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To cite this article: Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian (19 Sep 2025): Five Pillars of Zionist Genocidal Apparatus: A Palestinian Problematization of Genocide Studies, Journal of Genocide Research, DOI: [10.1080/14623528.2025.2556589](https://doi.org/10.1080/14623528.2025.2556589)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623528.2025.2556589>



Published online: 19 Sep 2025.



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## Five Pillars of Zionist Genocidal Apparatus: A Palestinian Problematization of Genocide Studies

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In this paper, I trouble the ways Genocide Studies has engaged with the ongoing genocide in Palestine and the political power embedded in invoking genocide. To begin, I must state that what guides my theorization are Palestinian voices and testimonies from the beginning of the Nakba in 1948 through the ongoing genocide today: Palestinian voices, like the voice of Fatmeh, the Gazan mother who went viral in October 2023 when she went to get food for her children, only to come back and find their scattered body parts – *ashlaa'*. As she said: “My kids died hungry ... I went to get them food and came back to find them *ashlaa'*, body remains, scattered all over the place, *ashlaa'* ...” I also speak for/from the unheard voices of Gazan newborns, left to decompose in incubators on 9 November 2023, in Al-Nasr hospital’s ICU ward. CNN reported: “The tiny bodies of babies, several still attached to wires and tubes that were meant to keep them alive, decomposing in their hospital beds. Milk bottles and spare diapers still next to them on the sheets.”<sup>1</sup>

My analysis of the ongoing genocidal Nakba in Gaza stages the centrality of death and overkill apparent in the *ashlaa'* of decomposed babies in incubators and Fatmeh’s dismembered *ashlaa'* of her children. It brings to our view the ordinary terror inhabiting the most vulnerable bodies – newborns and children – and most vulnerable spaces: homes, schools, and hospitals.

My analysis targets the Israeli state that reduces children and newborn bodies into decomposing, dismembered objects to support the larger project of demarcating the ontological boundary between the human and the non-human, the should-be-shredded, decomposed, and killed to disappear. The genocidal brutality of indiscriminate attacks intended to kill, including leaving newborns abandoned in incubators, inscribes in both the flesh and Zionist consciousness that Palestinian bodies can and should always be in a state of death and overkill. Such inscription of power on babies’ flesh, as on the flesh of Palestinian men and women, old and young, ontologically links their slowly dying bodies to the settler colonial state. As Fanon has explained, understanding the ontological difference of the colonized involves seeing below the notion of being and even below the notion of nonbeing, hence his insistence on talking about the colonized

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<sup>1</sup> Allegra Goodwin et al., “Infants Found Dead and Decomposing in Evacuated Hospital ICU in Gaza. Here’s What We Know,” CNN, 8 December 2023, <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/12/08/middleeast/babies-al-nasr-gaza-hospital-what-we-know-intl/index.html>.

and the tensions that emerge in the flesh/land and, I would say, the cut, scattered, burned flesh and bones.<sup>2</sup> Seen through the prism of incomprehensible *ashlaa'*, the settler colonial state deprives the racialized nonbeing, voided of life, of his/her humanity to maintain and extend Palestinian unwholeness. When Palestinians gather and collect the *ashlaa'*, tethering flesh/body, connecting individual and collective lives, they establish renewed peoplehood.

The violent horrors we are seeing in Gaza over the past twenty months have made us witnesses to the strangulation of newborn babies, a strangulation that demands their submission to the occupying power. What we have witnessed through these horrors is part of the Israeli necropenological global and local regime.<sup>3</sup> We witnessed this horror again just recently this month through the intentional starvation of Palestinian children and their communities by Israeli expansionist greed.<sup>4</sup>

Another blatant example of Israel's necropenological regime: on 5 May 2025, a group of Israeli soldiers filmed themselves blowing up a building in Gaza, using blue-coloured smoke for their "gender reveal" to celebrate the birth of the child of one of the soldiers.<sup>5</sup> This horrific act of celebration took place while abandoning newborns in incubators and while bombing entire families at home or in their tents, in hospitals, while care taking. The targeted assassinations of doctors, journalists, educators and more reveal the hunger for the unending death of Palestinians.<sup>6</sup> It is from the silent voices of those shredded newborn babies as *ashlaa'* and through the necropolitical cruelty of the "gender reveal" using Palestinian *ashlaa'* that I read the brutality of the occupier. It is against this deadly enfleshed ontology and the centrality of death in this ontology that I read the scattered body parts – the *ashlaa'*, the decomposed babies' overwhelming presence – as a strong voice to guide my analyses.

My ontological analysis is guided through the figurative occupation and possession of the decomposed Palestinian body. It is on this body that we can read the Zionist state's wanton use of violence to understand the centrality of death, killing, and overkilling in the settler colonial project. The Israeli soldiers' pleasure and joy during the May 2025 gender reveal express the Zionist colonizer ideology. This ideology rejoices over Palestinian maiming, death, and suffering. As they literally blew up Palestinian bodies, the soldiers celebrated by chanting "It is a boy." What does this suggest about Zionist ideology that soldiers can and do celebrate in the exact moments they destroy the colonized

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<sup>2</sup> Franz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox (1952; New York: Grove Press, 2008).

<sup>3</sup> Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian, "Necropenology: Conquering New Bodies, Psychics, and Territories of Death in East Jerusalem," *Identities* 27, no. 3 (2020): 285–301.

<sup>4</sup> OCHA, *Humanitarian Situation Update # 286: Gaza Strip*, 7 May 2025, <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/humanitarian-situation-update-286-gaza-strip>; "Palestinian Human Rights Organizations Condemn Israel's Continued Use of Starvation as a Weapon of Genocide," *Al-Haq*, 11 March 2025, <https://www.alhaq.org/advocacy/26047.html>; "Starvation as a Weapon of War," editorial, *Lancet*, 6 April 2024, [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(24\)00684-6/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(24)00684-6/fulltext).

<sup>5</sup> Admin, "Inhumanity: IDF Soldiers Drop Blue Bomb in Gaza as Part of Gender Reveal Celebration," *OccupySF*, 6 May 2025, <https://occupysf.net/index.php/2025/05/06/inhumanity-idfsoldiers-drop-blue-bomb-in-gaza-as-part-of-gender-reveal-celebration/>.

<sup>6</sup> Hala Gorani and Briony Sowden, "Israeli Military Is Destroying Hospitals and Targeting Medical Staff in Gaza, Doctors and Nurses There Say," NBC News, 23 July 2024, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/israel-hamas-war-investigation-doctors-hospitals-targeted-gaza-rcna162684>; UN OHCHR, *Gaza: UN Experts Condemn Killing and Silencing of Journalists*, 1 February 2024, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/02/gaza-un-experts-condemn-killing-and-silencing-journalists>; Patrick Jack, "Academia in Gaza 'Has Been Destroyed' by Israeli 'Educide'," *Times Higher Education*, 29 January 2024, <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/academia-gaza-has-been-destroyed-israeli-educide>.

population's geography and home? *This convergence of violence and pleasure – so spectacularly livestreamed through the gender reveal/bombing – exposes with its monstrosity, the local and global ontological politics and dilemmas facing Genocide Studies today.*

Palestinian dispossession and death as a result of Zionism reveal a genocidal economy, which is embedded in the geopolitics of racism and white supremacy that dispossesses Palestinian humanity, even of newborn babies. This economy's codes, technologies, aesthetics, and visuality enable the ongoing genocide and its ontological consumption. It is an economy that is reproduced through the enmeshment of *ashlaa'* and the viscerality of living in such a scale of death. This enmeshment takes yet another form, with Palestine serving as a laboratory for Israel to test its surveillance systems, which are marketed as "field-tested," deriving profits and legitimacy from the dismemberment of Palestinians.<sup>7</sup> It is rooted in – and serves to exemplify – the settler colonial state's commitment to violence and its exercise of power over the nonhuman, always-killable Palestinian body. This ontological stand reveals itself in all aspects of the settler colonial genocidal criminalities of the state.

Under such conditions, Palestinian *ashlaa'* becomes more visible in the settler state's infinite desire for expansion, even over shredded or sick bodies, empty stomachs, and collective graves. Palestinians are always kept in a state of neither life nor being. This enduring ontology depends on attacking the wholeness, integrity, and continuity of the Palestinian body and land. It has turned Gaza and all of Palestine into a collective graveyard for slow and fast death, a slaughterhouse of maiming and wounding for the political functioning of the state and hence the continuous Nakba.

I stand against the settler colonial assertion of turning the Palestinian body/flesh, geography, and economy into a death zone. This stand grounds my analysis as a feminist criminologist and scholar. My imperative is not the legal apparatus nor the human rights conventions but rather human life, dignity, integrity, and the futurity of our people. I do not believe in the system of the state or the "security of the state." The people are my centre.

To understand the ongoing genocidal Nakba – *Al Nakba al Ibadiyya al Mustamerrah* – highlighted in the criminal violence of the state and to decolonize its ontological enfleshment apparent in the Palestinian scattered and dismembered *ashlaa'*, I point to five analytical pillars of the Zionist genocidal apparatus.

## The Ontotheological Amalekite Pillar

By this I refer to the fusion between (1) enfleshed ontological analyses, (2) Israel's securitized theology, and (3) Israel's sacralization of politics.<sup>8</sup> To understand this fusion, we need to examine how, in the Zionist settler colonial order directed against the Palestinian

<sup>7</sup> On the field-testing of military technologies, see Leila Katibah, "The Genocide Will Be Automated – Israel, AI and the Future of War," *Middle East Report*, no. 312 (Fall, 2024); Chris Hables Gray, *AI, Sacred Violence, and War: The Case of Gaza* (Cham: Springer Nature, 2025), 79, 94. For a more detailed account of the militarized economy and its role in the genocidal economy, see Antony Loewenstein, *The Palestine Laboratory: How Israel Exports the Technology of Occupation around the World* (London: Verso, 2023), 8–10, 20, 29. In 2021, Israeli arms exports reached US\$11.3 billion, with around 140,000 workers in high-tech weapons production and more than 2,300 AI companies operating in the country, many possessing direct military links.

<sup>8</sup> On Israel's securitized theology, see Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian, *Security Theology, Surveillance and the Politics of Fear* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015). On sacralized politics, see Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian, "Sacralized Politics: The Case of Occupied East Jerusalem," in *When Politics Are Sacralized: Comparative Perspectives on Religion*

people, the Israeli state assumes the mantle of divine retribution, using what I call in my work *sacralized politics* (with Nadim Rouhana) and *security theologies*: biblical references banish the racial Other and submit Palestinians to enflashed ontological dismemberment and erasure of body and land in order to secure Israeli's "permanent security." Thus, in Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's account, the Israeli state transforms into the biblical nation of Israelites who "must remember what Amalek [Palestine] has done to you, says our Holy Bible. And we do remember, and we are fighting."<sup>9</sup>

For example, in a speech on 28 October 2023, Netanyahu asserted,

This is our second war of independence. We will fight to defend our homeland. We will fight and not retreat. ... We will destroy the enemy above ground and below ground ... This will be a victory of good over evil, of light over darkness, of life over death.<sup>10</sup>

Echoing this language in an address to Israel's military forces, he proclaimed,

The basis of the existence of the thousand-year-old nation of Israel is the constant struggle for our lives and freedom ... The current fight against the Hamas murderers is another chapter in the story ... This is a war between the sons of light and the sons of darkness.<sup>11</sup>

In this Manichean struggle, the state of Israel seeks biblical justice, following the Kahanist movement, founded by Meir Kahane.<sup>12</sup> This Amalekization of the Palestinians, apparent in the Gaza genocide, reveals how attacking, starving, and bombing civilians turns them into scattered *ashlaa'*, mere flesh; the dismemberment of the Palestinian body and land is the essence of the settler colonial ideology.<sup>13</sup>

Still, looking at these ontological, securitized, and sacralized enflashed conditions through legal terms or the legal debate about the UN Genocide Convention's "intent," we fail to acknowledge or name the decomposed *ashlaa'* of newborns as the dismemberment of the Palestinian society, families, homes and spaces, from the Nakba period until this moment of the ongoing genocide. In the settler colony, analysis fails because it is a psychic state of siege, because settler colonial brutality, as David Lloyd and Patrick Wolfe explained:

... is at once law-making, and therefore constitutive of a certain kind of sovereignty, and a "free and ruthless" use of force ... The corollary to this perpetual reconstitution of law-making violence, which does not allow the "forgetting" of the law's origins in appropriation, is the persistence of a *psychic "state of siege"*: the representation of the world as a surround populated by uncivil peoples who pose what, in the language of neoconservatism as of

*Claims and Nationalism*, ed. Nadim N. Rouhana and Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 134–58; and the entire collection.

<sup>9</sup> Lazar Berman, "Netanyahu: 'Goal of War is 'to Defeat the Murderous Enemy, Ensure Our Existence in Our Land,'" *Times of Israel*, 28 October 2023. Netanyahu (and others) invoke 1 Samuel 15:3: "Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass." In the *Tanakh*, the Amalek are the enemies and persecutors of the nation of the Israelites.

<sup>10</sup> Benjamin Netanyahu, *Statement by PM Netanyahu*, Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 28 October 2023, <https://www.gov.il/en/pages/statement-by-pm-netanyahu-28-oct-2023>.

<sup>11</sup> Benjamin Netanyahu [The Prime Minister of Israel], "Letter from Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to Our Soldiers and Commanders in the Swords of Iron War: 'Soldiers, men and women'," Facebook, 3 November 2023, <https://www.facebook.com/IsraeliPM/posts/873110637512400?rdid=dzGAh4dQY5siHiC>.

<sup>12</sup> Kahane was an ultranationalist and racist political figure who considered violence against Arabs and Palestinians a necessity to promote Jewish pride and to assure Jewish safety; see Shaul Magid, *Meir Kahane: The Public Life and Political Thought of an American Jewish Radical* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2021).

<sup>13</sup> Atalia Omer coins the term *Amalekization* in "On Turning Palestine into a *Terra Nullius*: On Amalek and 'Miracles,'" *Journal of Genocide Research* (22 May 2025), <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623528.2025.2504737>.

Zionism, is understood as an “existential threat” to civil subjects. With the impeccable logic of the paranoid, the “free and ruthless force” inflicted on those evicted “beyond the line” is projected onto its objects.<sup>14</sup>

The legal term *genocide* – referring to certain acts committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group – fails me as a Palestinian scholar who struggles daily under this legalized psychic state of siege while witnessing not only the dismemberment of Palestinian land and space and its violent separation but, further, the dismemberment of dead and overkilled bodies into *ashlaa'*. The legal concept invoked in the Genocide Convention, that is the “intent to destroy,” is nulled by the settler colony, which turns it into sacralized and securitized Israeli theology. The state on its own ground, with its security theology and sacralized politics, is engaged in preventing the future, in committing a genocide fully spectacularized, while Palestinian *ashlaa'* – both en fleshed and geographic – become part of global capital, as seen in the unconditional material support for Israeli genocide by the US, the UK, and other countries. The invocation of Amalekites in the context of declaring genocidal intent – a statement of the will to genocide, partly masked in securitized and biblical parallels – seeks to legitimize the violence by sacralizing both the genocide itself and the Zionist project of which genocide is a part, and it draws on Christian Zionist solidarity that carries major political power.<sup>15</sup>

### The Legal Pillar: The Crumbling of the International Legal Order

The ongoing genocide has turned Gaza into the graveyard of the international legal order, which has failed to stop the violence and bring those who are guilty to justice. The legal world order and ontological null zone that staged Palestinians' *ashlaa'* – the dismembered and cut to pieces bodies as nonbeing – reveals the failure of the legal order. Palestine, the absolute exception, threatens to bring the collapse of international legal and humanitarian order and its norms. As Noura Erakat so eloquently noted in her speech at the UN, during the commemoration of the seventy-seventh anniversary of the Nakba:

... If genocide is too much, you can confront this atrocity as a war, specifically, a colonial war against a racist regime and alien occupation regulated with the additional protocols and customary laws of war that recognize the captives as POWs, ensure them humane treatment, recognize Palestinian militants as combatants, permit third party intervention. We can use the law to protect hospitals, and schools, and shelters, to protect the journalists, and doctors, and aid workers, to forcibly open the humanitarian corridors, and abide by the ICC arrest warrants to arrest Netanyahu and Gallant upon arrival. If war is too much, you can confront this atrocity as a humanitarian tragedy, and you can send in a peacekeeping mission to protect Palestinians who have been denied their right to self-defence for nearly eight decades. And if humanitarian tragedy is too much, you can find a way to have mercy on the Palestinian children, the ones who have been pulled from the rubble with two limbs and no family and find themselves in a cage without food or water. Do not sit in the seat of power and do nothing.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> David Lloyd and Patrick Wolfe, “Settler Colonial Logics and the Neoliberal Regime,” *Settler Colonial Studies* 6, no. 2 (2016): 114, emphasis added.

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, Mitri Raheb, *Decolonizing Palestine: The Land, the People, the Bible* (New York: Orbis Books, 2023); and Munther Isaac, *Christ in the Rubble: Faith, the Bible, and the Genocide in Gaza* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2025).

<sup>16</sup> Jadaliyya, “Noura Erakat Addresses the UN in Commemoration of the 77th Anniversary of the Nakba,” YouTube video, 16 May 2025, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SAjmHht8Fk4>.

But unfortunately, despite the outstanding efforts and courage of many advocates – UN Special Rapporteur on the Occupied Palestinian Territories Francesca Albanese, the international lawyer specialized in human rights and the Middle East, in her report on the genocide; the relentless, longstanding work of many scholars; human rights organizations – the genocide is ongoing.<sup>17</sup> Under such a failure of the legal system, who can have faith in it anymore?

It is possible, as Mutua argued, that the human rights enterprise depends on a moral triangle: the savage who violates, the victim who suffers, and the saviour (often the West or international law, as you know) who rescues.<sup>18</sup> Such a structure relies on the recognizability and legibility of the victims, who must often present themselves as sympathetic, innocent people in need of salvation.<sup>19</sup> Yet, politically, the West will never define Palestinians as victims because they are not what Mohammad El-Kurd dubbed “perfect victims”: victims whose humanity is unquestioned, who deserve rescue.<sup>20</sup> To the West, Palestinians are born criminals and terrorists, judged by a moral economy that isn’t of their making within a politics of appeal that accommodates the colonizers.<sup>21</sup> Simultaneously, the responsibility to atone for the historical guilt of European antisemitism – in which they had no part – falls on Palestinians.<sup>22</sup> Such a double bind creates the space for colonial Zionism to sustain itself on a redemptive narrative of Israel by displacing and trivializing the intense violence of its settler-colonial structures. This is what Rashid Khalidi terms as the “hundred years’ war on Palestine.”<sup>23</sup>

But, by invoking the ontological status of Palestinians as nonbeing, their reduction to *ashlaa’* – whose very condition defies any recognition – Palestinians are denied victimhood itself: they are a politically implicated people who can’t be considered human, let alone be saved, a community beyond restoration or futurity. Thus, the category of victim in international law and humanitarian discourse collapses in the face of this uncontrollable and posthumous subject. We just do not fit the savage-victim-saviour script, amongst other reasons. Furthermore, and in addition to Mutua’s analysis, Minch-de Leon’s upcoming book explains how genocide has become one of the defining discursive relationships between the settler state and its native population, in which the state controls even the native’s relationship with the dead.<sup>24</sup> In the Palestinian case, this control includes *ashlaa’*. He argues that both slavery and genocide rest upon founding violence. Such an understanding makes its way into disciplined forms of knowing, including the law, and law serves as an active participant in the ongoing genocide.

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<sup>17</sup> Francesca Albanese, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in the Palestinian Territories Occupied since 1967: Genocide as Colonial Erasure* (United Nations, 1 October 2024), <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/genocide-as-colonial-erasure-report-francesca-albanese-01oct24/>. For relevant scholarship see, for example, Henry Cattán, *The Palestine Question* (London: Croom Helm, 1988); Richard Falk, *Palestine: The Legitimacy of Hope* (Washington, DC: Just World Books, 2014); Lisa Hajjar, *The War in Court: Inside the Long Fight Against Torture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2022).

<sup>18</sup> Makau Mutua, “Savages, Victims, and Saviors: The Metaphor of Human Rights,” *Harvard International Law Journal* 42 (2001): 201–45.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 230–3.

<sup>20</sup> Mohammad El-Kurd, *Perfect Victims and the Politics of Appeal* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2025).

<sup>21</sup> Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian, “The Occupation of the Senses: The Prosthetic and Aesthetic of State Terror,” *British Journal of Criminology* 57, no. 6 (2017): 1279–300; El-Kurd.

<sup>22</sup> Ussama Makdisi, “Beyond the Palestine Exception,” *Critical Times* 8, no. 1 (2025): 1–32.

<sup>23</sup> Quoted in Makdisi, 12.

<sup>24</sup> Mark Minch-de Leon, *Indigenous Inhumanities: California Indian Studies after the Apocalypse* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, forthcoming November 2025).

Israel is deliberately performing genocide in the full glare of publicity: as with its targeted assassinations, its commission of genocide with the “excuse” of counterinsurgency seeks not only to violate international law but also to break it – that is, to smash its norms and institutions. Before the current genocide, Israel relied on sophisticated loopholes to smash the law. Now it breaks the law openly, brazenly. This genocide is not only abhorrent in itself but also threatens *deliberately* the whole apparatus of post-1945 international law. What I am stressing here is that *the legal collapse is not an accidental “unintended consequence” of Israel’s genocide but one of its open aims. It flaunts its violations in order to make them the brutal norms of the new order.*

### The Necropolitical Annihilatory Enfleshed Pillar

By this pillar I refer to the centrality of death in the scattered flesh that stages *ashlaa’* as the overkillability of the dead. In doing so, I centre my analogy in the *ashlaa’* as Palestinians’ actual and psychic refusal of their reduction to dismembered non-living, non-existing or not-worth-living entities with numb despair. I use the Arabic word *ashlaa’* to refer to scattered body parts and dismembered flesh because Gazans anxiously reiterate and repeat this concept and concern, and their invocation of *ashlaa’* helps to analyse their perception of its functionality and to unpack the political work of its brutality. *Ashlaa’*, I argue, pushes beyond dismantling the biopolitical and necropolitical domains of racial command by requiring us to read its inscriptions in the dismembered, wounded, and dying flesh/body of the colonized. In doing so, I argue that *ashlaa’* *exposes the greedy appetite of the colonizer that prohibits the thinkability of Palestinian being and its possibility to be and to constitute itself as a whole entity, rising above its uprooting and dismemberment.*

In the West Bank and Occupied East Jerusalem, we witness a slow-motion ongoing Nakba – *Nakba Mustamerrah* – and in Gaza a full power genocide – what I refer to as *Nakba Ibadiyya Mustamerrah*. The settler colonial state’s targeting of the body and land as an object for dissolution into *ashlaa’* and all the eruptions of the skin itself are both an instrument and a symbol of Palestinian unthinkability. Drawing on the analogy of *ashlaa’*, this wasting of the physical body reflects Israeli genocidal dehumanization as a complete denial of any value to the Palestinian body, culture, nation, and land. The spectacular overkilling – the repeated destruction and dismemberment of the body and land, destruction beyond any political, strategic, securitized, or even sacralized intent – results in killing in ways that violate the body’s integrity beyond any reason. It is the pillar of the necropolitical annihilatory enfleshment that underpins religious Zionist lawmaker Tzvi Sukkot’s assertion, in an interview on Channel 12 News talk show *Ofira & Levinson* in mid-May 2025, that “Everyone has already gotten used to [the fact] that [we can] kill 100 Gazans in one night during a war [as indeed had happened in the previous two days] and no one cares.”<sup>25</sup>

This necropolitical annihilation also manifests in the economic and imperial exaltation of violence. AI systems, including “The Gospel,” generate lists of buildings or other structural targets to be attacked, and “Where’s Daddy?” – a system designed to hit family

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<sup>25</sup> “Religious Zionism MK Appears to Revel in Public Indifference toward ‘100 Gazans Killed Last Night,’” *Times of Israel*, 16 May 2025, [https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog\\_entry/religious-zionism-mk-appears-to-revel-in-public-indifference-toward-100-gazans-killed-last-night/](https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/religious-zionism-mk-appears-to-revel-in-public-indifference-toward-100-gazans-killed-last-night/).

homes when male targets are likely to be present – uses mobile locations based on social media to determine when a target is in a particular location so they can be attacked there.<sup>26</sup> Such systems assign kill orders on the basis of social network, proximity, phone usage, or familial association – a process which has chillingly been described as “ad targeting but for death” – and refuse the difference between combatants and civilians, as they all swirl into data points.<sup>27</sup> Usage of AI in determining targets allows for incremental killability. This is not an accidental by-product but an operational feature of the system itself.<sup>28</sup> Over the years, the urge for possessing “Total Battlefield Awareness” and automation of military processes has led to a growing enthusiasm for AI military technology.<sup>29</sup> Israel’s Data Decision System (DDS) utilizes “positive unlabelled learning” to flag Palestinians as threats based on unverified data or proximity to previously designated suspects.<sup>30</sup> Thus, a person no longer affiliated with Hamas is considered fair game. As Gray reports, the IOF doesn’t claim to be “surgical” in their operations; rather, one operator describes them as a “mass assassination factory” that “values quantity, not quality.”<sup>31</sup> Far from minimizing harm, AI has enabled the IOF to prosecute targets with exponential and alarming speed – from fifty per year to 100 per day – with an estimated error rate of ten per cent.<sup>32</sup> Mourning a friend, posting a picture, using flagged words such as *shahid* (martyr), Gray notes, could push a person in Gaza into the criteria that allows for preemptive violence, thus increasing the killability of the Gazan population and the production of more dismembered *ashlaa’*.<sup>33</sup> The death of a Palestinian isn’t considered regrettable, but righteous – a spiritually ordained and computationally operationalized act in service of the settler-colonial state.

The addition of AI to this mix allows for a convenient depersonalization of killing, as it puts physical distance between the soldier and their target. It additionally allows for re-personalizing violence in divine and military terms, creating a system in which Palestinian life is both knowable, disposable, and tracked. They are targeted, named, and erased.

## The Global/Western Pillar: *Ashlaa’* as Global Capital

Discussing the global pillar forces the question: who in the global community embodies international morality when countries issue invitations to those facing International Criminal Court arrest warrants, such as Netanyahu and Gallant, without regard for their crimes?

<sup>26</sup> Human Rights Watch, *Questions and Answers: Israeli Military’s Use of Digital Tools in Gaza*, 10 September 2024, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/09/10/questions-and-answers-israeli-militarys-use-digital-tools-gaza>.

<sup>27</sup> Gray, *AI, Sacred Violence, and War*, 14; see also Katibah, “The Genocide Will Be Automated.”

<sup>28</sup> Gray, *AI, Sacred Violence, and War*, 11, 52–3.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>32</sup> Katibah, “The Genocide Will Be Automated”; Gray, *AI, Sacred Violence, and War*. Katibah documents the system known as Lavender, which Israeli intelligence officers state produces a ten percent error rate, thus identifying individuals with little or no militant connection as targets while dramatically increasing the volume of strikes. On the effects of this expanded target acquisition, sociologist Yagil Levy has demonstrated that sixty-one percent of casualties in the current Gaza assault are civilians, compared to thirty-three to forty percent in previous Israeli operations, and higher than the twentieth-century global average of fifty percent. Cited in Julian Borger, “Civilians Make Up 61% of Gaza Deaths from Airstrikes, Israeli Study Finds,” *Guardian*, 9 December 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/dec/09/civilian-toll-israeli-airstrikes-gaza-unprecedented-killing-study> (accessed 18 July 2025). For original reporting, see Yagil Levy, “The Israeli Army Has Dropped the Restraint in Gaza, and the Data Shows Unprecedented Killing,” *Haaretz*, 9 December 2023.

<sup>33</sup> Gray, *AI, Sacred Violence, and War*, 92.

To comprehend the global order and ordering in its anti-Palestinian orientation, I rely on the analyses offered by Erakat in *Justice for Some* and the various intervention reports published by Albanese.<sup>34</sup> I also learn from the theorization of critical feminists, including Sherene Razack, Hortense Spillers, Suvendrini Perera, and Denise Ferreira da Silva, explaining how the global logics of violence are necessary for colonial conquest, domination, displacement, settlement, and enslavement.<sup>35</sup> I also draw, furthermore, on Joseph Pugliese's notion of geocorpographies: the understanding that "the body, in any of its manifestations, is always geopolitically situated and graphically inscribed by signs, discourses, regimes of visibility and so on" which, as the site of state torture, reveals "the violent enmeshment of the flesh and blood of the body within the geopolitics of war, race and empire."<sup>36</sup>

These analyses assist me in unpacking the violent enmeshments of *ashlaa'* within the geopolitics of the genocidal war against Palestinians. My concern is that Palestinian *ashlaa'*, in their dismemberment and wounding, are turned by the colonizer and their allies into overkilled en fleshed capital that affirms the global order of power. Under this global order, insurgency results in deportation, displacement, hunger, de-development, incarceration, extra-judicial killing, domicide, scholasticide, genocide, and the production of more *ashlaa'*. The disordered geocorpographic global regime, with its fetish for backing Israel, turns freedom fighters into killable Others: the colonizer can attack men, women, and children – everybody – because they are always already cast as killable, already *ashlaa'*. Here, too, legal constructs do not help. The violence is real, and international law about genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, state crimes, and so on will not stop the necrological geocorpographic global apparatus against Palestinians.

*Ashlaa'* in the global order is not only a structure of terror and overkill. It also reduces Palestinian being into a captive entity, an always-should-be-dismembered flesh and land that is not accorded the possibility of being – even when states like South Africa speak back legally and the global public walks the streets and boycotts the occupier to demonstrate against the genocidal state. In such a geocorpographic scene against the Palestinian Other, political powers take the world and Palestinian *ashlaa'* for granted, relegating it to a necropolitical, ontological, and epistemological grammar.

## The Psycho-Aesthetic and Rhetoric of Horror and Monstrosity Pillar

Today, the world can see all the social media coverage that shows the slaughtered bodies, the dead children, the naked and tortured men and women, the bombarded geography – all to reach "permanent security" for one entity, following over seventy-seven years of elimination and Nakba.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Noura Erakat, *Justice for Some* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019).

<sup>35</sup> Sherene Razack, *Dark Threats and White Knights: The Somalia Affair, Peacekeeping, and the New Imperialism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004); Sherene Razack, *Dying from Improvement: Inquests and Inquiries into Indigenous Deaths in Custody* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015); Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *Diacritics* 17, no. 2 (1987): 64–81; Suvendrini Perera, "They Give Evidence: Bodies, Borders, and the Disappeared," *Social Identities* 8, no. 3 (2002): 411–42; Denise Ferreira da Silva, "Toward a Black Feminist Poethics: The Quest(ion) of Blackness toward the End of the World," *Black Scholar* 44, no. 2 (2014): 81–97.

<sup>36</sup> Joseph Pugliese, "Geocorpographies of Torture," *ACRAWSA E-journal* 3, no. 1 (2007): 12.

<sup>37</sup> For more on the destruction of Gaza's built landscape, see Eyal Weizman et al., *A Cartography of Genocide: Israel's Conduct in Gaza since October 2023*, Forensic Architecture, updated 21 January 2025, <https://forensic-architecture.org/investigation/a-cartography-of-genocide>.

Today, it is spectacular. We all see it: burning people, flying bodily remains, dead and dying children, entire families erased. In addition, studies on modern warfare reveal *how the ruins and decaying rubble, the biological waste, and the dismantling of the health infrastructure together all cause severe diseases, including skin infections, that with time can take more lives than bombs do*. In Gaza today, the lethal combination of hunger, disease, displacement, and destruction, added to the loss of any sanitary conditions, has resulted in an increase of upper respiratory infections, meningitis, skin rashes, scabies, lice, chickenpox, and hepatitis. In Rafah, there is approximately one toilet for every 850 people and one shower for every 3,600 people, far exceeding the Sphere standards of twenty people per toilet and per shower.<sup>38</sup> Hunger alone weakens the body's defences and opens the door to disease, and malnutrition increases the risk of children dying. Furthermore, there are over 120,000 wounded who cannot receive medical treatment. Multiple examples from around the world show us that apartheid and settler colonialism negate the right to health, and dismantling such regimes of control are prerequisite for health justice. With its level of warfare and its health ramifications, Gaza is becoming a collective grave for slow agonizing death and overkillability.

What we see and witness aesthetically is similar to what feminist scholar and writer Anne McClintock conceptualized as “porno-tropics,” that is, “a fantastic magic lantern of the mind onto which Europe projected its forbidden sexual desires and fears.”<sup>39</sup> In the ongoing genocidal Nakba in Gaza, the porno-tropic aestheticized, feminized, and eroticized nature and the land is in the service of the colonial urge to penetrate and conquer. Under such an aesthetic and rhetoric, the mentality of the crime, the criminal, and those complicit exceed genocide, the “crime of crimes.”

The psychological horrors reveal not only ongoing accumulative trauma but, further, the agency of Palestinians in what I detect in their *lamlameh* (gathering) – the act of collecting and bringing together that which has been shredded – of their loved ones’ *ashlaa’*, as their decolonial way of teaching hope against dismemberment and despair.<sup>40</sup> Collecting the scattered body parts of their dead loved ones becomes the willful refusal to be erased and dismembered. It is a refusal to accept uprooting of remains, not just out of place, out of the body and land, but also out of the mind, the memory, and out of ontological existence. A Gazan father collects the remains, the *ashlaa’* of his children in plastic bags, crying and telling all those around him that these are the *ashlaa’* of his children, and a Gazan mother collects the remains of her child to make sure the child is buried as a whole and dignified: these acts allow Palestinian parents to specify the violence of the Zionist perpetrators, to assemble the scattered body parts back into being and humanity, to memorialize and stage colonial violence as a killing machine, and to defy the disappearance of their children into namelessness and uncountability.

The acts of *lamlameh*, the gathering of the *ashlaa’*, reveal how Gazan parents resist colonial brutality by freeing themselves from the coercive colonial system of killability

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<sup>38</sup> James Elder, *Gaza's Children: Trapped in a Cycle of Suffering*, UNICEF, 26 March 2024, <https://www.unicefusa.org/press/gazas-children-trapped-cycle-suffering>; Ghada Al-Jadba et al., *UNRWA at the Frontlines: Managing Health Care in Gaza during Catastrophe*, UNRWA, 13 February 2024, <https://www.unrwa.org/newsroom/official-statements/unrwa-frontlines-managing-health-care-gaza-during-catastrophe>.

<sup>39</sup> Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Context* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 21–2.

<sup>40</sup> Lara Sheehi and Stephen Sheehi, *Psychoanalysis under Occupation: Practicing Resistance in Palestine* (New York: Routledge, 2022).

and erasability. They are insisting on their wholeness and fullness, rather than conceding to their scatteredness and dismemberment. In those acts of embracing the *ashlaa'* and *lamlameh*, Gazan children's dismembered bodies do the work of defying the ongoing genocide, what indigenous scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson frames as the method of "embodied making and doing" or "presencing."<sup>41</sup> Though this genocide is absolute and spectacular overkilling, Palestinians face it with defiance, *lamlameh*, and re-vivifying *ashlaa'*, to insist on dignity and continuity while asserting forms of liveable sovereignty against the genocidal necropower. *Lamlameh* are acts of presence and presencing, of embracing, naming, disrupting the violent colonial order, of gathering power by producing a space of love, hugs, humanity, and breathability amidst genocidal death.

### Gaza: The Graveyard of the Legal Order

Is what is happening a genocide? According to Raz Segal, it is, and there is clear intent.<sup>42</sup> According to Darryl Li, by charging Israel with genocide, Palestinians and their allies are democratizing [the term's] power," "extricating genocide from a desiccated legalism" that serves the status quo and injecting it with an explicitly anticolonial politics."<sup>43</sup>

Amidst the trials to make sense of these overwhelming atrocities, all we witness is major failure to stop the ongoing genocide and the impotence and death of the international legal (and political) order. I challenge Genocide Studies to think about the features of the Israeli genocide against Palestinians. Analysing the colonial state's enduring commitment to violence, its utter annihilation of Indigenous Palestinians, and its engagement in overkill requires that we juxtapose it with the five pillars of Zionism. As in other settler colonial contexts, the legal definition of genocide affirms the (seemingly) bloodless legal regime that refuses to see Palestinian death and *ashlaa'* as juridical subjects.<sup>44</sup>

Building on the five pillars, we realize that what we are witnessing in Gaza is the deliberate targeting and destruction of each person and object: buildings, schools with children, hospitals, shelters, ambulances, journalists, doctors, educators, pregnant women, and children. The colonizers make all these calculations to kill and kill more. As Segal explains in "A Textbook Case of Genocide," Israel demonstrates its "explicit, open, and unashamed" intent to commit genocide, as defined by the 1948 UN Genocide Convention. But, away from the sociolegal jargon, engaging with Palestinian voices and ordeals leads me to stress the genocidal logic of the ongoing Nakba (النكبة الابادية المستمرة) that cannot be addressed with international conventions and legal interventions if the settler colonial Zionist entity continues to present itself as always a victim and never a genocidaire.

The nature of the settler state is embedded with a genocidal logic and ideology, from the multiple massacres during the 1948 Nakba to the military dispossessive regime that

<sup>41</sup> Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017).

<sup>42</sup> Raz Segal, "A Textbook Case of Genocide," *Jewish Currents*, 13 October 2023, <https://jewishcurrents.org/a-textbook-case-of-genocide>.

<sup>43</sup> Darryl Li, "The Charge of Genocide," *Dissent*, 18 January 2024, [https://www.dissentmagazine.org/online\\_articles/the-charge-of-genocide/](https://www.dissentmagazine.org/online_articles/the-charge-of-genocide/).

<sup>44</sup> For analysis of the US settler colony and its relation to California Indians, see Mark Minch-de Leon, *Indigenous Inhumanities*. See Pugliese for an analysis of Australian settler colonial relations.

imposed control and carcerality and prevented returnees from coming back to their homes, villages, and cities after their forced displacement, to the order by Israeli Defence Minister Yitzhak Rabin to “break the hands and legs” of Palestinians during the First Intifada (1987–93), to the Judaization of Jerusalem and the West Bank, to the apartheid regime, to the various wars on Gaza, and now an ongoing genocide funded by global empire and its dis/orders. When we examine this state, we further determine that, beyond the legal debate, the world must have a political, economic, and ethical international stand against the ongoing genocidal Nakba. If the Israeli state continues to speak in the language of “It is us or them” and “It is we who have the right to control the land biblically, Amalek-ly” and can erase the Palestinian Other politicolegally with securitized theologies, then the legal order is annulled. If the Zionist state maintains its necrological culture of “kill them, they are Amalek,” making sure Palestinians continue to be dismembered *ashlaa’* geographically and bodily and annihilated politically, with the economic support of Western powers, then law and international conventions will continue failing. The Israeli state is allowed to get away with war crimes, genocide, and crimes against humanity, so the entire legal order is in severe jeopardy. What I see today is exultation in the overkilling of Palestinians. International legal and political institutions are failing me as a Palestinian. The questions remain: What is Genocide Studies when its legal foundation disappears? And how does Genocide Studies remain true to its ethical principles in the face of genocide?

The fusion between “militaristic and theologized mass violence” and settler colonial genocidal geocorpographic logic/ideology, accompanied by Zionist racialized exclusivity, maintains the Israeli state as always a “victim” of violence, never a genocidaire. This fusion reduces Palestinian *ashlaa’* to a site of extraction of surplus value, when and while Palestinian living and dead bodies/flesh are registered as voids. When the Israeli colonial state singularizes itself as always “facing terrorism” and uses what historian Dirk Moses calls the permanent security” argument – that is, “a praxis in which ... civilians are targeted collectively and preventatively as security threats” – it requires the overkill in *ashlaa’* of Palestinians, always searching for moments and spaces, to kill and kill more.<sup>45</sup> Under such framing, the state defies any trial and thus drops any discussions around the legal term of genocidal “intent” – or any other trial to decide whether a genocide is taking place. But the knowledge produced by the voices of Palestinians troubles such a fusion. Their voices and witnessing speak about *ashlaa’* to defy it. They reveal the ongoing genocidal Nakba. They expose the moral bankruptcy of the world and the collusion of professional associations complicit with a mundane, socially mediated, and televised genocide.

The questions remain: when can the ongoing Nakba, the genocidal brutalities and mindset and the monstrous horror, end? How and in what way? What additional horrors lie in store for us as Palestinians? How can genocide scholars stay silent? With the scale of brutality and monstrosity of the Israeli settler state in Gaza, why call it “genocide” or “war crimes” without taking action to stop it and stop the production of *ashlaa’* and the ongoing Nakba? Under the logic and mindset of the settler colonial genocidal state pursuing deadly overkilling in Gaza, Palestinians are refusing what seems to be their one option: to become *ashlaa’* and to accept their death. Palestinians are resisting

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<sup>45</sup> A. Dirk Moses, *The Problems of Genocide: Permanent Security and the Language of Transgression* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 42.

their oppressor, refusing to disappear into physical and ontological nonbeing by embracing acts of *lamlameh*, gathering and elevating scattered *ashlaa'*, to hold proof of the continuity and life in Palestine, to signify their right to struggle for liberation, and to assert their selfhood, collectivity, and love to each other.

## Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

## Notes on Contributor

**Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian** is a Palestinian Jerusalemite feminist whose scholarship on the settler colonial state's brutality, unchilding, securitized and sacralized politics, state crime, law and society, and global feminist politics challenges epistemic violence. She is a Professor Extraordinarius, University of South Africa, and the Global Chair in Law, Queen Mary University of London. She is the author of numerous books, including *Militarization and Violence Against Women in Conflict Zones in the Middle East: The Palestinian Case Study* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), *Security Theology, Surveillance and the Politics of Fear* (Cambridge University Press 2015), and *Incarcerated Childhood and the Politics of Unchilding* (Cambridge University Press 2019). She has co-edited *Understanding Campus-Community Partnerships in Conflict Zones: Engaging Students for Transformative Change* (Palgrave Macmillan Press, 2019, with Dalya Yafa Markovich and Daphna Golan), *When Politics are Sacralized: Comparative Perspectives on Religious Claims and Nationalism* (Cambridge University Press, 2021, with Nadim N. Rouhana), *The Cunning of Gender Violence* (Duke University Press, 2023, with Lila Abu-Lughod and Rema Hammami), and a special issue of *State Crime Journal*, *Abolitionism, Settler Colonialism and State Crime* (2024, with Stephen Sheehi).