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'Say no genocide': discursive constructions of violence and identities around Gaza

Abstract

From online flame wars, to hostile responses to international university protests, to contested legal cases at the International Criminal Court and International Court of Justice, it is clear that there is a profound breakdown on consensual understanding of what is taking place in "the Middle East". This analysis argues that rather than focusing only on the veracity of specific events, there is value in analysing the ongoing catastrophe in Gaza in terms of how competing discursive constructions of violence and opposing subject positions are being created, the technologies through which these are mediated, and the interests which they serve. The phrase 'say no to genocide' can be understood in three different ways: to resist the current genocide in Gaza; to resist a historical recurrence of the Holocaust; and to denounce the use of the term 'genocide' to refer to the unfolding situation in Palestine. The work here is to analyse how streams of competing digital accounts are not simply aggregations of information, but are better understood as shaped by the technological systems through which they are distributed, and the meaning they are given by already established narratives. They further both construct and reflect

incompatible subject positions linked to deeper historical processes. Here the analysis attends to both the systems of power in which these interpellations occur and the intergenerational trauma, ranging from colonisation to the Holocaust, which invests them with affect. This helps to account for the seeming intractability of the conflict and radical incommensurability of the accounts offered, while suggesting a set of problems to be solved before peace and social justice can be achieved.

Keywords: genocide, violence, discursive construction, subject position, Gaza

In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends.

Martin Luther King Jr.

It is one matter to suffer violence and quite another to use that fact to ground a framework in which one's injury authorizes limitless aggression against targets that may or may not be related to the sources of one's own suffering.

Judith Butler, *Precarious Life*

From October 2023 social media users were invited into a new experience: livestreamed genocide (Tawil-Souri H 2024). Genocide itself was not new, having been a core strategy of Western colonialism for several centuries. Rather the innovation lay in the technological possibility of transmitting the images to hundreds of millions of viewers in real time. This technological capability had already been applied to other atrocities. The 2019 Christchurch Massacre introduced online audiences to live mass murder, as the killer streamed video of his attacks on two places of worship in which he murdered 51 people (Crothers and O'Brien 2020)

In contrast, previous genocides often took years of painstaking research to uncover all the horrors. Alongside the destruction of human life was the destruction of historical traces of the events and of the people who had been erased. Similarly, killers were often only identified after complex forensic investigations. Not so with the Christchurch killer: he deliberately showed his acts to the world as they occurred, and published an online manifesto detailing his motives, influences, and aspirations (Crothers and O'Brien 2020). In this sense the two situations are different: the mass murderer claiming his acts of violence, while the political regimes behind the Gaza genocide strenuously deny the nature of its violence and denounce those bringing evidence of this crime.

Underneath these apparent differences, however, we can detect a common project: to control the narratives of violence, and to shape how it is understood in ways that construct legitimacy for the perpetrators (Collins and Plüg 2020). For the Christchurch killer, this meant explaining that his mass murder was a heroic act of defensive war. He compared himself to Nelson Mandela, and expected to receive a Nobel Peace Prize in the future once his actions were better understood. In this he has been so far unsuccessful, instead serving a life sentence without the possibility of parole for the murder and attempted murder of nearly 100 people. Located within the ideological world of White supremacist replacement theory, he argued that both the declining birthrates of the 'White race', and migration from the Global South into Western countries, were creating a cultural and racial genocide. Western Civilisation and the 'White race' would eventually succumb to multiculturalism and changing population demographics. He thus broadcast himself taking a lone heroic stand against this imagined 'White genocide', murdering over 50 people in their houses of worship in order to assert the superiority of Western civilisation over foreign barbarism.

Similarly, the coalition of political regimes destroying Gaza and its peoples have constructed an account in which their actions are justified. They, however, have preferred to deny both the ongoing atrocities, and that these collectively constitute the crime of genocide. Like the Christchurch killer, they construct their actions as necessary self-defence (Bartov 0 2024). They narrate themselves as under attack by terrorists, rather than recognise the anti-colonial resistance of the people whose land they are attempting to ethnically cleanse and occupy. Unlike the Christchurch killer's livestream, they strive to conceal information: banning journalists and news organisations from the area, imposing restrictions on media topics, launching social and legal attacks on journalists, researchers, publishers and universities, and killing 278 journalists to date (October 2025). They have further criminalised social protests against the violence, advised their own soldiers to stop posting selfies of their atrocities online, attacked the legal institutions of the International Court of Justice (ICJ 2025) and International Criminal Court (ICC 2024), and criminalised attempts to provide evidence to the courts.

At the same time, they have conducted a widespread misinformation campaign though sympathetic Western media institutions, and through organised online social media networks, denying their own atrocities and making false allegations of atrocities against their opponents. But like the Christchurch killer, they have not yet convinced the courts. There remain ICC

arrest warrants for politicians and military leaders, and a continuing genocide case at the ICJ. Nor are the public persuaded: even in colonial strongholds, public opinion has decisively turned against the genocidal violence, especially amongst the younger online generation.

This brings us to the key conceptual issues:

i. There are attempts to control the awareness and meanings of violence.

ii. These narratives create subject positions (expressed as social identities).

iii. The narratives may be relatively more, or less, successful with different audiences in achieving plausibility and creating viable subject positions.

iv. The narratives become compelling to the extent that they either easily integrate with pre-existing systems of meaning, or by being able to change them.

v. They may be contested by counter-narratives doing similar but opposing work.

vi. This can lead to social fragmentation, polarisation, and hostility, as the contradictory narratives produce opposing subject positions.

These processes will already be structuring how potential readers engage with this article. There are three predictable groups. The first will not read it, identifying the theme of genocide as emotionally distressing or simply irrelevant to their interests. The second will be horrified and outraged, experiencing the authors' acceptance of the evidence of genocide as a dangerous, misguided and/or malicious attack on themselves and their community. The third group will find the approach fits better with their existing understanding of the world, and will proceed to evaluate the evidence and arguments in a less emotionally polarised way.

Task, theory, and method

The aim of this article is not to offer an analysis of specific media artefacts, but to elaborate a framework of intelligibility from which the chaotic field of competing claims about the genocide in Gaza can be understood. Methodologically, it adopts an Foucaultian approach to critical discourse analysis, identifying the histories of ideas, and how these are assembled into discourses which "produce the objects of which they speak" (Foucault 2013).

This is linked to an Althusserian (1971) analysis of subject-formation, identifying how these discourses create subject-positions for individuals which structure their identities and experiences of the world. The methodological focus is not primarily on empirical evidence to support the inference of these discourses, but rather to show how the articulation of these discursive formations renders a field of contradictory claims and reactions intelligible, by showing how they have structured collective subjectivities, and then function as an expression of those subjectivities. The task is to identify and elaborate the structures underlying the opposing ways of 'saying no to genocide'.

Here the aim is not to provide empirical evidence that constituent claims in these discourses are correct or incorrect, but to show how they work as systems for producing positions. The aim is also not to dramatise how these discourses are morally correct or incorrect, but rather to reveal how they create internal justifications for certain actions. We are assuming that identifying how certain discourses play a role in the ideological legitimation of colonisation, ethnic cleansing, and genocide, is adequate to unequivocally flag their catastrophic ethical dangerousness.

To be clear, we are unconvinced by the idea that demonstrating how a genocide-legitimating discourse is factually unsubstantiated is itself a solution to the practical problem of the violence that it facilitates. Rather, it is by articulating the structure of systems that produce beliefs, emotions, and interpretations of the world that motivate and justify violence, that we can pose the problem of how to dismantle these structures, rather than just to divert all our resources into waging war with the individuals who have been produced by them.

Three ways of saying no

Our task is thus to unpack the three contradictory meanings of the 'say no to genocide' in the title.

i. Say no to the **knowledge** of genocide. Keep genocide out of awareness. Avoid the distressing news and social media, the nightmarish images, and heart-rending stories. Psychological survival requires not exposing oneself to overwhelming traumatic knowledge.

ii. Say no to the **claim** of genocide. Reject the ascription of 'genocide' to the events that are unfolding. Reject the evidence of specific atrocities, but more

importantly reject interpretation of the events as collectively constituting the crime of genocide. If violence is acknowledged, narrate it differently: as necessary as self-defence. Posit the victims as the aggressors. Psychological survival from this perspective requires continuing to see oneself and one's community as victims, not perpetrators of mass violence.

iii. Say no to the **event** of genocide. Retain awareness of the atrocities that are occurring, and interpret them as not only illegitimate, but as part of an interconnected project of ethnic cleansing and genocide. Accept that this is both morally outrageous and criminal, and demand an end to this violence. Refuse to sit by while the genocide continues.

The first position is the one lamented by Martin Luther King Jr in his claim that "in the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends" and the quote misattributed to Edmund Burke, that "all that is required for evil to prevail is for good people to do nothing". The issue here is that while retaining strategic ignorance of atrocities and not challenging social injustice may be personally protective, even a form of self-care, it is precisely this collective disengagement that makes those atrocities and injustices possible. This position can be constituted in several different ways, from a deliberate conscious choice to avoid awareness, to an unthinking automatic reflex of avoiding aversive material. It may also be externally constructed by the absence of information, which may itself be either deliberately politically organised or simply be an absence of resources. While this may be the most widespread and possibly most damaging position, as indicated in the quotes above, it is also the one with the least malicious intent. But in this, it highlights the problem that malicious intent and harmful outcomes are not necessarily correlated (Collins and Plüg 2020).

Playing the victim

The second way of saying no is more complicated. Here people are aware of the account of violence, but reject it as a misrepresentation (Bartov 2024). This is a motivated rejection. The account of violence offered is incompatible with an already believed version of events, which is itself part of a broader understanding of the world. This understanding is not just an abstract conceptual framing, but a way of experiencing life. It is precisely a subject position (Althusser 1971), a way of experiencing oneself and the world, structured through existing discourse. This is important because here

the account of violence is not experienced simply as a factual error, but as an existential threat to an established way of existing in the world (Collins and Plüg 2020).

This threat is even worse if the identity being threatened is already structured by accounts of itself as a victim position, and thus predisposed to reading non-affirming accounts as hostile, malicious, and persecutory. This kind of victim position is common across a wide range of situations, and does not guarantee that a structural vulnerability actually exists outside of that interpretative framework.

This is clear in the case of the Christchurch killer. He experienced himself, his values, his culture, and his community as at risk of annihilation (Crothers and O'Brien 2020). But none of this was true. Multiculturalism, migration, and human rights were not a genocidal threat to White, Western patriarchal society, even though they changed its position in the world. He did not need to kill strangers to survive. But his White genocide replacement theory conceptual framework created such a compelling subject position for him that he felt compelled to buy several assault weapons, write a manifesto, plan a violent attack, and livestream his rampage of mass murder for the world to see.

Similarly, there is a victim subject position from which descriptions of the atrocities in Gaza, of the relentless violence being inflicted on the entire population, of the criminality of the acts and the way to combine to create an ethnic cleansing and genocide, are not simply interpreted as incorrect. Rather, these descriptions are experienced as an existential threat, as a hostile and malicious attack, as a form of violence in themselves. Even, paradoxically, as contribution to a threat of genocide against that collective victim position. This is why everyday claims about human rights expressed in statements such as 'stop killing children', 'don't bomb the hospitals' or 'free Palestine' are reframed within in the paranoid victim narratives as hateful, hostile, and racist attacks.

Privileged victims of history

Here it is important to recognise that these victim positions are not simply invented in the minds of isolated individuals. They are not cognitive errors or factual mistakes, but complex systems of understanding developed across social systems (Collins 2013). While some individuals may take a leading role in formalising or communicating them at specific points, these systems develop

and coalesce over time and through groups, they evolve and are transmitted at the level of culture and, except in crisis, the people inside them seldom have the opportunity to reflect on them or even notice that these frameworks exist. They are simply lived as an experience of the way the world is.

At the same time, these ideas have specific identifiable histories. At least three different constructed victim positions, with differing histories, can be identified in relation to the violence against Gaza (Kershner 2023). The first are elite Western imperialists, who need a military and political forward base in the oil-rich Middle East to pursue their global economic dominance. Linked to these are those who needed to stabilise a colony where they can dispose of the people they ethnically cleansed from Europe, both to ease their historical guilt and to prevent land claims being made against them by the people they displaced. Like the Christchurch killer, these groups feel attacked by the rise of the international system of human rights, the decline of the colonial prerogative of Western countries, and by the recognition of the humanity of indigenous people.

The second, and by very far the largest, group have a religious narrative (Dale 2004). For messianic fundamentalist Christians, the conflict in this region is the fulfilment of Biblical prophecy, a historical necessity for the return of their messiah and the fulfilment of their theological aspirations. An ethical critique of this violence is thus a threat to their claim to moral superiority, and offence against their god, and an obstacle to their collective religious redemption.

Unlike these two groups, the third victim position is derived from an actual history of violent persecution. A thousand years of discrimination against Jewish communities in Europe culminated in the catastrophic annihilatory brutality of the Holocaust, an event so staggeringly violent that the term genocide had to be created to describe it. The Holocaust was so shocking that it decisively called into question the normalised violence that Western culture was built on. In doing this, it also created Jewish people as a victim group *par excellence*, and flagged antisemitism as the unacceptable face of racism. It doing this is deprioritised other forms of racism such as colonial violence and the slave trade, giving a special status to European victims over those in the Global South (Pappé 2014).

While this shift served to delegitimate the long and brutal European traditions of antisemitic violence, it was also vulnerable to misappropriation into other projects. The focus on one specific victim group tended to eclipse the Nazi genocide of disabled people, gender minorities, progressive political groups,

and other ethnic groups. While it went a long way towards discrediting racism as a pervasive Western project, it simultaneously drew attention away from the long history of colonial racism and colonial genocides and focused on Western victims of racist violence.

At the same time, it provided exactly the impetus needed to consolidate a different nationalist colonial project. The idea of political Zionism had already been developed by Puritan Christians, and started being actively promoted by a few Jewish social leaders such as Herzl and Jabotinsky in the late 19th and early 20th century (Herzl 2012). The Jewish Colonisation Association initially began organising the movement of Jewish people from Eastern Europe to Argentina, and was later replaced by the Palestine Jewish Colonisation Association in the 1920s. While some persecuted Jewish communities welcomed the opportunity to migrate, the idea of establishing a Jewish state in the Middle East was not especially popular. It ran counter to the traditional theological tenet that Jewish communities had been divinely ordained to be 'a people among the nations' and that any political attempt to bring them together as a political nation state prior to the return of the messiah was an act of defiance against the faith (Pappé 2006, Shlaim 1995).

When political Zionists initially tried to sell the idea of the settlement of Palestine to European Jewish communities by organising visits to the region, these visitors returned with the apocryphal claim that 'the bride is beautiful, but she is promised to another man'. This indicated a rejection of the Zionist colonial slogan 'a land without people for a people without a land'. While the colonial ideology attempted to erase the indigenous people, Jewish religious principles initially resisted this negation, instead recognising their humanity and expressing specific concern about risks of treating Palestinians the way European Jewish communities had been treated (Shlaim 1995, Shlaim and Rogan 2001).

The Holocaust significantly changed this understanding (Forster et al. 2020). Having faced the extreme horrors of genocide, many European Jewish communities now prioritised the project of establishing a safe place in the world where they could protect themselves from antisemitic violence. This allowed the project of colonial Zionism to position itself as the political guardian of Judaism against threats of annihilation. The experience of genocidal victimisation could thus be appropriated into a narrative of the establishment of the Zionist state as a matter of collective life and death. The danger of this victim narrative is

that the gravity of its founding threat meant that this framing could be used to justify extreme measures to establish a political version of safety in the form of an invulnerable military state (Kershner 2023).

From the outset these measures included lethal violence against not only Palestinians, but against the British administrators of the region (Khalidi 2020, Pappé 2006, Shlaim 1995). To begin the ethnic cleansing and prepare for the establishment of a Zionist state, terrorist groups such Irgun, Haggenah, and Lehi (aka The Stern Gang) began murderous attacks on Palestinian villages to drive the indigenous residents away and seize their homes and land. In response to the British colonial administrators attempts to protect at least some of the human rights of Palestinians, Zionist terrorist group Irgun bombed their headquarters in the King David Hotel, killing 91 people. Zionist terrorist militia Lehi took similar action, bombing the Cairo-Haifa train multiple times and killed 68 more people. This escalated to the 1948 Nakba in which 15 000 Palestinians were murdered, and three quarters of a million Palestinians were ethnically cleansed from their homes in order to establish a Jewish majority state on their land.

The ideological justification of this violence, and the ongoing colonisation and the siege of parts of Palestine up to and including the Gaza genocide, was built on the foundation of this post-Holocaust narrative of Jewish victimisation (Forster et al. 2020). This narrative allowed all acts of resistance to the systematic ethnic cleansing to be reframed as threats to Jewish safety and security. Emptying this resistance of its anticolonial meaning further allowed it to be reframed as motivated by the same malicious racist hatred that had driven European antisemitism. Thus, all attempts to resist this siege, occupation, and ethnic cleansing is reframed as hateful antisemitic terrorism. It is further framed in the context of the Holocaust as yet another manifestation of the genocidal attempt to destroy the collective conditions of life of the Jewish people. It is precisely this framing that then legitimates the unbridled violence against the people of Gaza: a contemporary genocide, to prevent an imagined genocide based on an historical genocide.

Representing October 7th

This brings us to the specific issue of the framing of the October 7 2023 attacks. Given the horror of these attacks in which 1 200 people were killed and 250 taken hostage, why was it necessary to also spend so much energy

disseminating elaborate misinformation about what had happened (Goldenberg and Frankel 2024)? To invent and circulate bizarre accounts of decapitated babies and psychopathic torture-rapes? The attacks on civilians, the killing of civilians, and the kidnapping of civilians were all already war crimes, and could easily be used to justify a major counter-attack on the militias that perpetrated these crimes. An accurate account would have been enough to trigger charges of war crimes at the International Criminal Court, to justify sanctions against the perpetrators, and to mobilise an international peace-keeping force to prevent future attacks.

Instead of this, a narrative was created that was so unimaginably horrific that it triggered a state of traumatic shock in many audiences. This narrative circulated in a film to foreign governments, was uncritically reproduced in traditionally trusted Western news outlets such as the New York Times, and immediately widely circulated on social media. By the time it was investigated and fully discredited, the damage had been done (Goldenberg and Frankel 2024).

This traumatic account short-circuited the ability think through what had happened, why it had happened, and what could be done to prevent similar violence. Its design and effect were precisely to prevent such thought, and replace it with visceral emotional horror. This had two important effects: it prevented the attack being understood, and it legitimated an overwhelmingly violent response – far beyond anything that could be justified by rational analysis or international law.

This traumatic collapse of thought prevented certain questions being asked. Asking why the attack was specifically designed to take hostages, risked raising the issue that they were taken specifically for a hostage trade, which would raise the question of the 3 000 hostages and 6 000 political prisoners that were already being held by Israel. Asking how Hamas gained the military capacity to execute the raid, risked raising questions about the fact that Israeli prime minister Netanyahu had previously publicly called for people to support Hamas and had authorised the transfer of millions of dollars from Qatar to Hamas, as part of his project of creating a split between Hamas and the Palestinian Authority in order to prevent the formation of a unified Palestinian state. Asking why military intelligence officers who reported the raid being planned for several months beforehand were told to ignore it. Asking why troops on the most heavily surveilled border in the world were stood down for the first

hours of the attack. Asking why the notorious Hannibal Directive was invoked, instructing Israeli troops to attack homes and vehicles with hostages in them with tanks and helicopter gunships, leading to an as-yet undetermined number of Israeli deaths. Asking why Gaza had been kept in a state of siege for the past 17 years, and what the consequences of that siege were. Thus more complex political questions about how the attack happened and how such violence could be prevented in the future were erased.

Instead, the phantasmagorical account of deranged cruelty that was distributed had a predictable effect. It triggered the other great underlying historical trauma: the memory of the Holocaust (Forster et al. 2020). At an emotional level, the October 7 attack became continuous with the unimaginable horrors of that genocide, triggering the existential terror of collective annihilation. This traumatic emotional framing transformed the subjective experience of the attack from grief and outrage at a serious military attack, to the overwhelming fear of total destruction. Here the victim identity is completely solidified, and thus in turn constructs any perceived external threat as pure perpetrator with no other human qualities. Combined with the traumatic erasure of the cognitive capacity to analyse the events, this traumatic overlay transformed the situation into an apocalyptic battle for survival, in which any and all means were necessary and justified to prevent annihilation. This specifically included legitimating any amount of 'collateral damage': the deaths of any number of civilians, the killing of any number of children, and complete erasure of the perceived enemy through any degree of ethnic cleansing and genocide.

As with the earlier examples we explored, this construction of a victim identity becomes a way of legitimating violence (Collins and Plüg 2020). In addition, the elaboration of a narrative that triggers other underlying emotional trauma short-circuits the capacity to reflect on actual risks and possible solutions, replacing this with overwhelming negative emotion which triggers further dysfunctional reactions.

DARVO

The framing of the genocidal violence following October 7 can also be analysed using a conceptual framework developed in the field of interpersonal violence. Freyd was interested in the strategies that were used by perpetrators to conceal and legitimate their violence (Harsey and Freyd 2020). The acronym DARVO

identifies the key processes: Deny, Attack, Reverse Victim and Offender. The violence is denied, the person attempting to identify the violence is attacked, and instead a framing is offered in which the perpetrator is narrated as the victim, and the victim is narrated as the perpetrator.

Deny: Here we see the denial of the genocidal acts and intentions, both in the official International Court of Justice trial, and in the media. The denial is applied to both the individual genocidal acts (the carpet bombing of residential areas, the bombing of all hospitals, the deliberate killing of health and aid workers, the deliberate destruction of the water infrastructure, the blockade cutting off food and medical supplies to create mass starvation and death), and the fact these are all orchestrated as a strategy of ethnic cleansing and genocide (Mahase 2024, Salmiya 2024, Segal 2025). What is interesting here is how in some forums the genocide is denied while in others it is openly advocated by the same people, with no concern about the apparent contradiction.

Attack: The attack response is highly organised, with a well-developed discourse and a range of organisational resources. It relies on the power of the weaponised allegation of antisemitism. Anyone expressing concerns about the lives and human rights of Palestinians, or raising questions about the war crimes and crimes against humanity being committed, is immediately labelled as antisemitic (Montag 2024). This draws from a discourse that constructs antisemitism as the most egregious of all racisms by framing the Holocaust as the worst of all human atrocities, or even as the only real historical genocide. Those accused of antisemitism are by association framed as continuing the Nazi project and horrors of the Holocaust by other means. In the same ways all Palestinians who question or resist the denial of their human rights, the state of siege, or ongoing ethnic cleansing they face, are simply accused not only of antisemitism, but of being terrorists. The concept of the terrorist is a powerful tool widely used by state authorities to strip the meaning from acts of resistance to oppression and reclassify them as acts of criminality motivated only by a psychopathic desire to inflict terror and destruction on innocent citizens. Which is exactly how it is being used in this context.

Reverse Victim and Offender: Here those raising concerns about the genocide in Gaza are framed as actively supporting destruction of the Zionist state, and by association supporting the genocidal erasure of all Jewish communities. Those in Gaza resisting the genocidal violence are similarly framed as being motivated only by the desire to destroy the Zionist state, and

by association the safety of all Jewish people. Those attempting to prevent the genocide are accused of supporting a genocide against the aggressor. In a way typical of the DARVO process, the perpetrator narrates their violence as self-defence: those civilians being killed are framed as enemies who, given the opportunity, would stage their own genocide against that aggressor (Abdo 2024, Ajour 2025, Pappé 2014, Segal 2025).

Digital media and dissensus

One interesting aspect of this organised attempt to simultaneously deny and legitimate the genocide is that it is currently failing. Despite the well-developed Hasbara apparatus that had historically been very effective, at least in the West, at maintaining this narrative and silencing those who challenged it, rifts are appearing and public option is shifting (Silver 2025). While there has always been an active critique of Zionist colonial violence, it is now becoming widespread even in sectors where it was previously marginal. This is most visible among the youth in Western societies (Silver 2025). Some of the reasons for this are clear. As outlined earlier, we are living in a unique historical media moment of livestreamed violence. The traditional media structures of newspapers and television news are being superseded by social media platforms, especially among the younger generations. Here multiple vectors of extremely rapid dissemination are possible.

Citizen journalists in Gaza can post images and commentaries of their daily experience on social media and have these instantly circulate around the world (Tawil-Souri 2024). The organised influence on centralised news agencies by governments and powerful interest groups are increasingly bypassed by social media networks. Marginalised groups can more easily challenge the dominant narratives framing and legitimating violence by sharing their own accounts of experiences. Against the traditional structured state narratives, disruptive images and reports of immediate suffering and violence can appear in social media feeds, destabilising the traditional ideological accounts.

This is not to imply that social media feeds are realms of unregulated communicative freedom. They are tightly controlled by algorithms designed to generate income for the platform owners. They are just as susceptible to political interference, as clearly seen in Meta's throttling of Palestinian content on Facebook and Instagram, and the forced sale of USA TikTok to a Zionist

consortium to control future content. It is now even easier for states and other powerful actors to disseminate political content, and to direct that content to highly specific algorithmically targeted audiences with even less checks and balances on the veracity of that content.

But with those processes, there is also a new and disruptive way in which individual users can disseminate information in ways that may possibly threaten the traditional control of representation and understanding. It is possible for users to access a greater variety of interests, and to pursue their specific interests in more depth, as the platform algorithms shape each user's media feeds according to the individual engagement patterns. This is exactly what has happened with respect to the genocide. Many users are accessing online content which contradicts the traditional narratives that were available in their social worlds, and this is shifting their interpretations of what is happening.

Competing histories

The context in which these competing narratives are received is also significant. For those in communities who identify with the victims of the Holocaust, the identification with Zionist victim narratives can be very strong. For older generations in the West who see that Holocaust as a uniquely catastrophic event in human history, it is also compelling. But for those whose history placed them at the receiving end of colonial violence and continuing legacies of dehumanisation, dispossession and genocide, it is easier to identify with Palestinian experience of ethnic cleansing and genocide, and to interpret the conflict through the lens of anticolonial struggles for independence and human rights (Abdo 2024, Ajour 2025, Berry and Philo 2006, Khalidi 2020).

Conclusion

The significance of this article lies in analysing the ways in which the genocide is enabled or resisted by discursive constructions of victimisation and violence. Although for political and economic elites the motivation for the genocide may be cynical colonial greed for land, natural resources and political power, for most other people it requires that they are interpellated into constructed victim positions where they naively experience themselves as being forced to defend themselves against a malicious hostile threat. Their colonial violence, and their participation in ethnic cleansing and genocide, are hidden from them by

an ideological narration that simultaneously denies that this violence is taking place, interprets it as self-defence, and frames the real victims of this violence as the aggressors.

This DARVO construction not only frames the victims as aggressors, but also specifically constructs it as motivated by antisemitic hatred rather than an anticolonial battle to restore their land and human rights. It further frames those who resist colonial dispossession and dehumanisation as terrorists, a category that both empties their resistance of any contextual meaning, and suggests that they are simply motivated by some psychopathic desire to cause fear and destruction.

This carefully orchestrated political framing through the Hasbara propaganda project further narrates those who dare support the human rights of Palestinians as Holocaust-perpetuating antisemites. It then organises attacks on them to both remove those in positions of social influence in politics, media, and education, and to intimidate the broader public into remaining silent (Kim and Mullkoff 2025, Montag 2024, Ziadah 2025).

But the political project of creating and disseminating these narratives and subject positions is not always successful. We also recognise how, for those in the Global South, the experience of colonial violence is all too easily recognised and understood, making this propaganda project less successful. Similarly, we note how for the younger generations, having direct access to citizen journalism from Gaza through social media provides a different perspective from those who have been raised on the traditional media of corporations more sympathetic to the Western imperialist world view.

Here we see that the competing versions of the 'say no to genocide' in our title represent outcomes of complex discursive constructions of violence and victimhood, which in turn depend on historical experiences, collective cultures, and media resources. Most importantly, we show that some of these discursive constructions motivate and legitimate catastrophic acts of mass violence, while some of them oppose those forms of violence. We argue that these discourses are powerful precisely because they are invisible to the people inside them, even as they structure their perceptions, motivations, and understandings of the world. This is why revealing discourses can in itself be transformative. Rather than waging war with the individuals that they produce, we can address the systems that produce these individuals.

We thus conclude that there is significant value in the critical intellectual work of analysing how these constructions are created and maintained, what their consequences are, and how they might be dismantled. This may serve as one of many strategies for moving beyond the seemingly intractable forms of violence that exist around us.

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