a battle of civilization against barbarism."

Spare No One

On October 28, 2023, as Israeli forces prepared their ground invasion of the Gaza Strip, the Prime Minister invoked the biblical story of the total annihilation of the Amalekites by the Israelites, declaring: "You must remember what the Amalekites did to you, says our Holy Bible. And we remember." The Prime Minister again referenced the Amalekites in a letter sent to Israeli soldiers and officers on November 3, 2023. The relevant Bible passage reads: "Now go, attack Amalek, and devote to destruction all that they have."

Spare no one, but kill men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys.”

On October 12, 2023, President Isaac Herzog made clear that Israel does not distinguish between fighters and civilians in Gaza, declaring at a press conference before foreign media — referring to Palestinians in Gaza, more than a million of whom are children: "It's an entire nation out there that is responsible. It's not true, this rhetoric about civilians not being aware, not involved. It's absolutely not true... and we will fight until we break their backbone."

On October 9, 2023, Defense Minister Yoav Gallant informed an Israeli army briefing that Israel had “imposed a complete siege on the Gaza Strip. No electricity, no food, no water, no fuel. Everything is closed. We are fighting human animals, and we are acting accordingly.” He also informed the troops at the Gaza border that he had “released all restrictions.”

Quote: “The Gaza Strip will not return to what it was before. We will eliminate everything. If it doesn’t take one day, it will take a week. It will take weeks or even months, but we will reach every place.”

Even If Thousands of Bodies Lie in the Streets

Giora Eiland, Major General of the Israeli army, former head of the Israeli National Security Council, and advisor to the defense minister, has repeatedly called in the media for making the Gaza Strip uninhabitable.

In an interview on November 6, 2023, he said: “If a military operation against Al Shifa Hospital is intended, which in my view is inevitable, I hope the CIA director has been given an explanation of why this is necessary and why the United States must ultimately support even such an operation, even if thousands of bodies are lying in the streets afterwards.” He further suggested that “Israel must create a humanitarian crisis in Gaza that forces tens of thousands or even hundreds of thousands to seek refuge in Egypt or the Gulf... The Gaza Strip will become a place where no human being can live.”

Echoing the words of President Herzog, he has repeatedly emphasized that there should be no distinction between Hamas fighters and Palestinian civilians. Quote: “Who are the ‘poor’ women of Gaza? They are all mothers, sisters, or wives of Hamas murderers. On the one hand, they are part of the infrastructure that supports the organization, and on the other hand, if they experience a humanitarian catastrophe, then it can be assumed that some of the Hamas fighters and the younger commanders will begin to understand that the war is hopeless. ... The international community is warning us about a humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza and about severe epidemics. We must not shrink from this, however difficult it may be. After all, severe epidemics in the south of the Gaza Strip will bring victory closer. ... A civilian collapse will bring the end of the war closer. When senior Israeli figures say in the media, ‘Either them or us,’ we

should clarify who ‘them’ means. ‘Them’ are not just the armed Hamas fighters, but also all ‘civilian’ officials, including hospital and school administrators, and the entire population of the Gaza Strip who supported Hamas and cheered its atrocities on October 7th.”

Germany Delivers Weapons and Ammunition

Israeli soldiers in uniform were filmed on December 5, 2023; they danced and chanted, “May their village burn, may Gaza be wiped out.” Two days later, on December 7, 2023, they danced, sang, and chanted in Gaza: “We know our motto: There are no uninvolved civilians!” Up to this date, 17,177 Palestinians in Gaza had been killed — an estimated 70 percent of them women and children.

December 7 and 8, 2023, were particularly devastating for the Palestinians: Within 24 hours, 350 people were killed — approximately every four minutes, a Palestinian fell victim to the Israeli retaliatory campaign. All figures and quotes are from the South African petition before the International Court of Justice. ⁴

These are, as mentioned, only excerpts. The statements of Israeli politicians, media personalities, and soldiers that leave no doubt about the intent of the Israeli campaign fill seven pages of the South African petition. The representatives of a state government are announcing here that they will carry out collective punishment and slaughter the civilian population.

It is incomprehensible to me how anyone who makes even the slightest attempt to read the 80-page, meticulously researched and referenced South African document with an open mind could come to a different conclusion. Collective punishment is prohibited under international humanitarian law. Article 33 of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 states: “No protected person may be punished for an offence he or she has not personally committed.”

Such acts are considered war crimes because they violate fundamental principles of justice and individual protection. Whether this crime can be declared a genocide at this point or not is obviously less relevant than the fact that thousands of people, living defenseless in densely populated refugee camps, are being murdered by the army of a state during a collective punishment campaign.

It is astonishing that this fact alone is not enough to speak out against it. That for many, the question now seems to be primarily whether it constitutes a genocide under the narrow definition of the Convention or not is grotesque and gives the perpetrators and their supporters the opportunity to shift attention from their crimes to a debate among lawyers.

Germany supports the Israeli retaliatory campaign, delivers weapons and ammunition, and Chancellor Scholz, as of my writing in August 2024, has not even called for a

ceasefire. On the contrary, Germany has officially stated that the "accusation of genocide against Israel is without any basis" and constitutes a "political instrumentalization" of the UN Genocide Convention.

Tel Aviv — The hotel is almost surrounded by construction sites. In the streets, as at the airport, posters with pictures of the hostages hang everywhere. I had imagined Tel Aviv differently — I had been too influenced by the marketing of Tel Aviv as a hypermodern start-up nation and had pictured the city as a kind of Singapore on the Mediterranean.

Tel Aviv has a slightly run-down, chaotic coastal-city flair and reminds me more of Naples than Singapore. I liked it more than I expected. There are no tourists in the streets; before I open my mouth, I am automatically taken for an Israeli. Apart from the posters, nothing in Tel Aviv gives any indication that only a few kilometers away, a crime of horrific proportions is taking place.



24-year-old civilian held hostage by Hamas: Eden Yerushalmi

The Plan Bears Fruit

Two days ago, on February 18, 2024, hungry, desperate Palestinians stormed food trucks in northern Gaza. The Israeli army opened fire, shot into the crowd, and killed at least one of the starving. A truck driver was attacked, which is why deliveries were

suspended for the time being — they will continue to go hungry. From the Israeli perspective, everything is going according to plan.

“The pressure on Gaza is so great that Gaza has become an area where people cannot live. People cannot live until Hamas is destroyed. This means that Israel not only stops supplying energy, diesel, water, food, as we have done for the past twenty years, but we should prevent any possible support from others and create such a terrible, unbearable situation in Gaza that can last for weeks and months.” This was precisely the plan that Giora Eiland had outlined in a “Times Radio” interview on October 12, 2023. Now, three months later, it is bearing fruit.

I hail a taxi on the street, and we drive along a coastal road to my first stop, the Israeli homeland museum. The large museum, comprising several buildings, is almost deserted, and as I walk from room to room, I realize for the first time how all-encompassing the Zionist propaganda project is. The museum was not founded with the intention of approaching a historical reality.

The museum’s goal is to create a reality, to buttress the founding myth of the State of Israel, and to erase the presence of the Palestinians in “Eretz Israel.”



“Eretz Israel” Museum, Tel Aviv: Building block of a monumental propaganda project

According to the glossary of the *Jüdische Allgemeine*, “Eretz Israel” refers to the Land of Israel and is the biblical designation for the Jewish state, or the Hebrews. The term was

revived after the beginning of political Zionism in the nineteenth century and is also frequently used in the State of Israel today.

Brief Introduction to Modern Zionism

Political Zionism is a nationalist movement that emerged in the late nineteenth century with the goal of establishing a colony settled by European Jews in Palestine. Palestine, a province of the Ottoman Empire for 400 years, was under British administration at the time. At the beginning of British rule in Palestine in 1920, approximately 700,000 people lived there. The population consisted of 560,000 Muslim Palestinians, 70,000 Christian Palestinians, and 76,000 Jews.

The founder of modern Zionism was Theodor Herzl (1860–1904), an Austro-Hungarian journalist and writer. Under the impression of antisemitism, particularly antisemitic pogroms in Russia, he developed the vision of a Jewish state. In 1896, he published *The Jewish State*, in which he advocated the founding of a Jewish state as the solution to the “Jewish question.” A year later, he organized the first Zionist Congress in Basel and was elected president of the World Zionist Organization.

“Eretz Israel” — the name says it all, and according to the *Collins Dictionary*, it has a second meaning: “The concept, favored by some extreme Zionists, of a Jewish state whose territory corresponds to the greatest extent of biblical Israel.”

The 1977 platform of the currently ruling Likud party makes unmistakably clear what is meant by this: “The right of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel is eternal and indisputable and is linked to the right to security and peace; therefore, Judea and Samaria (the West Bank) will not be handed over to any foreign administration; between the sea and the Jordan there will only be Israeli sovereignty.”

The “Jewish Culture and Folklore” Pavilion documents: “The emergence of Israeli nationalism and Israeli culture, as well as the changes they underwent during this period. These are expressed in the design and symbolic meaning of the ‘Judaica’ objects, which played a central role in shaping the new Israeli-Jewish identity.”

The “Kadman Numismatic Pavilion,” the coin collection, also serves the creation of reality. It reports the following: “Since the founding of the State of Israel in 1948 and to this day, its coins express the historical connection between the reborn state and the ancient numismatic heritage of the Jewish people. The motifs on the modern coins are largely taken from ancient Jewish coins, a phenomenon unique in the world.”

The Biblical Promise

The “Eretz Israel” Museum is part of a project that the Israeli psychologist B. Beit-Hallahmi describes as follows: “The historicization of the Bible is a national project in Israel, carried out by hundreds of scholars at all universities. The Israeli Defense

Ministry has even published a complete chronology of biblical events that includes exact dates for the creation of the world, the killing of Abel, and the Exodus from Egypt.” ⁵

Intellectually honest scholars such as the Israeli-American anthropologist Jeff Halper, who have made the effort to face the facts, have come to these conclusions: “Although the ancient Israelites and Judeans ruled the land for only 1,300 of its 10,000 years of recorded history (and a third of that was under Babylonian, Greek, or Roman authority), Jewish claims in Zionist thinking trump all others, including the 1,300 years of Muslim rule.” ⁶

Ze’ev Herzog, Professor of Archaeology at Tel Aviv University, was confronted with a storm of outrage in Israel in 1999 when he conceded that no archaeological evidence exists for the existence of an ancient Jewish nation: “This is what archaeologists have found in their excavations in the Land of Israel: The Israelites were never in Egypt, did not wander through the desert, did not conquer the land in a military campaign, and did not pass it on to the 12 tribes of Israel. Perhaps even harder to digest is the fact that the united monarchy of David and Solomon, described in the Bible as a regional power, was at most a small tribal kingdom.” ⁷

Not a Religious Movement

The Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* summarized the state of research in the 1999 article “Who Are the Jews” as follows: “In fact, Herzog’s research and that of other archaeologists suggest that if a historical entity called Israel briefly emerged, it was a pagan kingdom and Jerusalem was not its spiritual center. Herzog says about the reaction in Israel to his findings: ‘Every attempt to question the reliability of the biblical descriptions is perceived as an attempt to undermine “our historical right to the land” and to destroy the myth of the nation that renewed the ancient Kingdom of Israel.’” ⁸

As strange as this entire debate may seem to a German public that has long since largely abandoned the idea that the Bible is a precise description of historical facts, in Israel, it remains relevant. What makes the whole situation particularly absurd is the fact that Zionism is not a religious but a secular, nationalist movement in its origins.

Even though it may seem, in 2024, as if nations have always existed, before the eighteenth century, there was no such thing as a nation in the modern sense. Nations and nation-states are modern phenomena that frequently simulate a return to a glorious past that exists only in the imagination of nationalist ideologues.

To give the proclaimed heroism of the “New Man” a pseudo-historical justification, modern Italian nationalism under Mussolini, for example, placed its actions within a thousand-year history and updated its reference to the Roman Empire under Augustus.

The symbols and rites of the past were plundered by the ideologues for propaganda purposes. In essence, nationalist movements were anti-traditional and atheistic. Their

goal was the creation of a new society for new people; their mortal enemy was the traditional, God-given order.

For this reason, Zionism was initially rejected by the majority of religious Jews. In their view, only God has the right to end the exile of the Jews. Many ultra-Orthodox Jews, such as American Rabbi Yaakov Shapiro, still firmly hold this position today and see the fight against Zionism as an important part of their God-given mission.

Shapiro, whose book *The Empty Wagon* — unfortunately available only in English — played an outstanding role in my research on the topic; it provides, in contrast to the contradictory construct of the Zionists, a clear and unambiguous description of his Jewish identity.

Who Is a Jew?

Shapiro writes in the introduction to his book: “I come from a family with Polish roots, I am a citizen of the United States of America, and I speak English. I am no more or less Jewish than a Yemeni Jew, a French Jew, or a Chinese Jew who speaks Arabic, French, or Chinese. Country of origin, language, culture, and nationality play no role in my Jewish identity. The ‘Am Yisroel’ is a religious collective, not a national or cultural one.”

I will return to this topic and Shapiro’s book repeatedly throughout this essay, because an understanding of the subject is impossible without the distinction between Judaism and Zionism. Zionism is a utopian nationalist ideology, a redefinition of Judaism from a religion to a nation in the modern sense, and simultaneously a colonial project that was initially flexible regarding the location where the “Jewish state” was to be established. Both Uganda and Argentina were options that the early Zionists seriously considered at the beginning of the project.

Only those who know this context are in a position to understand how bizarre appearances like that of Israeli UN Ambassador Danny Danon in 2019 in New York actually are. Danon, a member of the Likud party, read from the Bible during the session, with the intention of using the biblical passages to prove that the Israelis had the sole right to settle in Palestine. ⁹

The Likud party, of which Prime Minister Netanyahu is also a member, emerged from an atheistic, ultra-nationalist movement, the “Revisionists.” Herzl, the father of the nation, was an atheist, as was the majority of the Israeli leadership elite from the beginning and continues to be to this day.

The religious component of Zionism gained significance only late, particularly through the contributions of Abraham Isaac Kook and those of his son, Zvi Yehuda Kook. Rabbi Kook, the first European-born Chief Rabbi of Palestine, integrated religious and national

aspirations by interpreting the Zionist movement as part of a divine plan for the redemption of the Jewish people.

He saw the return to “Eretz Israel” as a religious duty and regarded the secular Zionists as unconscious instruments of this divine plan. His son developed these ideas further and became the mentor of the settler movement. Kook Junior regarded the settlement of the occupied territories after the Six-Day War of 1967 as a central religious commandment and a decisive step in the process of redemption.

Heroes of the Nation

In the museum shop, toy figurines depicting historical personalities caught my attention: the “Nation’s Great Figures” series. One of the 8-centimeter figurines represents Avraham Stern. Stern is described by the figurine manufacturer, “Piece of History,” as follows: “Underground fighter and poet, founder and first commander of the Lehi organization (Israel Freedom Fighters).”



Nation’s Great Figure “Avraham Stern”: One man’s terrorist is another’s, poetic revolutionary

Following this propaganda logic, one could also describe Andreas Baader as a poetic revolutionary and underground fighter. The designation “terrorist” is, however, more accurate for both men, with the distinction that Stern robbed more banks and killed more people.

While the other two Zionist militias, the “Irgun” and the “Haganah,” had decided during World War II to support the British, the “Lehi,” also known as the Stern Gang, continued its terror campaign against the British, Arabs, and “Jewish collaborators.”

The British, who assumed that Stern's death would mean the end of the group, shot Stern in February 1942 and arrested his closest associates, including Yitzhak Shamir, the future Israeli Prime Minister. The British calculation did not work out; the "Lehi" continued its series of killings.

Cutting off the snake's head does not seem to be an effective way to persuade people who are convinced they are fighting for a just cause to give up. The Israelis have also killed many high-ranking PLO and Hamas leaders without achieving this goal.

Nevertheless, the Israeli state repeatedly carries out these assassinations, presumably from the conviction that the other side must be continuously "defeated, humiliated, and deterred," as Dan Schueftan, Director of the National Security Studies Center at the University of Haifa, put it in a 2016 working paper for the "Federal Academy for Security Policy."¹⁰

A prominent and tragic victim of the "Lehi" terror campaign was the UN mediator Count Bernadotte. Bernadotte, a member of the Swedish royal family, served as a diplomat during World War II and helped with the liberation of tens of thousands of prisoners held in Nazi Germany.

On September 17, 1948, four Lehi fighters ambushed Bernadotte's convoy in the Katamon neighborhood of Jerusalem and fired six shots at the UN mediator and another 18 at French officer Colonel André Sérot, who was sitting next to him. Sérot died instantly, while Bernadotte was taken to a hospital and died shortly afterward.

Why did Count Bernadotte have to die? The reason was the "Bernadotte Plan," which he had presented to the UN General Assembly on September 16, 1948.



Bernadotte assassination newspaper report

This plan did confirm the existence of the State of Israel, but also strongly supported the Palestinian right of return. It advocated that the Palestinians who had been expelled

from their land and possessions during the “Nakba” — the Catastrophe — be allowed to return and reclaim them.

For those who did not return, repatriation, resettlement, and financial compensation were envisioned. The Zionists, however, could not accept this. They aspired to an ethnically cleansed “Eretz Israel.”

Yitzhak Shamir, leader of the “Lehi” at the time of Bernadotte’s assassination and significantly involved in the notorious Deir Yassin massacre, in which more than 100 Palestinian civilians were killed, was an influential figure in Israeli politics for many years and served as both Foreign Minister and Prime Minister. His figurine is available as a souvenir in the Eretz Israel Museum, as is that of Vladimir Jabotinsky, perhaps the most influential Zionist ideologue.

Jabotinsky, founder and leader of the Revisionists, is a good example of the fascination that Italian fascism held for the Zionist founding thinkers. A central component of Mussolini’s master plan for a new Italy was a grand educational project for the people: physical fitness combined with the transformation of consciousness, education for combat, and the acceptance of danger. The male ideal was embodied in the figure of the warrior, the legionnaire.

For comparison, here is a quote from the introduction written by Jabotinsky to “Chaim Nachman Bialik: Poems from the Hebrew”: “The (Jewish) Ghetto despised physical manhood, the principle of male power as it was understood and worshipped by all free men in history.”



Vladimir “Zev” Jabotinsky

Yaakov Shapiro summarizes the Zionist enthusiasm for power and violence as follows: “They looked down on the Jews as ‘stooped, ragged, depressed figures who put all their trust in the Psalms of David ben Yishai.’ At the same time, they admired the big, muscular, sun-tanned Russian Cossack, whose entire faith lay in his ability to shoot, or the blond, blue-eyed German Aryan, in whom they saw the qualities of beauty, strength, and honor.”

Antisemitism as a Symptom

But even more than beauty, strength, and honor, they saw in the non-Jewish people and their behavior forms of normality. The cultivated, honorable German intellectual, the strong, courageous Russian Cossack — that is what a human being should be, they believed. That was normal. The Jews, on the other hand, were abnormal, sickly, psychologically damaged, and broken people.

From Shapiro’s perspective, the genesis of the Zionist ideology presents itself as follows: “The Zionists created Zionism to do far more than simply respond to antisemitism. The existence of antisemitism led the Zionists to the conviction that something was wrong with the Jews, that something needed to be ‘fixed’.

Like a doctor who recognizes pain as a symptom of a disease, the Zionists believed that the existence of antisemitism was a symptom that something was wrong with the Jew.”

Shapiro supports this thesis with, among other things, a further statement by Jabotinsky: “I have no doubt that I am a Zionist, because the Jewish people are a very nasty people, and their neighbors hate them, and they are right.”

The project of creating the new Zionist human being found its linguistic expression in modern Hebrew. Yakov Rabkin, Professor Emeritus of History at the University of Montreal, writes in the 2010 article “Language in Nationalism: Modern Hebrew in the Zionist Project”: “Jewish self-hatred is an essential component of Zionist ideology. In this case, it is expressed as ‘negation of the Diaspora’ and in its vernacular language, Yiddish. The word ‘Hebrew’ became synonymous with ‘new’ and ‘pioneer’ in the vocabulary of the Zionists. The new nation was to be Hebrew, not Jewish, and to live in Hebrew villages, far from the Jewish ‘shtetls’ of Eastern Europe, where most Zionist pioneers had been born and raised. Since the early twentieth century, modern Hebrew, the new common language, has been shaping the new Hebrew human being, a counterpart to the Diaspora Jew. The proponents of the new vernacular gave traditional Jewish concepts a new, secular meaning. Thus, it came about that the word ‘bitahon,’ which means ‘trust in God,’ took on the meaning of ‘military security.’” [¹¹](#)

On Jabotinsky’s Wikipedia page, the following quote from him can be found: “In order to imagine what a real Hebrew is, to form a picture of him, we have no example to orient ourselves by. Instead, we must apply the method of *ipcha mistavra* (Aramaic for deriving something from its opposite): We take as our starting point the Yid (used here as a pejorative word for Jew) of today and try to imagine his exact opposite.

The Hebrew should be proud and independent

Let us erase from this image all personality traits that are so typical of a Yid and let us insert all desirable qualities whose absence is so typical of him. Because the Jew is ugly, sickly, and unsightly, we will equip the ideal image of the Hebrew with masculine beauty, stature, massive shoulders, vigorous movements, radiant colors, and shades of color.

The Jew is fearful and oppressed; the Hebrew should be proud and independent. The Yid is repugnant to everyone; the Hebrew should enchant everyone. The Yid has accepted submission; the Hebrew should know how to command. The Yid likes to hide with bated breath from the eyes of strangers; the Hebrew should march with brazenness and grandeur before the whole world, look it directly and deeply in the eyes, and raise his banner: ‘I am a Hebrew!’” [¹²](#)

I left the “Eretz Israel” Museum and made my way to my next stop, the “Palmach” Museum. The “Palmach” was a special unit of the Haganah, the largest Zionist militia,

from which the Israeli army emerged. The museum is located only a few hundred meters along the same street, Chaim Levanon Street.

At the museum reception, I learned that the “Palmach” Museum can only be visited with a guided tour. Without understanding why, I accepted the appointment suggestion for the next day at 9:30, returned to the hotel, and spent the rest of the evening doing research.

The Dream of the Iron Wall

Vladimir “Zev” Jabotinsky is an interesting, ambivalent figure. In Israel, 57 streets, parks, and squares are named after him, more than after any other person in Israeli history. He was a soldier, translator, author, and founding thinker of Zionism. Despite his aversion to the “Yid”, he urgently warned Eastern European Jews of an impending catastrophe and tried to persuade them to emigrate to Palestine. He died in 1940 and thus did not live to see the founding of the State of Israel.

Jabotinsky harbored no illusions about the Zionist project and was a friend of plain language. In 1925, he wrote: “If you intend to colonize a land in which people already live, you need an occupying force or a benefactor who provides the occupying force. Zionism is a colonial project, and for this reason, the question of troops is the decisive issue.”

Jabotinsky’s view of the Palestinians seemed, at least, not as clouded by racism and arrogance as was common at the time. In 1923, the still-existing newspaper *Haaretz* published an article by him in which he assessed the situation as follows: “(Zionist) settlement can only develop under the protection of a force independent of the local population, behind an IRON WALL that they cannot breach. A voluntary agreement is simply not possible. As long as the Arabs preserve a glimmer of hope that they will succeed in getting rid of us, nothing in the world can cause them to give up this hope, precisely because they are not rubble, but living people. And living people will only be prepared to yield on such fateful questions when it gives up hope of getting rid of the foreign settlers.”

Elsewhere, Jabotinsky writes: “The Arabs loved their land just as much as the Jews. Instinctively, they understood Zionist aspirations very well, and their decision to resist them was only natural. There was no misunderstanding between Jews and Arabs, but a natural conflict.” With this attitude, he stands in pleasant contrast to another literary-minded folk hero of the colonial era, his contemporary Winston Churchill.

The Dog in the Kennel

Churchill’s conviction regarding the superiority of the white race was unambiguous and probably represents the consensus of his time more accurately. The Nobel Prize winner in Literature put his position succinctly: “I do not admit that the dog in the kennel has the

right to the kennel, even though he may have lain there for a very long time. I do not admit that right. I do not admit, for instance, that a great wrong has been done to the Red Indians of America or the black people of Australia.

I do not admit that a wrong has been done to these people by the fact that a stronger race, a higher-grade race, or at any rate a more worldly-wise race, to put it that way, has come in and taken their place. I do not admit it. I do not think the Red Indians had any right to say: 'The American continent belongs to us, and we do not want these European settlers to come here.' They had neither the right nor the power.” ¹³

Churchill's comments on the Arabs are also concise and unmistakable: “Churchill described the Arabs as a ‘lower manifestation’ than the Jews, whom he regarded as a ‘higher-grade race’ compared to the ‘great hordes of Islam,’ and called the Palestinians ‘barbaric hordes who eat nothing but camel dung.’” ¹⁴

Even if the racist attitude of the Zionist founding thinkers was perhaps not as clearly pronounced and formulated as that of the multi-talented Churchill, there is no question that racism and racial arrogance were a necessary prerequisite for the Zionist colonial project in Palestine.

The conviction of the superiority of one's own — that is, the white race prepared the ground for the systematic dehumanization of the Palestinians. The American anthropologist David Livingston writes in his book *Making Monsters: The Uncanny Power of Dehumanization*: “The dehumanization of a group is typically preceded by its racialization.”

Barbarism Against Civilization

“Europe would benefit from a modern Jewish state on the border with Asia, serving as an outpost of culture against barbarism.” Theodor Herzl's remark in his otherwise rather pragmatic and practice-oriented blueprint for the “Jewish State” testifies to the racial arrogance that was, at the end of the nineteenth century, unquestioned convention. While the explicit belief in the superiority of the white race as the representative of culture, the conqueror and educator of inferior races, has since been tabooed worldwide, it appears to live on in the political elite of Israel and large parts of the Israeli population.

In his speech before the American Congress on July 24, 2024, Benjamin Netanyahu again described the confrontation with the Palestinian resistance in these words: “This is not a clash of civilizations. It is a clash between barbarism and civilization.” Netanyahu's speech, an impressive example of cynical, shameless propaganda, was met with 58 standing ovations. ¹⁵

Tel Aviv — I check out of the hotel and take my suitcase with me. I will be leaving Tel Aviv today and traveling by train to Jerusalem. Israel is very expensive, so I am glad to have found an affordable hotel in East Jerusalem. I intend to stay three nights in Jerusalem and would also like to visit the West Bank.

It is Day 138 of the Israeli bombardment of the Gaza Strip. So far, there are 29,000 dead and 70,000 injured. Thousands are missing or buried under the rubble. The Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis, one of the largest hospitals in the Gaza Strip, has been besieged by the Israeli army for two weeks. The Israelis have arrested 70 hospital staff members; 136 patients are trapped without electricity, food, or water; eight patients have suffocated due to a lack of oxygen.

At the end of April, after the withdrawal of Israeli forces earlier in the month, Gaza civil defense workers exhumed nearly 300 bodies from a mass grave on the grounds. Al Jazeera English reported: “Among the bodies are elderly women, children, and young men.” A spokesperson for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights stated: “Some of them had their hands tied, which of course points to serious violations of international human rights standards and international humanitarian law.”

Propaganda Fantasyland

I arrive at the “Palmach” Museum on time and am greeted warmly, as the day before. I leave my luggage with the female reservists who apparently serve their military duty at the ticket counter. The group I am to accompany is already there.

They are teenagers, a school class. The visit to the history museum is apparently mandatory; the kids look disinterested, many staring at their phones. I receive an English-language audio guide, and then we get going.



Hero's grave in the Palmach Museum, Tel Aviv

We are led down a dark corridor and arrive at a large rectangular structure reminiscent of a gigantic grave. The room is dark; only the structure itself is illuminated. At the head of the rectangle hangs a sculpture resembling two book pages, bearing the symbol of the "Palmach" — a sword between two stylized ears of grain. The sides of the open rectangular structure, the hero's grave, are completely covered in Hebrew script — the names of the fallen heroes of the "Palmach."

Target-Audience-Appropriate Creation of Reality

From this moment on, it is clear that this is not a normal museum but yet another building block of the monumental Zionist propaganda project. The path into the museum leads around the hero's grave. We enter the first room: No exhibits, no critical contextualization. Instead, the room displays a set from Palestine during the period of British rule — a street scene with a market stand, bicycle, and café. The set enhances the short film on the large video screen, making it appear more vivid and realistic.

The film tells the first chapter of the story of a group of Jewish teenagers, recruits of the "Palmach," and follows the group's story from the Mandate period to the 1948 war and the founding of Israel. The school group with which I walk from room to room is no coincidence. Young people were obviously the target audience of the planners of this

gigantic, propagandistic video installation. The goal is not the transmission of knowledge and the promotion of critical thinking; the goal is reliving, immersive experience, total identification, and thereby a narrowing of perspective.

In the style of a modern soap opera, like “Friends” or “Neighbours,” young viewers are offered characters to identify with — teenagers who come to Palestine from various parts of the world and fight together for the creation of Israel. The army is the cradle and engine of the Israeli nation, as it is now.



Room in the “Palmach” Museum: A gigantic, propagandistic video installation

The films celebrate campfire romanticism and camaraderie, show a sentimentally transfigured image of military life, and buttress the myth of little, threatened Israel that, thanks to bravery and cleverness, wins the war against several Arab states.

After the historic victory, they set about constructing the outpost of European civilization in the land of the barbaric Arabs.

The brutal ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian population, in which the “Palmach” troops were significantly involved, is not mentioned with a single word. This museum, too, does not pursue the intention of reconstructing and critically reflecting on the past. It aims to stage a myth in a target-audience-appropriate manner and to create a false reality.

Dreams, Songs, Fantasies, and Black-Red-Gold Ribbons

All nations use propaganda and deliberately falsify reality. One of the differences between Israel and other nations lies in the fact that it was not first a group that lived in one place for a long duration and then elevated itself to nationhood with the help of myths and propaganda. Israel is the special case of a nation that begins with myth and propaganda and has to laboriously assemble its group.



Theodor Herzl at the Hotel Les Trois in Basel

Israel was founded more than any other modern nation on the conscious use of symbols and propaganda. Herzl described the propaganda plan for Israel in a letter to Baron Hirsch as follows: "For a flag, men live and die; it is indeed the only thing for which they are willing to die in masses. Do you know how the German Empire was created? Dreams, songs, fantasies, and black-red-gold ribbons."

Zionism was, from the beginning, not an intellectual system. It has always relied on Herzl's formula of symbolism, emotions, and slogans. By drawing on symbols from Jewish tradition, the Zionists suggested the authority of that tradition without directly invoking it.

For it was also an attempt to displace religion by capturing the meaning of its symbols in order to establish a secular order. After the Holocaust, the Zionists made even more

intensive use of this formula and constantly instilled in their followers the fear of a new Hitler in order to fan their nationalist sentiments.

Ironies of History

As a German, I am a citizen of a country that, after initial willful blindness, at least partially confronted its dark past. In my generation, there was a recognizable effort to immunize oneself against the dangers of nationalist propaganda. It is yet another bitter, hard-to-bear irony of history to encounter precisely this murderous phenomenon in the land of the descendants of the Holocaust's victims.

But Israel and Zionism are not identical with Judaism. It is especially important for Germans to be aware of this fact. A large number of Orthodox and secular Jews are and were anti-Zionists. The beginnings of modern Zionism lie in the late nineteenth century. It is a product of the colonial era, the time that the British historian Eric Hobsbawm dubbed "The Age of Empire."

Zionism is a product of modernity, an ideology that set itself the goal of creating a new human being.

The contemptible "Yid," the "Mauschel," was to become the proud, violence-ready Hebrew. It is an ideology that has much in common with fascism and little with the Jewish religion.

Thanks to the categorical dehumanization of the Palestinians, many modern Zionists have come cruelly, repulsively close to the ideal of their founding thinkers. The countless cell phone videos of Israeli soldiers in which they celebrate their genocide with malicious glee and perfidy and film themselves torturing Palestinians are testimony to the effectiveness of a lifeworld created according to propagandistic goals — a gigantic "Propaganda Fantasyland." The much-invoked Jewish humor mutates here into sadistic schadenfreude.

Social Media Genocide

One video, for example, shows dozens of Palestinian prisoners from Gaza, bound and blindfolded, sitting in a bus. An Israeli soldier then instructs them to praise his family and declare that they want to become slaves of his family "forever and ever." ¹⁶

Complaining about power supply problems in destroyed houses in Gaza is a popular gag of the Israeli forces. ¹⁷

The IDF even had an Israeli "influencer" mockingly "review" a "hotel" — that is, a civilian house in Gaza devastated by the army. ¹⁸

"The dehumanization of Palestinians is now normative and omnipresent," writes Israeli historian Lee Mordechai. I found the example videos in his highly recommended online archive "Witnessing the Gaza War." ¹⁹

Still Susceptible to Propaganda

Especially we Germans — the world champions of remembrance, who watch docudramas about the Wannsee Conference on Friday evenings — should be on guard against the power of dehumanizing propaganda. Then we would have learned something. Unfortunately, the lesson was obviously not understood. We seem to think that Nibelung loyalty to those we define as the descendants of our victims is our sacred duty.



Poster, Pauluskirche, Düsseldorf, 2024

We are readily willing to repeat the mistake; only the group changes. It seems as though, despite all official protestations, we have learned nothing, as if no transfer has taken place. I write “we,” but do so for stylistic reasons. I very much hope that a large portion of the German population has preserved its humanity and is, just like me, disgusted by the behavior of the German government.

What the Palmach “Museum” omits, the Israeli historian Ilan Pappé reconstructs with meticulous precision in his book *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*. It is regrettable that this important Jewish thinker is hardly known in Germany, and his work meets with little interest. It seems as though we are once again willfully blind. Ilan Pappé is one of the most influential Israeli historians. Born in 1954 in Haifa, his work is devoted to revising Israeli historiography.

Pappé belongs to a group of historians who became known as the “New Historians.” This group — which also includes well-known names such as Benny Morris and Avi

Shlaim — began in the 1980s to comb through the Israeli archives when documents about the War of Independence were declassified.

The discoveries they made contradicted the national narrative that had been firmly anchored for decades.



Ilan Pappé

In his work *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, Pappé shows that the expulsion of the Palestinians was not a random byproduct of war but a planned and systematic act carried out by the Zionist leadership from 1947 to 1949. His research, which also points to “Plan Dalet,” a 1947 plan, sparked fierce controversy in Israel.

Pappé’s book exposes the founding myth of Israel as a lie, particularly the portrayal of the events surrounding the founding of Israel in 1948 and the “Nakba” — the expulsion and flight of approximately 750,000 Palestinians. The “New Historians” used declassified government documents to reveal previously unexplained or deliberately suppressed details of the state’s founding. These sources were largely accessible because Israel — similar to Great Britain — applied a 30-year rule for the declassification of foreign policy documents.

Willfully Blind Again?

Pappé, one of those rarely found individuals who combine intellectual brilliance and moral courage, went further than many of his colleagues and spoke openly of war crimes and ethnic cleansing. He also supported the academic boycott of Israel and advocated for the right of return of Palestinian refugees — positions that made him an outsider in Israel.

In 2007, Pappé left Israel and moved to Exeter, England, where he now heads the European Centre for Palestine Studies. He was forced to leave Israel after he and his family received death threats. The question remains: why does a historian who

uncovers important, uncomfortable truths not receive more attention in Germany? Ilan Pappé should be a central figure in the German discourse on the Middle East.

Plan Dalet

What follows is the uncomfortable truth about the expulsion of the Palestinians. These are the facts without which the conflict between the settlers and the indigenous population cannot be understood. The attackers of October 7, 2023, are the children and grandchildren of those who were expelled from their towns and villages in 1948 and have been inmates of a vast prison camp for decades. It is the uncomfortable truth that Germany does not want to know about, and that is concealed from the young visitors of the propagandistic video installation.

The Palestinians call it the “Nakba,” the Catastrophe; the Zionists called it “Plan Dalet”: “The orders contained a detailed description of the methods to be used for the forcible eviction of the people: massive intimidation, siege and shelling of villages and population centers, setting fire to houses, property, and goods, expulsion, destruction, and finally the mining of the rubble to prevent the expelled inhabitants from returning.”

“After the decision was made, it took six months to complete the mission. When it was over, more than half the indigenous population of Palestine — nearly 800,000 people — had been uprooted, 531 villages had been destroyed, and eleven urban neighborhoods had been emptied of their inhabitants. The plan decided on March 10, 1948, and especially its systematic implementation in the following months, was a clear case of ethnic cleansing, which today constitutes a crime against humanity under international law.”

“When the Zionist movement founded the nation-state, it did not wage a war that ‘tragically but inevitably’ led to the expulsion of ‘a part’ of the indigenous population; rather, it was the reverse: The main objective was the ethnic cleansing of all of Palestine, which the movement coveted for the new state.”

Proceeding Without Mercy

“The perpetrators are not unknown — they are a very specific group of people: the heroes of the Jewish War of Independence (whose names will be quite familiar to most readers). The list begins with the undisputed leader of the Zionist movement, David Ben-Gurion, in whose private home all the early and later chapters of the history of ethnic cleansing were discussed and decided.”

Here is Pappé’s description of the role the “Palmach” played during the ethnic cleansing: “An important part of the Zionists’ military efforts was the training of a special commando unit, the ‘Palmach,’ which was founded in 1941. Originally, it was created to support the British army in the war against the Nazis, should they reach Palestine.

Soon, the zeal and activities of the 'Palmach' were directed against the rural areas of Palestine. From 1944 onward, it was also the most important pioneer force in the construction of new Jewish settlements. Before its dissolution in the autumn of 1948, its members were very active and carried out some of the largest cleansing operations in the north and center of the country.

The "Palmach" commander and folk hero Yigal Allon distinguished himself through a particular willingness for cruelty. His statements, recorded in Ben-Gurion's diaries, make clear that the will for mass murder of civilians was present long before October 7, 2023: "There is now the need for a harsh and brutal response. We must be precise regarding time, place, and the people we attack. If we accuse a family, we must proceed against them without mercy, including women and children. Otherwise, it is not an effective response. During the operation, there is no need to distinguish between the guilty and the innocent."



1948 — Palestinian women and children from near Haifa flee during the "Nakba."

Taking Over Palestine as a Whole

The instrumentalization of the Holocaust by the Zionist leadership elite also has a tradition: "In public, the leaders of the Jewish community brandished doomsday scenarios and warned the Jewish population of an imminent 'second Holocaust.' In private circles, however, they never used this discourse. They were fully aware that Arab rhetoric was in no way matched by serious preparations on the ground."

A letter by Ben-Gurion quoted by Pappé leaves no room for doubt about the actual situation: “If we receive in time the arms we have already purchased, and perhaps even some of the arms promised to us by the United Nations, we will be able not only to defend ourselves but also to deliver the death blow to the Syrians in their own country — and to take over Palestine as a whole. Of this I have no doubt. We can take on all the Arab armed forces. This is not a mystical belief, but a cold and rational calculation based on a practical examination.”

Key Events Must Be Denied

In Israel, the denial or suppression of the “Nakba” is widespread and is considered necessary for the maintenance of the national myth. Ilan Pappé is of the view that this refusal to accept historical reality not only ignores Palestinian suffering but also undermines the possibility of genuine reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians. Pappé is co-founder and chair of the “Nakba Memorial Foundation”. This England-based foundation has set itself the goal of combating the denial of the “Nakba.”

On the foundation’s website, the following analysis of Nakba denial can be found: “It is common practice for settler-colonial regimes not only to establish themselves through the expulsion of the indigenous population from the territory in question and to subjugate those who remain, but also to eliminate the memories and historical narratives of the indigenous population. History must be the history of the rulers arriving. No other narrative may survive that could call into question the supposed legitimacy of the settler-colonial regime. Key events in history, as experienced and remembered by the indigenous people, must be denied.

This practice was applied in virtually all territories where settler-colonial regimes established themselves, from the Americas to Africa to Australia. Historical memories and perspectives of the local population were denied, and in some cases, documents and cultural relics that supported local narratives were destroyed. The same applies to the Israeli settler-colonial regime that established itself in Palestine.” ²⁰

Train to Jerusalem

I collect my luggage from the reception and make my way to the “HaHagana” station in southern Tel Aviv to take the train to Jerusalem. Pride in the violent history of the country’s founding is omnipresent in Israel; the station bears the name of the Zionist militia from which the Israeli army emerged and to which the “Palmach” special commando unit also belonged.

Two young men in civilian clothes wait with me for the train, casually carrying their old M16s over their shoulders. At this point, the sight of the rifles surprises me; later, I realize that firearms are omnipresent in Israel.

The two seem to consider themselves tough guys, cool warriors. I find their posturing repulsive, especially when I think of the Israeli army's actions in Gaza. The "IDF," the "Israeli Defense Force," relies primarily on its air force and its technological superiority. The Israeli Air Force makes no distinction between "guilty and innocent" and deliberately destroys residential buildings, hospitals, and schools from the air with 900-kilogram bombs.

Initially, the "Hasbara" specialists — the IDF's propagandists — still went to the trouble of producing a video animation of an alleged "Hamas" command center under the "Al Shifa" hospital. By now, they attack hospitals, schools, and tent camps at will and simply claim that terrorists are present there.

No Distinction Between Civilians and Combatants

The renowned Italian jurist Francesca Albanese, since 2022 UN Special Rapporteur for the Occupied Palestinian Territories, summarizes the IDF's conduct in her report "Anatomy of a Genocide" as follows: "A core feature of Israel's conduct since 7 October has been the intensification of its 'de-civilianization' of Palestinians, a protected group under the Convention. Israel has used the terminology of international humanitarian law to justify its systematic use of lethal force against Palestinian civilians as a group and the widespread destruction of life-sustaining infrastructure.

Israel has done this by using concepts of international humanitarian law such as human shields, collateral damage, safe zones, evacuations, and medical protection so liberally that these concepts have been stripped of their normative content, their protective purpose undermined, and ultimately the distinction between civilians and combatants in Israeli operations in Gaza has been eroded." [21](#)



**Another victim of the instrumentalization of the antisemitism accusation:
Francesca Albanese**

The IDF's conduct is so extreme in its cruelty that Alan Shebaro, a highly decorated veteran of the American Special Forces, was so disgusted that he felt compelled to go public with his moral revulsion during a city council meeting in McKinney, Texas. Shebaro briefly summarized his career with the Green Berets before the city council and then got to the point: "I know what war is. What is happening in Gaza is not war."

It was the evening on which the United States used a veto in the UN Security Council for the third time to prevent a ceasefire in Gaza. The video clip of his short speech went viral in the USA; to my knowledge, it was not reported on in Germany at all. [22](#)

The Transmission of a Nationalist Attitude

The two young men with the M16s are only a few years older than the teenagers with whom I just visited the propagandistic video installation. They grew up in a country whose leadership elite has been manipulating the population since its founding. The foundation for the Zionist propaganda edifice was laid through the denial of the ethnic cleansing at the founding of Israel.

By now, indoctrination begins as early as kindergarten, and the time in the army serves to put what was learned in theory into practice.

For his book *Goliath*, available only in English, the American journalist Max Blumenthal interviewed Nurit Peled-Elhanan, who at the time was working as a Professor of Comparative Literature at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Peled-Elhanan had published a study on Israeli school textbooks in Europe and the USA in 2012. The study

covered seventeen textbooks on history, geography, and civics; in Hebrew, the work was never published.

The results point to patterns familiar from the “Eretz Israel” and the “Palmach” museums: In none of the textbooks did Palestinians or their culture receive a positive mention. Palestinians are ignored or depicted as terrorists, refugees, and primitive farmers. Israeli school textbooks serve as media for the transmission of a nationalist attitude, through explicit and implicit messages.

Education for the Good Soldier

“This is a clear socialization process. The state enforces a single viewpoint, a single narrative that excludes and displaces all other possible representations. In this way, the state creates a situation in which Palestinian life is expendable and can be ended with impunity. The goal is to educate good soldiers,” explains Peled-Elhanan in the interview.

Blumenthal lived in Israel for months to research his book, published in 2013. Anyone who reads his book gains the impression that the genocide in Gaza was foreseeable. It is not surprising that the American-born diaspora Jew Blumenthal is vilified by Zionist propaganda as a “self-hating Jew.”

The scholar Peled-Elhanan, who lost her daughter in a Palestinian suicide bombing, is no longer a professor at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. She was dismissed in 2024 and charged with supporting terrorism because, during a conversation in a WhatsApp group, she commented on a colleague’s post equating Hamas with the National Socialists with a Jean-Paul Sartre quote. [²³](#)

Every Accusation Is a Confession

There is no question that service in the IDF is a central building block of indoctrination and makes the reservists complicit. That may be one reason why social cohesion in Israel is so high: crossing ethical boundaries together creates bonds. The comparison with the indoctrination of the population by the National Socialists suggests itself here, albeit with the difference that the NSDAP was only in power for twelve years, while Zionist indoctrination has been going on for several decades.

That the Palestinians teach their children hatred and antisemitism is one of the Israelis’ talking points — this is how they try to justify their mass murder in Gaza. “Every accusation is a confession” is a phrase one hears often when it comes to Zionism, and it applies here as well.

Anyone who studies the history of the Palestinians is more likely to wonder at how moderate and willing to compromise many of them were for so long, despite all they have had to endure. Even Hamas makes clear in its revised charter of 2017 that its resistance is directed against the Zionist colonial project and not against Judaism: “Hamas affirms that its conflict is with the Zionist project and not with the Jews because

of their religion. Hamas does not wage a struggle against the Jews because they are Jewish, but wages a struggle against the Zionists who occupy Palestine. It is, however, the Zionists who constantly identify Judaism and the Jews with their own colonial project and their illegal entity.” ²⁴

This is not to say that Hamas or the Palestinians are free of antisemitism, but antisemitism is not the motive for the armed struggle. Parents do not need to teach their children hatred of the colonial power, Israel. The Israelis take care of that themselves by treating the Palestinians as second-class human beings, dispossessing them, murdering them by the thousands, and torturing them in prisons.

Ilan Pappé describes the attitude of the majority of the Palestinian population before the “Nakba” as follows: “Over the centuries, the land had passed from one hand to another, belonging alternately to European and Asian invaders and long forming part of a Muslim empire. The lives of the people, however, had hardly changed: they tilled the land or traded wherever they were and quickly adapted to the new situation until it changed again.

Therefore, village and town dwellers alike patiently waited to see what it would mean to be part of a Jewish state or another new regime that might replace British rule. Most of them had no idea what was coming, and that what was about to happen would represent an unprecedented chapter in the history of Palestine: not merely a transition from one ruler to another, but the actual dispossession of the people living on the land.”

The Inn of Syrian Christians

The journey from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem takes just under an hour. Jerusalem, in Arabic “Al-Quds,” is home to the Western Wall, the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, and the Al-Aqsa Mosque, the third-holiest site in Islam. Everywhere in the Jerusalem train station, the Israeli flag hangs. I have booked a room in a Christian hostel in East Jerusalem and have printed out the address as a precaution.

I show the address to some taxi drivers, but to my surprise, they are dismissive and claim they don't know it. Only Tamir, a Palestinian taxi driver, knows the address and is willing to take me. I estimate Tamir to be in his late 20s. He wears a gelled 1980s quiff and a Guess T-shirt. He speaks fluent English, and I ask him how it is possible that the other taxi drivers did not know the address.

He suspects that the other taxi drivers were Jewish Israelis who are reluctant to drive into Palestinian-inhabited East Jerusalem. Tamir is polite but reserved. I try to keep the conversation going because I am looking for someone to drive me to the West Bank.

Good Location

Bethlehem seems to me an innocuous destination that would be easy to explain to soldiers at the dreaded checkpoints. Only when we talk about Gaza, and I express my

horror at the mass murder of the population, does Tamir warm up. He had obviously assumed that, as a German, I would stand firmly on Israel's side.

Tamir agrees to drive me to Bethlehem. A few minutes later, we arrived at my hostel and exchanged phone numbers. The "St Thomas Home's Guesthouse" is located on a narrow side street off Nablus Road, only 600 meters from the Damascus Gate and the Old City of Jerusalem. The simple hotel was originally founded for Christian pilgrims from Syria; on the ground floor, there is a Syrian Orthodox chapel.

The chapel is a simply designed room with low, round arches and an unadorned stone wall. Against this background, the icons painted in tones of red, gold, and green stand out even more. Striking are the flat perspectives and the elongated, solemn faces of the saints.

I am too early; my room is not ready yet. I deposit my luggage and use the time to explore the neighborhood. I had not looked at the hotel location carefully on the map beforehand; I had only seen that it was near the Old City. As I slowly walk down Nablus Road, past Palestinian fast-food and candy stands, I realize that the hostel's location could not be more ideal: after barely 10 minutes, I am standing at the steps leading down to the Damascus Gate.

The Damascus Gate, in Arabic "Bab el-Amoud," is the largest and most impressive of the seven open gates of the Old City of Jerusalem and is used mainly by Palestinians and tourists. Around the roughly 12-meter-high walls of the gate, there is a large, semicircular amphitheater where Palestinians used to gather with friends and family to drink coffee.



Damascus Gate

The Goal Is Silent Expulsion

At the head of the stairs and at the gate entrance, there are fortified checkpoints of the Israeli army. East Jerusalem is an annexed and occupied territory, even though at this moment only a few soldiers are present in the large, covered checkpoint. After the end of the 1948 war, the city was divided into a Jewish-settled west and an Arab-settled east under Jordanian rule.

The renowned Palestinian journalist Khalil Assali describes in an article for the blog “Jerusalem Story” what happened next: “Israel occupied East Jerusalem in June 1967 and wrested control from Jordan. In the aftermath, the Israeli authorities did everything to suffocate life on the eastern side of Jerusalem, yet it remained a commercial center and the heart of Palestine. The ‘Musrara’ quarter was the commercial and transportation hub that connected the northern and southern parts of the West Bank with the Gaza Strip. Jerusalem retained its role as a cultural center through its newspapers, magazines, unions, and associations.

But this too ended after the signing of the Oslo Accords and the founding of the Palestinian Authority in the mid-1990s. For Jerusalem's residents, the Oslo Accords were a catastrophe. The Oslo Agreement led to the separation of East Jerusalem from

the rest of the occupied Palestinian territories without integrating it into the economy of the western part of the city.

Israeli policy focused on annexing the Palestinian parts of Jerusalem and imposing Israeli sovereignty over them without, however, integrating the Palestinian residents. The goal of Israeli policy is to reduce the number of Palestinian residents through silent expulsion as much as possible.” ²⁵

Oath Before the Western Wall

The soldiers ignore me, and I walk down the steps to the gate. The amphitheater is deserted; later, I read that the occupiers have forbidden the locals from gathering there.

I pass through the Damascus Gate and continue aimlessly straight ahead over the cobblestones of the winding street, past stands and shops selling phone cases, socks, backpacks, T-shirts, toys, incense, fruits, kebab, and sweets. The streets of the Old City of Jerusalem are narrow and winding; the stone floor is polished smooth by centuries of use.

In the alley, shops line up one after another; the shop owners stand waiting in front of them, but customers are missing. Some speak to me, and I let myself be persuaded to buy a pack of particularly long incense sticks. In between, Israeli soldiers of both sexes stand repeatedly behind metal barriers — all appear very young and can barely be older than 20. Some have their M16s casually at the ready, or with the muzzle resting on the metal barrier in front of them.

A double first: It is the first time I find myself in an occupied territory, and the first time someone points a loaded firearm at me. After about fifteen minutes, I reach a tunnel with a security checkpoint and metal detectors at its entrance. I pass through the security check and arrive at an enormous square full of soldiers.

It takes a moment before I realize that I have arrived at the large square in front of the Western Wall and that a swearing-in ceremony for Israeli recruits has just taken place here.

The golden dome of the Dome of the Rock towers above the two-thousand-year-old wall built from massive stone blocks. It is an impressive setting for an oppressive scene. Everywhere there are tables on which automatic rifles lie beside Bibles. The atmosphere is reminiscent of the relaxed beginning of a youth trip: teenagers stand around in small groups, chat, flirt, make phone calls, or grab a döner. Proud parents take photos with their children in uniform. The good mood is almost unbearable.



The entire scene, especially the Bible that each recruit receives along with his or her rifle, is a staging, a promotional clip that has nothing to do with preserving a tradition. Even the ceremonial square in front of the Western Wall was not an ancient gathering

place but was created in 1967, after the Israeli occupation of Jerusalem, by demolishing an entire neighborhood.

Zionism is a child of modernity, of the age of the spectacle. The haka dance of the All Blacks, New Zealand's rugby national team, is more authentic than this pseudo-religious oath before the Western Wall. Here, a religious text is being misused to justify a nationalist myth. The army is simultaneously the guarantor of Israeli security, the nation's educational institution, and the symbol of the state, both internally and externally.

The careful staging — the aesthetics — plays an important role in maintaining the national myth. The Palestinian intellectual Abdaljawad Omar writes: "The choreographed movements of soldiers and armored vehicles, the seamlessly integrated technology, the courage displayed by the armed forces, the ability to demonstrate one's power through its aesthetic effect and performance, the assassination of Palestinian leaders and activists, the covert operations of undercover units in the labyrinthine spaces of refugee camps and densely populated urban areas, all the great military operations against Arab armies culminating in spectacular victories — these serve not only to demonstrate dominance but also open up a narrative space in which the identity of the state defines itself." ²⁶

It would be shortsighted, however, to attribute the broad acceptance of militarism in the Israeli population solely to aesthetics and the Zionist idealization of power and violence. Even though these factors are certainly significant, the appeal to ideals such as duty and self-sacrifice is of even greater importance.

Shapiro describes the indoctrination mantra of Israeli recruits as follows: "Israeli soldiers are not simply soldiers. They are hyper-nationalized redeemers of the ancient people of the Bible, at all times the only thing standing between the Jewish race and Hitler's ovens, the only thing standing between the Jewish race and the wretched, contemptible lives they had to endure before Israel and the IDF were created."

The rabbi from New York also makes clear how Judaism, in contrast to Zionism, stands on the matter: "To bless war and warriors is severely condemned by Judaism." Believing Jews like Shapiro reject nationalism as a form of idolatry.

Unbearably Good-Humored

It is bad enough to have one's weapons blessed by a God one actually believes in. The deliberate, cynical manipulation of religious symbols is even more repulsive. It is worth repeating this important point: Zionism is, in its origins, an atheistic, anti-religious ideology, similar to Marxism, with which it initially had many points of contact.

All Zionist heroes and founding thinkers were atheists, as is Benjamin Netanyahu. Israel's first Prime Minister and mastermind of the "Nakba," David Ben-Gurion, was, for

example, of the opinion that socialism and Zionism were two sides of the same ideological coin. He was an admirer of Lenin and the communist seizure of power in Russia. He enthused about “the great revolution, the original upheaval, that would uproot the present reality and shake this rotten, decadent society to its foundations.” [27](#)

Ben-Gurion writes in his memoirs: “Since I so often invoke the Torah, I would like to say that I personally do not believe in the God it postulates. What I mean is that I cannot ‘turn to God’ or pray to a superhuman, omnipotent being who lives in the heavens... I am not religious, and most of the early builders of modern Israel were not believers either.”

I take out my phone and start photographing. I am not the only one doing so; I do not look like a Palestinian, so I do not attract attention, and no one minds being photographed by me. We are among ourselves. As I take the pictures, I wonder where these recruits will serve.



They will not pilot the F-35 and F-16 jets that drop thousands of US-supplied 900-kilogram bombs on the Gaza Strip. Will they be part of the crews of the Merkava tanks deployed against residential buildings? Will they learn to operate the armed quadcopter drones with which the IDF kills civilians daily from a safe distance? Will they learn to blow up the houses of those they previously drove out with bombing terror?

How does this unbearably good mood come about? It is obvious that “Propaganda Fantasyland” has done its work thoroughly and that most of them do not regard Palestinians as equal human beings. With that, the natural inhibition that humans usually feel against killing their own kind has already been decisively lowered.

I Want to Kill More

I think of a video that made the rounds on the internet before my departure: A young Israeli female reservist — she could easily be one of those standing before me here — brags about having shot two Palestinians and is offended when her interlocutor does not believe her. She makes a pistol with her hand, in the style of a hip-hop video, and says: “I want to kill more.”

How many of these 18- and 19-year-olds will come back broken and traumatized — broken and traumatized by what they have seen and what they have done? How many are immune to normal human feelings through the hermetic cult of Zionism? In Israel, a new genre of pop music has emerged: “Genocide Hip-Hop,” a contribution by the “Start-Up Nation” to music history. ²⁸



How many of them will burn in their tanks when the resistance in Gaza occasionally manages to get close enough to penetrate the high-tech “Trophy” protection system of the Israeli tanks with its primitive weapons?

What is the long-term effect on the psyche of participating in a mass murder of civilians? Devastating, if one looks at the suicide rates of veterans of the invasion of Iraq in the United States. “Breaking the Silence,” an organization of Israeli veterans who speak out against the occupation, shows that even a lifetime of manipulation through dehumanizing propaganda does not always survive contact with the enemy.

The “Breaking the Silence” report, “This is How We Fought in Gaza 2014,” for example, collects testimonies of Israeli soldiers who participated in Operation “Protective Edge.” The statements describe tactics that led to massive civilian casualties and the destruction of entire city blocks.²⁹

The Hannibal Directive

The soldiers describe a doctrine of engagement that calls for the use of massive firepower in densely populated areas. These are the same tactics the IDF uses during

the genocide. The application of the so-called “Hannibal Directive” is a particularly interesting parallel.

The Hannibal Directive is named after the Carthaginian general from antiquity who chose to poison himself rather than be captured alive by the Roman Empire. The order aims to prevent Israelis from being captured by the enemy, who could later use them as leverage in prisoner exchange negotiations.

This directive permits the use of extreme violence and accepts the death of Israeli soldiers and civilians. According to reports in various Israeli newspapers, the Hannibal Directive was applied during the attacks on October 7th.

Apache attack helicopters of the Israeli Air Force, armed with Hellfire missiles, fired on cars containing Hamas fighters and Israeli hostages. The Hellfire missile is a powerful weapon. A single missile can destroy a heavy battle tank — a capability comparable to the energy of a heavy industrial demolition charge. The heaviest weapons of the Hamas fighters on October 7th were hand grenades and RPGs — hand-held anti-tank grenade launchers of Soviet design.



Vehicles destroyed by the Israeli army

On October 7th at 12:00 noon, Israel’s top military leadership ordered all units to prevent the capture of Israeli citizens “at all costs.” The military “instructed all combat

units to implement the Hannibal Directive in practice, without expressly using that name,” as the Israeli journalists revealed.

The information comes from an investigative article by Ronen Bergman and Yoav Zitun, two journalists with extensive sources within the Israeli military and intelligence apparatus. They also revealed that Israeli attack helicopters, drones, and tanks destroyed approximately 70 cars driven by Palestinian fighters. ³⁰

It is noteworthy that this information is available in Israel. It is known that the nation's, the collective's, interests take precedence over everything, and individuals are sacrificed. Many Israelis accept this; they firmly believe in the story that has been drilled into them for a lifetime: Israel and Zionism are the salvation of the Jews. Only a strong Israel and the IDF stand between them and a second Holocaust; Shapiro calls it the Zionist Holocaust religion.

The willingness of the Zionist leadership to sacrifice individuals on the altar of the nationalist project existed from the beginning and cannot be explained by the Holocaust alone. Nevertheless, it is a fanaticism that can perhaps best be understood from the experience of humiliation and weakness in the face of the pogroms in Eastern Europe and the hatred of traditional, violence-rejecting Judaism. One of the many literary figures among the early Zionists put the creed of the new, the iron, self-sacrificing human being into verse:

“Iron, from which everything is made that the national machine needs. Does it need a wheel? Here I am. A nail, a screw, a girder? Here I am. Police? Doctors? Actors? Water carriers? Here I am. I have no qualities, no feelings, no psychology, no name of my own. I am a servant of Zion, prepared for everything, bound to nothing, with a single commandment: Build!”

Genocide Summer Camp

The event before the Western Wall begins to disperse. I have seen enough and made my way back to the hotel. Lying on the narrow bed in the room, I write an email to the editorial office of the independent English-language news magazine “Electronic Intifada” (EI).

I describe the scene before the Western Wall, attach some photographs, and offer to write a piece about the grotesque staging—the “Genocide Summer Camp.” I will regret this offer a few days later, but at this point, I do not yet know that Israeli security services interrogate tourists not only upon entry but also before departure.

The weekly livestream of “EI,” moderated by four journalists, is one of the best sources of information about the crime of the century in the Gaza Strip. In Germany, “EI” is incorrectly classified as antisemitic. “EI” supports the right of Palestinians to armed resistance against colonization and occupation. In this, the magazine’s editorial team is

in accordance with international law; under international law, states may not use force against the exercise of the right to self-determination.

Those seeking self-determination have the right to use military force when no other means are available to achieve their goals. I have watched more than 100 hours of their coverage and found no indication of an antisemitic attitude at “EI.” On the contrary, prominent Israeli dissidents such as the historian Ilan Pappé and the economist Shir Hever are regular guests on “EI.”

Annalena Baerbock’s Relationship with the Truth

An “EI” story of particular interest for Germany: the dissemination of atrocity propaganda by the German Foreign Minister. The article shows how lies about atrocities are used to justify Germany’s support for Israel’s actions in the Gaza Strip.

On May 26, 2024, Minister Baerbock claimed, during a visit to Israel, to have seen a video recorded by Hamas fighters on October 7, 2023, showing the rape of an Israeli woman. This claim, however, was refuted by Israeli media and a UN team, who confirmed that no such video exists.

The accusations of mass rapes by Hamas fighters on October 7, 2023, were the atrocity story that followed the 40 beheaded babies. The story of the 40 beheaded babies was exposed as a lie just days after its first publication and is now heard less frequently.

The claim that the Hamas guerrillas systematically raped women during their commando operation, carried out under extreme time pressure, is also inaccurate, but this story has become lodged in the public consciousness. A UN report published in June 2024 concluded that there is no reliable evidence of rapes. Here is the relevant paragraph of the report:

“With regard to rape, the Commission has seen publicly available reports alleging that Israeli civilians were victims of rape and other forms of sexual violence on 7 October at various locations in southern Israel. The Commission has examined witness statements from journalists and the Israeli police regarding rapes, but was unable to independently verify these allegations, as it had no access to victims, witnesses, and crime scenes, and its investigations were obstructed by the Israeli authorities.

The Commission was unable to review the unedited version of such witness statements. For the same reasons, the Commission was also unable to verify reports of sexualized torture and genital mutilation. Furthermore, the Commission found that some specific allegations were false, inaccurate, or contradicted by other evidence or statements, and excluded these from its assessment.” [31](#)

This is not to say that no women were mistreated on October 7, 2023, or that many uninvolved civilians were not murdered. The terrorists indiscriminately murdered

civilians — the UN report just quoted leaves no doubt about that. Particularly at the “Nova” festival, horrifying scenes unfolded:

“Around 8:00 AM, Palestinian fighters reached the main grounds and began shooting at fleeing and hiding festival-goers. Palestinian fighters essentially held the festival grounds under their control until at least 12:30 PM and fired at will. Survivors who fled on foot across open fields to the east described the experience as ‘like shooting ducks,’ and ‘the perpetrators drove motorcycles and golf carts across the field and shot at the fleeing festival-goers.’” ³²

Social Media Propaganda Campaigns

Weighing horrific acts of violence against each other is not helpful for the attempt to understand the root causes of the problem. Supposing the rapes invented by Israeli propaganda had actually occurred, would they be a justification for the collective punishment of the civilian population in Gaza? Would the systematic use of sexual violence by Hamas change the fact that Israel is a settler colony that could only come into existence through ethnic cleansing?

What is relevant regarding the atrocity propaganda of mass rapes is the observation of how effective, cynical, and simultaneously reckless Israeli propaganda has become. As the UN report shows, Palestinian attackers on October 7th brutally and indiscriminately killed uninvolved civilians. Israeli propagandists used this fact for a large-scale communications campaign. They wanted to ensure that the world public would not turn away from Israel’s side even after the beginning of the carnage in the Gaza Strip:

“Immediately after October 7th, Israel launched a massive advertising campaign to illustrate the horrors of the Hamas massacre. An examination of the evidence revealed that in the first ten days, Israel ‘flooded’ social media with at least 70 advertisements, including videos with graphic images, reaching millions of people.

Approximately 30 advertisements were completely removed from Google’s public library due to the violent images they contained. Another investigation found that in fewer than two weeks, Israel targeted audiences in Western Europe with approximately 88 advertisements and spent \$7.1 million to reach nearly one billion impressions.” ³³

Initially, world public opinion was fully on Israel’s side, and the Israeli media campaign amplified this effect. But after the images of October 7th were displaced by the horrifying images from Gaza, a story appeared in the *New York Times* at the end of December 2023, in which “systematic rapes” were mentioned for the first time. According to the *Times* article, a young woman named Gal Abdush was also supposed to have been a rape victim.

Shortly afterward, Abdush’s relatives came forward and accused the *Times* reporters of lying and manipulation: “Not only did Abdush’s sister and brother-in-law deny that she

was raped, but the former also accused the *Times* of manipulating her family into participating in the campaign through misleading information about the editorial approach.” ³⁴

In Germany, to my knowledge, there was no reporting on the exposure of this atrocity propaganda placed in the supposedly reputable *Times*, and the UN report also went unmentioned. What remained in memory is the image of the brown man, crazed with hatred and lust — the Islamic barbarian who rapes innocent white women.

For Israeli propaganda, evidence is irrelevant, and new atrocity fantasies kept being added: In his speech before the American Congress, Netanyahu fantasized about murdered children in attics, in order to evoke Holocaust associations through the figure of Anne Frank, who hid in an attic.

Dark Tourism

The equation of the Holocaust with October 7th is part of the Israeli communications strategy. As I write this, eight months after my stay in Israel, a large-scale, multimedia cult of remembrance around October 7, 2023, has emerged there, described by Canadian author Naomi Klein in the article “How Israel Has Made Trauma into a Weapon of War” for the *Guardian* as follows: The Israeli government “justifies a genocide in the present with a genocide in the past — while its supporters use art, film, virtual reality, ‘dark tourism,’ and even fashion to project Israeli trauma to the entire world.”

In doing so, the propagandists draw on developments of methods already tested at the “Palmach” Museum: immersive experiences that let the visitor feel and relive. The goal is not healing or education, but manipulation and narrowing of perspective. Klein cites Amy Sodaro from City University of New York in her article, who says: “There is a difference between understanding an event, which preserves the analytical capacity of the mind as well as self-awareness, and the feeling of personally living through it.”

The latter does not lead to understanding but to what Sodaro calls a “prosthetic trauma” that, as she writes, contributes greatly to a “simplifying dualism between good and evil with important political implications.”

The consumers of these experiences are encouraged to feel a kind of distilled bond with the victims, who embody the essence of good, and a distilled hatred of their attackers, who embody the essence of evil. ³⁵

Unequal Citizens

I have no desire to leave the hotel room again and research recruitment and military service in the Israeli army. The IDF is a conscript army; every Israeli citizen of Jewish nationality (until recently, with the exception of ultra-Orthodox Jews) must serve between 24 and 32 months of military service.

This applies to men and women, but not to the Palestinian “citizens” of Israel, and only with restrictions for other population groups such as Druze and Circassians. Israel is the only modern nation-state that distinguishes between citizenship and nationality. In searching for a detailed explanation, I come across a report by Amnesty International that describes the apartheid system in Israel. The report is extensive — 280 pages. I search for the relevant passages and find this:

“Military service in Israel is compulsory for Jewish Israeli men and women, as well as Druze and Circassian men in Israel. Palestinian citizens of Israel are exempt and have largely not served in its army since the founding of the State of Israel in 1948 for national and political reasons. The exemption is not enshrined in law but was introduced as an administrative practice, based on the Israeli army’s discretionary powers under the provisions of the Military Service Law of 1986.

No Housing Allowance Without Military Service

Israeli citizens who complete military service receive substantial financial compensation from the state, access to jobs in certain sectors such as the military and security industry, and access to housing allowances. The Absorption of Discharged Soldiers Law of 1994 and its subsequent amendments provide a broad range of benefits exclusively for former soldiers, including educational grants and housing allowances.

By linking benefits to military service, the state ensures that the overwhelming majority of Palestinian citizens of Israel are excluded from these benefits. While the minority of Jewish Israelis who do not serve in the army are also denied access to these benefits, they at least have a meaningful choice.

For almost all Palestinian citizens of Israel, it is unthinkable to serve in an army that occupies Palestinian land and systematically suppresses the rights of Palestinians. The linking of benefits and military service has been the subject of public debate in Israel for decades, with the focus on the idea of using a compulsory alternative national service for Palestinian citizens of Israel or the exclusion of Palestinians from military service to justify the privileges that Jewish Israelis enjoy for serving in the army.” ³⁶

Lived Apartheid

What would the reaction be in the Fatherland if Germany distinguished in this way between purebred Germans and German citizens of Turkish descent? Would Björn Höcke be in favor, or would that go too far for him?

Israel operates two strictly separated school systems — one for the Jewish, Hebrew-speaking majority and one for the Palestinian, Arabic-speaking minority. The ostensible rationale is that this arrangement takes sociocultural differences into account, but it is really about maintaining the differences between the two groups and protecting the privileged situation of Jewish Israelis.

Unlike Jewish students, who read the literature and poetry of the Zionist movement, celebrating the founding of Israel in 1948, Palestinian students do not read the literary classics taught in the Arab world. They also learn nothing about the “Nakba” or the history of the Palestinians.

They must engage with Jewish values and Jewish culture. Although Arabic is the language of instruction at Palestinian schools, Palestinian students spend significantly more time studying Hebrew, Jewish history, and Jewish culture than Arabic literature and history.³⁷

What would the reaction in Germany be if there were separate school systems for purebred Germans and Germans with a migration background?

These examples of unequal treatment, however, seem like insignificant details when compared with the massive, life-threatening discrimination to which Palestinians in the occupied territories and the Gaza Strip are subjected.

The situation of the more than 300,000 Palestinians in occupied East Jerusalem is described in the Amnesty report as follows: “Palestinians in East Jerusalem, on the other hand, can participate in political life neither in Israel nor in the West Bank. While they can vote and run in municipal elections in Jerusalem, they have traditionally boycotted them in protest against Israel’s ongoing occupation and illegal annexation of East Jerusalem and remain excluded from national elections.”



Israeli police station in occupied East Jerusalem

But that is not all: Palestinians in East Jerusalem are subject to a whole series of additional “special regulations”: “Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem are not Israeli citizens. Instead, they are granted an insecure permanent residency status that allows them to live in Jerusalem and access social services.

Center of Life Revoked

Through discriminatory laws and policies, however, the Israeli authorities have revoked the status of thousands of Palestinians, including retroactively, if they cannot prove that Jerusalem is their ‘center of life.’ This has devastating consequences for their human rights. In contrast, Jewish Israeli settlers living in East Jerusalem enjoy Israeli citizenship and are exempt from laws and measures enacted against Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem.”

How and where do the Palestinians in East Jerusalem live?

“In July 2021, 358,800 Palestinian residents lived within the borders of the city of Jerusalem, accounting for 38% of the city’s population. Of these, approximately 150,000 live in areas separated from the rest of the city by the wall and other military checkpoints. Approximately 225,178 Jewish Israelis live in East Jerusalem in 13 illegal

settlements built by the Israeli authorities and in private homes taken over from Palestinians under discriminatory programs.”

What is the goal?

“Since the annexation of East Jerusalem in 1967, Israeli governments have set targets for the demographic ratio of Jews to Palestinians in Jerusalem as a whole. In several resolutions, Israeli governments endorsed a 70% to 30% target ratio. In 2006, the target was revised as part of the Regional Master Plan 30/1.

In 2009, a new target of 60% Jews to 40% Palestinians, established in the ‘Jerusalem 2000’ plan, was deposited with the Regional Planning Committee. Statements by Israeli politicians suggest that the denial of economic and social rights for Palestinians in East Jerusalem is not merely a consequence of Israel’s dispossession and segregation policies but is rather intentional.

Thus, Teddy Kollek, the then Mayor of Jerusalem, said in 1990: ‘For Jewish Jerusalem, I have done something in the last twenty-five years. For East Jerusalem? Nothing! What have I done? Nothing. Sidewalks? Nothing. Cultural institutions? Not one. Yes, we installed a sewage system for them and improved the water supply. Do you know why? Do you think it was for their benefit, for their welfare? Forget it! There were some cases of cholera there, and the Jews were afraid they would catch it, so we installed a sewage system and a water system against cholera.’”

Israel for the Jews, Foreigners Out

Anyone who wants to understand Israel cannot avoid the demographic problem — that is, the expulsion of the Palestinians from the Jewish state. Israel for the Jews, foreigners out; as so often, it is not necessary to search through secret documents — the Zionist leadership elite has long since stopped mincing words.

When then-Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu posted a message on Instagram in March 2019 saying that “Israel is not a state of all its citizens” but rather “the nation-state of the Jewish people and only that,” he crystallized a policy that had been in the making for seven decades.

As early as December 2003, when he was Finance Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu said: “If there is a demographic problem, and there is, it is with the Israeli Arabs who will remain Israeli citizens.” He pointed to the need to pursue a policy aimed at integrating “Israel’s Arabs” while ensuring they do not constitute 35% to 40% of the population.

Those Down There Who Keep Bashing Each Other’s Heads In

Benjamin Netanyahu was indeed criticized for his 2003 remarks, but they were not the views of an outlier. Yitzhak Rabin, his predecessor as Prime Minister, said: “The red line for Arabs is 20 percent of the population; that must not be exceeded.” Ariel Sharon, as

Prime Minister, said in a 2002 Knesset debate that Palestinian citizens did have “rights in the land,” but “all rights over the Land of Israel are Jewish rights.”

Ehud Olmert said in 2003, as Deputy Prime Minister and three years before becoming Prime Minister, that “the demographic question” would “dictate the solution we must apply,” and that the “formula for the parameters of a unilateral solution is: maximize the number of Jews; minimize the number of Palestinians.”

Many Germans think Israel was founded by believing Jews, religious fanatics, as an understandable reaction to the Holocaust, and that Jewish fanatics are now clashing with fanatical Muslims. That is certainly one of the reasons for the popularity of the phrase about “the fanatics down there who have been bashing each other’s heads in for centuries.”

One More Gene for Reason

What resonates with some people here is a cozy folk racism that, over a third beer, ruminates on the differences between people and tells itself that we Germans simply have one more gene for reason than those people down there. This racism comes across as more good-natured than Churchill’s formulation, but the two are closely related.

But many Germans also simply do not know that the situation in Palestine is comparable to the colonial history of Vietnam, South Africa, Algeria, or the United States. The indigenous population is defending its land against European newcomers who have established a colony. It is not a conflict that has been going on since time immemorial. It begins with the Zionist movement’s decision to establish its colony in Palestine.

The nationalist ideology of the European settlers — Zionism — is a flexible, pragmatic ideology that does not care about God and permits cooperation with anyone who can be helpful in achieving the goal of maintaining and expanding the colony. The Zionists want to settle the land and use Jewish religious fanatics just as they use the frequently antisemitic, fundamentalist Christian fanatics in the USA.

Violence Is Part of Every Liberation Struggle

In Europe, the situation in Palestine is most comparable to the history of Ireland, which is probably why many Irish people understand the plight of the Palestinians better than the Germans. Ireland was England’s first colony. The country was part of the English and later the British Empire for 700 years. The Irish forced the establishment of their own state in 1922 through a bloody guerrilla war.

Rashid Khalidi, emeritus Professor of History at Columbia University in New York, states the undeniable historical truth in an interview with the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz*: “I am no friend of violence, but I am aware that violence is an essential part of every

liberation struggle. Against the overwhelming violence of the colonial rulers, there will be violence, whether I want it or not.”

Khalidi also points to important differences between the situation in Palestine and the confrontation between indigenous peoples and European settlers in other countries: “If you’re talking about the French in Algeria, I would argue that placing a bomb in a café violates both moral and state laws; it is a violation of international humanitarian law.

Two heroines of the Algerian Revolution — Jamila Bouhired and Zahra Zarif — did that. On a political level, that is, in my view, debatable, because the colonists, French settlers in Algeria, ultimately have a place to return to. They suffer from what I call ‘colonial anxiety.’ They are afraid of the ‘indigènes,’ the indigenous population, because the ‘indigènes’ outnumber them, and they know the ‘indigènes’ resent them.

But they do not suffer from an innate fear of persecution. Unlike the Jewish Israelis, they have no narrative in which every attack on them is placed in this context rather than in the local context. And ultimately, this violence was successful. Morally speaking, the attitude toward indiscriminate violence is black and white. But politically speaking, it is gray.”

Khalidi also highlights in the conversation the particular difficulty of the Palestinian liberation struggle: “It is harder than any other liberation struggle because it is not directed against a colonial project where the people can go home. There is no home. The Jews have been living in Israel for three or four generations. They are not going anywhere. You can’t simply appeal to them as you could to the French to bring their colonists home. It is more like Ireland and South Africa, where you have to come to terms with a population that you regard as a foreign group but that has become rooted and has developed a collective identity.” ³⁸

Similar to the topic of the “Nakba” — that is, the ethnic cleansing of the Palestinians as a precondition for the “Jewish and democratic” state — there is complete agreement in serious academic discourse regarding the fact that Zionism was and is a colonial project. Given the evidence, this is hardly surprising. What is more remarkable is that these fundamental facts have so far not found their way into the general public consciousness in Germany through the mass media.

In academic discourse, the debate now centers primarily on the correct definition of the colonial project. The definition I have encountered most frequently in the course of my research is that of the “settler colony.” Settler colonies are characterized, among other things, by the fact that the settlers have no intention of returning to their homeland and do not intend to exploit the indigenous population, the “natives,” for the benefit of the colonial metropole. The primary goal of the project is land theft and the appropriation of resources.

Cleansing, Genocide, and Assimilation

The Palestinians — the indigenous population of today's Israel — represented and represent a disrupting factor that the colonists want to eliminate. This can happen in various ways; ethnic cleansing and genocide are frequently the means of choice in such situations. But assimilation into the society created by the colonists is also an option. In Israel's treatment of the Palestinians, as in the treatment of "Indians" — Native Americans — by white Americans, examples of all three variants can be found.

The granting of Israeli citizenship to a portion of the Palestinian population is an example of the Israeli state's attempt to solve the problem at least partially through assimilation. Until 1966, citizens of Israel of Palestinian descent were subject to a special military regime. Their freedom of movement, as well as freedom of speech and assembly, was restricted.

Indians and Other Natives

An interesting difference between the settler colony of Israel and the settler colony of the USA is the evolution of the media representation of the indigenous people and their resistance to land theft, ethnic cleansing, and genocide. The depiction of Native Americans as bloodthirsty savages, as barbarians and natural enemies of the civilized white man, appears today — at least to part of the audience — as implausible and racist. John Wayne has outlived his usefulness as a heroic figure. This does not, however, prevent German journalists like Christian Schröder from writing paragraphs like this one for the *Tagesspiegel* as recently as 2007:

"It is about taming the wilderness, and the men who push the boundaries of civilization ever further westward are taciturn conquerors who obey no law but their own morality. They would rather go down fighting than submit. No other actor embodied these pioneer-era virtues — which correspond to the American Constitution's promise of happiness for every individual citizen — as convincingly as John Wayne, who was born one hundred years ago today in Iowa. He is the greatest American hero that the twentieth century produced." ³⁷

Hard Men, Brutal Methods

Taciturn conquerors, hard men who use brutal methods to tame the wilderness. It is the same sound familiar from Netanyahu. It is astonishing how persistent the most simplistic clichés about the United States are in Germany, while the fictional character "John Wayne," created by the actor Marion Robert Morrison, is rejected by the younger generation in the USA itself as a negative example of a dishonest, "toxic" form of masculinity.

Within the Western genre, there has been an evolution since the days of John Wayne. In the film *Dances with Wolves*, for example, which made Kevin Costner a world star in 1990, one can at least observe the attempt to depict Native Americans in a more

realistic, less racist way. This kind of evolution is largely absent in action films with Muslim or Arab characters.

Here, Arabs and Muslims appear primarily as bearded, barbaric terrorists. Hollywood productions like the Chuck Norris classic *Delta Force* or the courtroom drama *Rules of Engagement* starring *Pulp Fiction* star Samuel L. Jackson are just two of many examples of this kind of subliminal propaganda. ³⁸ It is this kind of omnipresent, entertainment-wrapped propaganda that enables the dehumanization of the Palestinians.

Jerusalem — I decide to take a break from the research. I know that the carnage in Gaza continues; later, I read that on this day, another 40 Palestinians were killed in the bombardment of a residential building. I feel exhausted and overwhelmed, stay in bed for a long time, answer emails and WhatsApp messages, and check whether I have a new match on “Bumble.”

“Bumble,” the dating app that is rather more wholesome compared to “Tinder” and geared toward serious intentions, seems to me a good way to get into conversation with Israelis. I have resolved not to mention the topic of genocide in Gaza in the chats. I want to understand how Israelis think about the subject when they don’t feel on the defensive — whether they even bring it up at all.

I chat with L., an educated-seeming woman in her 40s, who, after a brief initial small talk, asks me whether I am Jewish. It is obviously impossible to escape the topic for even an hour. I answer truthfully that I don’t know for certain, but there is a possibility that my maternal grandfather was Jewish.

It is the family’s unsolved mystery; the probability seems to favor it. From the perspective of Orthodox Judaism, this family relationship would not qualify me as a Jew. The “Halacha,” the religious law, stipulates that only someone born to a Jewish mother or who has undergone “Giur” — that is, converted before a “Beit Din,” a rabbinical court — is Jewish.

From the perspective of the State of Israel, the matter looks different: In 1970, the immigration guarantee of the Law of Return was extended to the children and grandchildren of a Jew. So, if my grandfather was indeed Jewish and never officially renounced his religious affiliation, I would have a chance of obtaining first-class Israeli citizenship.

Then I could, for example, live as a generously state-subsidized settler in the West Bank under the protection of the IDF, on expropriated or stolen land, and could use the roads reserved exclusively for Israeli citizens of Jewish nationality.

The Right to Mistreat with Impunity

I could have myself armed by the Israeli state and prevent Palestinian farmers from cultivating their olive groves, under the protection of the IDF, and in the hope that the farmers will give up, and we can reclaim another piece of “Eretz Israel.” This is how I could make my contribution to the realization of the Zionist dream, invoking the word of a God I don’t believe in, just like Ben-Gurion and Jabotinsky.

I would have the right to steal from and mistreat Palestinians with impunity. I would remain unpunished because I would be under the protection of the army, and as soon as anyone outside Israel dared to criticize me, I could play the victim and accuse my critics of antisemitism.

All of this I could do thanks to an absurd construct, a sleight of hand that has turned a world religion into a nationality. A nationality that defines itself through the proof of Jewish blood, but immediately renders the definition absurd by granting me first-class Israeli citizenship only if my grandfather was not a convert. Would his conversion to Christianity have had an effect on the Jewish proportion of his blood cells?

The Jewish Question

I ask L. to what extent it matters whether I am Jewish, and add that even if I were, it would seem unimportant to me, since I understand Judaism as a religion and I don't believe in God. I am aware that I am making it too simple for myself, but I want to hear her answer. L. replies that she understands, but that it is not about religion — it is about national belonging and nationalism. After that, the conversation dies out.

I make arrangements with Tamir; he will pick me up the next morning and drive me to Bethlehem. Then I make my way back to the Old City. On this day, the Israeli soldiers are standing in front of their fortified checkpoint at the head of the stairs. An Israeli soldier is interrogating a Palestinian boy; he cannot be older than 12 or 13.

I stop to observe the scene. She takes the boy's phone away and orders him to unlock it. Then she takes the phones into the guardhouse.

The soldier with whom she had been conducting the interrogation notices that I have stopped and signals me to move on.



Damascus Gate checkpoints

I have no interest in being interrogated myself and obey. The Amnesty report comes to mind. “Since 1967, the Israeli authorities have arrested over 800,000 Palestinian men, women, and children in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and in the Gaza Strip, and have brought many of them before military courts that systematically fail to meet international standards for fair trials and in which the overwhelming majority of cases end in conviction.” The idea that the boy could end up in an Israeli prison camp is frightening but not unlikely.

I walk the same route as the day before. Halfway to the Western Wall, I find an open café and sit down inside. At the table in front of me sit two English-speaking tourists; they look like a couple. He is giving her a half-voiced lecture about the history of Jerusalem — about the time under Jordanian rule, the Six-Day War of 1967, and its effects on the city. I think longingly of my noise-canceling headphones, which I forgot at the hotel.

The café has an internet connection. I take my phone out of my pocket and try to tune out the conversation and concentrate on the Wikipedia article about the Via Dolorosa. I had seen a sign the day before pointing the way there. I want to take the opportunity to see more of the place that is of such great significance for Christianity. Even at this point, it is clear to me that I may not return to Israel — at least not in its current form.

The Premonition of Being Defamed as an Antisemite

I assume that after publishing this text online, I will be defamed as an antisemite, and I consider it possible that I will not be allowed to enter Israel a second time. If critical Facebook posts are already enough to be considered a terror sympathizer, this seems a realistic scenario. Every foreigner entering Israel is questioned by Israeli security authorities upon entry and departure, and their online profile is checked.

The instrumentalization of the antisemitism accusation has by now been so overused that the charge has lost its significance. Since all serious critics of Israel, such as UN rapporteur Albanese, are slandered as antisemites, the public has become skeptical — a circumstance that plays into the hands of actually existing antisemites.

Since no universally recognized standards for information credibility exist anymore, and the culture of debate, especially in the United States, frequently sinks to a tribal level, when it comes to this topic in particular, the only thing that matters is looking like the winner at all costs and harming the opponent. Antisemite. Child molester. Whatever works.

It is noteworthy that serious accusations such as “Donald Trump is controlled by Vladimir Putin” or “Donald Trump is the new Hitler” are constantly heard in American media, and precisely for that reason, they no longer stick. This kind of slander and rumor-mongering is simply part of the landscape now and is obviously neither meant seriously nor taken seriously by any of the participants.

The descent of discourse to a tribal level can be taken literally and may even be an insult to nomadic hunter-gatherer groups. These societies were, by all appearances, more egalitarian than media-steered mass democracies and less warlike. One commonality, however, is the belief in magic and spiritual contamination, which have experienced a spectacular comeback in the USA. The influence of apocalyptic evangelical Christianity in the USA is frequently underestimated in Germany.

The Return of the Savior Is Near

Millions of Americans, such as former Vice President Mike Pence and Republican Speaker of the House Mike Johnson, are convinced they are active participants in the final battle between good and evil. These evangelical Zionists regard the founding of Israel — a secular nation — as the fulfillment of biblical prophecy, an announcement of the imminent return of the Savior. Anyone who divides the world into good and evil, into “good guys” and “bad guys,” finds diplomacy deeply suspect.

Anyone who, like American politician Tulsi Gabbard, has met the Syrian dictator Assad has been brushed by the breath of evil, is impure and suspect. Anyone who holds a position also held by Putin is contaminated by that agreement. In Germany, we are rapidly approaching this level with insults like “Putin-Versteher” (Putin sympathizer).

This magical thinking, this cult of purity, exists in both political camps in the USA. Anyone who maintains contact with a person branded as immoral, as a “bad guy,” becomes — particularly in the eyes of the Left — soiled by that proximity and must likewise be shunned. It is probably less the behavior of a tribal culture than that of a medieval village.

The ideal of individual freedom is a product of the city and the culture of the printed word. The current situation, in a negative sense, is reminiscent of the “Global Village” that the Canadian media theorist Marshall McLuhan foresaw emerging with ubiquitous digital communication. The mob in the Global Village is ignorant, guided solely by emotion, and intimidating to the individual.

At the same time, online censorship and surveillance are becoming ever more aggressive. Anyone who wants to keep their job and not show a potential new employer any “red flags” takes care not to expose themselves through their opinions or leave problematic traces on the internet. I don’t know whether I would have published this text if I worked as an employee. Personal integrity has its price, and the question of who is helped by posting Palestinian flags on Facebook is obvious.

The Decay of the Via Dolorosa

I pay and make my way to the Via Dolorosa. On the way, I encounter two Christian monks, and two Palestinian boys try out their English on me and demand a dollar. The idea that children like these two are dying by the thousands in a rain of bombs in Gaza is particularly unbearable at the place where the God of love supposedly sacrificed himself for the sins of humanity.

The Via Dolorosa, Jesus’s Way of the Cross, winds through the alleys of the Muslim Quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem. The approximately 600-meter-long path begins near the Lion’s Gate and leads to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the place where, according to the Bible, Jesus was crucified and buried.

The facades of many buildings are decayed, and the streets are riddled with potholes. Graffiti adorns the walls; trash accumulates in the corners. This neglect reflects the political and social situation in East Jerusalem. The tension between the religious significance and the sobering reality of the Via Dolorosa points to the deeper problem: the connection between monotheism and power, between God and violence, between religion, identity, and politics.

Beauty Brigade

I leave the Via Dolorosa behind and return once more to the Western Wall. On the way there, my gaze falls on the hand of an Israeli female soldier. The finger that hovers casually above the trigger of her M16 is adorned with a silver-lacquered artificial

fingernail. The strange image reminds me of the many TikTok dance videos of IDF soldiers in uniform circulating online.

Max Blumenthal describes the role of young women in the Israeli army as follows: “Rather than earning respect through military zeal, as their male counterparts do, female soldiers are often pushed into the role of ‘mattress,’ proving their value to the state through sexual availability and a flawlessly seductive appearance. In the words of Ezer Weizman, a former Israeli president and commander of the country’s air force: ‘The best men into the cockpit, the best women to the pilots.’

Until 2001, female soldiers upon their conscription into the army were assigned to a women’s unit called ‘Chen’; ‘Chen’ means ‘beauty’ and ‘grace’ in Hebrew — the ‘Beauty Brigade.’ While male soldiers focus on maximizing their physical abilities, many women receive beauty tips and help with individually customizing their uniforms for maximum sex appeal. In return, they are used as props in pro-army propaganda, with pretty soldiers in full makeup frequently appearing on the front pages of Israeli newspapers and portraying the military as a heavily armed Ibiza.” ³⁹

The square in front of the Western Wall is less crowded today, so I take the opportunity to take photos.

Again, I feel the oppressive discrepancy between the ordinariness of my tourist program and the reason for the trip.



The Western Wall

The Al-Aqsa Mosque is located only 60 meters from the Western Wall. The mosque is considered the third-holiest site in Islam, after the al-Haram Mosque in Mecca and the Prophet's Mosque in Medina. During the Crusader rule from 1099, the mosque was converted into a palace and served as the headquarters of the Knights Templar. After the reconquest of Jerusalem by Sultan Saladin in 1187, the Al-Aqsa Mosque was restored to its original purpose.

Today, the Al-Aqsa Mosque is administered by an Islamic trust (waqf). Access to the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem has been a central point of conflict between Jewish Israelis and Palestinians for decades. From the Jewish perspective, the mosque was built on the Temple Mount, the site where, according to tradition, two significant Jewish temples once stood.

The religious significance of the site for both groups regularly leads to tensions and violent clashes.

In April 2023, during the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan, severe clashes occurred between Palestinian worshippers and Israeli police at the Al-Aqsa Mosque. The trigger

was reports of planned Jewish rituals on the grounds. The police stormed the mosque, deploying tear gas and stun grenades, resulting in numerous injuries and over 350 arrests.

As early as May 2021, the situation escalated when Israeli security forces stormed the mosque, injuring hundreds of Palestinians. The repeated restrictions on access to the Al-Aqsa Mosque, particularly during religious holidays, are perceived by the Palestinian population as a provocation. The Israeli government justifies these measures with security concerns.

The Ritual of the Red Heifer

The conflict over the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem is intensified by the actions of Zionist settler groups that seek to build a Third Temple on the Temple Mount. A central element of these aspirations is the ritual of the “red heifer” (Para Aduma), whose ashes, according to Jewish law, serve for ritual purification and are considered a prerequisite for the construction of the temple. Extremist Jewish groups have in the past attempted to bring red heifers to Israel in order to perform this ritual.

These activities are perceived by the Muslim community as a provocation and a threat to the status quo on the Temple Mount. Sheikh Ekrima Sabri, the preacher of the Al-Aqsa Mosque, has described the legend of the red heifer as “Jewish superstition” and emphasized that such rituals have nothing to do with the Al-Aqsa Mosque.

The current focus on Bezalel Smotrich and Itamar Ben-Gvir, the extremist settlers in the Israeli government, distracts from the actual causes of the conflict: the expansive, nationalist ideology of Zionism and the continued occupation of Palestinian territories.

The dispute over the mosque is another example of the misunderstanding that the conflict is primarily about religion; after all, the Hamas attack on October 7, 2023, also carried the internal title “Operation Al-Aqsa Flood.” Hamas published a seventeen-page document in English setting out the motives for the attack on October 7, 2023. The statement makes clear that religion plays only a subordinate role and that the conflict was about colonization and resistance, as it always has been.

The first sentences of the Hamas statement on October 7th read as follows: “The struggle of the Palestinian people against occupation and colonialism did not begin on October 7th, but 105 years ago, including 30 years of British colonial rule and 75 years of Zionist occupation. In 1918, the Palestinian people owned 98.5% of the land in Palestine and constituted 92% of its population.

While the Jews, who were brought to Palestine in mass immigrations coordinated between the British colonial authorities and the Zionist movement, managed to gain control of no more than 6% of the land in Palestine and constituted 31% of the

population before the Zionist entity was proclaimed on the historic land of Palestine in 1948.” ⁴⁰

Perfidious Albion

The 30-year British colonial rule — the “Mandate period” — began with the conquest of Palestine by British troops in 1918. Before that, Palestine had been a province of the Ottoman Empire for 400 years.

During Ottoman rule, clans and families were the decisive reference groups in Palestine; the modern concept of a homogeneous nation-state only became globally dominant in the nineteenth century. The so-called Mandate system, established by the Allied Powers, was a form of colonialism and occupation that was intended to be temporary.

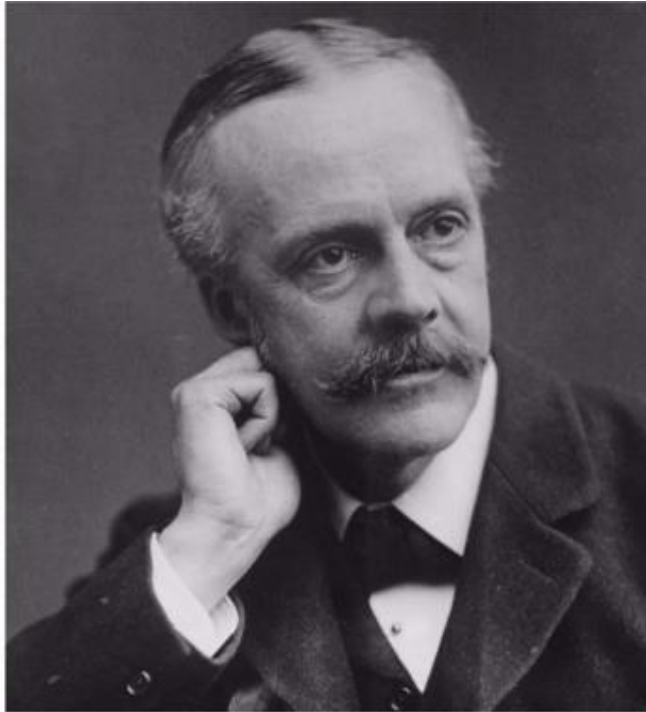
The system transferred rule over the territories previously controlled by the defeated powers — Germany, Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria, and the Ottoman Empire — to the victors.

The declared aim of the Mandate system was to enable the victors of the war to administer the newly emerging states until they could become independent.

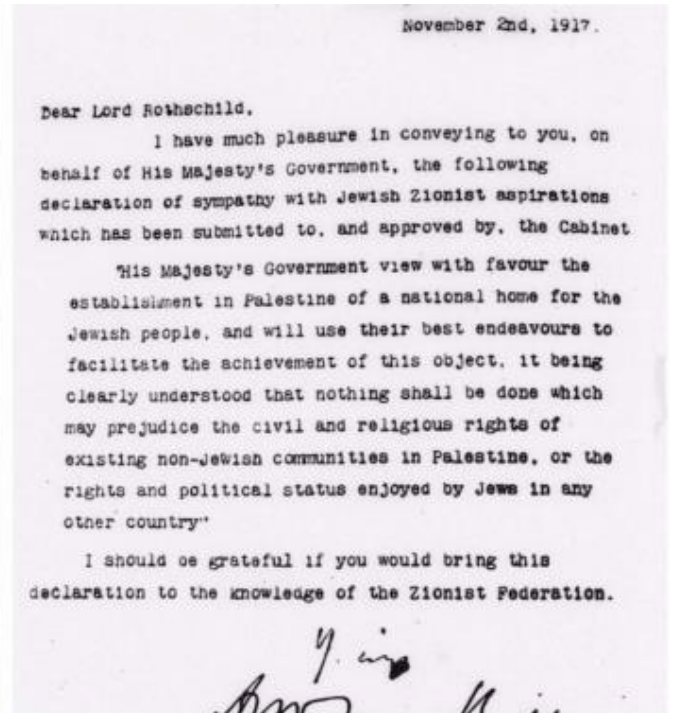
Another event decisive for the conflict was the “Balfour Declaration” of November 2, 1917. The document marks a decisive turning point in the region's history. In a brief letter, British Foreign Secretary Arthur James Balfour expressed to the influential Zionist Baron Rothschild the British government's support for the establishment of a “national home for the Jewish people” in Palestine.

After Uganda and Argentina had fallen out of the running, the Zionist movement had focused on the creation of a Jewish state — that is, a European colony — in Palestine. The initial efforts, particularly negotiations with the Ottoman Empire, remained unsuccessful.

The geopolitical shifts during the First World War offered new opportunities and led to talks between British government representatives and Zionist leaders such as Chaim Weizmann. The result was the Balfour Declaration, which for the first time expressed the official support of the then-dominant world power for the goal of “the establishment of a national home for the Jewish people” in Palestine.



Lord Balfour



Here is the English text of the fateful letter:

Dear Lord Rothschild,

I have much pleasure in conveying to you, on behalf of His Majesty's Government, the following declaration of sympathy with Jewish Zionist aspirations which has been submitted to, and approved by, the Cabinet.

His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.

I should be grateful if you would bring this declaration to the notice of the Zionist Federation.

In the gentle language of diplomacy and with an ambiguous formulation, the British Empire committed itself to supporting Theodor Herzl's goals of Jewish statehood, sovereignty, and control over immigration throughout Palestine. Tellingly, the overwhelming Arab majority of the population — then approximately 94 percent — was not mentioned by Balfour, or rather was mentioned only in an insidious manner as "existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine."

The Balfour Declaration is one of the rare documents of which it can be said with certainty that it decisively influenced the course of world history. The brief letter gave

the Zionist movement momentum and led to increased immigration of European Jews to Palestine. At the same time, it laid the foundation for the conflict between the settlers and the indigenous population.

Jerusalem — Tamir picks me up at 9 AM. He says it's a good time to get through the checkpoint quickly. Later, I read in a travel blog that it is apparently forbidden to take a taxi from Israel into the West Bank. You are only allowed to take the Israeli taxi to the border and must then switch to a local taxi. Fortunately, I did not know this at the time of our crossing. I was already uneasy at the thought of the checkpoints even without this knowledge, although I don't expect to run into trouble.

A German tourist on his way to Bethlehem seems innocent enough and will probably be waved through. It is the Palestinians who have to suffer at the checkpoints. Rashid Khalidi, the former professor at Columbia University in New York, describes the role of checkpoints in the lives of Palestinians as follows: "The quintessence of the Palestinian experience takes place at a border, an airport, a checkpoint: in short, at one of those many modern barriers where identities are checked and verified. For Palestinians, the encounter with these barriers means the experience of powerlessness and fear."

Particularly feared is Checkpoint 300, the most frequently used checkpoint between Jerusalem and the southern West Bank. Checkpoint 300 presents a dystopian panorama: a nine-meter-high concrete wall, watchtowers with darkened glass windows, machine-gun muzzles peering through firing slits, the whole adorned with anti-apartheid Banksy street art.

The Palestinian author Ahmed Alkhateeb described his experience with Checkpoint 300 in a 2020 article for *Haaretz*: "Each room has a cage-like turnstile with a very small opening through which only one person can fit. On the other side of each turnstile is a metal detector next to a small room with a darkened glass window. The Israeli soldier in the control room operates the turnstiles remotely.

An electric display on top of the turnstile lights up green when it is open and red when it is closed. Usually, it would light up green for a few seconds and then stay red for minutes." The waiting time at Checkpoint 300 can be hours. ⁴¹

Tamir and I passed through the "Tunnels" checkpoint this morning. It extends over four lanes in the direction of Jerusalem and two lanes in the direction of Bethlehem. Unlike Checkpoint 300, "Tunnels" is a "low-tech" checkpoint. Apart from the cameras, there are no visible machines — there isn't even a traffic light to keep cars from driving up to the control points.

The only mechanisms used to slow cars down are speed bumps and the soldiers standing on the road when entering Israel. My nervousness proves unfounded; there are no soldiers on the lane heading toward Bethlehem — we are waved through without issue by the uniformed man in the guardhouse.

The "Tunnels" checkpoint is located several kilometers west of the "Green Line" in the West Bank. The "Green Line" is the armistice line between Israel and the West Bank,

the Gaza Strip, the Golan Heights, and the Sinai Peninsula. In 1967, it became the dividing line between Israel and the territories it had conquered in the Six-Day War.



Tunnels Checkpoint

According to an NGO, as of June 2020, there were 179 checkpoints throughout the occupied West Bank, along with 154 road gates and 68 roadblocks. In addition, the Israeli army erects thousands of temporary checkpoints, so-called “flying checkpoints,” on the roads in the West Bank every year.

Under the Oslo II Accord reached in 1995 between Israel and the PLO, the occupied territories were divided into three categories. “Area A,” 18% of the total area, is under Palestinian Authority (PA) administration. Although the PA has control, Israel reserves the right to intervene militarily in certain situations. Bethlehem is in “Area A.” “Area B,” 22%, consists of smaller towns under the control of Israeli police and military, with Palestinian civil administration. “Area C,” 60%, is under Israeli military administration and military law. Palestinians there receive no building permits.

The Failure of Oslo

The Christian “Kairos Solidarity Network” describes the situation created by this division as follows: “Without the territories under Israeli administration, a viable Palestinian state is not possible. The livelihood of the Palestinians is being destroyed through land theft, the uprooting of more than one million olive and apricot trees, and the deprivation of water resources: Palestinians pay three times the price for water compared to Israelis

and receive only 1/5 of the quantity, even though the water often comes from the West Bank.” ⁴²

The different perceptions of the Oslo Accords on the Israeli and Palestinian sides are another example of the ever-present danger with this topic: getting lost in side theaters and losing sight of the decisive factors. On the Oslo Accords alone, a whole series of books has been written.

Both sides are deeply dissatisfied with the outcome: the Israelis because Hamas, which disagreed with the conclusion of the agreements, hit Israel with a wave of attacks; the Palestinians because a sovereign state of their own, contrary to the promises made, has receded even further into the distance and they must continue to live under the boot of the Israeli occupation, whose control has in many areas even intensified. The Israeli historian Arnon Degani, who describes himself as a Zionist, has published an interesting English-language podcast on the topic. ⁴³

It is important to remain aware of the fundamental constellation: This is not a conflict between two parties that are even remotely on equal footing. It is not about Jews and Muslims who have been bashing each other's heads in down there for millennia. It is about colonization and resistance, about oppression and self-determination.

The US government estimates the total Palestinian population of the West Bank at approximately 3 million people. According to UNRWA, the “United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East,” more than 912,879 registered refugees live in the West Bank, approximately one quarter of them in 19 refugee camps. Most of them are descendants of those expelled during the 1948 “Nakba.”

The Disinterest of the Media

Overcrowding in the camps is the norm; large families live in cramped, stuffy quarters, often without sanitary facilities. Access to clean water is a constant problem; power supply is irregular; and sewage systems are inadequate.

Another problem is the lack of access to education and professional opportunities. Unemployment and poverty prevail; many children are malnourished. The situation in Gaza is even more depressing, especially since the beginning of the Israeli blockade in 2007. These are living conditions that many Germans can barely imagine and that are hardly reported on in the German media.

The same applies to most Israeli media, with a few commendable exceptions, such as *Haaretz* journalists Amira Hass and Gideon Levy and the magazine *+972*. Israel is unique among democracies in that permanent military censorship exists. It is legally required that every article on security matters must first be submitted to the censor.

When Palestinians in the camps are reported on, it is usually about terrorists and Islamic Jew-haters; there is hardly any personal contact between the two groups. Many

Israelis set foot in the house of a Palestinian family in Gaza or the West Bank for the first time when, as soldiers during a nighttime commando operation, they kick in the door.

Palestinians in the West Bank are considered stateless, as they do not possess citizenship in a recognized state. The PA does issue identity cards and passports, but these documents do not confer full citizenship rights and are not universally recognized. Israel retains control over the population registry in the West Bank, further complicating the legal status of the Palestinians.

The Israeli authorities severely restrict family reunification between Palestinians in the West Bank and their spouses living in Israel. The Israeli Citizenship Law prohibits family reunification for Palestinians, meaning that Palestinians from the West Bank who are married to Israeli citizens cannot obtain Israeli citizenship.

First-Class Citizens

As of early 2024, approximately 520,000 Jewish Israelis lived in settlements in the West Bank. The settlers are first-class Israeli citizens and enjoy all the privileges that come with it. Since the Palestinians in the West Bank do not possess recognized citizenship, they enjoy little legal protection. They are subject to military orders and laws that differ significantly from those governing the settlers. ⁴⁴

The continuous expansion of the settlements has made the creation of a contiguous Palestinian state impossible. Even though German politicians, such as Foreign Minister Baerbock, still speak of “the two-state solution being the only solution,” experts on the situation such as Ilan Pappé and Rashid Khalidi unanimously state that there is no longer any possibility of implementing a two-state solution, even if a government were to come to power in Israel that, unlike Likud, were actually interested in it.

After more than 50 years of occupation, a complex occupation architecture has developed in the West Bank whose goal is to separate the presence of the Palestinians living in the West Bank from the everyday life of the Jewish settlers. Nothing makes this clearer than the separation wall erected by Israel. The separation wall consists of concrete, barbed-wire-lined fences, and surveillance towers.

The wall, stretching over 700 kilometers, often stands far from the Green Line, deep in Palestinian land. Officially, it serves security purposes and is meant to prevent attacks. But its course has far-reaching effects on the lives of the Palestinian population; the wall severs not only geographical but also human connections. The barrier separates cities and villages, divides plantations, and makes access to education and medical care difficult for many Palestinians.

Forbidden Roads

Many of the roads that the Israeli state has built or renovated in the West Bank since the beginning of the occupation are also reserved exclusively for Israeli settlers. The system is so complex and confusing that the 2004 report “Forbidden Roads” by the Israeli human rights organization B’Tselem spans more than 50 pages. ⁴⁵

According to the report, the “regime of forbidden roads,” based on the principle of separation through discrimination, bears striking similarities to the racist apartheid regime that existed in South Africa until 1994. In the road regime operated by Israel, a person’s right to move within the West Bank is based on their national identity.

The Israeli state justifies the establishment of the regime of forbidden roads with the protection of the Israeli civilian population. During the second “Intifada,” the last major armed uprising of the Palestinians from the occupied territories before October 7, 2023, according to B’Tselem, 741 Israeli civilians were killed within 10 years, including 124 minors.

Although B’Tselem expressly supports Israel’s right to protect its civilian population, the report reaches an unambiguous verdict regarding the regime of forbidden roads: “The regime of forbidden roads is based on the premise that all Palestinians constitute a security risk and that it is therefore justified to restrict their freedom of movement. This is a racist premise that has led to a policy that indiscriminately harms the entire Palestinian population and violates their human rights as well as international law.”

The Camps of Bethlehem

In the Bethlehem area, there are three refugee camps. The “Dheisheh” camp, founded in 1949, houses over 8,800 residents on an area of 1.5 square kilometers. “Aida Camp” was established in 1950 and has approximately 2,800 residents. The “Beit Jibrin” camp is part of the municipality of Bethlehem and is the smallest refugee camp in the West Bank. It is also one of the most densely populated camps. The camp has one main road, approximately 250 meters long, that runs through the entire camp.

The children of the “Beit Jibrin” and “Aida” camps attend the same schools — the co-educational school in the town of Beit Jala and the boys’ school in the “Aida” camp. To reach the “Aida Boys’ School,” the students must cross a main road near the wall and an Israeli watchtower. Clashes frequently occur in this area, and according to a UNRWA report, tear gas canisters and bullets are repeatedly found in the schoolyard. ⁴⁶

On the way to Bethlehem, Tamir points out to me one of the yellow metal road gates with which the Israeli army can seal off access to towns and villages at will. “They block the streets whenever they want,” he says. “The Israelis are in control, not the PA.” His laconic remark mirrors the description that Rashid Khalidi gives of the situation: “The PA has no sovereignty, no jurisdiction, and no authority except that which is granted to it by Israel. Israel even controls a large share of the revenues through tariffs and other taxes.

The main task of the PA, for which a large part of its budget is spent, is the preservation of security — but not that of the Palestinian people: The PA is charged by the USA and Israel with ensuring security for Israel's settlers and occupation forces against resistance, violent and otherwise.

Since 1967, there has been only one state authority in the entire territory of Mandate Palestine: that of Israel. The establishment of the PA has not changed this reality but has only rearranged the deck chairs on the Palestinian Titanic and provided the Israeli colonization and occupation with an indispensable Palestinian shield.” ⁴⁷

I would like to ask many questions — about the increasingly cruel behavior of the settlers since October 7th and the forbidden roads, for example — but I don't feel comfortable doing so. The Gaza Strip is only 73 kilometers from Bethlehem. The airstrikes on Gaza continue; entire city blocks are razed to the ground; every day, whole families are wiped out; even tent camps are shelled.

There Is No Shortage of Information

There is hunger; there is barely any drinking water, barely any medicine, barely any electricity. In light of the monstrous crime happening less than 100 kilometers from us, my research seems tasteless, like a silly attempt to cling to the illusion that reporting would accomplish something. There is no shortage of information; there is a shortage of will among the powerful to do something.

It is obvious that I am not the first person Tamir has driven on a research trip through East Jerusalem and the West Bank. He already tells me, unprompted, what the others wanted to know too. His tone is not unfriendly, but flat and melancholic. I can understand him. He doesn't want to give up hope, but generations of journalists have already reported on the situation of the Palestinians; the reports of the human rights organizations and the United Nations are unambiguous and run to thousands of pages.

In 2021, UN Secretary-General António Guterres said: “If there is a hell on earth, it is the lives of children in Gaza.” He was expressing his “deep shock” at the Israeli airstrikes and artillery attacks in Gaza at the time, which had cost the lives of more than 200 Palestinians, including 60 children, and injured thousands more. ⁴⁸

The then Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett was indifferent to Guterres's shock, just as today the world is indifferent to Benjamin Netanyahu's horror.

“Refugeeland”

I think of a phrase by the American journalist Joe Sacco, who processed his time in the occupied territories in the early 1990s in a kind of documentary graphic novel.

“Refugeeland.” That was the title Sacco gave to the account of his first visit to a refugee camp in the Gaza Strip.

At that time, the Gaza Strip was not yet completely cut off from the outside world. This phase, which made nearly half the population unemployed and led to 80% of the more than 2 million people becoming dependent on aid deliveries, began in 2007 with Hamas's election victory.

Sacco writes in the cool, ironic style that was so popular in the 1990s: "Some of the blackest holes in the world are out in the open, and anyone can see them. You can, for instance, book a tour of a Palestinian refugee camp in the Gaza Strip. Just call UNRWA, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, at 051-861195. They'll take care of it, they'll drive you, and admission is free. They'll probably want to stick you in a group with Swedes and Japanese, but you want your refugee camp experience to be more intimate, and you insist on taking the tour alone."

"Refugeeland." A phrase that feels inappropriate 30 years later, even though Sacco mocks the absurdity of an excursion to a refugee camp, and his account of the situation honors the humanity of the Palestinians. Irony implies distance, and in 2024, it is hard to keep the horror at a distance. In 2024, the whole world can see the images of the carnage on their phones, and anyone who has not yet decided to block out everything negative and retreat into a "positive-vibes-only dreamworld" is condemned to a feeling of powerlessness, of impotent moral disgust.

Wounded Child No Surviving Family

Hospitals in Gaza were forced to introduce a new abbreviation: "WCNSF" — Wounded Child No Surviving Family. Injured children are operated on without anesthetics due to the blockade; stray dogs tear pieces from unburied corpses; the stench of untreated sewage and decomposing bodies under the rubble hangs in the air. "Refugeeland" has become "Genocideland," and the irony-loving 1990s seem like a better, more innocent time. 2024 is a year about which schoolchildren will ask: "And why did nobody do anything back then?" when they cover it in history class.

We arrive in Bethlehem, park near a PA police station, and walk across Manger Square toward the Church of the Nativity. The streets of the old town around the Church of the Nativity are narrow and uneven. The low stone buildings with their arched doors and barred windows stand close together, but Manger Square is a spacious plaza paved with light limestone.

Christians in Palestine

On the western side stands the Omar Mosque, the only mosque in the old town. Opposite, on the eastern side, towers the Church of the Nativity, a stoic witness to a long and eventful history. The morning sun is shining, and the massive limestone walls of the church glow in warm earth tones. The simple bell tower rises like an index finger into the sky. It is a massive, rugged structure, a fortress-like basilica.

It has survived invasions, regime changes, fires, earthquakes, and most recently the siege by Israeli troops in 2002. In 1852, the church was placed under the joint custody of the Roman Catholic, Armenian, and Greek Orthodox churches.

The basilica is surrounded by three monasteries, each representing one of these faiths: the Franciscan Monastery and the Church of St. Catherine on the northeast side, the Armenian Monastery, and the Greek Orthodox Monastery on the southeast side.

We enter the church through the “Door of Humility,” a small rectangular entrance from the Ottoman period. The doorway was reduced in size to prevent looters on horseback from entering and plundering the church. Entering the wide nave transports you fifteen centuries back in time, especially this morning, for the first five minutes, we are the only visitors. The nave is supported by four rows of columns made of pink limestone; many columns are decorated with paintings, though what exactly is depicted is hard to make out in the dim light.

Even though I chose Bethlehem as a destination in the West Bank primarily because it seemed harmless and innocuous, I cannot resist the awe-inspiring effect of the nave. I resist it internally, because the awe-inspiring architecture of sacred buildings is also a form of intimidation, of manipulation. It exploits the human need for self-transcendence and loss of self for the benefit of an institution, and institutions are demonic, as the theologian Paul Tillich writes.

Believers Who Pray with Bloody Hands

All religious institutions are suspect, but the monotheistic ones are the most dangerous. Yahweh is a jealous God: “You shall have no other gods before me” is his first commandment. Monotheisms are the substrate on which the illusion of dividing humanity into the good and the evil thrives best; the illusion of fighting on the side of the absolutely good against the absolutely evil is perhaps the most effective justification for war and violence.

Nevertheless, all holy books contain beautiful, ethically elevated passages — for example, in the Quran: “O mankind! We have made you into nations and tribes so that you may know one another. The noblest of you in the sight of God is the most righteous among you.”

In Judaism, it is tradition to read from the “Haftarah,” the Book of Isaiah, on the Sabbath and holidays: “When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you. Even though you make many prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are full of blood. Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean! Remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes! Cease to do evil! Learn to do good! Seek justice! Help the oppressed! Defend the orphan! Plead for the widow!”

Repulsive are the believers who pray with bloody hands, who focus on the aesthetic and formal aspects of religion, ignore the ethical core of the message, and misunderstand religious symbols as tribal emblems. Unfortunately, this superficial form of piety is widespread. I wonder what the believers think when they pass through the checkpoints and drive past the wall and the refugee camps.

Do they think of the Gospels? Do they think about the fact that the Lord sent his son “to proclaim the Gospel to the poor, freedom to the captives and sight to the blind, to set the oppressed free”? What does visiting the birthplace of Jesus mean to them? How do they follow in the footsteps of Christ?

The Little Sisters of Jesus

An Asian woman with a selfie stick slips through the Door of Humility — the first of a group of Asian Christians. The reverent five minutes in the Church of the Nativity are over. Only afterward do I realize what a privilege it was to experience the church so empty. In a normal year, Bethlehem receives 1.5 million visitors. At the time of our visit, the city seemed deserted.

To my surprise, Bassem, an acquaintance of Tamir’s, approaches us and greets us. He is older than Tamir, has a receding hairline, and wears a mighty mustache. I estimate he is in his mid-50s. Bassem speaks good English and gives us a tour of the church. He shows me the various areas reserved for the three religions and the entrance to the Grotto of the Nativity, where a ceremony is taking place at the time of our visit.

At first, I am not clear about the reason for his presence, but it doesn’t take long for the puzzle to be solved. He invites us to coffee at his shop, which is just a few hundred meters from the Church of the Nativity. Hardly any tourists come to Bethlehem; Tamir had obviously tipped him off, hoping I would generate some business.

On the way to his religious souvenir shop, we pass a sign that catches my attention: “The Little Sisters of Jesus.” I take a photo of the sign, assuming it is the shop’s original name. I had been under the impression that, because of his divine fatherhood, Jesus was an only child. (Back at the hotel, I Google the name and it turns out that the “Little Sisters” are a Catholic religious order that traces itself not to Jesus Christ but to the French monk and hermit Charles de Jésus.)

No Pilgrims in the Holy Land

Once in the shop, Bassem insists that we first drink the promised coffee together. On the walls of his shop stand shelves made of darkly stained wood. On one of them, arranged in rows by size, stand olive wood carvings: crosses, nativity scenes, and statues of saints. But it is the Orthodox icons that dominate the room. Their aesthetic reminds me of the figures in the chapel of my hotel. Their surfaces, decorated with gold

leaf, reflect the light, while the painted figures stare at the viewer from their elongated, serious faces.

Bassem brings the coffee. We sit on a bench in front of the shop and talk about the difficult situation in which the Palestinian Christians in Bethlehem find themselves. Many of them, like him, make their living from tourism, but since October 7th and the beginning of the Israeli retaliatory campaign, hardly any tourists come to Bethlehem. The birthplace of the Palestinian Jew Jesus of Nazareth was once home to a large Christian community.

According to UN information, in December 1946, 145,000 Christians lived in the land, accounting for 12% of the total Palestinian-Arab population. During the “Nakba” of 1948, 75,000 Palestinian Christians were driven from their homes and became refugees in neighboring countries as well as in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Today, approximately 45,000 Christians live in the West Bank, while only about 1,000 remain in Gaza.

Palestinian Christians have always posed a problem for the Zionist propaganda narrative of antisemitic Islamofascists, because Palestinian Christians have also been at the forefront of the armed resistance against the Zionist colonial project. Particularly prominent examples of militant resistance from the Christian population of Palestine are George Habash and Wadie Haddad. Both men were born as Greek Orthodox Christians and driven from their homeland.

From Doctor to Terrorist

They met during their medical studies in Beirut and initially worked as doctors in the then-newly established refugee camps. Afterward, they became involved in the resistance and, in the late 1960s, founded the still-existing Marxist-Leninist group “Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine” (PFLP).

The career paths of these two men make clear how incidental ideological and religious labels are to the actual motivation of the actors. Habash and Haddad were motivated neither by the Christian faith nor by revolutionary Marxism, just as today the fighters of the “al-Qassam Brigades” are not motivated by Islam.

So what turned Habash, the Christian doctor, into a violence-ready revolutionary? A journalist for the then still-relevant *Time* magazine, not suspected of any sympathy for the Palestinian resistance, once asked Habash, who died in 2008, exactly this question. The account by *Time* journalist Scott MacLeod is illuminating. In response to MacLeod’s question about his motivation, Habash simply told him about his personal experiences when his family lost their home during the 1948 war:

“His mother insisted that he stay in Lebanon for his studies. When war broke out in 1948, he returned to Lydda. In July, Israeli troops under the command of Moshe Dayan

marched into Lydda. In Israeli accounts, the Palestinians were long depicted as having 'fled.' However, the Israeli historian Benny Morris wrote in 1999 that Israeli forces had killed at least 250 townspeople, including young men who were massacred in a mosque.

No More Time for God

It was the horror that Habash also remembered, made worse by a personal tragedy: that same night, one of his sisters died. Although she died of typhus, the clan blamed the Israeli attack for preventing her from receiving proper care. He buried his sister in the backyard, took her small children by the hand, and followed the instructions of the Israeli soldiers to leave the city. 'The soldiers said: "Everyone out! In that direction!" I remember asking one of the soldiers where we were supposed to go.' Habash told me that he rejected Christianity at that point. 'I kept imagining myself as a good Christian serving the poor. When my country was occupied, I had no time to think about religion.'"

Habash never returned to Lydda, which was renamed Lod and became part of the State of Israel." [⁴⁹](#)

It was obviously not necessary to teach Habash hatred of the Israelis, and he did not take up arms because he read Marx and Lenin. How many of the thousands of young Palestinians who are currently having similar experiences in Gaza will choose the armed struggle?

The PFLP pioneered the hijacking of airplanes as a terrorist tactic in the Middle East as early as 1968, when three armed PFLP agents hijacked an Israeli El Al flight on its way from Rome to Tel Aviv. Since then, checking in for a flight has never been the same.

Unlike Hamas, the PFLP at that time was actually a globally operating group that used terrorist means to achieve its political goals. In 1970, PFLP members hijacked four planes simultaneously, flew three of them to Jordan, blew them up, and thereby triggered a war between the Jordanian monarchy and the Palestinian guerrillas.

In Germany, it is above all the hijacking of the Lufthansa flight "Landshut" by the "PFLP-SC" — a splinter group of the organization founded by Habash and Haddad — that remains in memory. The hijackers demanded the release of eleven first-generation RAF terrorists imprisoned in West Germany, including Andreas Baader, Gudrun Ensslin, Jan-Carl Raspe, and Irmgard Möller.

PFLP Meets RAF

In addition, the commando wanted to free two Palestinians from Turkish prisons; as ransom, the hijackers also demanded 15 million US dollars. The five-day drama ended in October 1977 with the storming of the aircraft in Mogadishu by a special unit of the German Federal Police, the famous GSG-9. The failed operation was presumably the trigger for the suicides of the RAF leadership figures in Stammheim prison.

In a paper from the “INSS,” the Institute for National Security Studies, a think tank at Tel Aviv University, Haddad is quoted with the following description of the PFLP’s strategy:

“I mean spectacular, one-off actions. These spectacular operations will draw the world’s attention to the Palestinian issue. The world will ask: ‘What the hell is the problem in Palestine? Who are these Palestinians? Why are they doing these things?’ At the same time, such operations will be very painful for the Israelis. Spectacular, sensational operations, carried out by well-trained people in secure secret structures — that is how we will hit them where it hurts. In the end, the world will be fed up with its problem; it will decide that it has to do something for Palestine. It will have to give us justice.” ⁵⁰

So far, the world has not given the Palestinians justice. Wadie Haddad died in 1978 in terrible pain in an East Berlin hospital. By all appearances, the Israeli intelligence service Mossad murdered him with poisoned toothpaste. ⁵¹

George Habash died in 2008 in the Jordanian city of Amman from a heart attack. As’ad AbuKhalil, Professor of Political Science at California State University, described his reaction to the news in an article for the blog of the International Solidarity Movement:

“I have spent more than half my life in the United States and never felt the sense of alienation I experienced on the day I read in a front-page obituary in the New York Times that George Habash, the Palestinian revolutionary who died last week, was described as a ‘terrorism tactician.’ What do you do when someone wants to convince you that a kind and gentle man you have come to know and respect as a person is a terrorist, even though you know better? Do you argue in vain about definitions?

Do you go back and see how the *Times* wrote glowing obituaries for the Zionist militia leader and later Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, a man whose record of killing civilians is just as terrible and grotesque as that of Osama Bin Laden, former Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin, the founder of the Fatah Revolutionary Council Abu Nidal, or the Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet?” ⁵²

Habash and Haddad saw armed struggle as the only way to achieve their political goals — a view they shared with Yitzhak Rabin, Menachem Begin, and David Ben-Gurion. Alongside this, however, there is also a long tradition of nonviolent Palestinian resistance. The last major wave of nonviolent resistance was the “Great Marches of Return” demonstrations.

The “Great Marches of Return” began on March 30, 2018, to demand the end of the Israeli blockade and the right of return for refugees of the “Nakba” and their descendants. The IDF responded to the largely peaceful demonstrations with extreme violence and targeted killings by snipers. Among those killed were children, paramedics, journalists, and people with disabilities. 183 people were shot dead, and another 6,106 were wounded with live ammunition. ⁵³

Munther Isaac, the pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bethlehem, is a current example of this tradition of nonviolent Palestinian resistance. On February 18, 2024 — five days before my arrival in Israel — Isaac delivered a sermon at the Bloomsbury Central Church in England.

The Betrayal of the Brothers in Faith

He appealed to the conscience of his Christian brothers in faith and described the situation in Palestine in clear terms: “I address the churches in the United Kingdom: As churches that strive for justice and righteousness, we must, in obedience to Christ’s commandment, have the courage to speak our minds and call things by their names! This is not a conflict; Israel is not exercising its right to self-defense. Rather, Israel is the colonizer; Israel is a settler colony. We live under apartheid. What is happening in Gaza is a genocide and ethnic cleansing.” ⁵⁴

Isaac’s criticism of the lack of support for the Palestinian cause by Western Christians, especially Christians in the USA, seems justified. The organization “CUFI,” “Christians United For Israel,” founded by the American televangelist John Hagee, for example, claims to have more than ten million members. CUFI supports the illegal settlement of the West Bank and ignores the situation of Christians there. Hagee and CUFI are fanatical supporters of Israel, whose existence they see as the fulfillment of biblical prophecy and a sign of the imminent return of the Savior. ⁵⁵

The “Christian Zionists” support the annexation of the West Bank and a purely Jewish state because only in this way can the prophecy be fulfilled. The return of the Savior would, however, not be good news for the Jews who would dare to continue insisting on their Judaism, as the majority of them did during the Savior’s first visit to Earth. There is disagreement among the evangelicals as to what exactly would happen to these stubborn Jews, but the consensus seems to be that they would be judged and denied heaven. If there were a similar prophecy in Islam, it would certainly be called antisemitic.

The “Christian Zionists” are now the most important and most uncritical supporters of the Israeli government. Their number in the USA alone is estimated at 30 million; they are well-organized and possess significant political power. Netanyahu speaks at their conferences and invokes their covenant with Israel. The situation is almost unrivaled in its absurdity: While ultra-Orthodox Jews like Yaakov Shapiro reject the Israeli Zionists, accuse them of identity theft, and resist being identified with Israel, the atheistic Zionist elite around Netanyahu enters into an alliance with these ignorant fanatics — with fanatics who adhere to an antisemitic ideology.

Holy Earth for the Mother-in-Law

This kind of absurd entanglement and inconsistency is one of the reasons why I am suspicious of every form of organized religion and ideology. But Bassem and his

souvenir shop have nothing to do with the abuse of Christian ideas — he wants to feed his family, and I am obviously the first customer in his shop in days.

I know that my mother-in-law will be pleased with Christian souvenirs straight from Bethlehem, and I engage in the sales conversation. He shows me a small icon with a gold-leaf border. The price he quotes me seems far too high, so we start haggling.

In the end, I bought the icon, a larger cross, and a small one packaged in a transparent bag with certified holy earth from Bethlehem. As a free bonus, Bassem throws in a necklace with a Star of David pendant. Once we are back in the car, Tamir praises me for having haggled. He says he would have intervened if I had accepted the first price. As we reach the “Tunnels” checkpoint, I get a small taste of how Palestinians experience encounters with Israeli soldiers.

The soldier standing on the road signals us to pull over into the side lane. When we come to a stop, he taps the barrel of his M16 against the driver’s side window. Tamir rolls down the window, and the soldier speaks to him in Hebrew. There is nothing of the superficial, mechanical politeness I am accustomed to from border officials in the young soldier’s manner. His tone is condescending; he dominates the situation in a casual, subtly threatening way.

Tamir answered him in Hebrew. I sit in the back seat; the soldier turns his attention to me — obviously, Tamir has explained to him what the occasion for the tour was. The soldier asks me to show him my passport and studies the visitor card I received at the airport. After that, he lets us continue. I ask Tamir what the “worst case scenario” of such an encounter at the checkpoint would be.

Strict Sabbath in Jerusalem

“They can arrest you. And they can keep you as long as they like,” he answers without hesitation. “They have a special name for it; I don’t know what it is called in English.” (Later, I find out he means “administrative detention”: “In administrative detention, a person is held without trial, without having committed an offense, on the grounds that they intend to break the law in the future. Since this measure is supposed to be preventive, it is not time-limited.”) ⁵⁶

I changed the subject and told Tamir that I had difficulty finding an open restaurant the evening before.

He replies that it would be even more difficult the next day because, unlike in Tel Aviv, in Jerusalem, the Sabbath is strictly observed. Most shops and restaurants close as early as Friday afternoon. I hadn’t thought of that and asked him whether it would even be possible to get a train to Tel Aviv on Saturday. “No, I don’t think so,” he answers.

I feel nervousness rising in me. My return flight from Tel Aviv to Amsterdam is very early Sunday morning; I had wanted to spend the last night in Tel Aviv. The prospect of

everything in Jerusalem being closed the next day doesn't appeal to me either. Before Tamir drops me off at the hotel, we agree that I will contact him later if I decide to leave Jerusalem that same day.

The Abolition of the Green Line

Back at the hotel, I answer emails and search for more information about the checkpoints. To my surprise, I find a scholarly article from 2021 that deals explicitly with the "Tunnels" checkpoint. The 25-page article, written by a Dutch geographer, reaches the following conclusion:

"The arbitrariness in deciding who is stopped and who is not — which for my interviewees also included the checking of commuters who cross these checkpoints daily — shows that the checkpoints are a tool for Israeli soldiers to reinforce the asymmetric relations between occupier and occupied.

As such, the checkpoints, through their spatial design, their layout, and their managers, generate specific geographies aimed at restricting and controlling the freedom of movement of Palestinians, while simultaneously advancing the continued abolition of the 'Green Line' and the future establishment of a 'Greater Israel.'" ⁵⁷

I am still unsure whether I should spend another night in Jerusalem as planned. Tamir was right — on Saturday, the trains in Israel do not run. By now it is 1 PM; the last train to Tel Aviv departs in two hours. The Old City and the Western Wall have impressed me the most, and I want to pay them one more — perhaps the last — visit.

As I step out of the narrow alley at the end of which the hotel lies hidden behind a wall, I am presented with a scene that differs markedly from the previous days. The street is full of people — many of them Palestinians, in small groups, obviously headed for the Damascus Gate.

It is the time of Friday prayers; they are on their way to the Al-Aqsa Mosque. On the previous days, only a small group of Israeli soldiers stood at the fortified guardhouses at the Damascus Gate. On this day, there are many more, and they are already standing on the street well before the gate.

The Privilege of Being Ignored

The soldiers operate several "flying checkpoints," randomly picking out passersby and demanding to see their papers. If the inspection of an individual takes longer, they order the others to keep moving. Their treatment of the Palestinians is disrespectful and aggressive; they don't even try to conceal their contempt. They ignore me completely — never before have I been so acutely aware of the privilege of my white skin.

At the guardhouse before the Damascus Gate, there is also a larger number of soldiers today, who likewise ignore me. Inside the Old City, too, everything is different today: the soldiers are not standing behind metal barriers to the side, as on previous days. Today,

the metal barriers stand in the middle of the alley and have become additional “flying checkpoints.”

Even though I have not been asked for my papers once so far, it occurs to me that I left my passport at the hotel. The narrow alley is now full of people; I can only advance slowly. I realize that I will miss the train if I continue.

I decide to leave Jerusalem and turn back. Once back near the hotel, I stand on the street for a few more minutes and observe the interactions at the “flying checkpoints.” The soldiers' arrogance comes across as casual, but that makes it even more provocative and threatening.

It is obvious that the mood could tip at any moment. The dehumanization of the Palestinians, expressed in the soldiers' behavior, is so obvious and unmistakable — I have never seen anything comparable. Hardly any of the Palestinians dare to get agitated, to argue; they know exactly what consequences await them.

Flight from Jerusalem

Back in the room, I write Tamir a message. I ask him to pick me up and begin packing my worn red cabin trolley. Tamir responds quickly but doesn't have time and promises to send a friend to pick me up. Mohamed will be there in half an hour at the latest — enough time to catch the last train to Tel Aviv.

I use the waiting time to book two nights at a hotel in Tel Aviv online and to explain to the friendly receptionist with the blue horn-rimmed glasses why I am leaving the hotel a night early. I don't want her to think there was something wrong with the room.

I have barely convinced her of my ignorance about the strict observance of the Sabbath in Jerusalem and my poor planning when I receive a message from Mohamed. He is waiting for me at the entrance to the alley. I say goodbye and make my way to him. Mohamed is older than Tamir, seems more sober, less fashionable.

His hair is cropped short, and he wears a plain black shirt. He speaks good English and tells me that he is studying engineering but is currently taking time off to earn money driving a taxi and support his family.

I tell him about the scene on the street. Mohamed is unimpressed. That was nothing, he says — he knows many people who have been arrested during such checks and disappeared for a long time. Since October 7th, everything has only become more extreme. I remember my reaction exactly because, in hindsight, it embarrasses me so much.

I ask him: “What can you do in such a situation? Just accept it?” “No, I don't accept it,” he answers. His tone remains calm, but I sense the pain and the anger he is hiding.

What a stupid question. How would I feel in his situation? Like a second-class human being? Would I simply accept it? I apologize for my stupid question, and we have already arrived at the train station. He looks at me and says goodbye with a smile: "Don't worry. It's hard to imagine for someone who doesn't live here. I understand. Have a safe trip."

"We're Fucking Them"

The last train to Tel Aviv is already at the platform but won't depart for another 15 minutes. After buying my ticket at the machine and stowing my trolley on the train, I notice a small group of three soldiers, half hidden behind a pillar, smoking cigarettes. So far, I haven't had the opportunity to get into conversation with Israeli soldiers. This seems like a good opportunity.

I get off the carriage again and walk over to them. They are young conscripts — one woman and two men. I take out a cigarette and ask for a light. After I have lit my cigarette, they signal me to come closer, to stand behind the pillar like them — smoking on the platform is forbidden. The spokesman, heavyset and with a three-day beard, asks where I'm from, and I answer truthfully. The young woman wants to know whether conscription is also in place in Germany. When I say no, she explains the Israeli system to me.

Suddenly, the heavyset one asks me what I think about the war in Gaza. I wasn't expecting this, and the best I can manage is to say: "Well, it's not a fair fight, is it?" The third, a lanky one wearing glasses who has been silent until now, looks at me thoughtfully and answers: "No, it isn't." The heavyset one puts his fists to his sides, thrusts his pelvis forward, and says: "We're fucking them."

Tel Aviv — The hotel is reminiscent of an East German barracks tarted up with Buddha statues, colored string lights, and plush carpets. The narrow veranda with its inflatable round pool and tiny stools is particularly impressive. It is a beautiful, sunny day. Beach weather. The beach is visible from the hotel's veranda. After drinking my espresso there — a gift from the receptionist, who addresses all male guests as “Brother” — I set off.

On the way to the beach, I discover a McDonald's and take the opportunity to have breakfast and go online. On the display boards of the McDonald's franchise, too, images of Hamas hostages in Gaza alternate with advertisements for burgers and chicken wings. Despite this omnipresence and scattered protests by the population against Netanyahu's policies, the Israeli army continues its retaliatory campaign against the Palestinian civilian population at full intensity.



On this day, Saturday, February 24, 2024, according to OCHA's website (the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs), 1.7 million people in Gaza are displaced.

The Israeli air force is intensifying its attacks on populated areas in Rafah. By now, 1.5 million people are seeking shelter in Rafah — six times the population before October 7, 2023. Since October 7th, the Israeli army has killed nearly 30,000 people in the Gaza Strip; more than half were women and children.

Between October 7, 2023, and February 23, 2024, 399 Palestinians fell victim to the Israelis in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. More than 100 of the victims were

children. 2023 was the deadliest year for Palestinians in the West Bank since the United Nations began keeping records in 2005.

Philippe Lazzarini, Commissioner-General of UNRWA, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, is quoted with the following statement: “In just over four months, more children, more journalists, more medical personnel, and more UN staff have been killed in Gaza than anywhere else in the world during a conflict.” [⁵⁸](#)

1.7 million people displaced — women, children, the elderly, on foot, on bicycles, and on donkey carts, bombed from the air. Many are malnourished; all are housed in tents and emergency shelters. The contrast with the beach of Tel Aviv, 71 kilometers away, could not be greater.

On the promenade this morning, an endless parade of attractive women in Lululemon leggings marches by. The mood is relaxed and cheerful; beach volleyball is being played, and folk dancing is being improvised in groups. A beach boy with broad shoulders carries an automatic pistol tucked into the back of his shorts. I reach a wide staircase sheltered by sun canopies. I notice that the facade of the building at the top of the stairs is decorated with the colors of the rainbow flag.



The decoration reminds me of the “Brand Israel” advertising campaign, which aimed to improve Israel’s image in the USA. Positive associations were to be anchored instead of war and conflict; in the USA, too, the erroneous assumption of a religiously motivated conflict that has been going on for centuries is widespread. The campaign’s most important target group was Americans aged 18 to 31. Initially, the campaign’s creators focused primarily on the heterosexual portion of the target audience.



The star of the first campaign, organized in collaboration with the men’s magazine *Maxim*, was Gal Gadot, who later became known as “Wonder Woman.” The cover image of the series also served as the invitation card of the consulate, which had insisted on organizing a celebration for the presentation of the *Maxim* issue. The photo series appeared with the headline “Women of the Israeli Defense Forces” and the text: “They are drop-dead gorgeous and can field-strip a Uzi in seconds flat. Are the women of the Israeli Defense Forces the hottest soldiers on earth?” ⁵⁹

The images themselves are unfortunately no longer to be found online, but they are described in an article published by the University of Heidelberg under the title “The Israeli Military in Public Space” as follows: “Visual productions like these, in which ostensibly military elements are at most hinted at in the background while sexual appeal is demonstratively pushed to the foreground, are reminiscent of the iconography of modern warrior Amazons from the most diverse entertainment genres, such as the fictional cyber-heroine Lara Croft from the video and computer game Tomb Raider or the comic and film character Barbarella, well known in the 1960s. This character type, through tight-fitting, figure-hugging clothing and the wearing of boots and weapons, embodies a mixture of female sex appeal, power, and military strength.” ⁶⁰

In the Name of Love

One might think this state-funded eroticization of power and violence would be hard to surpass in tastelessness, but that would be a mistake. Driven by the imperative to distract from the Zionist colonial project and the brutal oppression of the Palestinians, the “Brand Israel” campaign changed its thrust and subsequently focused on celebrating Tel Aviv as a queer oasis in the desert of Arab homophobia.

In doing so, the Israeli state tailors the message to the target audience: When addressing a liberal, LGBTQ-friendly audience in Israel or the rest of the world, it produces pink rhetoric to portray Israel as a gay paradise. For homophobic target audiences domestically and for Christian Zionists abroad, the emphasis is on conservatism and adherence to family values.

The cynical exploitation of the topic, dubbed “pinkwashing” by critics, culminated in November 2023 with this photo of the destruction in Gaza published on “X”:



The episode is a good example of the derailment of Israeli propaganda and the moral erosion of the society that produces it. Objectively speaking, the focus on the topic of homosexuality was an intelligent chess move. It is better to use selectively chosen facts for a campaign if you want to be successful in the long term. Good propaganda lies with the truth.

It is true that the legal situation in Israel regarding homosexuality is significantly more humane and enlightened compared to most countries in the region. It is true that within the Islamic world, there is hardly any tolerance for homosexuality. There is no doubt that the overwhelming majority of Islamic theologians are extremely hostile toward homosexuality.

This statement by an association of Australian imams is a good example: "From the Islamic perspective, homosexuality is a forbidden act, a grave sin, and anyone who

engages in it is considered a disobedient servant of Allah, incurring His displeasure and disapproval. This is clearly established in the three main sources of Sharia: the Quran, the Sunnah, and the consensus of all scholars, extending from the time of the Prophet to the present day.” ⁶¹

Homosexuality is rejected and severely punished in many Islamic countries. In these countries, according to a US government fact sheet, consensual same-sex relations carry the death penalty: Iran, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Nigeria, Somalia, Mauritania, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Pakistan, Afghanistan. ⁶² Only in Iran does the death penalty for homosexuality appear to continue to be enforced; most recently, according to the Associated Press, two men in Iran were executed for the crime of homosexuality in 2022. ⁶³

A Queen’s Lack of Imagination

The British Mandate Criminal Code of 1936, which continues to apply in Gaza, criminalizes “unnatural” sexual acts between men with a maximum penalty of ten years in prison. Under British law, only men were considered — allegedly because Queen Victoria was unable to imagine that women could be capable of such acts at all.

Although this law is formally in force, there is little evidence of its practical application. The legal situation is complex, and some experts argue that the law could be interpreted in a way that consensual homosexual acts are not punishable. ⁶⁴

The crucial question is, of course: What does any of this have to do with the fact that Israel is a colony planned by European settlers that drove the indigenous population, the “natives,” from their land and has since disadvantaged, oppressed, robbed, and periodically massacred them?

Nothing.

Effective propaganda demonizes by reducing people to caricatures. Caricatures only work if they contain a kernel of truth. But this kernel of truth does not serve as the starting point for an argument. Logic plays no role here. In Saudi Arabia, three gay men were still being beheaded in 2002. ⁶⁵ Does that give the free, civilized, Western world the right to colonize Saudi Arabia?

The goal of propaganda is not argumentation but devaluation, distraction, and obfuscation. Good propaganda comes across as empathetic and benevolent, as for example in this article in the *Algemeiner*, a Zionist publication in the USA: “The brutal treatment of LGBTQ+ Palestinians under Hamas is a serious human rights violation that urgently requires attention. The geopolitical complexity of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is immense, yet the fundamental human rights of LGBTQ+ individuals should not be pushed into the background. Their suffering is a stark reminder of the brutality that marginalized groups face under oppressive regimes.” ⁶⁶

The crucial sentence: “The geopolitical complexity of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is immense, yet the fundamental human rights of LGBTQ+ individuals should not be pushed into the background.”

The ever-same phrases: The conflict is terribly complex and hard to understand; they’ve been bashing each other’s heads in down there for centuries; religious fanatics on both sides. Nothing can be done about it; let’s better leave the topic aside.

In any case, it is wrong and evil that Hamas mistreats gay people. They are barbarians — not noble desert knights like the faithful friends and allies of the free world, the Saudis, who have long since stopped beheading gay people and now only have them civilizely flogged. ⁶⁷

The ever-same phrases — none of them is true. The conflict is not hard to understand. Was the conflict between white settlers and indigenous populations in the USA, Canada, or Australia hard to understand?

Talented propagandists for the Zionist cause, such as the *Times of Israel* journalist Haviv Rettig Gur, like to raise the objection at this point that many of the European immigrants were homeless Holocaust survivors. That is true, even though the Zionist elite around Ben-Gurion and Jabotinsky had been settling in Palestine long before the Holocaust. ⁶⁸

This cynical, manipulative instrumentalization of human suffering as justification for the colonization and ethnic cleansing of the Palestinians is a rhetorical trick. Jews were not the only group of people who fell victim to the Holocaust. Among others, 500,000 Roma/Romnja and Sinti/Sintizze were also murdered during the Holocaust.

The Devouring of the Roma and Sinti

They were gassed in the Auschwitz extermination camp and fell victim to violence, hunger, and disease in forced labor and concentration camps. Many were deported and exploited as forced laborers. Roma and Sinti call this genocide “Porajmos,” which means “devouring” or “destruction” in Romani.

Linguistic analyses have shown that Roma and Sinti originally came from India. Does the crime of the Holocaust give the surviving Roma and Sinti and their descendants the right to establish a colony in India and drive out the indigenous population?

Rettig Gur’s arguments and the article in the *Algemeiner* are examples of effective propaganda through manipulative rhetoric. For tactical reasons, they acknowledge points made by the opposing side, come across as empathetic and thoughtful, without yielding even a centimeter in their unjust cause. They do not withstand critical scrutiny, but propaganda never does.

Stages of Moral Erosion

Bad propaganda makes itself ridiculous at first glance, like the “In The Name of Love” photo, which is grotesque and repulsive. The dehumanization of the Palestinians has apparently progressed so far that many Israelis no longer even notice the contrast. They do not associate the ruins of Gaza with human suffering.

They are literally no longer able to perceive the grotesque contrast between the symbolism of the rainbow flag and the bombed-out apartment buildings.

Their moral erosion appears to be in its final stage. They are incapable of even feigning humanity. The suffering of the civilian population in Gaza has completely lost its real, human dimension for them. The Palestinians in the Gaza Strip are nothing more to them than “cockroaches.” That is what Dan Schueftan, a “security expert” popular with German institutions, calls them during an interview for the podcast “Two Nice Jewish Boys.” ⁶⁹

The development is particularly drastic within the Israeli army. What is disturbing is the fact that much of the evidence of moral degeneration is recorded and published by the Israeli soldiers themselves. Similar to the case of the rainbow flag against the backdrop of Gaza’s rubble, the soldiers do not seem to be aware of how their video messages are perceived by people outside Israeli society.

Dogs Eat the Corpses

On February 5, 2024, for example, an Israeli soldier stationed in the Gaza Strip published a video that once again shows how devastatingly the occupation and the religiously veneered, bloodthirsty nationalism have affected the psyche of many Israelis.

Here is a text excerpt: “We are the sons of Abraham... We are the sons of Joshua, who conquered this land from seven different peoples. Do you remember the Canaanites? The Hittites? The Jebusites? They have all disappeared from the world, and the people of Israel are here to stay... And they tried to fight us... and every time they lost. Every time we won, and that was thanks to the heroism of the soldiers and citizens of Israel... They are not just human animals, they are also idiots; they give their people no hope, only hatred and blood and hell.” ⁷⁰

The *Haaretz* article “No Civilians. Everyone Is a Terrorist.” proves that the genocidal revenge fantasies were also put into action: “For the division, the ‘kill zone’ extends as far as a sniper can see.

We kill civilians there, who are then counted as terrorists. The IDF spokesman's statements on casualty numbers have turned it into a competition between units. If one division has taken out 150, the next unit wants to kill 200. After the shots, the bodies are not collected. That attracts the packs of dogs, which eat them. In Gaza, people know that you have to stay away from these dogs wherever you see them.”

“Once, guards spotted someone approaching from the south. We reacted as if it were a large militant raid. We took up positions and simply opened fire. I’m talking about dozens of bullets, maybe even more. For about one to two minutes, we just shot at the body. The people around me were shooting and laughing. We approached the blood-soaked body, photographed it, and took the phone. He was still a boy, maybe 16 years old.”

A signals officer collected the items, and hours later, the fighters learned that the boy was not a Hamas activist but just a civilian. “That evening, our battalion commander congratulated us on the death of a terrorist and said he hoped we would kill ten more tomorrow.” ⁷¹

“The Jews Are Above All a Race”

The racist superiority complex has accompanied the Zionist colonial project from the very beginning. The philosopher Moses Hess, a contemporary and occasional collaborator of Karl Marx, was one of the forerunners of Zionism and wrote in his 1862 work *Rome and Jerusalem*: “The Jews are above all a race. They should bring civilization to the primitive peoples of Asia and be teachers of European sciences.”

Herzl, the founding father of modern Zionism, has one of the one-dimensional characters in his 1902 novel *The Old New Land* present the following reflection regarding the successful colonization of the African continent: “But the conditions are different in Africa. There, all these expenditures are not possible because the prerequisite — mass immigration — is lacking. The white man, the colonizer, perishes there. Africa will only be opened up for civilization once malaria has been rendered harmless.”

Racist superiority was a generally accepted standard at the time and is not a unique feature of Zionist ideology or of Europeans. The slave trade, racism, and brutal dehumanization of groups defined as inferior were also widespread in the Arab world.

Pyrrhic Victory

Although the “Nakba,” the expulsion of the Palestinians and the theft of their land, stands at the beginning of Israel’s history, many Israelis see the Six-Day War of 1967 as the moment when the country lost its way, and the process of moral degeneration began.

From this perspective, the Six-Day War — a military triumph for Israel — marks the beginning of moral erosion through occupation. The conquest of the West Bank, East Jerusalem, the Gaza Strip, and the Golan Heights transformed Israel into an occupying power. Critics warned early on that the permanent military control over millions of Palestinians would poison Israel’s soul. Particularly pointed and prophetic was Yeshayahu Leibowitz’s criticism.

From Nationality to Bestiality

The Israeli thinker Yeshayahu Leibowitz was a rare phenomenon: a polymath who penetrated natural science, philosophy, and theology with equal sharpness. Born in Riga, he earned doctorates in chemistry and medicine, taught biochemistry at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and published groundbreaking works on neurophysiology.

After the Six-Day War of 1967, he warned of the “corrupting power of the occupation” and drew parallels between Israeli military actions and Nazi methods — a statement that earned him death threats. In 1993, he declined the Israel Prize in protest against a government he considered morally bankrupt. What Leibowitz, who died in 1994, prophesied has come true:

“Since the Six-Day War, Israel has become a power apparatus, a Jewish power apparatus ruling over other people. That is why I say in all clarity: This glorious victory was the historical misfortune of the State of Israel. In the year of the ‘Spring of Nations,’ 1848, Franz Grillparzer warned of the path that leads from humanity through nationality to bestiality. In the 20th century, the German people actually walked this path to the very end. We embarked on this path after the Six-Day War.” ⁷²

I walk a good stretch further along the beach. Even at the beach, there is no escape from the Israeli flag. I can no longer stand the sight of it.

I try to remain objective, to remind myself that the Israelis were victims of a murderous attack on October 7th, that small children were kidnapped; that from childhood they are manipulated through propaganda and are unable to recognize that the Palestinians are not the successors of the Nazis but an oppressed people defending itself against land theft and colonization. This acquired blindness to the obvious is terrifying.



I traveled to Israel to form my own judgment. I did not want to take the easy way out and rely only on books, articles, and videos. It was important to me to confront the reality and the people in the country directly.

For me, there is no longer any doubt that a large part of the Israeli population adheres to a dangerous nationalist ideology that makes use of the symbolism of Judaism but rejects the ethical values of this religion.

Israeli propaganda insists on the equation of Zionism and Judaism, but this equation is misleading and inaccurate. Leibowitz already put it succinctly in a 1990 interview: “The word ‘nationality’ can have several meanings. One of them is simply the statement of a fact. A man is indeed the son of a particular people. In this sense, he has no choice.

He is born and lives in a kind of ‘natural reality.’ But the word nationality can also mean a particular ‘program,’ and then it is the most abominable and contemptible thing. In Israel, there is a program.

‘Who are we?’, ‘What are we?’, ‘What are our values?’ The question is very hard to answer, so we avoid it, because we are the ones to whom all injustice was done. So we allow ourselves to be arrogant and immoral... but who cares, since we are the ones to whom all injustice was done! We only need to be reminded of it and are immediately freed from everything! So we can massacre Arabs in refugee camps. Are we not the ones who caused all this in the first place?” [73](#)

Many Germans, for understandable reasons, do not want to speak out on the subject. They think it is not their place to criticize the descendants of the victims of the

Holocaust. But can that be the right lesson from the Holocaust? The focus on one's own German identity vis-à-vis the identity of Jewish Israelis?

Is the lesson from the Holocaust not, on the contrary, precisely the mandate to look beyond identity constructs and labels and to focus on the universally human, on what connects all individuals?

Every form of dehumanization is equally reprehensible; there must be no hierarchy here. This insight is the great ethical achievement of our time, a development we also owe to Christianity and, thus, to its origin, Judaism. Article 1, Charter of the UN: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights."

A Universal Potential

The events in Palestine prove once again that all human beings carry within them the latent potential for the dehumanization of the Other. On the side of Jewish Israelis, this potential is activated by the nationalist ideology of Zionism.

Zionism is the ideological superstructure for a settler colonial project devised in the nineteenth century, and it makes use of the Holocaust and the long history of Jewish suffering in Europe to maintain a constant sense of threat.

In this way, Zionism legitimizes the oppression, expulsion, and mistreatment of the indigenous population. The Zionist ideology is communicated and reinforced through demonizing propaganda — a form of communication that, according to Aldous Huxley's famous definition, pursues the goal of making one group of people forget the humanity of other groups.

No Moral Progress Discernible

Today, this kind of propaganda is often associated with posters and slogans from the era of the World Wars. "Every shot a Russian, every thrust a Frenchman" is a famous slogan from the First World War; in 2024, it seems absurd and laughable. It would be easy to get the impression that we have evolved, that we are more humane and civilized in 2024. This impression is deceptive — the mass murder in Gaza, supported by the USA and Germany, leaves no doubt about that.

The dehumanizing caricatures of the Other are no longer posted on billboards. That is not necessary, because they are continually portrayed as characters in entertainment industry products. Bearded Arab terrorists and tattooed Russian gangsters are indispensable components of cozy German television evenings. Since the American elite is preparing for a confrontation with China, we will surely soon see even more mysteriously smiling, sadistic Chinese characters.

Demonizing propaganda continues to be capable of manipulating the understanding of the world in a way that suggests to at least part of the population that they are on the right side while ignoring or even supporting mass murder. The aesthetics are different,

and the methods have become more sophisticated, but propaganda continues to supply the raw material to convince oneself of the rightness of a morally wrong position.

The World as a Superhero Movie

The dehumanization of the Other is cemented by a mass media machine that refuses to establish connections and presents events like October 7th as spontaneous evil acts, not as part of a chain of action and reaction.

This distortion of perception has created a situation in which everything seems possible. The reporting of Western mass media contributes to reducing the world's understanding to the level of a superhero movie.

Dichotomous thinking — the classification of groups of people into “good guys” and “bad guys” — is a precursor to dehumanizing thinking. The others are evil. They are not driven by the motive of defending themselves against a brutal colonial power that, during the founding of the Israeli state, forcibly expelled nearly 800,000 people and treated more than 2 million descendants of the refugees in Gaza like convicts for decades.

Who Grants States the Right to Exist?

The Israeli state was “born in sin,” as the Israeli sociologist Baruch Kimmerling writes in his book *Politicide*. It was born in sin, like Australia, Canada, and the United States of America. Do these countries, therefore, have no right to exist? Is there even a country that has the right to exist? Who grants a country the right to exist?

The settlers in the USA, Australia, and Canada took that right for themselves. They expelled and murdered the majority of the indigenous population. That is how they broke their resistance. In Israel, this has so far not succeeded for various reasons, but the process continues.

If the killing is to stop, then the path South Africa took appears to be the only viable one: the “One-State Solution,” however unrealistic this idea may sound at the moment. ⁷⁴

The future of Israel and Palestine cannot be based on the annihilation or domination of one people by another. The one-state solution would require an honest reckoning with the past and a commitment to equal rights for all citizens of Israel.

The distinction between citizenship and nationality would have to disappear. There would only be Israelis of different religions and no ethnic subdivision into “Jews” and “Arabs.”

The Lessons from German History

It is my last day in Israel. It was my first and perhaps last visit. Nobody treated me badly. But it is precisely this bizarre contrast between the respect and friendliness I

experienced and the murderous contempt with which the Palestinians in the occupied territories are treated that makes the country deeply unsettling to me.

Apart from that, I could imagine that the publication of this text would be enough to brand me as an enemy of Israel and deny me further entry. I am not “against the existence of Israel” or doubt “Israel’s right to exist,” to pick up two phrases of Israeli propaganda. I am against mass murder and against oppression; I am against ethnonationalism and against a two-class society.

I do not apply a “particularly strict standard” to Israel, nor am I “fixated” on the country. I did not choose this situation. I happen to be German and grew up with discussions about the lessons of German history. The German government supports the mass murder in Gaza. I am against it, and although I am of course aware of how little I can accomplish, I consider silent capitulation to be wrong. That is one of the lessons I have drawn from German history.

Human Beings Are Dangerous Creatures

Another lesson from German history is this: I understand it as the mandate to resist manipulation by nationalist propaganda and to stand against every form of dehumanization. The lesson from German history should be that a human nature shared by all members of the species exists. This commonality is more significant than all superficial labels.

Just as the long experience of injustice, persecution, and oppression did not prevent the Jews and their descendants from becoming perpetrators — but on the contrary supplied the fuel for the Zionist project — the long experience of injustice, persecution, and oppression has, in all probability, had a similar effect on the Palestinians.

All human beings, without exception, are dangerous creatures. We are inclined to exalt our own group, risking being blinded and manipulated by ideologies.

The Message

Join a time-honored tradition and embark on the journey to the Holy Land. At least since Hape Kerkeling walked the Way of St. James, pilgrimages have been popular in Germany. It could be the most important journey of your life and change the way you see the world, just as the visit to East Jerusalem and the occupied territories did for the African American author Ta-Nehisi Coates.

In his book *The Message*, he writes: “As surely as my ancestors were born into a country where none of them was the equal of any white man, Israel proved to be a country where no Palestinian was ever the equal of any Jew.” I hope “Journey to the Holy Land” inspires you to want to see for yourself.

I wrote this essay because I am horrified that the German government supported the massacre in Gaza. As a German citizen, I am disgusted by the abuse of Holocaust remembrance to support a genocide.

— René Lindner