

# Talking Palestine: The Politics of Narrating the Conflict

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Hello, good evening, and welcome.

I would like to thank the organizers for inviting me to share some perspectives on narrating the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

This subject is particularly challenging because it generates significant polarisation, with argumentation infused with intense emotions, as well as the general issues of historical revisionism, impaired sightedness, and other inherent biases that persist in the framing of the problem from different perspectives.

The recent events following the shocking October 7 attacks by Hamas have raised numerous concerns about how we can fully comprehend and address this problem.

For many people, everything began on October 7. For those of us who have been watching Israel closely for more than four decades, we know it is a slight drop in an exceptionally large sea of suffering. ***That is, of course, if people see the suffering of Jews more than they do of Arabs.***

This is not to diminish the extent of the horrors faced by Israelis on that day.

Many suffered disturbing deaths at the hands of Hamas fighters. But these *are the same Hamas fighters*, of course, who were able to take 250 people hostage and keep them alive despite the endless bombs dropping on them all.

In exchange for prisoners held by Israel, during the initial days of the exchange, Israel released 116 Palestinian prisoners while simultaneously arresting 117 separate Palestinians, potentially on arbitrary charges.

I have written extensive blogs and am trying to explain them to my students who ask me about this issue. They often question why there are double standards in the West when it comes to the differences between Jews, Muslims, and Christians. They wonder why there is so much bias against the Muslim world.

I have also experienced the wrath of others who decry what I do and see as activism that is unhealthy in universities. But I disagree. It is my duty as a

scholar to educate others, in particular to challenge their own assumptions.

Over the last 30 years, I have consistently tackled the most significant challenges in ethnic relations, aiming to demystify widespread misunderstandings and debunk pervasive biases. My consistent efforts to tackle the most significant challenges in ethnic relations have naturally led me to be here today with you.

As a scholar, I have devoted many years to researching and advocating for greater justice and understanding between individuals and communities, as well as between Israelis and Palestinians.

From a decolonial perspective, some of the core issues in the Israel-Palestine conflict include:

1. Settler colonialism: The establishment of Israel involved European Jewish settlers displacing the existing Arab Palestinian population from their land, similar to other settler colonial enterprises like the Americas, Australia, etc. Many critics view this ongoing project of settling and claiming Palestinian territory as an unjust colonial imposition.
2. Ethnic cleansing and refugeedom: The 1948 war and Israel's independence led to the expulsion or flight of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from their homes. Palestinians view the denial of their return and compensation as an attempt to ethnically cleanse the land. Multiple generations now live away from their homeland.
3. Apartheid-like oppression: Israel's military occupation of Palestinian lands, special privileges for Jewish Israelis, and denial of basic rights to Palestinians amount to an apartheid system in the view of an increasing number of rights groups, activists, and scholars. It institutionalizes racial and ethnic discrimination and domination.
4. Resistance and accountability: Palestinian resistance takes varied forms, from civil disobedience to violent attacks by militants. In a decolonial narrative, ending systematic oppression is necessary to address the inevitable response to injustice, which is resistance. Avoid condemning victims by using resistance.

A decolonial lens demands dismantling Israel's structures of occupation, militarism, and ethnocracy that subjugate Palestinians.

It frames this as an anti-colonial struggle for self-determination, the return of refugees, equal rights, and intercultural justice.

At its core, this is a profoundly asymmetric conflict: on one side, Palestinians live under military occupation or as refugees excluded from their homeland.

On the other hand, Israelis have secured statehood and global support. Power imbalances shape dominant narratives justifying violence or opposing compromise.

Palestinians cry out for basic rights and sovereignty, while Israelis demand security from terrorism—both urgent human needs.

The latest clashes in Gaza reflect this tension; triggers include Israeli settler schemes to displace Palestinians from Jerusalem, riots by right-wing Israelis, and Hamas exploiting the unrest.

Until the recent and temporary ceasefire, Israel justified its war on Gaza as self-defence, whereas the UN condemned disproportionate force and violations of international law.

Images of dead Palestinian children counter the publicity of Israelis under rocket fire.

Such cherry-picked narratives fuel anger and the dehumanisation of others.

The international response has been disappointing.

Global inaction and failure to hold Israel accountable have emboldened violations of Palestinian rights.

Media coverage remains biased.

Western governments offer words about restraint and peacebuilding but no meaningful pressure on Israel.

However, a rising tide of grassroots activism and human rights campaigns shows promise.

As an academic, I strive for objective analysis—to call out abuses without exception while avoiding blanket demonisation.

But when embedded power disparities enable ongoing oppression, I believe scholars must give voice to the vulnerable.

Our words shape reality.

So, we must counter Zionist historical revisionism and popular myths of Palestine as “a land without people for a people without land.”

Just peace requires facing hard truths.

The path forward seems daunting, yet glimmers of hope remain.

In recent years, more people have awakened to the Palestinian story. Arab states are signalling their openness to normalizing relations with Israel if it accepts a sovereign Palestinian state. Though extremists dominate headlines, polls show the majority of both people would accept compromise. A more ethical narrative recognizing equal humanity could unlock peace. I invite all parties to take courageous steps in that direction.

Many thanks for your time!