

"All the Consent
That's Fit to Manufacture"

The New York ^{WAR} Crimes

Late Edition
Today, accusations still
confessions. Tonight, Zion-
ism continues to be racism.
Always, for a free Palestine.

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FREE

MEDIA MANUFACTURES CONSENT FOR GENOCIDE

HOW THE NEW YORK TIMES HELPS ISRAEL WEAPONIZE RAPE CHARGES AGAINST PALESTINIANS

"...the fraudulent rape charge stands
out as one of the most formidable
artifices invented by racism"

—ANGELA Y. DAVIS¹

By FEMINIST SOLIDARITY
NETWORK FOR PALESTINE

EVERYWHERE—As an international collective of feminist academics, writers, and lawyers, we offer the following critical analysis of claims made in the New York Times article "Screams Without Words": How Hamas Weaponized Sexual Violence on Oct. 7," published December 28, 2023. While this article is presented as the result of an extensive investigation, our research demonstrates that its arguments are not only unfounded, but rely on non-credible witnesses, including unreliable first-responder and IDF testimony. Despite the flimsiness of the given evidence, we debated whether addressing specific claims was the best way to proceed. Before we begin, a few words on why.

What is 'Screams without Words' actually attempting to do?

While it claims to be presenting evidence, the article is in fact better understood as aiming to evoke an emotional response in the reader. Professor of criminology Anthony Collins explains that 'Screams without Words' belongs to a genre of 'trauma porn' which, regardless of factual integrity, is "very socially powerful at triggering not only emotional responses in individuals but collective social responses with social consequences."² By dwelling on the most explicit and gruesome details offered in testimonies regarding the alleged atrocities of October 7's Al-Aqsa Flood, while deliberately refusing to situate the actions of the Palestinian resistance within any political or historical context, the article aims to trigger an overwhelming affective response in the reader (disgust, revulsion, fear, rage). Met with an informational void, the average Times reader will seize upon already available narratives to make sense of this response. The most obvious of these is the myth of the Black/Brown rapist. As scholars of History, Philosophy, Politics and Literature, we know that colonized and racialized men have long been depicted in western cultural production as hypersexual, brutish threats to the 'purity' of white/colonial women, and that this narrative has repeatedly served as a means of justifying and enabling racial/colonial violence.

This was the narrative enlisted to justify the lynching of thousands of Black men and boys in the Jim Crow US South, including 14 year old Emmett Till, who was brutally lynched after being accused of having whistled at a white woman, Carolyn Bryant Donham, in a store in Mississippi. As Angela Y. Davis reminds us, "the myth of the Black rapist has been methodically conjured up whenever recurrent waves of violence and terror against the Black community have required convincing justifications."³ When framed as defending white/colonial women's 'purity' against the supposed danger of Black men's sexuality, any extreme of retaliatory violence—or so the story goes—is justified. Taking this history seriously means that the demand to "believe women" qua women cannot be embraced unconditionally or uncritically without an intersectional understanding of colonial/racial power. This is especially important when the demand is weaponized by an oppressive state to silence dissent and to perpetuate the dehumanization of a people whom it seeks to subjugate and destroy.

Similar patterns emerge when it comes to western imaginaries of Arabs and Muslims. With the spread of European colonialism, the predatory Arab or Muslim man (often used interchangeably) began to appear as a major figure in western literature and art, shaping the dominant imaginary. This figure was depicted as a hypersexual, despotic and abusive tyrant from whom Muslim/Arab women needed to be rescued. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, for example, depicted 'The Orient' as "despotic...more virile, jealous and brutishly sensual...its men are tyrants."⁴ Edward Said explained that in the 19th century European imaginary the Orient "offended sexual propriety; everything about the Orient...exuded dangerous sex...an excessive 'freedom of intercourse'."⁵ By representing Arab/Muslim men as sexual predators and Arab/Muslim women as endangered, westerners could justify their colonial invasions of Muslim lands as civilizing missions. This narrative, which carries strong emotional weight with material consequences, has resurfaced time and again to justify imperialist violence—most evident in western representations of gender oppression used to justify the US invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq.⁶ Today, Jasbir Puar argues that the figure of the 'terrorist' in the west stands in for what is considered illicit or aberrant sexuality, and so works to define the category of 'normal' sexuality.⁷ Far from being accidental, the twin tropes of the terrorist and the sexual brute operate in tandem to demonize Arab and Muslim men in the public imagination. That 'Screams Without Words' invokes Orientalist cultural tropes that depict the Arab/Muslim male as a terrorist-rapist in order to fuel racial fantasies in the reader is clear. De-

scriptions of "severed heads" and "slaughter" with knives (beheading and cutting the throat with a knife are common Islamophobic tropes) and acts of extreme psychopathic brutality ("slic[ing] off her breast" with a box cutter and "play[ing]" with it) summon up tropes of native savagery. This reinforces references to Palestinians as "human animals"—most recently by Israeli war minister Yoav Gallant—in order to strip Palestinian resistance fighters of their rational agency and portray them as bloodthirsty and inhuman. We locate such descriptions within a long history of colonial attempts to dehumanize the colonized; as Frantz Fanon wrote in 1961, "the colonist turns the colonized into a kind of quintessence of evil...The 'native' is declared impervious to ethics, representing not only the absence of values but also the negation of values. He is, dare we say it, the enemy of values."⁸ It is this framing that allows the Times to avoid accounting for their decision not to interview a single leader or operative of Hamas (who released a statement denying that their fighters engaged in sexual violence) or any other Palestinian political or military group. Despite representing a clear departure from journalistic standards of neutrality, this omission goes unchecked. Nor do the writers of this article account for the absence of the voices of Palestinians who have been subjected to systematic and well-documented sexual violence by Israeli and Zionist forces for over 75 years.

Deflecting Attention

Thus, the current manufactured outcry by Israel serves to distract attention from the *longue durée* of Israeli colonial violence—with its reliance on U.S. military, economic and political support. At the time of writing, almost all the population of Gaza has been displaced, over 23,910 Palestinians have been murdered, at least 8,000 are missing under the rubble, tens of thousands are injured, and countless children have been brutalized and orphaned. The media have played a crucial role in reproducing the discourses used to justify and enable racial/colonial violence for centuries. They "inculcate individuals with the values, beliefs, and codes of behavior that will integrate them into the institutional structures of the larger society."⁹ Considering the centrality of the Zionist settler colonial project to maintaining US hegemony in the Middle East, it is not surprising that mainstream media invest resources in obscuring the realities of the genocide in Gaza by projecting Israeli violence onto, and scapegoating, its victims. As one of the leading stenographers of US imperialism, the Times has played a crucial role in this effort.

Given this context, further focusing on these claims carries the risk of entangling us in Israel's narrative. Indeed, part of the strategy behind the weaponization of sexual assault is to force voices calling for justice for Palestine into a defensive stance and to divert our energy into rebutting individual allegations. Nevertheless, it is clear that painting Hamas fighters and by extension all Palestinian men¹⁰ as irreconcilably 'savagely', 'evil' and prone to sexual brutality enlists powerful western cultural tropes, and so demands address. Collective work is needed to dislodge these images, preventing them from snowballing and undermining the global movement in solidarity with Palestine. As anti-racist feminists, and as witnesses to Israel's unfolding genocide—its targeting of schools, hospitals and communications, its maiming, massacre, and torture of Palestinians, its campaign of mass starvation and disease, its targeted assassination of journalists and academics, its desecration of the dead—we refuse to allow Israel to hide behind the language of gender justice. We call upon feminists worldwide to stand with us in refusing to be silenced by Israel's racist misappropriation of this language.

While no author can definitively prove the negative—that no *single* instance of rape was committed by any side on October 7th—what we can and do prove is the following: Firstly, that Israel has lied—repeatedly, shamelessly, and often badly—in its attempt to claim that Hamas or other Palestinian resistance groups carried out a campaign of *systematic* rape on October 7th, and that the Times is complicit in these lies. Secondly, that the central claim of 'Screams Without Words' that there was "a broader pattern of gender-based violence on Oct. 7" is unsubstantiated.

The following close analysis systematically responds to quotations taken directly from the Times article "Screams without Words." It is intended as a critical tool for the use of feminists and allies seeking to grapple with claims that Hamas, and by extension the Palestinian resistance, used rape as a weapon of war in their October 7th operation Al-Aqsa Flood.

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A mural in Gaza City of the journalist Shireen Abu Aqleh, martyred by the Israeli occupation on May 11, 2022.

Creating the Illusion of Credible Journalism: The NYT Investigation

A two-month investigation by The Times uncovered painful new details, establishing that the attacks against women were not isolated events but part of a broader pattern of gender-based violence on Oct. 7. Relying on video footage, photographs, GPS data from mobile phones and interviews with more than 150 people, including witnesses, medical personnel, soldiers and rape counselors, The Times identified at least seven locations where Israeli women and girls appear to have been sexually assaulted or mutilated.

Response

What "new evidence" is presented in 'Screams Without Words'? The eyewitness testimonies of both Sapir and Raz Cohen are on the public record—already interviewed by police (see hamas-massacre.net, a website set up by the government of Israel) and by news outlets, respectively. The Times conducts longer interviews with each, but the journalists do not appear to have asked probing questions that would establish the credibility of these witnesses. Some "volunteer medics" (ZAKA), an IDF paramedic, and the two IDF reservists at the Shura Military Base have already been interviewed in other media—although the particular ZAKA volunteer whom the Times chooses to focus on is new. Yet, in cases where

Israeli officials say that everywhere Hamas terrorists struck—the rave, the military bases along the Gaza border and the kibbutzim—they brutalized women.

Response

The four witness testimonies cited in 'Screams Without Words' all center around the rave (Nova music festival), specifically "two different places along route 232." The NYT had previously published articles with detailed timelines of events at Kibbutz Be'eri¹ and extensive interviews with survivors from Kfar Aza,² in which there was *no mention of rape*. The paramedic testimony from Kibbutz Be'eri

The Times viewed photographs of one woman's corpse that emergency responders discovered in the rubble of a besieged kibbutz with dozens of nails driven into her thighs and groin

Response

This is a horrible and graphic scene. Does this show a sadistic act of torture, or could the nails have come from the shelling of the house? Hamas and other Palestinian fighters had bullets and hand grenades; while a handful had Rocket Propelled Grenades (RPG), most entering kibbutzim are seen to carry Kalashnikov rifles. Depending on the type, a grenade can create fire and fragmentation,

these "volunteer medics" or soldiers claim to have suspected sexual abuse, no forensic evidence was collected and no autopsies were done. Indeed, there is no forensic evidence, nor any autopsies at all. Arguably, the testimonies that corroborate each of Raz Cohen and Sapir could be construed as "new details," only if these testimonies withstand scrutiny. We show their weaknesses below.

The Times claims credibility for its investigation from a sheer accumulation of data (which on closer examination proves flimsy), from affective appeal to the singular story of Gal Abdush, and from spectacular and horror-inducing descriptions not only of rape, but of monstrosity, mutilation, and beheading (Is-

has already been proven to be false (below). The Times does not provide exact details of the testimonies of volunteer medics from Kfar Aza.

The Times seems to be basing much of its argument for a "pattern" of rape on postmortem observations by "soldiers and volunteer medics who together described finding more than 30 bodies of women and girls in and around the rave site and in two kibbutzim." They infer rape by interpreting the postmortem appearance of the bodies they collected or prepared for burial, not from any medical or forensic examination for which, moreover, they were not trained. Indeed, *none* of the Times' sources appear to have requested autopsies or forensic examination for the bodies they claim to have believed were raped. Below, we show why these witness accounts from the Shura Military Base and from volunteer 'medics' are to be treated with a great deal of caution.

even a hole in a structure. But reducing a house to rubble may indicate, instead, shelling from a tank. It has been established that IDF tanks entered kibbutzim on October 7th, including through interviews with tank crews themselves.³ And there are at least two verified cases in which tanks shelled houses in kibbutzim—houses containing both Israeli settlers and Palestinian fighters. These are also the two kibbutzim where the NYT claims to have found evidence for rape from the postmortem disposition of bodies.

Kibbutz Be'eri

Yasmin Porat, a survivor who had been at the Nova music festival and had taken refuge at Kibbutz Be'eri, recounted in an interview on Israeli State Radio on October 15 that there had been very heavy crossfire ("a gunbattle starts that our police started") and later "two tank shells were fired into the house."⁴ In a more detailed interview on November 15, Ms. Porat told Israeli Public Broadcaster Kan that

lamophobic tropes). In particular, the Times relies heavily on interviews conducted with two categories of witnesses: those claiming to be eyewitnesses of rape (4 in total from two locations at the rave) and witnesses who infer rape by interpreting the positions and states of bodies postmortem.

The Times also claims access to videos and photos (which, except for those claimed to exist on IDF bases, were publicly available prior to the article). Regarding the first category of eyewitness, and despite the lengthy interviews that The Times conducts, their testimonies remain stereotypical and schematically thin. The second category of witness are defined as "medical personnel, soldiers, and rape counselors," yet on closer examination none cited in the article are professionally trained to determine sexual abuse or rape (see below on ZAKA and the Shura Military Base). More importantly, none of those who say they suspected sexual abuse at the time asked for forensic experts to conduct examinations of the scene or use rape kits on the bodies of potential victims. Anonymous "rape counselors" are only cited to support generic descriptions of the obstacles faced by rape victims in coming forward.

The Times also viewed a video, provided by the Israeli military, showing two dead Israeli soldiers at a base near Gaza who appeared to have been shot directly in their vaginas

Response

This is an IDF claim that we are asked to take at face value. This video has neither been made public, nor independently verified. We can assume that the journalists shown the video by the Israeli military were not themselves qualified to determine the nature or location of gunshot wounds to a dead body.

she believed everyone in the house was killed when it was shelled by the IDF tank. When she asked why they shelled, the IDF had told her it was "to break the walls in order to help purify the house."⁵ The NYT interviewed Ms. Porat and a second survivor, Hadas Dagan, who had been held hostage and was in the garden at the time; they cite Brig. Gen. Barak Hiram as ordering the shelling.⁶ Video evidence has surfaced of a tank shelling a house in Kibbutz Be'eri and was shown on Israel's Channel 12 in December. Families of those killed in the house are seeking an official probe into the events.⁷

Kibbutz Kfar Aza

In an interview on October 14, Lt Col. Golan Vach was asked about the total destruction of burnt-out houses at Kibbutz Kfar Aza. He responded that IDF tanks had to shell houses in order "to conquer back the whole settlement." (In the house behind him, he noted, 19 Israeli hostages had died).⁸

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We do not want to reform the New York Times
We do not want to change the New York Times
We want to destroy the New York Times

—Writers Bloc

“The Woman in the Black Dress”

Unpacking the case at the center of ‘Screams Without Words’

The Times frames its story around the grainy video of Gal Abdush’s body—a video that was taken on the evening after her death and circulated online—and through a series of interpretative leaps in reading that video. Yet, there is no physical evidence presented to corroborate this interpretation—even though Israeli police are

said to have suspected rape when they saw the video and even though Israel made use of the video in its campaign to convince western media to support its genocide in Gaza. The Times was able to gain access to Ms. Abdush’s family and to interview them, on what the family has since claimed were misleading grounds.

At first, she was known simply as “the woman in the black dress.” In a grainy video, you can see her, lying on her back, dress torn, legs spread, vagina exposed. Her face is burned beyond recognition and her right hand covers her eyes.

Response

This video of Gal Abdush’s body was filmed by Eden Wessely, as she searched for a friend later on the evening of October 7, and then posted to her Instagram account. It was later posted on *hamas-massacre.net*, a website set up by the government of Israel. The Times may have focused on this video because it was part of a compiled 43 minute montage shown to select journalists and diplomatic missions by Israel in its campaign to convince western governments to support its genocide in Gaza. However, at least one independent journalist working for *The Guardian*, who saw that montage, said he did not register seeing evidence of rape.¹

In interpreting the video, the Times does not consider any of the other possibilities presented by the available information. The position of Gal Abdush’s body and nature of burn injuries could be consistent with Ms. Abdush sitting in a car when it was hit by an air strike from an IDF Apache helicopter (which we know fired on the site of the rave),² causing her body to fly out of the car. The car could have also been hit by a grenade thrown by a Hamas fighter, or from IDF tank fire, since there is evidence of a tank and an armored vehicle (APV) being on Route 232 with orders to prevent fighters from moving north or returning south.³

The videos caught the eye of Israeli officials as well—very quickly after Oct. 7 they began gathering evidence of atrocities. They included footage of Ms. Abdush’s body in a presentation made to foreign governments and media organizations, using Ms. Abdush as a representation of violence committed against women that day.

Response

The Times inadvertently admits, here, that Israel has been weaponizing the image of Ms. Abdush. But its reporters do not bother to inquire why no forensic evidence was col-

lected from the scene or from Ms. Abdush’s remains, given that Israeli officials suspected this to be a case of gender-based violence early on.

Based largely on the video evidence—which was verified by The New York Times—Israeli police officials said they believed that Ms. Abdush was raped, and she has become a symbol of the horrors visited upon Israeli women and girls during the Oct. 7 attacks.

Response

The video being “verified” only means that the Times has determined that the video itself was not doctored. It does not mean that any of the claims being made about the video by Israeli police officials are true. Note that the video was taken postmortem; it is not a video that shows any act of rape or sexual assault. Curiously, Israeli police did not inform Ms. Abdush’s fam-

ily that they suspected she had been raped, nor did they conduct any forensic examination or an autopsy of the body, either of which should have been possible if, as the Times claims, they suspected rape early on. This seems especially egregious if, as Israeli police now claim, they are having difficulty finding testimonies to substantiate rape on October 7.⁴

Some members of the Abdush family saw that video and another version of it filmed by one of Ms. Wessely’s friends. They immediately suspected that the body was Ms. Abdush, and based on the way her body was found, they feared that she might have been raped

Response

Gal Abdush’s family—shown in the cover image of the article ‘Screams Without Words’ and quoted throughout—have recently stated that they were misled by the Times, who gave them the impression that the article would honor the memory of Gal Abdush and her partner, Nagi Abdush. They did not know that the article would focus on rape. Nor, it appears, had “they feared that she might have been raped” from viewing the video immediately after October 7.

Indeed, Gal Abdush’s mother and brother said they had not suspected rape before they were approached by the journalists from the Times who claimed they had evidence of sexual assault. Her mother, Eti Bracha, told Ynet on December 31, 2023: “We didn’t know about the rape at first, we only knew when the New York Times reporter contacted us. They said they cross-examined the evidence and said that Gal was sexually assaulted. Until now we don’t know what exactly happened.”⁵ Her brother said: “It was only in the New York Times investigation that we understood from the journalists that my sister was raped. The feeling was difficult, knowing what she went through.”

Nissim Abdush, Nagi Abdush’s brother, appeared in a 14 minute interview on Israeli Channel 13 on January 1, 2024, in which he repeatedly denied that Gal Abdush had been raped, claiming “the media invented it.”⁶ He stated that his brother had called him at 7:00 am, telling him that Gal Abdush had been killed and that he was next to her body. His brother

continued to communicate until 7:44 am and, in that time, “never mentioned anything related to sexual assault.” The Times states that Nagi Abdush sent his last message at precisely 7:44 am, asking the family to take care of their children, but fails to mention that he had told his brother that Gal had been shot at 7:00 am or that he never mentioned sexual assault.

Both of Gal Abdush’s sisters also denied that she was raped. According to Mondoweiss, her sister, Tali Barakha, posted on Instagram: “no one can know if there was rape or if she was burned while alive. Have you gone mad? I spoke to Nagi personally! At 7 o’clock, Gal was killed by those animals, and they shot her in the heart. Nagi was alive until quarter past eight...”⁸ Indeed, like us when we viewed the video online, several of her family members and friends found that the video “lacks enough information to support the claim of rape.” In an Instagram post on January 2, 2024, Ms. Abdush’s sister, Miral Altar, responded to a video detailing Hamas “sexual atrocities” by Yoseph Haddad (a pro-Israel influencer) saying: “why this story in particular? It’s based on only one video published without the family’s knowledge... It is true that the scenes in the video are not easy, but it’s clear that the dress is lifted upwards and not in its natural state, and half her head is burned because they threw a grenade at the car. I don’t want to be understood as if I’m justifying what they did; they are animals, they raped and beheaded people, but in my sister’s case, this is not true.”⁹

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Protesters outside The Times in November 2023—we’ll be back ;-)

Breaking Down Eyewitness Testimonies

Four witnesses at two locations near the Nova Music Festival

Sapir, a 24-year-old accountant, has become one of the Israeli police’s key witnesses. She does not want to be fully identified [...] She also spoke to The Times. In a two-hour interview outside a cafe in southern Israel, she recounted seeing groups of heavily armed gunmen rape and kill at least five women.

She said that at 8 a.m. on Oct. 7, she was hiding under the low branches of a bushy tamarisk tree, just off Route 232, about four miles southwest of the party. She had been shot in the back. She felt faint. She covered herself in dry grass and lay as still as she could.

About 15 meters from her hiding place, she said, she saw motorcycles, cars and trucks pulling up. She said that she saw “about 100 men,” most of them dressed in military fatigues and combat boots, a few in dark sweatsuits, getting in and out of the vehicles. She said the men congregated along the road and passed between them assault rifles, grenades, small missiles—and badly wounded women.

“It was like an assembly point,” she said.

The first victim she said she saw was a young woman with copper-color hair, blood running down her back, pants pushed down to her knees. One man pulled her by the hair and made her bend over. Another penetrated her, Sapir said, and every time she flinched, he plunged a knife into her back.

She said she then watched another woman “shredded into pieces.” While one terrorist raped her, she said, another pulled out a box cutter and sliced off her breast. “One continues to rape her, and the other throws her breast to someone else, and they play with it, throw it, and it falls on the road,” Sapir said. She said the men sliced her face and then the woman fell out of view. Around the same time, she said, she saw three other women raped and terrorists carrying the severed heads of three more women.

Sapir provided photographs of her hiding place and her wounds, and police officials have stood by her testimony and released a video of her, with her face blurred, recounting some of what she saw.

Response

For some time, this was the only eyewitness testimony circulated by Israeli sources, part of which is posted on *hamas-massacre.net*. We know that a video of this testimony was also shown to Israeli and Western journalists.¹ The Times are the first journalists to have access to this witness, yet in their two-hour interview they fail to ask probing questions that could establish her credibility. Mondoweiss had already given a convincing critique of this testimony, in particular the claim that “terrorists [were] carrying the severed heads of three more women.” As Mondoweiss points out, “this final claim has not been shared by any Israeli officials and raises serious questions as to the overall reliability of the witness.” Indeed, there is no record of any, let alone three, women who were decapitated on October 7.

It should be noted that the testimony Sapir gave to the Times differs significantly from the one originally on record. In the video, we hear of only one woman who is raped and in Haaretz we are told that that woman was raped by two

individuals and then shot in the head.² But in the Times, Sapir tells of the rape of five women and their stabbing, while the sadistic torture she describes (the slicing of a breast) remains a common theme. Sapir’s narrative moves from individuals who may have raped one woman to the larger claim of a systematic pattern of rape (100 men, 5 women), but also from guns to the more bloody and primordial use of knives (stereotypical of Arabs and Muslims in Orientalist imaginaries).

We should add that the spectacular nature of mutilation claims in this testimony is troubling (potentially meant to provoke both horror and titillation). If true, they would indicate a sadism beyond the pale. Yet it is precisely for this reason that they require independent verification. These descriptions portray Palestinian fighters as monstrous—not only rapists but inhuman in their gratuitous mutilation and beheading of women. Since Israel has not conducted any autopsies or collected any forensic evidence, it is impossible to confirm but also to fully disprove

these claims. While unverified, however, such narratives remain in the western imaginary and stick through repetition and amplification, as well as through the weight of credibility and authority attributed to voices like the Times, the backing of mainstream western feminists and the weight of historical racist narratives. Left unchallenged, these images work to dehumanize Palestinian and Arab men and boys, and to justify their continued targeting for stripping, torture, and execution—atrocities that we know are being enacted by Israel in real time. It is not surprising that the intensification of rape allegations against Hamas, and the newer claim that they use rape as a systematic weapon of war, has coincided with the intensification of destruction in Gaza and the campaign to abduct and dehumanize Palestinian men and boys in the north. (This is confirmed if we scrutinize how Israel counts the terrorists it has killed—we find that it counts every single male Palestinian in Gaza, between ages 16 and 60, as a Hamas terrorist.)

Yura Karol, a 22-year-old security consultant, said he was hiding in the same spot, and he can be seen in one of Sapir’s photos. He and Sapir were part of a group of friends who had met up at the party. In an interview, Mr. Karol said he barely lifted his head to look at the road but he also described seeing a woman raped and killed.

Response

When Sapir’s testimony was reported in *Haaretz* by Josh Breiner on November 8th, 2023, the person who was with her said he had not seen the rape. *Haaretz* reported: “Another witness who has recounted the incident to

police was a man who was hiding behind the eyewitness and didn’t see the rape. He said she told him at the time what she saw.”³ Since in ‘Screams Without Words’ he says he barely lifted his head, it seems likely that this is the

same man, but that he has changed his story to corroborate that of Sapir. At the very least, we would expect the Times to ask after any change in his story and to scrutinize the credibility of this witness.

That same morning, along Route 232 but in a different location about a mile southwest of the party area, Raz Cohen—a young Israeli who had also attended the rave and had worked recently in the Democratic Republic of Congo training Congolese soldiers—said that he was hiding in a dried-up streambed. [...] Maybe 40 yards in front of him, he recalled, a white van pulled up and its doors flew open. He said he then saw five men, wearing civilian clothes, all carrying knives and one carrying a hammer, dragging a woman across the ground. She was young, naked and screaming. “They all gather around her,” Mr. Cohen said. “She’s standing up. They start raping her. I saw the men standing in a half circle around her. One penetrates her. She screams. I still remember her voice, screams without words.” “Then one of them raises a knife,” he said, “and they just slaughtered her.”

Response

Raz Cohen is a “discharged IDF officer from the elite Maglan unit” and an Israeli special forces veteran who trains Congolese soldiers. Like Sapir, his testimony has changed dramatically over time. Raz Cohen has given multiple interviews to the media (CBC, Israeli Channel 12, PBS), some in which he mentions rape and others not. In a PBS interview on Oc-

tober 10th, he mentions necrophilia (which he omits in the Times interview).

But more significantly there he voices a need for “revenge” and says: “If Gaza was on the map, after this Gaza won’t continue to be on the map of Israel.”⁴ In the same interview, we find out that he has been called up as a reservist and feels a need to take part in the

war on Gaza. This expressed genocidal desire for revenge, coupled with his shifting story, damage the credibility of Cohen’s account. Moreover, we might question why fighters equipped with guns and grenades (as we see on video from October 7) would use knives and a hammer.

Shoam Gueta, one of Mr. Cohen’s friends and a fashion designer, said the two were hiding together in the streambed. He said he saw at least four men step out of the van and attack the woman, who ended up “between their legs.” He said that they were “talking, giggling and shouting,” and that one of them stabbed her with a knife repeatedly, “literally butchering her.”

Response

Shoam Gueta says he saw an attack, and doesn’t specify rape. In an earlier interview with NBC News, he explicitly does not name rape. He says the victim was “cut with a knife.” His previous testimony does not include multiple stab wounds or laughter. (It is worth noting, again, that the use of knives to slaughter or butcher is a common Islamophobic trope that is supposed to recall the Muslim act of slitting the throat of sheep for sacrifice.)

Here’s his previous testimony from October 8th: “Shoam Gueta said he ran away from the barrage with a group of 20 people and hid in the bushes for nearly six hours as the onslaught unfolded around them. He used his mandatory military training experience to stay camouflaged and urged everyone in the group to remain silent and not to run away even when militants came within several feet. He saw Israelis gunned down as they tried to

take cover and watched as a woman was cut with a knife. One friend hid in a portable toilet. “We saw terrorists killing people, burning cars, shouting everywhere,” Gueta said. “If you just say something, if you make any noise, you’ll be murdered.” Quietly, he said, Gueta called his mother to reassure he was safe despite the surrounding carnage.”⁵

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The New York Crimes

Truth.

It comes at a cost.

But you won’t get it by subscribing to the *New York Times*, anyway. Unsubscribe now, save yourself money, and stop rewarding genocidal maniacs.

Analyzing Testimony From Volunteer Medics (ZAKA) and an IDF Paramedic

Hours later, the first wave of volunteer emergency medical technicians arrived at the rave site. In interviews, four of them said that they discovered bodies of dead women with their legs spread and underwear missing — some with their hands tied by rope and zip ties — in the party area, along the road, in the parking area and in the open fields around the rave site.

Jamal Waraki, a volunteer medic with the nonprofit ZAKA emergency response team, said he could not get out of his head a young woman in a rawhide vest found between the main stage and the bar. “Her hands were tied behind her back,” he said. “She was bent over, half naked, her underwear rolled down below her knees.”

Response

It is important to understand that “volunteer medics” have been among the worst perpetrators of brutality propaganda in the aftermath of October 7. Eli Beer, the founder of United Hatzalah, went on a tour of the US following October 7, in which he told stories of supposed Hamas atrocities to avoid audiences of American Zionists, raising over US\$49 million for his efforts. One such story was that of the Jewish baby baked in an oven.¹ This story has since been debunked, and United Hatzalah has claimed that the story was passed on by a volunteer whom they have since dismissed.

Another organization of volunteer responders is ZAKA. ZAKA, which is referred to in “Screams Without Words” only as a nonprofit “emergency response team,” is described by *Haaretz* as “an ultra-Orthodox Jewish organization whose members retrieve bodies after terror attacks.”² The testimonies of several ZAKA commanders and volunteers have already been debunked by both *Haaretz*³ and *Liberation*⁴ in their corrective articles about October 7. Since the Times does not give us the names of the “four emergency medical technicians” with whom it spoke, it is not possible to address their individual credibility. To date, Yossi Landau, Simcha Greinman, and Haim Otmegzin have all been discredited.

It is likely that the Times chose to speak to a Muslim Arab-Israeli member of ZAKA, Jamal Waraki, to avoid the criticisms that have arisen about its ultra-religious Jewish-Israeli members. However, Jamal Waraki works for both ZAKA and United Hatzalah, by his own admission; his main appearance, prior to the Times article, is in a propaganda video to promote Jewish-Arab unity on the Israeli government’s official Twitter account.⁵ Waraki’s relation to these organizations means that we should take his testimony with a grain of salt. At the least, his testimony cannot be considered credible without corroborating evidence. (Note that in his video appearance on Israel’s Twitter account, Waraki describes what he interprets as the aftermath of a different rape at a kibbutz, not the one in the Times article.)

“Screams Without Words” does cite Yossi Landau; he is quoted explaining his regret at

Similar discoveries were made in two kibbutzim, Be’eri and Kfar Aza. Eight volunteer medics and two Israeli soldiers told *The Times* that in at least six different houses, they had come across a total of at least 24 bodies of women and girls naked or half naked, some mutilated, others tied up, and often alone.

Response

The Times has previously published articles with detailed timelines of events at Kibbutz Be’eri¹³ and extensive interviews with survivors from Kfar Aza,¹⁴ in which there was no mention of rape. Rape was not part of the accounts that survivors gave. As the Kibbutzim are small and tight-knit communities where settlers are

A paramedic in an Israeli commando unit said that he had found the bodies of two teenage girls in a room in Be’eri. One was lying on her side, he said, boxer shorts ripped, bruises by her groin. The other was sprawled on the floor face down, he said, pajama pants pulled to her knees, bottom exposed, semen smeared on her back. Because his job was to look for survivors, he said, he kept moving and did not document the scene. Neighbors of the two girls killed — who were sisters, 13 and 16 — said their bodies had been found alone, separated from the rest of their family. The Israeli military allowed the paramedic to speak with reporters on the condition that he not be identified because he serves in an elite unit.

Response

According to the official Israeli records, there were two teenage sisters, 13 and 16, killed in Kibbutz Be’eri. But the girls were killed with their mother. Speaking to the BBC, their grandmother described how the bodies were found by a soldier “all cuddled together with Lianne [the mother] doing what a mother would do — holding her babies in her arms, trying to protect them at the end.”¹⁵ In a *Mondoweiss* article, it is shown that the elite commando unit, Unit 669, to which “G” belonged was not deployed to Kibbutz Be’eri on October 7, shedding doubt on his presence at Be’eri that day.¹⁶

It should be noted that this paramedic pro-

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having not taken photographs of the evidence he claims to have encountered, alongside a photograph of him gazing into the distance. The Times omits to discuss his lack of credibility, which has been amply demonstrated by *Liberation* which points to several false testimonies that he has given. Landau is responsible for, among others, the story of the mass murder and burning of children tied together at Kibbutz Be’eri and a graphic account of the shooting of a non-existent pregnant woman, cutting of her abdomen, and knitting of her fetus at the same kibbutz.⁹ Both accounts have been disproven due to the absence of any bodies corresponding to the stories.

However, as a recent *Mondoweiss* article shows, there are structural problems that make ZAKA suspect beyond the false stories of atrocities spread by its individual members.⁷ This includes their financial corruption and attempt to raise funds through atrocity narratives; the accusations of rape and sexual assault that plagued their founder (Yehuda Meshi-Zahav) and over which he committed suicide in 2021; and the complicity of other members of ZAKA in defending him. In his ethnography of the organization, Israeli scholar Gideon Aran writes that, because of their Orthodox religious status, ZAKA members are exempt from military service, yet in their work they cooperate closely with the Israeli military, of whom they frequently express “envy and admiration.”⁸ ZAKA, Aran notes, is fiercely Zionist and “represents a revolutionary ideal: Haredi macho.”⁹

Even more damning is the lack of professional qualifications of ZAKA members to make assessments of sexual violence, and the lack of detail (age, location, time) in their testimonies, as well as their refusal to provide evidence. The vagueness of their testimonies means that often “it is impossible to either confirm or debunk them.”¹⁰ Moreover, as *Mondoweiss* points out, ZAKA has “a radical religious position against autopsies and forensic procedures,” and it is within their mandate “to work to prevent autopsies.”¹¹ What has not been sufficiently examined is the role of ZAKA in the destruction of evidence and its tampering with crime scenes, that have meant that certain questions may never be answered. Specifically, who died from Hamas fighters’ gunshots or grenades, and who from IDF fire, shelling by tanks, or fire from IDF Apache helicopters? How were the cars fleeing from the Nova Music Festival burned (we know that IDF Apache helicopters fired on the site of the festival and couldn’t distinguish Israelis from Palestinian fighters)? What caused the total destruction of some of the kibbutzim houses (we know of at least two kibbutzim where houses were burnt-out and reduced to rubble by IDF tank shelling, but what of the rest)? And how did Ms. Abdush die (after all, the Times tells us that her family has yet to receive a death certificate)? Videos of ZAKA members show them cleaning up the blood from houses in the kibbutzim.¹² The NYT notes that emergency response teams “said they had moved bodies, cut off zippers and cleaned up scenes of carnage. Trying to be respectful to the dead, they inadvertently destroyed evidence.” It blames this destruction of evidence, not on their political interests but rather on their adherence to strict religious rules “that command deep respect for the dead.” It is hard not to see this as designed to back readers into a corner. If we criticize ZAKA’s destruction of evidence we are framed as critiquing Jewish burial practices and thus as potentially antisemitic (just as the article frames those who demand evidence of sexual assault as putting too much pressure on victims or failing to believe survivors, and hence anti-feminist).

At the Shura Military Base

Two witnesses, neither of whom has the medical or forensic training required to determine rape

Many of the dead were brought to the Shura military base, in central Israel, for identification. Here, too, witnesses said they saw signs of sexual violence. Shari Mendes, an architect called up as a reserve soldier to help prepare the bodies of female soldiers for burial, said she had seen four with signs of sexual violence, including some with “a lot of blood in their pelvic areas.”

Response

Shari Mendes is a volunteer with the IDF Rabbinical Corps whose work is to prepare the bodies or remains of female soldiers for burial according to Jewish custom. The Times presents her as though she were an expert witness. However, while Ms. Mendes knows how to identify and prepare female bodies for burial, she is not trained in determining signs of sexual abuse or rape. She is neither a forensic examiner, nor does she have any medical training. In a previous interview with the *Daily Mail* on October 20, Ms. Mendes gave a more elaborate testimony, not only about four women, but of mass rape: “There is evidence of mass rape so brutal that they broke their victims’ pelvis — women, grandmothers, children.” And she added: “A baby was cut out of a pregnant woman and beheaded and then the mother was beheaded.”²¹ This story of a pregnant woman who was disemboweled and whose fetus was then beheaded is disproven by the National Insurance Institute records which show that, while there is a pregnant woman who was killed on October 7, she is a Bedouin woman who was shot in her car and her baby then died at the hospital after being delivered prematurely.²²

Ms. Mendes’ testimony at the UN on December 4, 2023 preempted some of what she says to the Times, but in that testimony it was clear that she was describing facial and genital “mutilation” due to gunshot wounds.³ She noted that the female soldiers she prepared for burial “were shot in several places in the body and then many times in the head [...] and it seems as if mutilation of these women’s faces was an objective.” Even more damning for the Times’ attempt to present Ms. Mendes as a credible witness of the postmortem signs of sexual violence, at the UN she doesn’t testify to having herself seen genital mutilation. Rather, Ms. Mendes says: “Our team commander saw several female soldiers who were shot in the crotch, intimate parts, vagina, or shot in a breast. This seemed to be a systematic genital mutilation of a group of victims.”²⁴

A dentist, Captain Maayan, who worked at the same identification center, said that she had seen at least 10 bodies of female soldiers from Gaza observation posts with signs of sexual violence. Captain Maayan asked to be identified only by her rank and surname because of the sensitivity of the subject. She said she had seen several bodies with cuts in their vaginas and underwear soaked in blood and one whose fingernails had been pulled out.

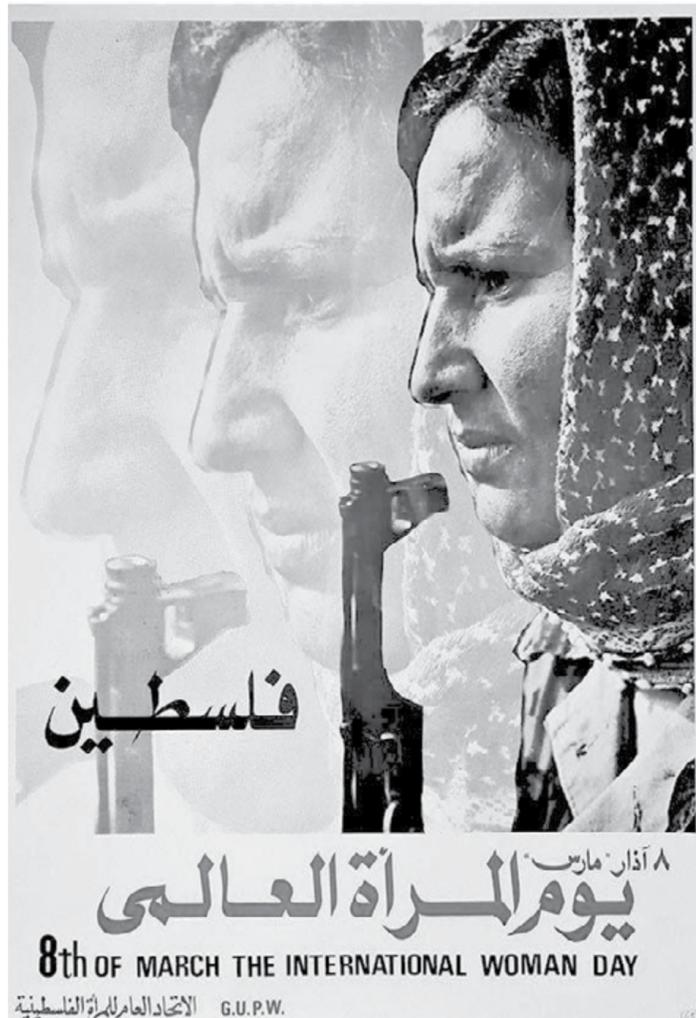
Response

The same two witnesses from Shura military base, whom the Times interviews, were already cited in a position paper published by Physicians for Human Rights Israel. In that paper, however, we are cautioned that they “are not professionally trained to determine whether rape had occurred.”²⁵ In that paper, Maayan also testified to “broken legs and pelvises.”

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Fatah, for example, fights against American Imperialism. But American imperialism is also the New York Times and CBS. We, we are fighting against CBS. There are a lot of journalists who sincerely consider themselves as leftist, and who are not fighting CBS and the New York Times. They may think they are helping Fatah by publishing an article in the bourgeois press. But they are not fighting.

—Jean-Luc Godard, 1970



A poster of the General Union of Palestinian Women ca. 1970

Lack of Physical Evidence and Corroborating Eyewitness Accounts

The Israeli authorities have no shortage of video evidence from the Oct. 7 attacks. They have gathered hours of footage from Hamas body cameras, dashcams, security cameras and mobile phones showing Hamas terrorists killing civilians and many images of mutilated bodies. But Moshe Fintzy, a deputy superintendent and senior spokesman of Israel’s national police, said, “We have zero autopsies, zero,” making an O with his right hand

Response

“No shortage of video evidence” makes it sound as if Israeli authorities have proof of sexual assault on film. Yet, these videos are of “mutilated bodies,” where the possible signs of sexual assault or mutilation are interpreted from the postmortem condition and disposition of those bodies. In fact, there is a lack of corroborating videos that show sexual assault, despite the magnitude of footage.

Owen Jones (of *The Guardian*) — who saw the compiled 43 minute montage by Israel of October 7 shown to select international journalists and diplomatic missions — notes that this was presumably the best evidence Israel had of

Investigators with Israel’s top national police unit, Lahav 433, have been steadily gathering evidence but they have not put a number on how many women were raped, saying that most are dead — and buried — and that they will never know. No survivors have spoken publicly.

Response

The magnitude and scale matters for the claim of systematic and planned mass rape. Yet we have no sense of scale here. Indeed, the vagueness of the numbers turns out to be a problem not of too many bodies to count, which is what the Times attempts to portray, but of there being too few or no documented cases.

On January 4, 2024, *Haaretz* published an article on the difficulty that the Israeli police investigators were having “finding living victims of or witnesses to sexual assault committed by Hamas on October 7.” It explained that this was “due to the fact that many of the victims were killed that day, taken hostage or are in a state of psychological distress and unable to testify.”²³ The aim of the article was

“Many people are looking for the golden evidence, of a woman who will testify about what happened to her. But don’t look for that, don’t put this pressure on this woman,” said Orit Sulitzeanu, executive director of the Association of Rape Crisis Centers in Israel. “The corpses tell the story.”

Response

Yet, this runs counter to the call that Israeli police investigators just issued to “living witnesses and victims” to come forward and give a statement to police.⁴ This is because it is by now evident that Israel has not been able to collect evidence from corpses, or was not willing to do so. The problem here is not with the silence of survivors of sexual violence, but with the weaponization of that

Hamas “atrocities.”²¹ He explains that Israel had access to CCTV and dashcam footage, and so would not have had to rely simply on Hamas telegram channels and mobile phone videos from fighters or Israelis. It is worth noting that Jones said he did not see conclusive evidence of rape in the Israeli compilation.

While as feminists we agree that “[i]n cases of widespread sexual violence during a war, it is not unusual to have limited forensic evidence, experts said,” this case differs. Israel has the capacity and infrastructure to carry out forensic examinations (as it has done for DNA analysis of remains, revealing that 200 of the initial 1400 dead were in fact Palestinians whose bodies were charred beyond recognition).² This is especially the case given that the window of active fighting was relatively small and Israeli police/military had unimpeded access to bodies in the aftermath. The problem is not only that no forensic evidence of sexual assault was collected at all. More damning is that we are asked to lend credibility to several witnesses interviewed by the Times — “volunteer medics” from ZAKA, soldiers, reservists at the Shura morgue — all of whom claim that they saw bodies with what they suspected, at the time, were signs of sexual violence, yet none of whom asked for forensic examination nor autopsy of the bodies in question. While not all bodies could be examined, it would have been logical to examine those where signs of sexual abuse were claimed to have been noted early on — as in the case of Gal Abdush for instance. This engineered incompetence serves to obscure accountability.

to appeal “to the public to encourage anyone with information to contact [the police] and give a statement.” This public call by Israeli police puts the lie to many of the claims in the Times article of December 28.

After all, the Times’ claim is not that there were individual and isolated acts of sexual violence, but that there was a “pattern.” While the Times claims that “very quickly after Oct. 7 [Israeli officials] began collecting evidence of atrocities,” it is clear that they have not been able to collect reliable corroborating testimonies of sexual assault. Indeed, in cases where rape is used as a “weapon of war,” it is systematic, planned and intentional, so that multiple testimonies and eyewitnesses exist to corroborate one another.

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Every Accusation Is a Confession

At the same time as Israeli and western media launch unfounded accusations of systematic sexual violence against the Palestinian resistance, Israel continues to systematically enact sexual violence against Palestinians, as it has done now for over 75 years. This violence, which is enabled by the broader structural violence of the occupation, is pervasive and well-evidenced.

Below, we offer just some examples of this violence.

Rape and sexual abuse during Israeli military aggression

Evidence of rape and sexual assault committed by Israel during military aggressions date back to the Nakba of 1948, in which Israel destroyed over 600 Palestinian villages, murdered over 20,000 Palestinians and expelled over 750,000 Palestinians from their homes. Historian Ilan Pappé details several instances during the Nakba in which mass rape was enacted by Israeli soldiers. These instances of mass rape were reported by Israeli soldiers to their own high command within a few days of the events. One such instance was the Massacre of Dayawmeh on October 28 1948, of which Pappé writes, “The Jewish soldiers who took part in the massacre also reported horrific scenes: babies whose skulls were cracked open, women raped or burned alive in houses, and men stabbed to death.”² Pappé details extensive Israeli documentation of rape committed by its own soldiers both during the Nakba and in its immediate aftermath. For example, Israeli prime-minister at the time David Ben-Gurion made note of “rape cases” every few days in his personal diary. One such entry described “a case in Acre where soldiers wanted to rape a girl. They killed the father and wounded the mother, and the officers covered for them. At least one soldier raped the girl.”³

Israeli militarism has continued to call on discourses and practices of sexual violence, with mounting ferocity. Accompanying Israel's 2014 assault on Gaza which killed 2, 251 civilians, left 500, 000 displaced and injured 11, 231 were images demanding and celebrating sexual violence, such as the portrayal of Gaza as a half-naked woman in a niqab with a caption calling on Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu to rape her, circulated widely on Israeli social media. Public banners sponsored by the City Council of Or Yehuda declared, “Israel Defense Forces soldiers, Or Yehuda's residents are with you! Pound ‘their mothers’

and return safely to your own mother!”⁴ At the same time, incidents of Israeli female soldiers posing photographs of themselves posing besides blindfolded and handcuffed Palestinian male prisoners, such as those posted by Eden Abergil, demonstrate the ways in which Israel's sexual and gendered violence is also perpetrated against Palestinian men.⁵

Today, we have evidence that Israel has been using sexual violence, not only against Palestinians held in Israeli prisons (see below) but against Palestinian civilians in Gaza. In a chilling video first published on social media on October 31 and verified by Amnesty International's Crisis Evidence Lab, nine Palestinian men are pictured stripped naked or half-naked, blindfolded and handcuffed, surrounded by at least 12 armed Israeli soldiers, one of whom kicks a detainee in the head.⁶ Similar videos of Palestinian men of all ages—including elderly and disabled individuals, and children—forced to strip, blindfolded and forced into humiliating and degrading positions en masse have circulated in the weeks following.

Sexual abuse of prisoners

On December 21, the *Guardian* reported that over 8000 Palestinians were being held in Israeli prisons, many of them detained after October 7.⁷ Thousands of these prisoners—and more than 80% of those detained since October 7—are subject to so-called ‘administrative detention’: indefinite, arbitrary imprisonment. Amnesty International has found that Israel has systematically used administrative detention as a tool to persecute Palestinians.⁸ This persecution involves forms of routine sexual harassment and abuse. According to Addameer, a Palestinian Non-Governmental Organization based in the West Bank, “the majority of Palestinian women prisoners are subjected to some form of psychological torture and ill-treatment throughout the process of their arrest and detention, including various forms of sexual violence that occur such as beatings, insults, threats, body searches, and sexually explicit harassment.”⁹ During an interview with Al Jazeera Arabic TV, Ruqayah Amra, one of the Palestinians released as part of the November 2023 prisoner exchange deal, explained that female Palestinian prisoners were subjected to threats of sexual assault and naked beatings. In a December 1 interview with *Democracy Now*, freed Palestinian journalist Barah Abo Ramouz explained that “the situation in the prisons is devastating. The prisoners are abused. They are being constantly beaten. They're being sexually assaulted. They are be-

ing raped. I'm not exaggerating. The prisoners are being raped.”¹⁰

In an interview published by *Middle East Eye* after her release from Israeli prison in November 2023 Palestinian journalist and writer Lama Khater stated that she was treated “with great brutality and extreme violence” and an Israeli intelligence officer threatened her with rape. “I was handcuffed and blindfolded,” she recounts “I was explicitly threatened with rape. I was even told they had 20 soldiers around me. It was clear the goal was to intimidate me.”¹¹ According to Khater threats of rape were used against other female prisoners, and female prisoners—including women kidnapped from Northern Gaza in the days before the truce—were subjected to strip searches. Amnesty International has similarly reported on the use of rape threats and forced nudity against Palestinian prisoners, and the confiscation of sanitary pads from Palestinian women prisoners.¹²

In a 2015 Israeli investigation conducted by Bar Ilan University, it was found that the sexual abuse and torture of Palestinian men and boys in Israeli prisons is “systemic.”¹³ The study based its results on thousands of testimonies collected by the Public Committee Against Torture in Israel (PCATI). Examples of sexual abuse suffered by the prisoners included forced nudity (often for extended periods of time), verbal sexual harassment including threats of rape, touching or kicking the genitals, being urinated on while handcuffed, simulated rape and actual rape with blunt objects. Victims of sexual torture and abuse described in the study included minors, with an age range from 15–43 years.

Many children are among those imprisoned and subjected to sexual violence. According to a 2023 report by Save the Children, Palestinian children are the only children systematically prosecuted in military courts, and between 700–1000 Palestinian children are imprisoned by Israel each year (many for alleged stone throwing, which can carry a prison sentence of up to 20 years).¹⁴ While imprisoned, “the majority of children experienced appalling levels of physical and emotional abuse.”¹⁵ During their detention, over 86% of Palestinian children are routinely beaten, 60% are subjected to solitary confinement, and 69% are strip searched.¹⁶ Addameer reports that sexual threats and assaults are common against child prisoners, and include “the form of grabbing a child's testicles and threats of rape or sodomy with an object.”¹⁷ In 2021 the rape and sexual torture of a 15-year-old Palestinian boy at a Jerusalem detention facility was reported by Defense For Chil-

dren International Palestine (DCIP). The boy had been told that if he reported the rape he would face further sexual torture.¹⁷ On October 25, 2021 DCIP was listed as a terrorist organization by the Israeli government in response to these allegations.

Sexual abuse and harassment at checkpoints, during raids and in airports

In their study of the experiences of women visiting loved ones held in occupation prisons, Al Issa and Beck (2021) found that 19 out of the 20 Palestinian women they interviewed had experienced “multiple instances of sexual abuse.”¹⁸ Each of the 19 women had experienced “physical touching and forced nudity, which was often accompanied by humiliating or derogatory remarks.”¹⁹ All but two of the women stayed silent about the abuse, out of fear of jeopardizing future visitation rights. This points to the dramatically uneven power dynamics shaping the capacity of Palestinians to speak out about their sexual abuse at the hands of the Israeli police and military.

Despite this, instances of systematic sexual abuse against Palestinians are well documented. This includes sexual abuse at Israeli checkpoints, which govern the movement of Palestinians throughout the West Bank, and sexual abuse during Israeli military raids of Palestinian homes (a common Israeli device of terror and collective punishment). For example, in 2023 Israeli soldiers forced five Palestinian women to strip naked in front of their children during a night raid on their homes.²⁰ When interviewed about the incident Palestinian human rights activist Hisham Shrabati explained, “This is not an exceptional incident, and it is not the first case of this kind that I document in Hebron... There are similar cases happening regularly, as the occupation forces raid Palestinian homes in Hebron on a daily basis.”²¹

Multiple instances of sexual violence committed against Palestinian women by Israeli soldiers at checkpoints have also been reported in *Haaretz* and by B'Tselem, such as the demand for sexual “favors,” i.e. the enacting of physical sexual abuse in order to be allowed to pass through a checkpoint.²² As an indicator of how structurally endemic such abuse is, in 2022 both *Haaretz* and the *Times* of Israel reported that a senior Shin Bet officer accused of rape and of ordering a “genital examination” of a Palestinian woman at an Israeli checkpoint had been promoted to a high position within Shin Bet, despite advice that he be fired.²³

A Final Note...



While this analysis has aimed to deconstruct Israeli propaganda, we acknowledge that for many Palestinians this work does not need to be done. Dr. Refaat Alareer (*above*), assassinated in Gaza by Israel on the 6th December, 2023, wrote in 2010:

It is no wonder when Gazans remember Israel as the Israel that bombed, destroyed and/or bulldozed Gaza bridges, schools, universities, thousands of houses, mosques, farms and fields, trees and greenhouses. Israel, for Gazans, killed thousands and inflicted injury, pain, deprivation, poverty, and disability on tens and hundreds of thousands. No matter how many clips they post, no matter how many pictures they claim to use as evidence, no matter how many millions of dollars they spend for the cover up, and no matter how many arrogant spokespersons, who by the way have a habit of never answering any question, appear on TV, Israel swots up on its homework to be done in Gaza. It spends billions of dollars on propaganda and thousands of hours of meetings and preparations. However, in Gaza and only by Gaza, Israel's true face is revealed in a blink on an eye. There is no homework done well for Israel in Gaza.

No amount of propaganda will erase the memory of Palestinians living through Israel's current genocide, just as no amount of propaganda will erase Palestinians' collective historical memory of Israeli violence. In the propaganda war, the truth of this memory will ultimately win out.

In conclusion and summary...

Our case against the allegation that systematic rape was committed by the Palestinian resistance on October 7 is as follows:

First, All the rape testimonies are centred on the rave (Nova music festival), where there were thousands of people—and even after evacuation, several hundred remained. There are four testimonies in the *Times* article, at two locations at the festival site. However, according to *Haaretz*, Hamas likely did not have advance knowledge that the rave was still taking place on Saturday. (It was supposed to end on Friday and the organizers asked, a few days before, to extend it till Saturday.) It appears that fighters were surprised to find the rave taking place in the field near Kibbutz Reim. So planning mass rape at the festival was not even a possibility.

This means that if there was a plan of systematic rape, it would have targeted the kibbutzim. Yet we have shown through detailed analysis that there is no credible evidence of sexual violence at the kibbutzim. This is telling given that fighters spent a long time entrenched with the hostages in kibbutzim houses, trying to delay the retaking of the Gaza Envelope (in some cases into Sunday).

Second, there are only four testimonies featured in ‘Screams Without Words.’ This does not constitute a “pattern,” and each of the four testimonies has significant problems that affects the credibility of the witness. Even when we include the “volunteer medics” and military personnel, we still have only a handful of witnesses—many of whom are interpreting the condition and disposition of a body postmortem, with no professional expertise or medical training.

Third, Israel is relying heavily on recorded

visual “evidence,” photographic or video, that has been circulated online. These visual recordings present hermeneutical challenges. While conclusions of rape are often circulated as self-evident, specific knowledge, care and corroborating sources are needed to interpret manner of death or injury from such sources; these are only one among many sets of possibilities they present. It is also important to pay attention to their limitations, for context and history, cleared villages and occupied land, remain outside the frame. Indeed, as Ariella Aisha Azoulay notes, “images do not have an innate truth; they live in community with or against those who are involved in them.” Outside the frame of the images in which Israel asks to see Palestinian violence is the very “fact that images of violence targeting Israelis are being weaponized as decisive proof for the legitimacy of Israel's response,” for the genocide of Palestinians.²

Fourth, the charge that rape has been used as a “weapon of war” requires both systematicity and intentionality. Israel has relied on two confessions to support its case that rape was a planned and intentional part of the October 7 operation. Yet, given the interrogation practices of Israel's Shin Bet, such confessions would have been obtained under torture and cannot be relied on.³ In a public statement released on December 31, 2023, Hamas political bureau member Dr. Bassem Naim stated that Hamas “categorically deny” allegations that their fighters had engaged in the use of rape and sexual violence. This is not the first time that Hamas has denied the allegations and welcomed an independent international investigation.

Fifth, the purported universality of rape as a “weapon of war” is employed to justify the claim that it was used systematically and deliberately on October 7 by Hamas. However, several prominent Israeli sources in the campaign to accuse Palestinians of rape on October 7th have said that Israeli authorities were not prepared to conduct forensic examinations, use rape-kits, or collect evidence of rape, because they did not expect it.⁴ This is because Hamas, and the Palestinian resistance more generally, had never committed rape in past attacks. This historical matter of fact should contextualize and undermine universalizations regarding rape as a weapon of war.

More troubling, the argument that rape is always a weapon of war normalizes rape as a quotidian part of military action. It is argued: why would Hamas, and by extension Palestinian fighters, be any different from other military groups—or the IDF? This argument feeds into attempts to render both sides equivalent, removing the ability to make value judgements. But only one side benefits from such equivalence, since this equivalence renders ordinary—and beneath outrage—the actions of those who wield power; it renders normal the colonial violence that structures the status quo. In other words, it normalizes Israeli sexual violence against Palestinians. Yet in the case of Palestinian fighters, as we saw, the Israeli charge of rape is compounded with allegations of mutilation, sadism, and beheading. This serves to put Palestinian fighters beyond the pale—to cast them as not only rapists but

inhuman monsters. It is for this reason that the testimonies Israel promotes are exorbitant in their cruelty, with gruesome details and Islamophobic stereotypes. It is for this reason that the charge of systematic and brutal rape is a tool used not only to demonize the Palestinian resistance, but to dehumanize Palestinian men in general. By framing Palestinian resistance, not as an anticolonial liberation movement but through the trope of the terrorist-rapist, the right of Palestinians to armed resistance against occupation under international law is also erased.⁵ The urgency with which the narrative of the terrorist-rapist is being employed correlates to the timing of intensification in Israel's genocide in Gaza. The timing of this campaign may also have to do with Israel's anxieties over losing the media war and its attempt to counter the humanization of Palestinian men that has taken place through the proximity that the public feels to their stories, as they film and share their own images online—contrasting starkly with racist depictions in the hegemonic media.

Far from being a “newspaper of record,” *The New York Times* has demonstrated once again its complicity with power. The paper's editorial guidelines demand that reporters “preserve a professional detachment, free of any whiff of bias,” yet the newspaper has consistently violated its own as well as internationally recognized journalistic standards of objectivity. As this report has demonstrated, *The New York Times* has been a leading actor in manufacturing consent for genocide in Gaza.

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