

CAPITALISM AND GENOCIDE

Mathias Clivaz and Hugues Poltier. October 15, 2024.

1. In 2007, Israeli lawyer Ram Caspi published the following in the Tel Aviv-based financial daily *Globes*: “Neither ground invasion nor air attack, but strangulation... [...] the Israeli government will take steps to cut Gaza off from essential resources such as fuel, water, electricity, telephone, and will prevent anyone from providing them.” (quoted by Gideon Levy in *Haaretz*, 10.6.2007) The election of Hamas that year – which Israel supported in order to oust Fatah – provides a ready-made pretext for initiating a blockade of the Gaza Strip. Slowly suffocated, GDP per capita falls by 27% and unemployment rises by 49% between 2007 and 2018.
2. But the stranglehold is only just beginning.¹ There are signs, both rhetorical and institutional, of what is coming. In 2009, Benjamin Netanyahu becomes Prime Minister of Israel, a position he will hold for eleven years, then again from 2022; and on several occasions he aims to make the Palestinians an *abject* people, for example when he blames them in a speech in 2015 of having suggested the Final Solution to Hitler. But it's really with the election of Donald Trump to the White House in 2017 that everything accelerates. In obviously coordinated moves, the USA recognizes Jerusalem as Israel's capital and transfers its embassy there in May 2018 and, two months later, the Knesset approves a constitutional law that ratifies the settlement process in the West Bank, and declares Jerusalem the “whole and unified” capital of Israel. The two-State solution has been buried.
3. The next stage is to secure impunity and consolidate power. A step in this direction is taken with the signing of the Abraham Accords in 2020, again

¹ Let's remind ourselves that its origins lie in European colonialism. In 1916, anticipating the fall of the Ottoman Empire, the British and French signed the Sykes-Picot agreements, dividing up the territories of the Middle East. In 1917, British Foreign Secretary A. Balfour declared in an open letter his government's support for the establishment in Palestine, then under British mandate, of “a national home for the Jewish people”. The State of Israel was established in 1948, largely as a result of the Second World War and the Holocaust. But even before the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, and on a massive scale during the war, the creation of the State of Israel was achieved through the forced displacement of over 700,000 Palestinian Arabs – the *Nakba* – from Palestine. This population, whose descendants live mainly in neighbouring countries, now numbers around 6 million. What would happen if Palestinian refugees were allowed to return home to a Palestinian state? Since 1948, Israel has been doing everything in its power to prevent this from happening.

under the patronage of D. Trump: peace agreements between Israel and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), followed by normalization of diplomatic relations with Morocco and Sudan. Then in 2022, Israel and the UAE sign a free-trade agreement. The stakes are clear: normalization-pacification of Israel's relations with its Arab neighbors, *bypassing the Palestinian question*. — European companies are not to be outdone. A study² by the coalition *Don't Buy Into Occupation* showed that between January 2020 and August 2023, 776 European financial institutions (including BNP Paribas, HSBC, Deutsche Bank and Société Générale, to name just the top four creditors) had dealings with 51 companies actively involved in Israeli settlements, for a total investment of \$164.2 billion, and a stake of \$144.7 billion in shares and bonds. This despite the fact that, under international law, such investments in occupied territories are illegal. — The American tech giants are there also. In 2022, Amazon and Google signed lucrative contracts with Tel Aviv for the construction of data centers and with the army to manage their cloud operations, including maintaining surveillance data on most Palestinians living in Gaza, data that is being used by the AI models that determine who should be targeted for attacks.³

4. A transnational network of capital has thus been set up, whose interest lies in the growth of the Israeli State and its regional supremacy. This in turn involves the arms trade: Israel, whose defense budget is the highest on the planet as a proportion of GDP, is enabling the US military-industrial complex – which supplies 69% of its weapons – to make record profits in 2023 (the conflict in Ukraine being the other major market that year). Germany is not to be outdone, since the country supplies around 30% of Israel's weapons. The United Kingdom, Italy, France and other countries are also part of this security-capitalist alliance, to which are added all the companies that export “dual-use” and consumer goods to Israel, have industrial, commercial and educational partnerships with Israel — and buy its surveillance systems.

² The study is accessible on the website on the FIDH, which is part of the coalition, https://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/2023_dbio_iii_report_11_december_2023.pdf.

³ Y. Abraham, "'Order from Amazon': How tech giants are storing mass data for Israel's war", <https://www.972mag.com/cloud-israeli-army-gaza-amazon-google-microsoft/>, 4.8.2024.

5. In the meantime, the hands have tightened around the victim's neck: walls have been erected between 2017 and 2021 around the entire perimeter of the Gaza Strip, now a hermetically sealed open-air prison. The strangler waits, observing the effects of asphyxiation⁴ on his victim. The victim calls for help, but no one comes. Others sound the alarm, but no one listens. So the victim screams and struggles. And Israel will conclude – and with Israel all the countries of the Global North who have a hand in the operation – that Gaza is threatening Israel.
6. On October 7, 2023, 1,139 Israelis are killed by Hamas and other Palestinian groups. These included around 800 civilians. Atrocities were committed, with Hamas guilty of war crimes. Israelis are also killed under the “friendly fire” of the Israeli army, whose military doctrine aims to prevent hostage-taking. Hamas took 252 Israeli hostages captive, with the probable aim of exchanging them for the more than 1,300 Palestinians then being held in administrative detention (imprisoned without charge or trial) in Israeli prisons. But the Israeli scriptwriters have already written the rest of the story: Israel accuses Hamas of posing an “existential threat to Israel” and invokes the right to defend itself. Never mind that Hamas has no means of destroying Israel, and that in its 2017 Charter it declared itself in favor of a two-State solution on the 1967 borders.
7. From October 7, 2023, the declarations of genocidal intent are explicit. B. Netanyahu declared on October 12: “We will fight these savage beasts with all our might, destroy them and wipe them off the face of the earth”. Israel's president, I. Herzog, on October 13: “It is a whole nation that is responsible. The rhetoric about citizens not being involved, not being aware, is absolutely false.” A. Dichter, Minister of Agriculture, on November 12: “We are now carrying out the Gaza Nakba”. And it will continue. B. Smotrich, Minister of Finance, in May 2024: “There is no job half done. Rafah, Deir al-Balah, Nousseirat – total destruction.” The organization *Law for Palestine* has listed more than 500 instances of calls for genocide⁵ during the first

⁴ As a result of years of Israeli blockade, in 2022 64% of the population of the Gaza Strip is classified as moderately or severely food insecure by the United Nations.

⁵ <https://law4palestine.org/law-for-palestine-releases-database-with-500-instances-of-israeli-incitement-to-genocide-continuously-updated/>.

months of Israel's war on Gaza. Starting October 2023, there is no doubt that Israel launches a war of annihilation.⁶

8. At the same time, Israel invests millions to circulate propaganda messages on all the channels of the global North, including the most macabre *fake news* (forty babies beheaded by Hamas, a pregnant woman disembowelled, etc.), picked up on a loop by Germany and the USA. On smartphone screens across the planet, the cognitive war is in full swing: between the selection of the visible by Silicon Valley algorithms and the oligarchy's stranglehold on the mainstream media; between the constant threat of accusations of anti-Semitism against individuals and the editorial offices of independent newspapers, and the more than 100 journalists killed in Gaza by the Israeli army in 6 months. In plain sight, disguising the announced massacre of the Palestinian people as a “fight against terrorism”, the “world's most moral army” is strangling Gaza, strangling it with fury, strangling it with the laughter of Israeli soldiers on Tik Tok, strangling it to death.
9. In truth, it's nothing new. As historians know, this is the latest act in an ethnic cleansing that began in 1948, and whose tools are forced displacement (over 6 million Palestinians are refugees in neighboring countries), apartheid of Israel's Arab citizens (kept under 20% of the country's population⁷), the murderous and violent colonization of the West Bank, the destruction of Palestinian land and infrastructure, and the normalization of arbitrary detentions, executions, torture and sexual abuse, including in Israeli camps where 9,700 Palestinians, most of them kidnapped, were being arbitrarily detained in July 2024. Nothing new, and that's the problem.
10. In the year following October 7, 2023, Gaza's Ministry of Health has counted 41,689 Palestinian deaths because of Israel's war, the overwhelming majority of them civilians and, according to the UN, over 15,000 children. That's without counting the number of wounded (at least 96,625) and sick, the

⁶ While the question of the chain of command remains unresolved for the time being, due to lack of information, the calls for genocide by the highest leaders of the State of Israel are sufficient to establish a causal link. They are not the only ones to use the media and social networks to get their message across, as D. Trump did on January 6, 2021.

⁷ The leader of the Zionist project, D. Ben-Gurion, wrote in 1948 that the sustainability of the republican State of Israel then being created depends on linguistic and confessional homogeneity: the number of Jewish Israelis must be maintained at a minimum of 80% of the State's citizen population (Cf. I. Pappé, *Le nettoyage ethnique de la Palestine*, 2007).

chronically ill (around 350,000), the malnourished and starving (100% of the population), the severely mentally harmed (100% of the population), in a situation where hospitals have been systematically bombed by Israel. Schools, places of worship, universities, housing, refugee centers, water management infrastructures, heritage – nothing is spared. In August, the UN satellite agency reported a volume of debris in Gaza 14 times greater than the combined total of all the conflicts of the last 16 years. The body politic of the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip has been effectively annihilated. To understand the extent of the massacre and the intent behind it, we need to add up the direct *and* indirect victims, and multiply these figures (based on the experience of past wars and genocides) by a factor of 3 to 15.⁸ that puts Palestinian deaths to date at between 150,000 and 770,000, or 9% to 30% of the Gazan population. But while the countries of the Global South and a few rare voices in the North call for an end to the genocide, the USA and Germany continue to deliver arms, unperturbed.

11. There are several conclusions to be drawn from these events, which will enable us to get to the heart of the problem facing all societies today.
12. First conclusion: the crime of genocide does not exist in a binary yes/no mode. It is a *process*, beginning with an aim and ending with its implementation by all kinds of means, not just State means. In this respect, when the International Court of Justice (ICJ) concluded that there was a “real and imminent risk of genocide” in January 2024, it established *de facto* that genocide was underway. By the same reasoning, Russia's abduction of Ukrainian children and their Russification amounts to genocide (Art. II, e), as does China's treatment of the Uighur people. Second conclusion: the alliance between Israel, the USA, Germany and a few others points to the rise of white capitalism, a trans-imperial formation whose supremacism is being exercised here against the Arab populations of the Middle East. As has been demonstrated time and again, capitalist States use racism in their imperialist ventures as much as in the colonization of their own populations. Third conclusion: capitalism, now complete on a planetary scale, is experiencing an acceleration in the frequency of its crises, due to its

⁸ This is the methodology of an article published by R. Khatib, M. McKee and S. Yusufin in The Lancet on July 10, 2024, Cf. [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(24\)01169-3/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(24)01169-3/fulltext).

illimitation in a world of limited resources. The capitalist response to each crisis of capital is the same: to proceed with the fascization of society, with the aim of ensuring the further concentration of capital and the continuity of existing privileges, through the militarization of States, authoritarianism and the transformation of market competition into a war of “us” against “them” (*à la* Huntington). Low-key fascism has become the norm in “liberal democracies”. Fourth conclusion: the war between rival capitalisms (American, Chinese, Russian, Indian, Europeans) is expressed by the intensification of imperialist struggles aimed at securing a greater capacity to mobilize resources, both material and human. The instrumentalization of racism leads to the total degradation of populations of no interest to capital. Understood as *waste*, they are integrated by capitalism via an economy of destruction that identifies them with the material substratum of their living environment. And so, after Gaza, the bombs rain down on Lebanon. Two lessons here: the imperative of control over the world’s most important oil-producing region remains a priority for US imperialism; the ensuing demand for “regional normalization” authorizes the treatment of hostile populations living there as enemies or waste to be eliminated. The USA and its allies, in any case, are arming this annihilation. There is a clear continuity here between the Nazi holocaust of the Jews and the genocide of the Palestinians by Israel and its allies, insofar as both peoples were/are treated as “obstacles” to a supremacist project, and put to death with capitalist tools. Fifth conclusion: since capitalist rationality is built on the reification of “nature”, every non-human being is assimilated to a commodity. In this context, identifying a human being with “nature” is tantamount to degrading them: the *Negro slave* is historically the figure of the identification of human beings with a commodified nature, transformed into pure labor or merchandise. At the other extreme, this logic implies that the supremacy of one race over another is *ipso facto* the domination of the “human” over “nature”. Capitalism, linked to the techno-scientific project of modernity, cannot be understood outside the interweaving of genocide – the destruction of peoples as raw material – and ecocide. Indeed, it is impossible to defend human rights without also defending the rights of nature.

13. How do capitalism and genocide fit together? First, on the immediate material level, capitalism, because it is defined by growth and because

growth is today unrestrained, necessarily leads to the normalization of exclusion in the mobilization of resources. In order to exclude, capitalism engages social and State forces to degrade the target populations so as to dispose of them as pure resources. This zone of organized death is a potential reality anywhere on the planet, for all living beings: whether it's a matter of grabbing a territory rich in raw materials, gentrifying a neighborhood, managing immigration, or building a factory. Capitalism's dream is to achieve an absolute mobilization of resources, viewing life as matter to be destroyed and shaped at will at the service of profit. Second, capitalism, on the immaterial level, is indexed to the valorization of value, i.e. to the valorization of capital, through constant and unfettered growth, in profit, in size and scale. As a result, capitalism enters a crisis at the first sign of a decline in surplus value. The response to this decline is always the same: for the same quantity produced, reduce human labor by replacing it with dead labor (machines, AI, etc.); and/or increase the quantities produced to at least maintain the level of surplus value. This has a twofold effect: it increases the absolute number of excluded/wastes that can be eliminated without damaging capitalism; and it increases global environmental predation, as shown by N. Machado.⁹

14. The Palestinians are the figure of a population relegated to the rank of waste in the capitalist order, since they have been and are kept outside the global logic of value. In truth, they are valued more from being massacred than from being kept alive, since they are much more integrated into the logic of value through the arms market, and later through the market of "reconstruction". If we shift the focus to other populations kept outside the circuits of valorization and "sitting" on exploitable resources, the conclusion is similar: their extermination is required by the demand to maximize profit; or, at the very least, their forced displacement. Extraction to maintain growth has as its necessary flip side the erasure of the rights of these populations, which happens simply by the signature of business contracts.
15. This dynamic gives rise to what we call, following A. Mbembé, a *necropolitics*.¹⁰ At the heart of this process is integrated capitalism's ability to

⁹ N. M. C. Machado, *La limite écologique du capitalisme*, in Jaggernaut n°4, 2022, pp. 26-27.

¹⁰ Published in 2006, <https://shs.cairn.info/revue-raisons-politiques-2006-1-page-29>.

play both sides of the public/private, State/entrepreneurial divide, enabling it to pre-empt the legislative capacity of political bodies and the right of populations to self-determination. We can speak with S. Sassen of *predatory formations*: individual decisions and actions certainly matter, “but they are part of larger assemblages of mutually reinforcing elements, conditions and dynamics” (*Expulsions*, 2014). On the other side, States in turn attempt to capture these polymorphous flows, giving rise to what G. Deleuze and F. Guattari have called *State war machines*, which “take war as their object, and form a line of destruction extendable to the limits of the universe” (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 1980).

16. Confronted with these realities, international institutions are unable to give force to the law of which they are the depositories. As in the case of the ICJ's judgments concerning Israel, they can only observe their powerlessness to compel established powers, whether they be States protected by their military might,¹¹ or transnational corporations that flout borders and rules and surpass most of the world's States in power.
17. The genocide of the Palestinian people in Gaza signals the fate of all living beings confronted with the “progress” of capital, which its servants believe and desire to be the ultimate sovereign. At the crossroads of other fetishisms (that of the nation, that of religion, that of technology), effectual death *materializes the abstraction* of value: it consecrates the supremacy of capital over all other forms of social relations (this is, strictly speaking, the fetishism of value). With no conceivable opposition to stop it, capitalist necropolitics is this power that exists only by putting its destructive capacity to the test, by casting the concrete shadow of a *supreme* predation.

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¹¹ It seems pointless to hope for any change in this respect until the veto power at the United Nations held by the USA, China, Russia, France and the UK has been abolished.