

From Coexistence to Genocide: The Systematic Destruction of Palestine

In the 19th century, Palestine under Ottoman rule was a beacon of intercommunal harmony. Muslims, Christians, and Jews - approximately 25,000 Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews among a largely Arab population - coexisted in cities like Jerusalem, Hebron, and Jaffa. They shared markets, neighborhoods, and cultural traditions, with the Ottoman millet system granting minorities like Jews protected status. While minor tensions surfaced, violent conflict was rare, and social bonds often transcended faith. This fragile peace was obliterated by a colonial project that prioritized European Zionist ambitions over the indigenous Palestinian majority, culminating in 77 years of dispossession, apartheid, and genocide.

The Zionist movement, formalized by Theodor Herzl at the 1897 Zionist Congress, declared Palestine the target for a Jewish state in 1899, driven by European antisemitism and colonial hubris. Small settlements, funded by European capital, sprouted across Palestine, displacing local farmers through land purchases from absentee Ottoman landlords. The revival of Hebrew as a modern language cemented a separatist identity, alienating the existing Jewish communities integrated with Arabs. By 1917, the Balfour Declaration - engineered by Zionist lobbyist Baron Rothschild - saw Britain's Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour promise Palestine, a land he had no right to give, for a Jewish homeland, ignoring the Arab majority's rights and aspirations.

The 1930s saw further escalation with the Haavara Agreement, a chilling pact between Zionist groups and Nazi Germany. It funneled 60,000 German Jews and their assets to Palestine in exchange for German goods. As Jewish immigration surged to 450,000 by 1939, Zionist paramilitaries like Irgun and Lehi unleashed terror. Their bombings, like the 1946 King David Hotel attack killing 91, and assassinations of British and Arab targets made the British Mandate ungovernable. Britain's retreat in 1947 led to the UN's Partition Plan, a grossly unjust scheme that ignited the Nakba and set the stage for decades of Palestinian suffering.

The Unfairness of the UN Partition Plan

The 1947 UN Partition Plan (Resolution 181) was a colonial carve-up that defied fairness and self-determination. Despite Palestinians comprising 67% of the population (1.2 million) and Jews 33% (600,000), the plan allocated 56% of Palestine's land to a Jewish state, including fertile coastal areas and key economic hubs like Jaffa and Haifa. Palestinians, who owned 94% of the land and had lived there for centuries, were relegated to 43% - fragmented, less arable territories in the West Bank and Gaza. The plan ignored the demographic reality: Jews owned less than 7% of the land and were a minority in every district except Jaffa. Jerusalem, a shared holy city, was proposed as an international zone, disre-

garding Palestinian claims. The Arab majority rejected the plan as a violation of their rights, while Zionist leaders accepted it as a stepping stone to greater territorial control, as later evidenced by their expansion beyond the allotted borders. The UN, dominated by Western powers, imposed this partition without consulting Palestinians, reflecting colonial arrogance and prioritizing Zionist aspirations over indigenous sovereignty.

The Nakba and Its Legacy

In 1948, Israel's declaration of statehood unleashed the Nakba - "catastrophe" in Arabic. Over 700,000 Palestinians, half the Arab population, were forcibly expelled or fled in terror as Zionist militias razed over 500 villages. Massacres like Deir Yassin, where over 100 civilians were slaughtered, cemented fear. Palestinians were driven to Gaza, the West Bank, and refugee camps in Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria, barred from returning. This ethnic cleansing, meticulously planned by figures like Yosef Weitz, a Jewish National Fund official who in 1940 declared, "There is no room for both peoples in this country... The only solution is a Palestine... without Arabs," laid the foundation for Israel's apartheid state. Weitz's vision of forced "transfer" shaped the Nakba's brutality and continues to echo in Palestinian dispossession.

Dispossession and Displacement in the West Bank

Since Israel's 1967 occupation of the West Bank, dispossession has been relentless. Over 700,000 Israeli settlers now live in illegal settlements, built on stolen Palestinian land, fragmenting the West Bank into disconnected enclaves. Israel's policies - land confiscation, home demolitions, and restrictive permits - have displaced tens of thousands. According to B'Tselem, over 20,000 Palestinian homes have been demolished since 1967, often under pretexts like lacking permits, which Israel rarely grants. In areas like the Jordan Valley and East Jerusalem, entire communities face eviction; for example, Masafer Yatta's 1,000 residents are threatened with removal to expand military zones. Settlement expansion, backed by Israeli law and military protection, has seized over 40% of West Bank land, with Palestinians confined to 165 "islands" under tight control. Checkpoints, roadblocks, and the separation wall - deemed illegal by the International Court of Justice in 2004 - sever families, farmland, and livelihoods, rendering Palestinian life untenable. This systematic theft, coupled with the denial of building rights, forces displacement while entrenching apartheid.

Settler Violence in the West Bank

Israeli settler violence in the West Bank is a daily terror, enabled by state complicity. Settlers, often armed and shielded by Israeli forces, attack Palestinian farmers, shepherds, and villages, aiming to drive them off their land. In 2024 alone, the UN documented over 1,200 settler attacks, including arson, vandalism, and physical assaults. In villages like Huwara and Qusra, settlers have torched homes, olive groves, and livestock, with incidents like the 2023 Huwara pogrom leaving one Palestinian dead and hundreds injured. Israeli soldiers frequently stand by or intervene against Palestinians defending themselves. B'Tselem reports that settlers, backed by military outposts, have created "no-go zones" for

Palestinians, seizing thousands of acres through violence. Extremist settler groups, like the Hilltop Youth, openly aim to expel Palestinians, emboldened by government figures like Bezalel Smotrich, who oversees settlement policy and has called for Palestinian “subjugation.” This violence, rarely prosecuted, is a tool of ethnic cleansing, making Palestinian existence precarious.

Genocidal Rhetoric and Actions

Israeli leaders’ rhetoric has long dehumanized Palestinians, justifying atrocities. Yosef Weitz’s 1940 call for an Arab-free Palestine was echoed decades later by figures like Ovadia Yosef Eitan, a former general, who in 1983 likened Palestinians to “drugged cockroaches in a bottle,” a vile metaphor for their containment and extermination. More recently, in October 2023, Defense Minister Yoav Gallant imposed a “complete siege” on Gaza, declaring, “No electricity, no food, no fuel... We are fighting human animals.” Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, advocating for Gaza’s total destruction, stated in 2023 that “erasing Gaza” was necessary, endorsing starvation and bombardment. These statements, paired with actions like the blockade and relentless airstrikes, align with the UN’s definition of genocide: deliberate acts to destroy a group. The Jerusalem Flag March, an annual event since 1967, sees thousands of Israeli ultranationalists, including settlers, chant “Death to Arabs” through East Jerusalem, a ritual of hate protected by police. In 2024, marchers attacked Palestinian shops and journalists, with no significant repercussions, normalizing genocidal sentiment.

Gaza’s Ongoing Genocide

Gaza, a 365-square-kilometer prison for 2 million, faces unrelenting horror. Since October 2023, Israel’s military has killed over 60,000 Palestinians - 70% women and children - per Gaza health ministry estimates. The blockade, tightened by Gallant and Smotrich’s siege, has starved 80% of Gazans, with 1.8 million facing acute food insecurity (UN, 2025). The Gaza Humanitarian Foundation’s aid sites, established in 2025, are death traps: over 743 Palestinians killed and 4,891 injured, often by Israeli gunfire and shelling, while seeking food. Amnesty International and Doctors Without Borders call these acts potential war crimes, with the UN labeling Israel’s starvation policy genocidal. Hospitals, schools, and refugee camps lie in ruins, with 90% of Gaza’s infrastructure destroyed. The savagery - children shot, families buried under rubble, and crowds mowed down - reflects a calculated intent to erase a people.

Conclusion

From 19th-century coexistence to today’s genocide, Palestine’s story is one of colonial theft, betrayal, and unrelenting cruelty. The UN Partition Plan’s injustice, the Nakba’s ethnic cleansing, and the West Bank’s ongoing dispossession and settler violence form a continuum of oppression. Genocidal rhetoric from Weitz to Gallant, amplified by “Death to Arabs” chants, fuels a system that thrives on Palestinian suffering. Gaza’s slaughter, with over 60,000 dead, is not just a tragedy but a crime against humanity, enabled by global silence. The Palestinian struggle demands not just remembrance but justice.