

What is the genocide charge against Israel all about?

For historian Georges Bensoussan, the International Court of Justice's recent decision against Israel stems from a militant use of history.

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The charge of genocide brought against Israel is not new. The pattern has been known for a long time. Anti-Zionism is an untraceable godsend," wrote Jankélévitch as long ago as 1971, "because it gives us permission, even the right and even the duty to be anti-Semitic in the name of democracy! Anti-Zionism is justified anti-Semitism, finally within everyone's reach. It is permission to be democratically anti-Semitic. What if the Jews were Nazis themselves? That would be wonderful. There would be no need to pity them; they would have earned their fate."

Jews, Nazis? Here we are. In so doing, the real crime of the Nazis disappears behind the war being waged by the Israeli army against Hamas in Gaza. The idea has been gaining ground for a number of years. During a demonstration for Gaza in January 2009, the anti-Semitic writer Alain Soral declared: "We, the French resistance fighters of Égalité et Réconciliation, wish by our presence here to salute the heroic resistance of the Gaza ghetto as we would have saluted, sixty years ago, in the name of the same values, the heroic resistance of the Warsaw ghetto." In 2023, Lebanese historian Gilbert Achcar uses the same comparison to evoke the Hamas action of October 7: "The latest Gaza counter-offensive is rather reminiscent of the Warsaw ghetto uprising of 1943.

To accuse the State of Israel today of practicing genocide in Gaza - Israel must do everything in its power to "prevent the commission of any acts falling within the scope" of the Genocide Convention, declared the International Court of Justice (ICJ), which sits in The Hague, on Friday January 26, without mentioning a ceasefire - which would reproduce point by point the Nakba depicted as the Arab-Palestinian counterpart of the Shoah, first of all, it makes it possible to avoid the collusion of the Mufti of Jerusalem with the Nazis, which, far from being reducible to a "personal drift" (sic) as is sometimes read, was on the contrary in tune with a large part of Arab nationalism, as in Iraq (where he found refuge in 1939), where the Al-Futuwwa and Kataëb Al-Shabab youth movements flourished, profoundly receptive to Nazi propaganda.

Admittedly, Amin al-Husseini's Nazi past weighs heavily in the liabilities of this national struggle, which is why some will endeavor to present his exile in Berlin as the consequence of retaliatory measures taken against him by the British since 1937, with the implication that they drove him into the arms of the Third Reich. As if he had only turned to the Nazis after his forced exile in 1937, whereas it was as early as March 31, 1933 that he had secretly visited the German consul in Jerusalem, Heinrich Wolff: "The Muslims inside Palestine," he told him, "welcome the new regime and want the anti-democratic fascist leadership to spread." He even offered him a luxury asylum in Berlin from November 1941 until the fall of the Reich in April 1945, with 50,000 Reichsmarks per month for him and his retinue of around 50 people, generally taken from looted Jewish property. It was also from Berlin that

the Mufti of Jerusalem played an active role on Radio Zeesen, the German short-wave transmitter broadcast throughout the Mediterranean basin and as far as the Middle East, including Iran, as when, on March 1, 1944, he declared, among a hundred other similar messages: "Kill the Jews wherever you find them, for the love of God, history and religion! It was also from Berlin that he played an active role in preventing the rescue of Jews, particularly Jewish children, who could be sent to Palestine in exchange for German prisoners. Collaboration with the Nazi Reich was not a "personal shipwreck"; it was the shipwreck of a large part of Arab Palestine, where the Mufti of Jerusalem remained extremely popular in 1945. In this respect, the French ambassadors in Cairo in 1944-1946 warned the Quai d'Orsay and the French government that the person of the "Grand Mufti of Jerusalem" was very popular in the Arab world. This popularity explains why France, embarrassed by its colonial possessions in the Maghreb and its general interests in the Arab world, saw him as a cumbersome prisoner. Hence Amin al-Husseini's pseudo-escape to Egypt in May 1946.

### The 1948 "battle of the roads"

If we're talking about the expulsion of part of the Palestinian population by the Israelis (the Nakba), we need to be complete on the subject. And begin by explaining that in March 1948, the Jews were losing the "battle of the roads" in Palestine. This was because the discontinuous Jewish settlement was like an archipelago, with communications the weak point, particularly the axis linking Tel Aviv, the largest Jewish city in Palestine (200,000 inhabitants, a third of the country's Jewish population) to Jerusalem, the second largest Jewish community (100,000 inhabitants). The road leading to Jerusalem rises to an altitude of 800 metres, and along the way there are a number of Arab villages that have been blocking communications on this and other roads for several months. The "Jewish archipelago" was gradually strangled. In March 1948, supply convoys were ambushed one after the other, leaving no survivors: there were no prisoners, and all convoy members, including children, were killed. By the end of March 1948, Jewish Palestine was on the verge of losing the war. Particularly in Jewish Jerusalem, thirsty and hungry from the siege.

It was against this backdrop that, from April 1, 1948, under the "Dalet Plan" - a source of countless fantasies to this day - Jewish troops went on the offensive, expelling part of the Arab population from the "mixed cities" of Tiberias, Safed, St. John of Acre and Jaffa, cities that have kept the memory of massacres of their Jewish population alive. Like Safed in Galilee, which suffered massacres in 1834, 1838 and 1929, and Jerusalem in 1920 and 1929. In all these cases, the expulsion carried out by Jewish troops was a preventive measure designed to prevent a massacre which, even more than in the past, would inevitably occur at the slightest sign of weakness. A black legend surrounds the "Dalet plan", which is seen as a plan for the general expulsion of the Palestinian population. Yet historians, even those most critical of Zionism, now admit that the "Dalet Plan" was neither a "secret plan" nor a plan for systematic expulsion. His reading of the Arab population. A pseudo "secret plan" distributed to hundreds of fighting units and so "secret" that it is freely available for consultation in all Israel's archives and can be read in full in several history books. Starting with those by Israeli historian Benny Morris.

A reading of "Plan Dalet" reveals what was at stake: the risk, at best, of "ethnic cleansing" directed against the Jews of Palestine, at worst of a general massacre, as all the armed engagements since early December 1947 foreshadowed, of extermination. The Arab discourse, whether broadcast or written, left no doubt in this regard for the 600,000 Jews of the National Home, who knew from experience that they could indeed fear the worst. Was this fear a fantasy? Not according to the writer Amos Oz, one of the leading figures in Israel's "peace camp": "Every Jewish town that fell into Arab hands during the war of independence was wiped off the map without exception [...]. In the conquered territories, the Arabs carried out a far more radical ethnic cleansing than the Jews did at the same time. [...] On the west bank of the Jordan and in the Gaza Strip [...], there was not a single Jew left. Their villages had been wiped out, their synagogues and cemeteries destroyed.

The "Dalet plan" made a brutal break with the Yishuv's hitherto strictly defensive strategy, going on the offensive by expelling the population of hostile Arab villages, which the Jewish military did not want to leave behind their lines as pockets of population that would tomorrow constitute a "fifth column". In other words, a threat of extermination from the very heart of their territory.

The "Dalet plan" also aims to expel the population of villages blocking communication routes, in particular the Tel Aviv-Jerusalem axis, a road blockade that is leading the Jewish National Home to defeat. The aim was to save the Jewish state-in-training from a defeat that was looming at the end of March 1948. It was a response to the Arab, and not just the Palestinian, desire to put an end to the embryonic Jewish state, which refused to accept the ancient status of "protected minority", with all the risks of massacre that this implied. In the end, the "Dalet plan" was so little more than a systematic expulsion plan that today, Arabs make up 21% of the population of the State of Israel. More than 2 million of its citizens. This plan, the subject of all the rumors, was intended to respond to strategic considerations of survival. Both the Israeli General Staff and the civilian authorities were convinced that, in the event of victory, Arab troops would have carried out a massive massacre.

Fear makes people flee

Finally, militant accounts seem to ignore the reality inherent in all conflicts: fear makes people flee. In August 1914, a huge mass of refugees from Belgium and northern France rushed to the heart of the country. In June 1940, 8 million Belgian and French refugees clogged the exodus routes. Why should the Arab peasantry be an exception? Would what is true for everyone be true everywhere in the world, except Palestine?

In 1949, at the end of the fighting, it was not the State of Israel that prevented the birth of Arab Palestine, but Jordan and the Arab League with it. King Abdallah of Jordan was the first to contact the Jewish Agency and pledged not to launch his Arab Legion against the young Jewish state, on condition that the latter left him free rein in the territory allocated to Arab Palestine by the United Nations. In other words, to annex it. The State of Israel obviously stands to gain from an agreement that diverts the only real Arab military force away from itself.

The Arab State of Palestine envisaged by the United Nations is thus absorbed by Jordan without the Arab League (of which it is a member) preventing it from doing so. The West Bank (biblical Judea and Samaria) and the territory of Gaza destined by the United Nations for the State of Arab Palestine were then free of any Israeli presence. Hence the all-important question: why didn't the Arab State of Palestine come into being in 1949, once the war was over? And why did this question only resurface eighteen years later, with the Israeli occupation of these territories in 1967?

In the current process of demonizing the Jewish state, we also have to reckon with what Houria Bouteldja, with her well-known finesse, calls "the greatest hold-up of the century". It's understandable that, presented in this way, the Zionist project should appear at the very least as a murderous utopia. Holy ignorance, which sees "the Zionists" destroying in 1948 a State of Palestine that never existed. At the same time, it sees the Jews, portrayed as "thieves of their homeland", as illegitimate in Palestine, when their national and religious imaginary anchors them in this land that inhabits them, because it is at the heart of their existence as a nation and as a faith, as shown by the extraordinary richness of the debates within the Jewish world in the 19th century. This is why, from the outset, the most equitable solution was the division between two national legitimacies. But the repeated refusal to compromise and the entrenchment of an "all or nothing" stance have led to the current impasse. The "two-state solution" undoubtedly appears to be the most rational, but we remain dubious when faced with repeated Arab refusals of this solution: 1937 (Peel plan), 1947 (United Nations), 2000 (Camp David), 2001 (Taba) and 2009 (Olmert plan). As if accepting the State of Palestine were tantamount to accepting the State of Israel. This is the irreducible core of a refusal ("from the river to the sea") that runs until October 7, 2023.

#### A militant use of history

It is in this context of a militant use of history that the complaint lodged by the Union of South Africa against Israel for crimes against humanity in Gaza comes into play. Today, the aim is to launch the accusation of genocide from South Africa, which hosted the Durban conference in 2001, in order to blur the original crime against humanity from which the current war stems, that of the acts committed on October 7, 2023, which were genocidal in nature. An onslaught of cruelty that bore witness not only to the "barbaric mores" we had already seen at work in 1929 and 1948, but to a plan to eliminate from the world an enemy who had been stripped, before or after his death, of any human character linking him to our world. Hence the desecration of corpses, decapitations and even the "theft" of a soldier's head, taken to Gaza and kept in a freezer for the purpose of trading it later for \$10,000 (sic).

Secondly, it is a question of imputing an accusation of genocide to this particular people, whose memory, in Israel as elsewhere, is marked by the memory of genocide. By inverting the accusation of genocide, the aim is also to place the State of Israel and the Jews in the camp of the oppressors, i.e. the West, the ritual accuser of the United Nations. The way in which the UN accepted the South African Union's complaint denies any moral legitimacy to these automatic majorities (57 Muslim states in the UN, a single Jewish state) which, in 2020, out of 23 condemnations issued by the General Assembly against states, issued 17 against the State of Israel alone. This inversion of reality is typical of totalitarian reasoning: "love is

hate", "peace is war", when reality is annihilated in favor of reconstructed narratives. Behind Israel, the paragon of evil, the accusatory inversion places the whole of the West in the dock of history-tribunal, facing "historian-prosecutors". The accusation of genocide (in itself grotesque: Gaza 1967, 400,000 inhabitants, Gaza 2023, 2,300,000 inhabitants) sullies the word and the memory of the Armenians, the Jews and the Tutsis. Hatred of the Jewish sign is flourishing, and here has less to do with anti-Semitism, as psychiatrist Jean-Jacques Moscovitz notes, than with what he rightly calls asemitism: the world doesn't want Jews. Nor does it want the State of Israel.

Thirdly, however insane the accusation of genocide may seem, the intellectual logic behind it is not only aimed at erasing the genocidal nature of the acts committed on October 7, it is also designed to discredit the West, in order to make non-Western history appear, a *contrario*, to be devoid of any violence. However, it would be a mistake to reduce these accusations of "genocide" against the Jewish state alone to the "decolonial" sphere. Holocaust deniers the world over have also understood what is at stake. In France, for example, not a week goes by without the weekly *Rivarol* (founded by former collaborationists) running headlines on the "genocide in Gaza" or the "ethnic cleansing of Palestine". In the United States, neo-Nazi David Duke, whose works have been translated into Arabic and who has been invited to speak in Bashar al-Assad's Syria, spoke as early as October 14, 2023 of the "Zionist genocide in Gaza". As for the Institute of Historical Review, that "temple" of Holocaust denial around the world, it publishes South Africa's indictment against Israel before the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in its entirety. Iran, where Robert Faurisson was received with great fanfare in 2006, has officially welcomed the South African complaint. Convicting the Jewish state of genocide: the stakes are high for those who deny the Jewish genocide committed by the Nazis. The concept of "genocide" was coined during the Second World War by a Polish Jew, Raphaël Lemkin, in direct reference to the Jewish genocide that was being perpetrated. Robert Faurisson's followers are hoping that Israel will be condemned in the name of the same principles that led to Eichmann being condemned and executed by this very state. Symbolically, the aim is to erase the legacy of the Shoah.

The same mental pattern is repeating itself here. It's the same one that in 1937, with Céline (*Bagatelles pour un massacre*), made the "Jew" the warmonger. It's the same one that today makes the State of Israel, decreed Europe's latest "colonial offshoot", the vector of a genocidal war. A mental schema that consists in banishing the "evil part of humanity" - once the people, now the state - who are reproached for persevering in their being. Here, a Jewish people, an "anomaly" in the eyes of Christian theology, and there a Jewish state, an "anomaly" in the eyes of post-national Europe. In short, the Jews are always at cross-purposes, and the case against them is not so much a policy as a principle: their stubborn persistence in a state existence that is condemnable as abnormal in the name of a secularized History, but still invested with ultimate ends. To establish a causal link between any Israeli policy and acts of a genocidal nature is to fail to understand the profound nature of this cruelty when it comes to eradicating an existence equated with evil. For we are not dealing here with a discourse driven by reason, but with an eschatological vision in which the State of Israel, whatever its policy or nature, secular or religious, represents the personification of the evil principle of humanity, which must be driven out of the world and out of oneself in order to hope for a life finally worthy of being lived. There is no link

between an Israeli policy, even the most reprehensible, and the genocidal essence of an Islamist movement that offers no hope of negotiation or compromise, and sees no future other than the definitive crushing of the State of Israel. And it demands nothing less.

The more the world is in disarray, the more the unifying anti-Semitism soothes collective fears. We love to hate together, and anguish ebbs away as we point the finger of blame for all the world's ills. Just like the collective fears of yesteryear, those born in the wake of the great epidemics or witch-hunts in 17th-century Europe. But behind collective madness, there are always men and women made of flesh and bone, who can't stand seeing themselves embodied as figures of heresy, defilement and abjection. It is from these murderous fantasies that the Jewish high-school girl from Bordeaux, the Jewish grocer from Krakow, the Jewish cabinetmaker from Rhodes, the Jewish teacher from Amsterdam, the Jewish bricklayer from Athens and the Jewish doctor from Cologne have died the most hideous of deaths.

The Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish understood perfectly how the old European "Jewish question" became part of the discourse of the conflict itself, when he said to the Israeli poet Helit Yeshurun: "Do you know why we Palestinians are famous? Because you are our enemy. Interest in the Palestinian question stemmed from interest in the Jewish question. Yes, it's you they're interested in, not me! If we were at war with Pakistan, nobody would have heard of me.

The obsessive ostracization of a pariah state paves the way for the delegitimization that precedes its dismantling. Israel's loneliness resonates today in the heart of a people few in number, beset by enemies for more than 75 years, a victim of mental wear and tear that will one day shake it to the core. This false power, whose vulnerability was revealed on October 7, could one day buckle under the weight of a lost war. Israel," said Ben Gourion, "will win every war but the last. Its enemies may indeed suffer defeat after defeat, but they will still exist in the aftermath of their setbacks. Not the Jewish State. Beset by the loneliness of October, Jews cannot afford the luxury of pessimism. Just as the State of Israel cannot afford the luxury of a single defeat. For both, their very survival is at stake. By dint of all the talk about the "military might" of the Jewish Goliath crushing the little Arab David, we've forgotten that this territory the size of Brittany, with a population smaller than that of the Ile-de-France, will not be able to resist eternally the tide of its enemies, served by sheer numbers, a strategy of infiltration and protected by the coming nuclear power of Iran, which the destruction of the accursed state will crown for a long time to come as the Shiite champion of the entire Islamic world. The clerk in Sderot, the grocer in Kiryat Gat, the worker in Rishon-le-Zion, the high-school student in Tel Aviv, the farmer in Ginossar and the dockworker in Haifa - all of them will learn one day that, as the figures of evil on earth, their disappearance will make humanity happy at last.