

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF SOLIDARITY WITH THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE

Anatomy of erasure: The unmaking of Palestine



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“The project of settler colonialism eventually was a simple one. Colonisers wanted the land and everything else the Indigenous people are burdened with daily, the legal or policy or economic or social discrimination the residential schools or gender violence are all part of the machinery that was designed, to create a perfect crime, a crime where the victims were unable to see or name the crime itself as a crime.”

— Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, an Indigenous scholar from Turtle Island, known to us as Canada.

Every time I open a YouTube video, it’s there—ads asking my help, a Palestinian mother, a child, sometimes a girl—framed by rubble. They start to talk: “Don’t skip.” Or softer: “Skip if you must.”

I skip. Quickly. After dealing with news all day when my midnights march in I feel angry, I don’t know at whom, I feel shame, for not listening to the mothers of ruin. I tell myself it’s exhaustion. I tell myself I need mindless joy, a brief escape. Everyone has their reasons, I suppose. I know why the algorithm sends me these, I know if I skip enough times it’ll stop.

Today is the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. It was established by the United Nations General Assembly in 1977. The interesting thing is the date was chosen as it marks the anniversary of the UN General Assembly’s adoption of Resolution 181 in 1947, which proposed the partition of Palestine into separate Jewish and Arab states. The decision that started all this.

The war since then spiralled, seemingly merging into genocide. Lands, as Edward Said once described, “lived on and owned by others,” are stripped away under the guise of right, erasing histories etched into the soil. The denial from the West is not accidental, it is deliberate, woven into the fabric of imperial complicity. What unfolds is not chaos, but a design—a slow, systematic unmaking of a people.

Using law as a weapon of subjugation, Palestine has become a grim textbook: “Genocide for Dummies,” an oral chronicle of annihilation. In Bethlehem, Eid, Christmas, and Hanukkah now share a shroud—wrapped in *kafon*, the white cloth of the dead. Last year, Christmas was cancelled in Gaza, and oh goody another one is coming up!

Statistics lay bare the scale of a tragedy, yet I am exhausted by the endless numbers—the steady, grim count of lives lost as time in



FILE PHOTO: REUTERS

A Palestinian man carries a wounded girl at the site of Israeli strikes, in Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip on October 14, 2023.

Palestine flows only to measure death. What’s the point of anything anymore, if the slaughter of thousands of children cannot extinguish the flames of violence? Must it fall upon Palestinian mothers to cry the fire away with their tears?

Since October 7, 17,000 children have been killed, including 700 infants under the age of one, as reported by the UN. What do you call it if not extermination? When 700 babies, still learning to coo, are killed before they can crawl—how do you process that? What do you do with 17,000 childless mothers? How do they carry on knowing that their crawling babies were deemed dangerous to an Israeli existence?

Nothing exemplifies gross human rights violations more starkly than the reality of Palestinian women, stripped of their dignity and subjected to unimaginable horrors. But where is the West’s indignation now? These

same voices, so quick to condemn and paint Muslim men as oppressors who apparently all cover their women in burqas, are deafeningly silent when Palestinian women are raped, murdered, and buried in shrouds. Is it more palatable to drape them in *kafons* than burqas? But I guess one has to be in a hurry to judge, but slow to act when the perpetrators of violence do not fit their convenient narrative of barbarism.

spreading like a virus. Mass arrests without charge or trial—because what greater crime exists than being Palestinian? That alone is charge enough. This isn’t collateral damage; it’s sacrifice on the altar of supremacy. And chaos, as we know, is a ladder.

In March 2024, Francesca Albanese, an international lawyer and expert in Middle Eastern human rights serving as the UN Special Rapporteur on Palestinian human

I shouldn’t have to seek the West’s condemnation, nor wait for permission to call the deaths what they are—genocide! I shouldn’t need anyone’s approval to count my own loss. I can see with my own eyes that my mothers and brothers are gone. Yet this is the world we live in, where the veto-wielding powers must grant me the right to mourn my unbloomed sisters, my brothers who will never fulfil their potential.

Under the scorching Gazan sun, a body decomposes—does it rot slowly or swiftly? How many passersby stop to look each day? Isn’t it “nice,” this grotesque ease with which a human is reduced to an “it,” stripped of names?

This abandonment is emblematic of a world that thrives on deliberate chaos—a human-made catastrophe designed with precision. Patterns of violence replicate geometrically,

rights since 2022, presented her fourth report to the United Nations, titled, “Anatomy of a Genocide.” Supported by three prominent Israeli scholars of genocide and the Holocaust—Professors Raz Segal, Amos Goldberg, and Omar Bartov—the report concluded that Israel is committing genocide. The challenge lies not merely in acknowledging that genocide is taking place but in proving it to a world that demands evidence while turning a blind eye to the atrocities unfolding.

Simply labelling these acts as “crimes against humanity” is insufficient now, that term has echoed ineffectively since 1949, long before the recent surge in violence.

The erasure of suffering is no accident, it is essential to sustaining the colonial and imperial systems. If we cannot see it, we cannot confront it. This is not just a genocide—it is a settler-colonial genocide, built on breaking

the people to take the land. And yet, for those of us who have been reduced to “it” in the past, it is all too easy to see the pattern. The machinery of power dehumanises and disposes, ensuring that many more will become “it” in the future under the guise of neoliberal progress. The erasure is the weapon, the silence is its accomplice, and the land its ultimate prize.

Francesca said accurately in a lecture that contrary to the somewhat detached and logical Western mind thinking land is where people live, to the Easterners the land is who they are.

Capitalism, in its imperial form, doesn’t just exploit, it erases. It forces us into the conditioned acceptance of the unthinkable—turning atrocities into mere statistics, suffering into background noise.

And as I think all struggles are interconnected, bound by the same system, I can look at my own country and trace the parallels. I see and understand the pain of Palestinians—one once colonised to another still enduring the chains of colonisation.

Holocaust survivor Primo Levi said that at the root of everything is “a colossal cowardice which masks itself as worrying virtue, love of country and faith in an idea.” What should be the idea of our future? Standing in the Global South, can we dream that future for ourselves?

A murderer is an individual, but genocide? Genocide is systemic, calculated, a machine of annihilation. And there’s no parallel to the devastation of Palestine in world history. Leaders change, names shift, but policies remain the same. And I see no difference between Trump, Biden, and Obama when it comes to the issue of Palestine. It’s all a revolving door of empty talk, their “concern” wrapped in pretty language that means nothing. The truth is clear: words are powerless against the weight of history when action never follows.

As Gaza has been turned into an Israeli wasteland, how do you even begin to mourn 17,000 children? I can barely process the loss of the children killed in our July-August uprising. All these lives stolen—how do you grieve without being consumed by guilt? I feel it—an unbearable, gnawing guilt that cuts deeper than the crashing sadness I once felt for Palestine. It’s more than grief now. I feel complicit, part of the machine that lets this happen. This survivor’s guilt is a weight I can’t shed, it’s not washable and is pointless.

I’m done trying to process any of it anymore. We’re already drowning in this endless saga of death that defines our time. So, let’s just let Ghassan Kanafani speak for us, shall we?

“I wish children didn’t die. I wish they would be temporarily elevated to the skies Until the war ends. Then they would return home safe. And when their parents ask them: ‘Where were you?’ They’d say: ‘We were playing with the clouds.’”

16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM AGAINST GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

When digital space becomes a paradise for harassers



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In the heart of Digital Bangladesh, where technology promises progress and connectivity, a darker reality lurks in the shadows of social media platforms and messaging apps. Women across the country often face digital violence with devastating consequences that ripple through their lives, families, and society at large.

Farzana Sithi, who became a familiar face during the July-August uprising for raising her voice against the authoritarian Awami League regime, faced severe cyberbullying in what appears to be a targeted attempt to discredit her advocacy. “They posted trimmed clips of me and turned them into weapons against me. While the officer present at the scene received a medal for ‘handling the situation well,’ I became the target of relentless online attacks, trolling and bullying,” she recounted. The scale of the assault was staggering. “I discovered 117 fake accounts using my name and photos on Facebook. They used AI to create deepfake videos of me that gained millions of views,” she shared. The most disturbing part of it was that the majority of those attacking her—questioning her character, clothes, and her very existence—were other women.

Her experience demonstrates a disturbing pattern where online violence is deliberately used to intimidate women activists and distort public narratives around their contributions to social movements.

Recent statistics paint a disturbing picture: Since 2016, gender-based case consideration has shown that 70 percent of women have faced cyberbullying, while the number for men has been 30 percent so far. A 2019 study published in the *Asian Journal of Psychiatry* found that cyberbully victimisation affects up to 55 percent of users globally, with

Bangladesh showing a concerning 32 percent prevalence rate among youth aged 14-17 years. More troubling still, 27.3 percent of these victims developed psychiatric disorders, with major depressive disorder being significantly higher among victims compared to non-victims.

Moreover, fear of victim-blaming often prevents women from seeking justice in cybercrime cases. Dhaka University student Promiti Sankar Atri recently discovered that an unknown person had accessed her private social media photos and created a fake account to distribute these personal images without her consent. When encouraged to pursue legal action, Promiti’s response revealed a deeper systemic issue, “I am going to get blamed for it and harassed with inappropriate questions instead. It would be of no help.” Her hesitation reflects a common predicament faced by female victims of digital harassment, who must weigh the trauma of their privacy violation against the potential for further victimisation within the legal system. Recent data from the Police Cyber Support for Women, which was formed in 2020, reveals the scope of institutional failure. Between 2020 and April 2023, the unit received 34,605 complaints, with 26,592 from women. Alarming, 8,947 victims explicitly refused to pursue legal action, indicating a deep distrust in the system.

Fighting the fear and considering the hassle, when victims do pursue legal help, it often leads to dead ends. Farjana Akter, a Dhaka-based writer, shared her experience from 2022, “When I received explicit content from someone using their real account, I decided to take legal action. But the system seemed designed to discourage victims.” Police initially refused to file her complaint

due to jurisdictional issues, and even after she could register the case, it was an endless loop of hollow assurances. After her three-month pursuit of justice, the system’s sluggishness essentially helped the perpetrator escape accountability.

Digital violence against women is increasingly amplified by coordinated campaigns of misinformation and disinformation. Initial harassment often



VISUAL: DEEANA MAQSOOD

escalates with the creation and spread of false narratives, manipulation of content, mass distribution through fake accounts, and the use of deepfake technology to create compromising content. Deepfakes pose significant security risks across international, national, and personal domains, potentially destabilising political environments, manipulating elections, and disproportionately harming women through non-consensual explicit content.

According to ActionAid’s 2022 report, the consequences are severe: 65.07 percent of victims suffered psychological trauma, including depression and anxiety; 42.79 percent lost confidence in online expression; and nearly a quarter experienced a devastating loss of self dignity.

The existing legal framework reveals critical gaps in addressing digital violence against women. There are no clear definitions for various forms of online harassment, making it difficult for victims to prove their cases. Additionally, the requirement for victims to file complaints in person, coupled with the absence of anonymous reporting mechanisms, creates significant barriers for women who fear social stigma. The

absence of specific timelines for investigation and prosecution means cases can drag on indefinitely, leading many victims to abandon their pursuit of justice. Perhaps most critically, there are no provisions for emergency protection orders or immediate content removal, leaving victims vulnerable to ongoing harassment while their cases slowly move through the system.

Addressing digital violence and creating safer digital spaces require a comprehensive, innovative approach that goes beyond traditional legal frameworks. Legal reform must begin by reclassifying cyberbullying as a cognisable offence and establishing specialised cybercrime units with gender-sensitive training. Fast-track courts for digital violence cases and stricter penalties for

creating and spreading deepfake content are essential steps forward.

A mandatory AI ethics training programme should be established, requiring social media and tech platform employees to undergo rigorous certification in digital consent and gender-based harassment prevention. Simultaneously, the government should develop a unified, encrypted national reporting platform powered by advanced AI tools capable of detecting and flagging potential harassment patterns, with blockchain technology ensuring evidence preservation.

Education must be a cornerstone of this strategy, integrating comprehensive digital safety and consent modules into the curricula from primary to tertiary levels. These programmes should teach responsible digital citizenship, focusing on understanding consent, recognising harassment, and promoting respectful online interactions. Complementing this, a corporate accountability framework would impose legal penalties on social media platforms that fail to respond to harassment reports promptly, with mandatory quarterly transparency reports and the establishment of a national digital ombudsman office.

To support victims, the government should create a tech-enabled support network featuring counselling resources, anonymous support groups, and real-time legal consultation channels. Free digital security audits and protection services would provide immediate assistance to those experiencing online harassment. Additionally, international collaboration will be crucial, with cross-border mechanisms for tracking and reporting digital violence, enabling the sharing of technological solutions and best practices across different jurisdictions.

The promise of Digital Bangladesh cannot be fully realised until digital spaces are safe for all citizens, regardless of gender. As we advance technologically, we must ensure that progress doesn’t come at the cost of women’s safety and dignity in the digital landscape. This requires not just institutional change, but a fundamental shift in how society views and responds to digital violence.