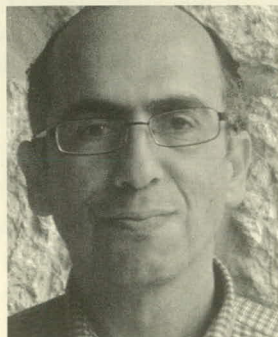


How the Colonizers are also Mentally Colonized: An Israeli-Palestinian Example



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Introduction

Colonization usually involves a concentrated dismissal and destruction of indigenous people¹ and this includes tools to mentally manipulate both populations: the colonized and the colonizers.² In the case of Palestine, an area only recently colonized, the situation is even more dramatic in terms of the use of propaganda and manipulation to shape perceptions.

The process of impacting minds to strengthen colonization is referred to as “mental colonization” and a whole body of literature describes its effects on colonizers globally³ and also in the case of Palestine.⁴ The use of propaganda dehumanizes populations, licenses killings and warrants genocide, as is well established and salient from historical examples

¹ Patrick Wolfe (2006) *Settler colonialism and the elimination of the native*. *Journal of Genocide Research* 8(4): 387-409. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623520601056240>

² See Frantz Fanon (2004) *The Wretched of the Earth*. Translated from French by Richard Philcox, Grove Press, NY.

³ Tunteng, P. Kiven (1974) *Political Freedom and Mental Colonization*. *Transition*, (44), 9-16. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2935100>; E. J. R. David (2008) *A colonial mentality model of depression for Filipino Americans*. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology* 14(2): 118-127. <https://doi.org/10.1037/1099-9809.14.2.118>

⁴ Mazin Qumsiyeh and Amani Amro (2019) *Liberation from Mental Colonization: A Case Study of the Indigenous People of Palestine*. In *The Routledge Handbook of Postcolonial Social Work*, edited by Tanja Kleibl, Ronald Lutz, Ndongwa Noyoo, and Benjamin Bunk, 185-196. Taylor & Francis Group.

ranging from Nazi Germany to the Rwandan genocide.⁵ Decolonizing minds henceforth becomes imperative for liberation. The rich post-colonial research cited focused on mental colonization of the oppressed and less literature has focused on the mental colonization of the oppressor, especially in prolonged conflicts like that which continues to this day in Palestine.

Understanding mental decolonization is critical.⁶ This paper contends that mental colonization as evidenced on a social media platform impacts the colonizers in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. There were few studies that tried to map mental colonization of the occupiers and these were done mostly trying to compare mentality of Israelis and Palestinians without addressing the colonizer and colonized binary.⁷ This paper attempts to address this gap by dissecting and examining the voices of respective colonizers and colonized, Israelis and Palestinians, as voiced on a social platform and then discusses how we can bridge the gaps in perceptions, a prerequisite for decolonization (peace based on human rights and justice). The study was done before the current war on Gaza.

Methods: Case Study

“*Israelis & Palestinians for Peace*” is a Facebook group working to create a grassroots movement for peace between Israelis and Palestinians. Their main goal is to build trust between the two parties through respectful and peaceful dialogue and, unlike other peace groups, they offer real-time discussion opportunities for Israelis, Palestinians, and other parties using virtual Rooms or Zoom. Participants fall into at least four major groups of interest: 1) Supporters of Israel/Zionism, 2) Palestinians, 3) Israelis who oppose Zionism/colonization, and 4) Internationals who oppose colonization/support Palestinians. From each of the four groups, we selected 7-10 members selected for having high participation and activity over a period of one year (26th June 2022 to 26th June 2023). In order to get a real reflection of interests in each group, we excluded Israeli and Palestinian moderators who were naturally guarded in their posts. The names of the posters are not shared to ensure confidentiality, but the raw data is available in our institute and the results summarized assure anonymity. There was thus no need for informed consent per our institutional guidelines. We

⁵ Thomas Hauschildt and Matthew Lower. 2014. “The Media as a Tool of War: Propaganda in the Rwandan Genocide.” *Human Security Centre, Human Rights and Conflict Resolution* 1(2).

⁶ Frantz Fanon (1967) *A dying colonialism*. *Monthly Review Press, New York* <https://abahlali.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/Frantz-Fanon-A-Dying-Colonialism.pdf>; Frantz Fanon (2004) *The Wretched of the Earth*. Translated from French by Richard Philcox, *Grove Press, NY*.

⁷ Uri Ram (1993) *The colonization perspective in Israeli sociology: Internal and external comparisons*. *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 6(3), pp.327-350; Efrat Ben-Ze'ev (2015) *Blurring the geo-body: Mental maps of Israel/Palestine*. *The Middle East Journal*, 69(2), pp.237-254.

chose participants who were most active in each of the four groups to see a trend. In group 1, there were 10 participants, seven from group 2, 10 from group 3, and eight from group 4, totaling 35 participants. There were not enough active participants in groups 2 or 4 and their profiles/activity were too neutral to categorize them in the various groups. Participants' activity in the group was assessed and recorded using Facebook's contributions reward point system. As Facebook group members participate in the group by posting or commenting, their points increase, and they are eligible to earn various Facebook 'badges'.

The archived Facebook posts of 35 individuals were read including replies from the same 40 to tally-up the issuers of most concern to each community. Posts and replies that did not relate to the Facebook group (i.e. religious holidays, congratulations, etc.) were excluded from data collection. Data is summarized for the most common themes for each group.

We also examined the role of social media by posting a simple poll in the Facebook group: "Is this Facebook group helpful in peacemaking?" The three options included 1) "Yes", 2) "No", and 3) "Sometimes". We also posted a list of four questions and encouraged members to post open-ended responses. The four questions included 1) "Do you think social media, in general, can be helpful in peacemaking?" 2) "Is this Facebook group helpful in peacemaking?" 3) "Did this group change your perception of the 'other' side?" 4) "Have you learned more about the 'other'?"

Results

711 Facebook posts were evaluated and included in our analysis of the four groups. The categories identified in the four figures include 630 posts or 89% of analyzed posts.

Group 1: Israelis Who Support Zionism: 168 posts were analyzed for this group over the span of one year and their Facebook Contributions Points totaled to 4,529. The three most common post categories for Group 1 included: Experiences/feelings of victimization (29 posts), Connecting Palestinians & Israelis (26 posts), Anti-Netanyahu/Democracy or criticizing Israeli government (23 posts), (Fig. 1).

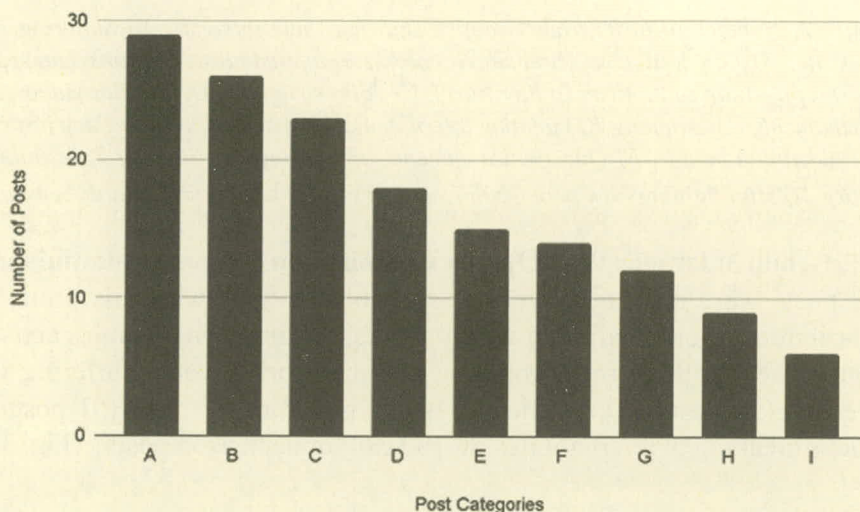


Figure 1. Number of posts from Group 1 showing their interests: A) Experiences/feelings of victimization, B) Coexistence, C) For Legal reform, D) Paint positive aspects of Israel, E) Palestinian suffering/deaths, F) Questions & prompting discussion, G) Downplaying or dismissing the situation/defending Israel's actions, H) Positive personal experiences/stories/feelings, I) Promoting videos/articles on the conflict.

Group 2: Palestinians: 177 posts were analyzed for group 2 over the span of one year with their Contribution Points totaling to 3,379. The top three most common post categories were: Suffering in Palestine including deaths, trouble with checkpoints, home demolition, general violence (35 posts), Opposition to Zionism or colonization (29 posts), Urge for peace or sharing peaceful celebrations between Israelis & Palestinians (23 posts) (Fig. 2).

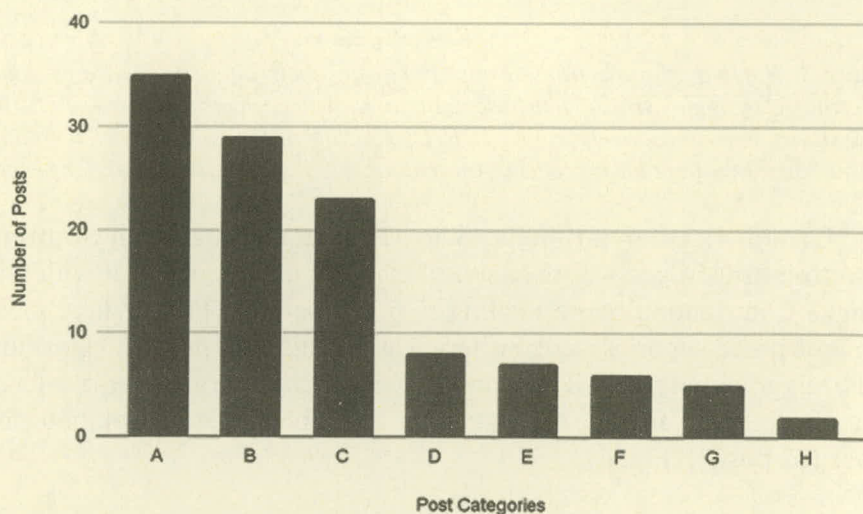


Figure 2. Number of posts from Group 2 showing their interests: A) Suffering in Palestine, B) Opposition to Zionism & colonization (articles, opinions, general Jewish opposition to Zionism in literature), C) Joint struggles, D) Articles/videos of dehumanizing Palestinians, E) Violating international laws and norms & seeking justice for Palestinian people, F) Questions/comments/suggestions, G) Sharing Palestinian history, H) Highlighting how people who support Palestine are labeled anti-Semitic.

Group 3: Israelis Who Oppose Colonization/Support Palestinians:

212 posts were analyzed over the span of one year with this group's Contribution Score totaling to 11,139 points, making them the most active group. The top three most common post categories were: Suffering in Palestine (90 posts), Opposition to Israeli government / IDF (51 posts), Israel's breaking of international law and call for justice (35 posts), (Fig. 3).

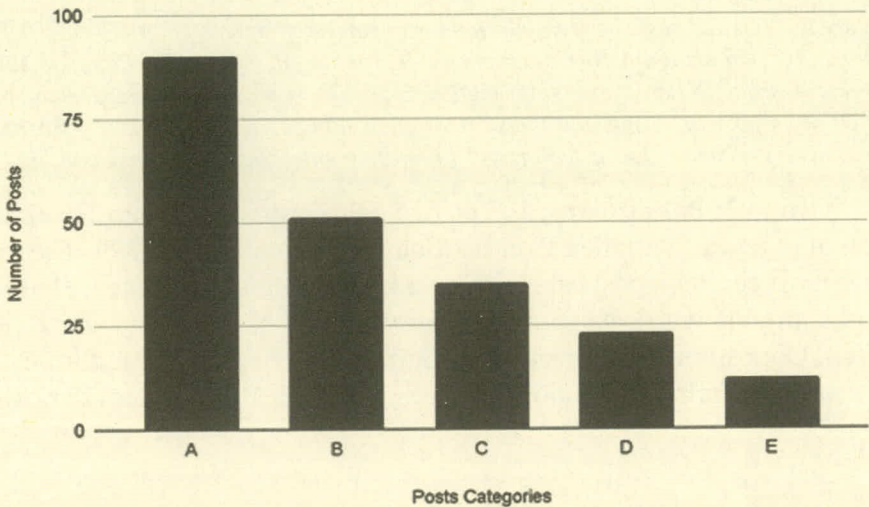


Figure 3. Number of posts from Group 3 showing their interests: A) Palestinian suffering & struggles (raids, home demolition, violence, deaths, trauma, etc.), B) Opposition to Israeli government / IDF, C) Calling attention to Israel breaking international law, urge for justice, D) Anti-colonization/apartheid, E) Call for peace.

Group 4: Internationals Who Oppose Colonization/Support Palestinians:

154 posts were analyzed over the span of one year with this group's Contribution Score totaling to 6,734 points. The top three most common post categories were: Suffering in Palestine (48 posts), Opposition to Israeli government / IDF (32 posts), Questions or surveys for members about feelings towards the conflict or opinions about possible solutions for peace (32 posts), (Fig. 4).

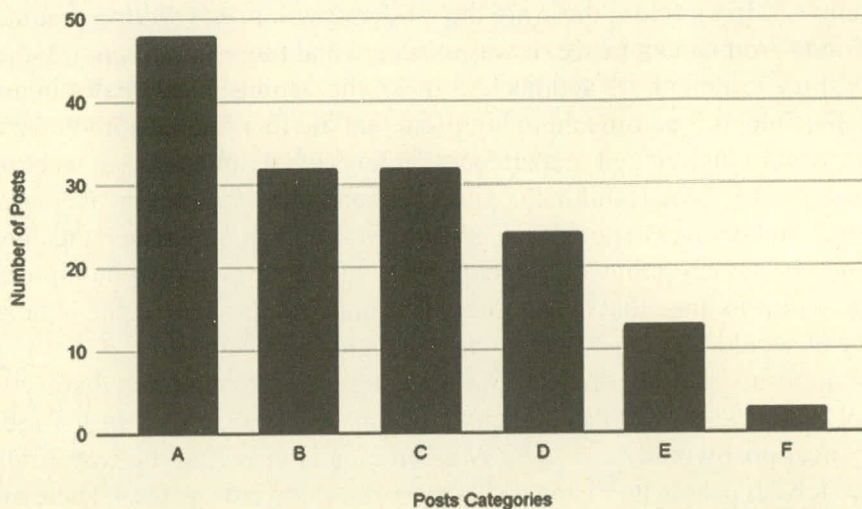


Figure 4. Number of posts from group 4 showing their interests: A) Palestinian suffering & struggles (raids, home demolition, violence, deaths, trauma, etc.), B) Anti-Israeli government/ IDF, C) Questions or surveys (towards members), D) Calls for peace/coexistence, E) Calling attention to Israel breaking international law, urges for justice, F) Painting positive aspects of Israel or defend Israel.

A poll question posted in the analyzed case-study group, “Is this Facebook group helpful in peacemaking?” received 32 responses over the span of 5 days. The responses revealed that 44% believe that the group is not helpful, 35% believe it is sometimes helpful, and 21% believe it is helpful. The poll was followed up by another post to allow open-ended responses to the following questions: “Do you think social media, in general, can be helpful in peacemaking? Is this Facebook group helpful in peacemaking? Did this group change your perception of the ‘other’ side? Have you learned more about the ‘other’?” The 17 responses varied, but almost all agreed that the Facebook group helped them learn more about the ‘other’ side to some degree.

Finally, several Palestinians, who are in the minority in this Facebook group, complained that moderators (mostly Israeli) have not allowed posts through to the group.

Discussion

While the poll results showed that all groups felt that social media was useful for learning about the ‘other’ (points of view or individuals), the analyzed posts showed significantly differing interests between the four groups. The interest in type of post helps us understand the mind of the

colonizers. In this case, these are the moderate colonizers willing to join a dialogue group about peace. It was expected that those who support Israel would try to defend its actions and make the actions of the Palestinians indefensible. It is significant to highlight that the four most common posts from group 1 highlighted “experiences/feelings of victimization, connecting Palestinians & Israelis (normalization), demonstration/discontent over legal reform, and pointed to positive aspects of Israel” (Fig. 1). Further, the topic of internal Israeli politics shows up in the top three most common posts. Maybe they assume that the success of demonstrations against the judicial reforms would have a positive impact on achieving “peace.”

In terms of normalization posts, we observed many posts that try to extol the greatness of Palestinians or Arabs who normalize with Israel. A typical post would read “This Muslim man is changing the way Arabs view Jewish people and Israel. This is working towards peace.” There are also posts that downplay or dismiss the gravity of the situation in a way to defend Israel’s actions: “*From way up there [space], our confrontation seems so silly and insignificant.*” There was significant discussion of Zionism either it is a colonial ideology with predictable outcomes or “Jewish self-determination.”

Some posts from Group 1 attempt to paint positive aspects of Israel. For example, one participant stated: “*Here’s something. A female border police has been charged in Israeli courts for harming a young Palestinian woman. Does anyone here notice something? We do convict our own!*” Posts of Israeli soldiers aiding a sick Palestinian or handing candies to children (which recalls similar images of American soldiers in Vietnam) are common. The posts are challenged as whitewashing systematic brutal oppression (exceptions proving trend). Palestinians were less likely to reply to posts that oppose Israeli government judicial reforms and/or dismiss them as irrelevant and an internal quarrel within Israel and most Palestinians have no established voice on that side of the wall (doesn’t make sense).

Elements of resistance, feelings of being wronged (injustice), and insistence on restorative justice as a route to peace are all present in the group 1’s posts. This is congruent with literature regarding liberation from mental colonization available earlier.⁸ The mental shape of the colonizers is different even among this somewhat liberal group of Zionists. The left Zionists note “both” parties responsible. Right leaning colonialists blame the victims for everything. Non-Zionist and anti-Zionist Jews agree with

⁸ Monika Albrecht, ed. (2020) *Postcolonialism Cross-examined: Multidirectional Perspectives on Imperial and Colonial Pasts and the Neocolonial Present*. Routledge.

locals on decolonization. Supporters of Israel posted many posts (18) to paint a positive image of Israel indicating a rather defensive attitude. This can be seen in other anti-colonial struggles.⁹ Similarly, threats to safety faced by colonizers are exaggerated in such situations.¹⁰ In the Israeli context, the history of conflict, wars, and terrorism has contributed to a sense of vulnerability and the belief that their own security and survival are constantly at risk/under threat.

Addressing the psychology of colonialism (both for the colonized and colonizer) is now taking its place in the growing field of postcolonial studies.¹¹ Mental colonization often reinforces the belief of the colonizers in their own superiority and entitlement based on mythologies which results in uneven power dynamics, cultural and social effects, and dehumanization.¹² Colonizers have long created mythological histories and connections do this.¹³ Thus, mental decolonization starts with reframing the subject to reflect reality.¹⁴

⁹ Jan Eckel (2010) Human Rights and Decolonization: New Perspectives and Open Questions. *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development* 1, 1(1): 111-135. <https://doi.org/10.1353/hum.2010.0008>

¹⁰ Kobi Michael (2009) Who Really Dictates What an Existential Threat Is? The Israeli Experience. *Journal of Strategic Studies* 32(5): 687-713; Ephraim Kam (2003) Conceptualising Security in Israel. In *Security and Environment in the Mediterranean: Conceptualising Security and Environmental Conflicts*, edited by Paul F. Rogers, Antonio Marquina, Mohammad E. Selim, Peter H. Liotta, and Hans G. Brauch. Vol. 1. *Springer Berlin Heidelberg*. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-642-55854-2_23 <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390903189360>

¹¹ Albrecht (2020); Richard Keller (2001) Madness and colonization: psychiatry in the British and French Empires, 1800-1962. *J Soc Hist.* 35(2): 295-326. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jsh.2001.0126>

¹² Nurit Peled-Elhanan (2008) The denial of Palestinian national and territorial identity in Israeli schoolbooks of history and geography 1996-2003. In R. Dol ó n & J. Todol í (Eds.), *Analysing identity in discourse* (pp. 77 – 107). Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company. <https://doi.org/10.1075/dapsac.28.06pel>; ibid (2012) Palestine in Israeli School-Books: Ideology and Propaganda in Education. *I.B. Tauris*. London. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9780755608195>

¹³ Baruch Kimmerling (2005) The Invention and Decline of Israeliness: State, Society, and the Military. *University of California Press*. <https://www.ucpress.edu/book/9780520246720/the-invention-and-decline-of-israeliness>; Shlomo Sand (2009) The Invention of the Jewish People. Translated by Yael Lotan. *Verso*; ibid (2012) The Invention of the Land of Israel: From Holy Land to Homeland. Translated by Jeremy Forman. *Verso*; Keith W. Whitelam (1996) The invention of ancient Israel: the silencing of Palestinian history. *Routledge*; Zeev Sternhell (1997) The Founding Myths of Israel: Nationalism, Socialism, and the Making of the Jewish State. *Princeton University Press*.

¹⁴ Edward Shizha (2010) Rethinking and reconstituting indigenous knowledge and voices in the academy in Zimbabwe: A decolonization process. In *Indigenous knowledge and learning in Asia/Pacific and Africa: Perspectives on development, education, and culture* (pp. 115-129). *New York: Palgrave Macmillan US*; Mazin Qumsiyeh (2004) Sharing the Land of Canaan: Human Rights and the Israeli-Palestinian Struggle. *Pluto Press*; Mazin Qumsiyeh (2012) Popular Resistance in Palestine: A History of Hope and Empowerment. *Pluto Press*; Basem L. Ra'ad (2010) Hidden Histories: Palestine and The Eastern Mediterranean. *Pluto Press.*; Nur Masalha (2018) Palestine: A four thousand year history. *Zed Books*

This study was done before the recent onslaught on Gaza that saw 1,200 Israelis killed on 7 October 2023, and over 31,000 Palestinian civilians killed in three months. A brief glimpse at the posts since then confirm our findings and show hardening of attitudes of both Israelis and Palestinians. Decolonizing bodies begin by decolonizing minds¹⁵ of both colonized and colonizers. We show that social media is a double-edged sword to this effect. On the one hand, it can increase understanding of the ‘other’ especially among open minded members of the privileged class.¹⁶ On the other hand, it can simply amplify the voices of oppression coached in peace-making efforts that emphasize normalization and merely refer to human rights violations as “errors” or “aberrations” in an otherwise normal “system.”

¹⁵ Thiong’o, Ngũgĩ wa (1986) Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature. London, James Currey.

¹⁶ Aouragh M (2016) Revolutionary maneuverings: Palestinian activism between cybercide, and cyber intifada In: Jayyusi L and Anne Sofie R (eds) Media and Political Contestation in the Contemporary Arab World. New York: Palgrave Macmillan

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