

WEAPONIZATION OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE BY ISRAEL

Amidst barrages of Israeli accusations of alleged sexual assault by Hamas, overwhelming evidence of sexual violence inflicted by Israeli forces in Gaza has emerged. It is important to unpack how Israel has weaponised sexual violence in its onslaught in Gaza since October 2023 and in its campaign of settler-colonial violence against Palestinians historically.

Since October 2023, Israeli forces have inflicted severe sexual violence against Palestinians in Gaza, shown not only by countless reports, such as the Sde Teiman report, but also witnessed by the world through footage online:

- Rape, threats of rape, sexual assault, strip-searching, beatings, arbitrary execution, and forcible transfer of women and children in detention.
- Male detainees being stripped, blindfolded, handcuffed, forced to kneel, transported in trucks, starved, beaten and executed.
- Israeli soldiers displaying in front of cameras on social media underwear of Palestinian women killed or displaced from their homes.

Sexual violence has long been used by colonial powers and occupiers against local populations, especially in situations of armed conflict, for purposes of torture, intimidation, and humiliation.

In fact, as early as in 1948, Zionist militias had used sexual violence through threats of rape as an instrument of ethnic cleansing to coerce Palestinian women and girls to flee their homes and villages, eventually leading to the dispossession of over 750,000 Palestinians in the Nakba. In the decades that followed and until today, female Palestinian prisoners in Israeli detention have often been subjected to sexual violence such as rape during interrogation or torture.

In contexts of colonial rule and occupation, sexual violence - which is also racialised - against both men and women reflects the urge to exercise domination and force submission.

At a critical juncture in Palestinian survival, it is crucial that narratives of colonial feminism used to justify cycles of violence against Palestinians be debunked and abandoned. Rather, atrocious acts of sexual violence committed by Israel in Gaza ought to be understood as part of Israel's weaponization of sexual violence against the Palestinian population.

"Israel's use of rape as an instrument of war is nothing new. What's unique is that it has been at war with the Palestinians for [76] years." Palestinian journalist, Tamam Mohsen .

"Israeli soldiers... join a long line of conquest images, from Abu Ghraib images to the spectacle of Jim Crow-era lynchings." Professor Nina Berman, Columbia University.

"Purple-washing exists in a two-fold sense here: first, the demonisation of men, particularly Muslim men... Secondly, through the purported claim of women's interests while simultaneously disregarding them entirely." Writer and researcher on Palestine, Nadine Sayegh.