



Opinions | Israel-Palestine conflict

## Erasing Palestine

*What is happening in Palestine can no longer be described as genocide, or even ethnic cleansing. It is beyond mass extermination – it is total erasure.*

**Omar Suleiman**

Imam Omar Suleiman is an American Muslim scholar and theologically driven activist for human rights.

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This picture taken from Israel's southern city of Sderot shows a smoke plume erupting during Israeli bombardment in the northern Gaza Strip on October 19, 2023 [Jack Guez/AFP]

As the siege and bombardment of Gaza continues at full force, killing hundreds each day, maiming many more and [wiping entire families out](#) of the civil registry, the international community is still watching idly by. The global conversation on the assault on Gaza is shifting towards the annexation of yet another part of historic Palestine by Israel, with countries around the world rushing not to prevent the injustice but to ensure Palestinians made into refugees as a result won't end up coming their way.

Today, the fear of what comes next is looming larger for Palestinians than the cruelty of the world's apparent indifference to their suffering.

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This time, the Nakba is being televised, and it has a stench of finality to it. What is happening in Palestine can no longer be described as genocide or even ethnic cleansing. It is beyond mass extermination – it is total erasure.

Alongside the deranged and morally rotten military campaign to extinguish the lives of innocent Palestinian civilians – most of whom are women and [children](#) – is the equally if not more sinister campaign to entirely erase their identity.

Open Apple, Google or any other digital map. Type “Palestine”. You won't find it. You will only find Israel. If you're lucky, you may be directed to a small patchwork of what is called “Palestinian Territories” firmly embedded inside Israel lest anyone mistakenly think it is an independent nation-state. And of course, you will find nowhere on any map the keyword that precedes Palestinian Territories to lay bare the ugly, but necessary and harrowing truth: “Occupied.”

Every single Palestinian alive today has had either the brutal experience of being rendered stateless and/or homeless, or waking up to the reality that the homeland of their parents is apparently fictional. I will never forget the experience as a young boy born and raised in Louisiana when my mom had to explain to me why my second-grade teacher said “Palestine doesn't exist.” Suddenly all the maps, flags, pictures, culture, and even old coins from prior to 1948 that had “Palestine” written on them were supposedly a lie. This, even though my father is five years older than the state of Israel. Everything about us is supposedly non-existent.

It's not just the Palestinian people or the name of the country that's disappearing, but the word Palestine itself. Palestine is being deliberately erased from our consciousness and discourse, during war and even in peace.

The [Abraham Accords](#), the supposed blockbuster deal brokered by the United States to normalise relations between Arab states and Israel, somehow manages to exclude the main aggrieved party: the population of Palestine. One would assume that the plight of the Palestinians, which has supposedly been the single biggest impediment to peace between Arab states and Israel, would have made the Palestinian people a critical – if not the central – stakeholder in such a monumental deal. Yet, as far as the Abraham Accords are concerned, the Palestinians are non-existent.

And now, the current genocidal campaign being waged by the occupying state of Israel against Palestinians is being universally – and erroneously – described as “a war between Israel and Hamas”. Somehow the Palestinian people, who have been subjected to Israeli occupation and oppression for 75 years before October 7, no longer matter. This sinister public relations move is deeply problematic for two reasons.

First, it allows for a simplistic story of good vs evil, where Israel takes on the role of the peace-loving, civilised democracy minding its own business and Hamas the inexplicably evil and barbaric militia group – decorated with all the anti-Muslim trimmings and tropes imaginable – that attacks it out of the blue. This despite the fact that according to Human Rights Watch, Amnesty and even numerous Israeli human rights organisations, Israel is in fact an apartheid state and illegal occupier that has implemented the most inhumane open-air incarceration system on earth. Israel may have dozens of politi-

cal parties, but the oft-repeated claim that it is the only “democracy” in the Middle East cannot be taken seriously when its veteran prime minister, who is embattled with corruption charges, can undermine the judiciary and appoint to his government senior officials that openly refer to themselves as [fascists](#).

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Second, and far more disturbingly, by strategically erasing Palestine from the narrative, Israel entirely sidesteps any awkward questions about the attacks of October 7 being linked to its more than 70 years of occupying the Palestinian people.

The simple truth is that the word “Palestine” is deeply damaging to Israel’s image on the international stage. The word “Palestine” carries with it so much universally recognised victimhood and so many stories of oppression, subjugation and genocide that when it is included in the conversation, Israel simply cannot dispute, however desperately it tries to, its crimes. The moral weight of Palestine is so heavy that every time the word is uttered, you can hear the deflating hiss from Israel’s PR bubble. No amount of beach resorts and tech unicorns can wipe the permanent stain of Palestinian blood off Israel’s hands.

Which is why the only way to get rid of the heavy moral burden of Palestine, Israel seems to think, is to literally get rid of “Palestine” altogether, and that includes totally erasing it from the map. And yet, it is Israel that stands in front of the United Nations, year after year, pleading to be protected from the “barbarian” nations that supposedly wish to erase it from the map. The irony may be hysterical, but the hypocrisy is real.

***The views expressed in this article are the author’s own and do not necessarily reflect Al Jazeera’s editorial stance.***



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