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ABSTRACT

Cultural Genocide in Gaza: Legal and Psychological Impacts on Palestinian Identity

Nour Iriqat

Supervisor: Danyah Jaber

Al-Quds University

Cultural genocide, as theorized by Raphael Lemkin, involves the systematic destruction of a group's cultural identity, traditions, and historical memory. In Gaza, the ongoing targeting of cultural, religious, and educational institutions by Israeli forces raises serious questions about whether these acts constitute cultural genocide. This study explores how the destruction of sites such as mosques, churches, libraries, and universities functions as a means of erasing Palestinian identity and severing connections to heritage and collective memory. The research aims to examine whether such acts fall under Lemkin's broader concept of genocide, despite the exclusion of cultural genocide from the 1948 Genocide Convention. It also investigates how this legal omission enables impunity and complicates international recognition of cultural destruction as a form of mass atrocity.

Employing a qualitative interdisciplinary methodology, the study analyzes legal documents, human rights reports, and academic literature. The research is grounded in Lemkin's framework and includes case comparisons to assess how Gaza's experience reflects broader patterns of settler-colonial erasure. Although the study is still in progress, expected findings suggest that Israel's destruction of Palestinian cultural heritage aligns with key indicators of genocidal intent, including psychological harm and disruption of community life. These patterns indicate that cultural genocide operates alongside physical displacement as part of a broader colonial strategy.

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Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to the mentioned authors at the mentioned institutes.

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E-mail: research@admin.alquds.edu

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The study anticipates concluding that the current international legal framework is inadequate for addressing the cultural dimensions of genocide. It argues for the inclusion of cultural genocide within the legal definition to ensure accountability and justice. Recognizing cultural heritage as essential to group survival is critical in confronting long-term efforts to erase identity, as seen in the Palestinian context. The case of Gaza calls for urgent legal and scholarly attention to cultural genocide as a distinct and prosecutable form of violence.

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