

Israel Killed Thousands of Children in Gaza. How Can So Many Israelis Remain Indifferent?

Monday 18 December 2023, by [HASS Amira](#) (Date first published: 18 December 2023).

For decades we've been brought up believing that only military force can ensure the state's survival, while denying rights to the Palestinians. That's just one of many sad answers to the question

The Gaza Strip is gradually being erased, along with its families, its people, its children, their smiles and laughter. What enables the majority of Jewish Israelis to support this systematic and mass erasure?

What enables them to see it as the only suitable response to [the massacre that Hamas and its accomplices perpetrated](#), to the military humiliation of Israel and to the indescribable suffering of the hostages, the wounded, the survivors, their families and the families of the hundreds killed?

Israel's military is erasing the streets of Gaza's cities and the alleys of its refugee camps. It's erasing Gaza's beach promenades, villages and its unexpected yet existing agricultural areas. It's erasing its cultural institutions, universities and archaeological sites.

A woman in Rafah in southern Gaza on Saturday. We Jews have assumed a monopoly on the suffering caused by the cruelty of the Other. Credit: Mohammed Abed/AFP

[Hamas' military infrastructure is being destroyed](#) and may be destroyed entirely. Thousands of its armed men are being killed and will be killed. But the organization will be rebuilt; it and its leaders will flourish in every community and place where the erasure of Gaza continues.

What enables the majority of Jewish Israelis to remain unshocked by the fact that in about two months [we've killed around 7,000 children](#) (a provisional figure) with the help of America's improved bombs?

What enables most of the Jews not to gasp in horror at the crowding of 1.8 million or 1.9 million people into about 120 square kilometers (46 square miles), a "safe area" that's constantly being bombed? What's preventing those Jewish Israelis from screaming when they hear about the thirst and hunger of 2.2 million Palestinian civilians and [the diseases spreading](#) due to the crowding, the water shortage and the out-of-action hospitals?

What enables this erasure and the slaying of children with both our active and passive participation? Here are some answers:

- For decades we've been educated to believe that only military force can ensure the state's survival

and ability to flourish, while denying rights to the Palestinian people.

- We've erased any "context" – incitement has made this word a synonym for support of Hamas and justification of its horrors.
- We Jews have assumed a monopoly on the suffering caused by the cruelty of the Other.
- We've chosen not to look at the unbearable pictures of trembling Palestinian children, faces gray with dust, being rescued from between bombed concrete walls. And there's no way of knowing who's more fortunate: those children or the ones who were killed.

A woman and two children in Rafah on Saturday. We remember every massacre of Israelis by Palestinians. We forget every massacre of Palestinians by Israelis. Credit: Mohammed Abed/AFP

- Every mass or gradual killing that we've been carrying out against the Palestinians for years, every theft, humiliation and abuse passes through thousands of media, psychological and academic filters. The sifted product is our conviction that the Palestinians are better off than the Somalis or Syrians, so they shouldn't complain.
- We remember every massacre of Israelis by Palestinians. We forget every massacre of Palestinians by Israelis.
- For decades we've gotten used to living in comfort while five minutes away Israel (in other words, us) demolishes Palestinian homes and builds for Jews, channels water to Jews and makes Palestinians go thirsty. All the rest is written in the reports of the rights groups HaMoked, B'Tselem and Adalah.
- For decades we've been ignoring the "moderate" Palestinians' warning that the continuous grab of freedom and land and the settlers' violence – assisted by the state and inspired by its violence – narrow their children's horizons and generate despair and faith in arms only and revenge.
- We've embraced an essentialist worldview: The Palestinians are terrorists because that's the way they are. They were born with genes for hating us – the offspring of Roman Emperor Titus and the pogromists of East Europe's [Khmelnitsky Uprising](#) of the 17th century.
- We're convinced that we're a democracy, even though for 56 years we've been ruling over millions of subjects without civil rights, controlling their land, money and economy.
- We have profound racist contempt for the Palestinians, which we developed to justify, both cognitively and psychologically, our trampling over them.

Medics tend to children injured during Israeli bombardment at Nasser hospital in Khan Yunis on the southern Gaza Strip on December 16, 2023. Credit: MAHMUD HAMS - AFP

- We've been in denial of Palestinian history and the rootedness of Palestinian existence between the river and the sea.
- The erasure of Gaza is possible because since 1994 we have deliberately missed the opportunity – offered to us by the Palestinians – to shed some of our traits as a dispossessing and settling entity and let them have a state on 22 percent of the area west of the Jordan River (including Gaza). [I wrote in July 2021](#) that "in all the heat of the talk about [apartheid](#), a dynamic, active and dangerous dimension of it – the Jewish settler colonialism – has become dulled and blunted.

"According to the ideology and policies of Jewish settler colonialism, the Palestinians are superfluous. In short, it is possible, worthwhile and desirable to live without the Palestinians in this country between the river and the sea. Their existence here is conditional, dependent on our wishes and our goodwill – a matter of time.

"The ideology of 'superfluosness' is a poison that spreads especially when the process of settler colonialism is at its height. ... Settler colonialism is a continuous process of grabbing land, distorting historical borders, reshaping them and then expelling indigenous peoples."

I referred to the "superfluosness" of the Palestinians in the West Bank and warned about the intentions to expel them. I assumed then that the viewing of Gazans as superfluous sufficed with severing them from their people and their families on the other side of the Erez checkpoint that separates Gaza from the rest of the land (Israel and the West Bank).

But now the "superfluosness" is being reflected in expulsion, disguised as voluntary under the shelling. It's being reflected in the physical erasure of the Gazans, and in plans to return Jewish settlers to Gaza. Woe to them and woe to us.

Amira Hass

P.S.

• Haaretz. Dec 18, 2023 1:09 pm IST:
<https://www.haaretz.com/opinion/2023-12-18/ty-article-opinion/.premium/israel-killed-thousands-of-children-in-gaza-how-can-so-many-israelis-remain-indifferent/0000018c-788c-d55c-a7cc-fb8edb100000>