Visualizing Resistance: Between Hamas Violent Hostage Liberation Scenes and Palestinian Citizens' Narratives on Instagram During the Gaza Conflict

Visualizando a Resistência: Entre as Cenas Violentas de Libertação de Reféns pelo Hamas e as Narrativas de Cidadãos Palestinos no Instagram Durante o Conflito em Gaza

Visualizando la Resistencia: Entre las Escenas Violentas de Liberación de Rehenes por Parte de Hamás y las Narrativas de Ciudadanos Palestinos en Instagram Durante el Conflicto en Gaza

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates the visual strategies employed by Palestinian citizens amid the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict, focusing on how Instagram is used to challenge hegemonic media narratives that predominantly highlight violent hostage liberation scenes. Drawing on Southern epistemologies (Sousa Santos, 2018), the analysis highlights locally rooted visual semiotics that convey the lived experiences of Gazans. Through visual digital ethnography and visual literacy (Mizan; Ferraz, 2021), the study reveals how these audiovisual materials foster a decolonial perspective, subverting Western media representations and amplifying the voices of marginalized communities. This research ultimately contributes to the Southernization of Applied Linguistics by foregrounding alternative visual discourses that challenge colonial and capitalist commodification of the region and reassert local narratives of resistance.

Keywords: letramento visual; micropolíticas de resistencia; epistemologías del Sur; conflicto en Gaza.

ARTIGO

RESUMO

Este artigo investiga as estratégias visuais empregadas por cidadãos palestinos em meio ao contínuo conflito israelo-palestino, com foco nas maneiras pelas quais o Instagram é utilizado para desafiar narrativas midiáticas hegemônicas que destacam predominantemente cenas violentas de libertação de reféns. Com base nas epistemologias do Sul (Sousa Santos, 2018), a análise destaca semióticas visuais enraizadas localmente que transmitem as experiências vividas pelos cidadãos de Gaza. Por meio da etnografia digital visual e do letramento visual (Mizan; Ferraz, 2021), o estudo revela como esses materiais audiovisuais promovem uma perspectiva decolonial, subvertendo as representações da mídia ocidental e amplificando as vozes de comunidades marginalizadas. Esta pesquisa, em última instância, contribui para a suleação da Linguística Aplicada ao dar centralidade a discursos visuais alternativos que desafiam a mercantilização colonial e capitalista da região e reafirmam narrativas locais de resistência.

Keywords: letramento visual; micropolíticas de resistência; epistemologias do Sul; conflito em Gaza.

RESUMEN

Este artículo investiga las estrategias visuales empleadas por ciudadanos palestinos en medio del conflicto palestino-israelí en curso, centrándose en cómo se utiliza Instagram para desafiar las narrativas mediáticas hegemónicas que destacan predominantemente escenas violentas de liberación de rehenes. Basándose en las epistemologías del Sur (Sousa Santos, 2018), el análisis destaca semióticas visuales localmente arraigadas que transmiten las experiencias vividas de los ciudadanos de Gaza. A través de la etnografía digital visual y el alfabetización visual (Mizan; Ferraz, 2021), el estudio revela cómo estos materiales audiovisuales fomentan una perspectiva decolonial, subvirtiendo las representaciones de los medios occidentales y amplificando las voces de comunidades marginadas. Esta investigación, en última instancia, contribuye a la "surización" de la Lingüística Aplicada al poner en primer plano discursos visuales alternativos que desafían la mercantilización colonial y capitalista de la región y reafirman narrativas locales de resistencia.

Palabras clave: letramento visual; micropolíticas de resistencia; epistemologías del Sur; conflicto en Gaza.

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[To a killer] If you had contemplated the victim's face
And thought it through, you would have remembered your mother in the
Gas chamber, you would have been freed from the reason for the rifle
And you would have changed your mind: this is not the way
to find one's identity again.
Mahmoud Darwish, Under Siege

INTRODUÇÃO

The epigraph by renowned Palestinian poet and writer Mahmoud Darwish, draws a parallel between the Jewish holocaust and the ongoing treatment Palestinians have been getting since 1948, the year David Ben-Gurion, then Chairman of the Jewish Agency, proclaimed the establishment of the State of Israel, and before 1948, during the Zionist struggle to take possession of the lands that were historically inhabited by Palestinians. In juxtaposing these historical traumas, Darwish recognizes the suffering of the Jewish people and invites us to reflect on the dangers of perpetuating cycles of violence and trauma in the name of religious identity and nationhood.

The state of being a victim is ingrained in Jewish identity. Darwish, by inverting the roles and situating the status of victimhood in Palestinian bodies, challenges the historical right of Jewish people and Israel "to defend themselves". Jewish historical suffering and trauma has been weaponized to justify oppression and continuous colonization of Palestinian lands. Darwish poetically demands that the oppressor recognize the humanity of their victims, drawing attention to the ethical paradox of a people who, having endured one of the greatest genocides in human history, now find themselves in a position of power—and, from that position, continuously enact violence, displacement, and the erasure of another people who have been systematically marginalized and dehumanized.

In this reversal, Darwish calls into question the failure of historical memory to generate empathy, particularly when the memory of the Jewish people, who have suffered profound violence and trauma, is filtered through the lens of nationalist ideology and historical victimhood. Ultimately, the Palestinian poet invites the reader to consider a different path—one grounded not in the repetition of violence but in the radical act of recognition: to contemplate the face of the Other, to think it through and in it, to see oneself.

Israelis are taught through a combination of the national educational system, the media and literary production to, eventually, see Palestinians as their absolute Other, in spite of knowing little about Palestinians lives, histories and narratives of existence. The dehumanization process of Palestinian people allows the normalization of violence and occupation by promoting the lack of recognition of the existence of the Other. In this context, Darwish's insistence on recognition becomes a radical ethical demand: to confront the face of the other not as enemy, but as a reflection of one's own humanity. Holmes (2024, p. 77) reminds us of how Levinas perceives the ethical positioning in relation to the estrangement we feel for the Other:

> For Levinas, "the Other" referred to here is not another person that we might categorise as being different from prevailing norms but is rather a person or representation that is beyond comprehension, impossible to ignore, and for which we are called to take responsibility.

The Other, for Levinas, is not simply someone who deviates from social and cultural norms, but rather someone who is beyond comprehension and whose presence challenges us and confronts us with the demand to act ethically. Nationalist ideology promotes modes of representation of the Other that construct them as a threat. Darwish demand for recognition of the humanity in the Other is also a call for the recognition of humanity in ourselves.

Povinelli (2023, p. 6) reflects on Foucault's understanding of the modus operandi of the ethical self—one that continually seeks to update and expand its forms of knowledge by resisting the systematizations imposed by dominant historical sciences, often authored by the oppressors. This engagement with ethical reflection is not aimed at preserving mummified ways of knowing, but rather at situating the subject within an ongoing process of ethical becoming:

> If Foucault is to genealogically exhume the practices of the ethical self, he must consider this self as having been subjugated by established historical sciences and view the practice of exhumation as part of the ways in which he rendered these new forms of knowledge capable of opposing given systematizations (Foucault, 1999). When done correctly, this exhumation does not reveal a mummified ethnological subject, but rather an ethical subject concerned with the self (*souci de soi*), a subject engaged in a state of ethical reflection (*souci éthique*) and constant ethical practice (*travail éthique*) in relation to its own continuous ethical becoming[1] (Povinelli, 2023, p. 6).

For Povinelli (2023) the continuous ethical becoming involves a kind of curiosity that constantly tries to see things and think otherwise by researching a way of thinking that is foreign to us, disorients us and revisits prior understandings and knowledges. The will for ethical practice and ethical becoming in relation to the Other recognizes the humanity of the Other and resists dehumanization processes.

In this article, both authors draw inspiration from the ongoing struggles of subjects in the Global South to have their voices recognized within political, social, and cultural agendas. Over the past years, our research has focused on language education, visual and digital literacies, gender, race and sexual intersections, and the epistemologies of the South. One of the authors, who is Jewish and has studied and lived in Israel, experienced a profound rupture in her personal and familial relationships following the most recent conflict and ongoing war on Gaza since October 7th 2023. The inability—or refusal—of many within her Jewish community, including close family and

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[1] Our translation: Se Foucault for exumar genealogicamente as práticas do eu ético, ele precisa considerar este eu como tendo sido subjugado pelas ciências da história estabelecidas e considerar a prática de exumação como parte das formas como ele fez esses novos conhecimentos capazes de se opor a sistematizações dadas (Foucault, 1999). Feita corretamente, essa exumação não nos mostra um sujeito etnológico mumificado, mas um sujeito ético *preocupado* (*souci de soi*), um sujeito que está num estado de reflexão (*souci éthique*) e prática éticas (*travail éthique*) constantes em relação a seu próprio devir ético constante. (Povinelli, 2023, p. 6)

childhood friends, to engage in ethical reflection on the historical and current dimensions of the conflict has intensified this break. This ethical failure underscores the urgent need for a practice of ethical becoming—one that resists the systematized narratives constructed to justify the colonization of land and the erasure of other peoples. Even though the second author has not lived in Israel and is not Jewish, he acknowledges the urgent need for the practice of ethical becoming, not only in relation to the everlasting dehumanizing Gaza conflict, but also in relation to the many dehumanizing and violent conflicts in Brazil. Even though histories are not to be compared, Brazil is number one in killing transgender people in the world. Recent neoliberal Brazil - especially from 2016 to 2021, seems to be proud of excluding and expelling the poor, the LGBGQIAPN+ communities, women, indigenous and blacks.

As modern and humanist epistemologies increasingly reimagine Gaza/conflict zone as a commodified real estate venture and resort, this study examines how visual language becomes a tool for resisting colonization and oppression. Drawing on Southern epistemologies (Sousa Santos, 2018), the analysis highlights locally rooted visual semiotics that convey the lived experiences of Gazans. Through visual digital ethnography and visual literacy (Mizan; Ferraz, 2021), the study reveals how these audiovisual materials foster a decolonial perspective, subverting Western media representations and amplifying the voices of marginalized communities. This research ultimately contributes to the Southernization of Applied Linguistics by foregrounding alternative visual discourses that challenge colonial and capitalist commodification of the region and reassert local narratives of resistance.

1. FROM THE RIVER TO THE SEA: THE SOURCE OF THE CONFLICT

The violence and trauma suffered by the Jews during centuries of persecution, pogroms, and ultimately the Holocaust in Europe culminated in the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, in the territory formerly known as Palestine. For the Berlin-based, independent Israeli-German historian Tamar Amar-Dahl, the nationalization of the Jews in the second half of the 20th century marked a profound shift: "Jewish national statehood was established as a manifest way of life, with political sovereignty and military strength becoming the cornerstones of the new Jewish-Israeli self-image" (Amar-Dahl, 2017, p. 1). Historically, Jews had lived relatively peacefully in Europe within their own enclaves and communities, maintaining distinct religious and cultural identities while often facing systemic marginalization. The transition from diasporic existence to nation-statehood signified not only a response to historical suffering but also a redefinition of Jewish identity through the lens of nationalism, territoriality, religion, and the consolidation of state and military power.

The creation of the Israeli nation state is the result of the implementation of the Zionist project in *Eretz Israel*. The term *Eretz Israel*, which translates from Hebrew as **"Land of Israel"**, holds deep historical, religious, and ideological significance. In Zionist discourse, it refers to the biblical

homeland of the Jewish people — a territory that encompasses not only the modern State of Israel but also, at times, areas beyond its current internationally recognized borders. The use of the term in Zionist discourse frames the territory through the lens of Jewish history and religion and justifies it as a return to their ancestral homeland. One of the arguments used by the Zionist ideology is that the specific piece of land, historically, was Jewish land, "the promised land", given to Jews by God.

Similarly to most colonizing projects, the territory to be occupied and return to was depicted as unpopulated, uninhabited, an "empty land". However, the situation on the ground was completely different. The land was home for centuries to indigenous Arab populations, mainly the Palestinian people, who would resist the displacement and efforts of annihilation.

Thus, the "Jewish Dream" of *Eretz Israel*, where Jews could live peacefully as a homogeneous ethnic group, free from the persecutions they had to suffer during their diasporic existence and in peace with the indigenous Palestinian population and their neighbors soon was proved to be a fiction. Since the beginning of the Zionist project at the end of the 19th century, the reality of the indigenous Palestinian population living on the land was not taken into consideration. The Palestinians who remained in Israel after the creation of the State—those who were not evicted or forced into exile—gradually came to be referred to as the "Arabs of *Eretz Israel*," a term that serves to obscure their Palestinian identity. Meanwhile, those who became refugees within their own land - confined to areas such as the Gaza Strip and the West Bank - "turned out to be the true Achilles' heel of Zionist Israel" (Amar-Dahl, 2017, p. 18).

An interesting contradiction emerged with the establishment of the State of Israel in the Middle East: although Jews were "a problem" in Europe, the West transposed the "problem" to the East. The conflict between the Arab-Palestinian and the Jewish-Israeli collectives re-enacts historical relations and "is closely entwined with the tradition-steeped intellectual issues of the relations between Orient and Occident, Islam and Christianity" (Amar-Dahl, 2017, p. 19). Moreover, "Zionism as it has been asserted in Israel is orientated towards the West, fully distancing itself from its immediate environment. The Zionist perceives the Orient as "the other" to such an extent that Zionist Israel feels almost eerily out of place in the region" (Amar-Dahl, 2017, p. 20). This estrangement is not just cultural, but also political, since it is tied to the refusal to acknowledge as humans the people that inhabited Palestine before Zionism emerged as a colonizing movement.

Jewish colonization of Palestine resisted the recognition that the victims of that colonization still demand, so to speak the recognition that they have a face, a culture, a history and an ancestral connection to the land. Central to the Zionist narrative that facilitated this colonization was the myth that Palestine was "a land without people for a people without land." This discourse functioned as an ideological tool that erased the presence of the Palestinian people and their right to self-determination. By denying the existence of an indigenous population, the colonizing project positioned itself as a benign return to a land promised by the God of the Jews to his people, rather than a settler-colonial displacement.

This denial of recognition hasn't been merely ideological; it has had material consequences that has turned the Palestinian people into dehumanized subjects with no human rights whatsoever. During what the Palestinians call "the Nakba", the catastrophe of 1948, Palestinian villages were destroyed, lands were expropriated, and hundreds of thousands were expelled or fled from their ancestral lands. The Nakba, unfortunately, has never ended, but has been intensified by the colonization of more and more land. The refusal to recognize the Palestinian people as a people, has underpinned decades of violence and struggle:

> When pondering the question of territory in *The Jewish State*, Herzl barely gave any consideration to the population living in Palestine, or to how they may react to this Jewish-European colonization. Instead, his focus was on the dominant powers that needed to be coerced into giving Palestine to the Jews. While Herzl offered the Ottoman sultan "financial services" for the settlement of his empire's financial matters, he proposed the following return service to the West: "We should there form a portion of a rampart of Europe against Asia, an outpost of civilization as opposed to barbarism" (Amar-Dahl, 2017, p. 20).

Herzl's vision reiterates that Zionism was a project inspired in Western or, more specifically, European colonialism and its later manifestation, the civilizing mission. In the World Zionist Congress of 1907, Herzl's fellow campaigner Max Nordau declared that: "We will endeavor to accomplish in the Middle East what the English have done in India: We will come to *Eretz Israel* as the missionaries of culture and extend the moral borders of Europe all the way to the Euphrates" (Amar-Dahl, 2017, p. 22).

The sense of superiority held by Zionist campaigners toward the indigenous populations of Palestine and the broader Middle East has persisted to the present day and is evident in the ongoing dehumanization of Palestinians and Arabs in general. This dehumanization operates through strategies that shape discourses, policies, and representations, reinforcing Western perceptions of these peoples as evil, barbaric, and inherently terrorist.

The discourses that circulate in the media, history books and personal narratives in the West tend to look at the history of the Jewish people separately from the history of the Palestinians and the Middle East. Mizan, one of the authors of this paper, grew up listening about and celebrating the Independence of Israel, without ever being exposed to the other side of the story — the Nakba. The refusal to rake responsibility for the right of people to exist and continue living in their ancestral lands has led to continuous violence, displacement, death, injustice and perpetual war. Examples of the history of the conflict bring to mind

> the first Arab-Israeli War of 1948, Arab nationalism of the 1950s and 1960s under the leadership of Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser (1918–1970), and the Egyptian- Syrian attack on the Jewish Day of Atonement *Yom Kippur* in 1973… the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty of 1979… Israel's fight against the PLO in Lebanon in 1982… the First Palestinian Intifada against the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories (1987–1992), the ensuing 1990s peace process with the Palestinians and

its ongoing failure, and finally the outbreak of the Second Intifada (2000–2004) (Amar-Dahl, 2017, p. 30).

The October 7th, 2023 attacks on Israel and the ensuing taking of hostages intensified the traumas experienced by both Israeli and Palestinian populations. In response, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu repeatedly vowed to "flatten" Gaza, eliminate Hamas terrorists, and recover the hostages. However, the Israeli government's reaction has revealed a disproportionate use of force driven by a rhetoric of vengeance. The aggressive military campaign has devastated what remained of Gaza's already fragile infrastructure — reducing hospitals, schools, universities, and essential water, energy, and food supply systems to ruins. The humanitarian crisis has since escalated dramatically, deepening the suffering of a civilian population trapped in the crossfire of a conflict marked by historical asymmetries and cycles of violence. Dominant Jewish and Israeli narratives frequently construct Palestinians as driven by a desire to annihilate Israel, effectively silencing the historical injustices that lie at the core of the conflict.

> But what is ultimately at the heart of these conflicts on different fronts is the shift of borders that occurred in 1948 and 1967, in other words, the Palestine question... The fear of grappling with this question by political means is caused by the fact that this would mean calling into question a pillar of Zionism: *Eretz Israel* as the country of the Jewish people…Ensuing from this, Israel has gradually developed an understanding of the conflict according to which the confrontation with the Palestinians or the neighboring Arab states is not really about the land or other material resources, but rather about a general aversion against the Jewish state as such – in other words about the "all-absorptive hostility" of the "new *Goyim.*" (Amar-Dahl, 2017, p. 49)

Amar-Dahl (2017) believes that one of the reasons that have turned the conflict into a perpetual war is the fact that the conflict has become depoliticized. What is meant by the depoliticization of the conflict "is the refusal to locate its core within one's own politics, be it war, settlement or population policies…In the Israeli consciousness it is "the violence of the others" or the "Arab will to annihilation" that remain the pivotal factors for the emergence of Arab-Israeli animosities" (p. 51). However, the Zionist definition of Israel as a "Jewish and democratic state" ignores the bi-national reality of the territory and encourages the two processes underway since the establishment of the State of Israel "namely the "Judaization" of the land on the one hand and its "de-Arabization" on the other, meaning the expropriation and displacement of the Palestinians" (Amar-Dahl, 2017, p. 57). The intertwining of religious and secular notions in the formation of the Israeli nation-state reflects the complex dynamics through which Zionism mobilized both religious claims and modern nationalist ideals to legitimize its project.

2. ORIENTALISM IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE PALESTINIAN/ARAB IDENTITY

In *The Question of Palestine*, Edward Said (1980) examines George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* as a novel that anticipates and legitimizes early Zionist ideology through literature. Said (1980) argues that George Eliot, despite her humanist intentions, frames Jewish identity as necessarily fulfilled outside of Europe—specifically in Palestine—thus reinforcing the notion that Jews are fundamentally alien to Europe. This vision, according to Said (1980), aligns with broader imperialist narratives that see non-Europeans, even when admired, as ultimately "out of place" in the West. Eliot's novel contributes to the cultural groundwork for Zionism by imagining Palestine as an empty space ready for Jewish redemption, a narrative that not only erases the indigenous Arab population but also normalizes the displacement of Jews from Europe as both noble and necessary. Said (1980) critiques Eliot's Eurocentric worldview by highlighting the contradiction in portraying Jews as both European colonizers and exotically "Eastern," while ultimately excluding the non-European "East" from any claim to humanity, freedom, or redemption.

> Brightness, freedom, and redemption— key matters for Eliot— are to be restricted to Europeans and the Jews, who are themselves European so far as colonizing the East is concerned. There is a remarkable failure when it comes to taking anything non-European into consideration although curiously all of Eliot's descriptions of Jews stress their exotic, "Eastern" aspects. Humanity and sympathy, it seems, are not endowments of anything but an Occidental mentality; to look for them in the despotic East, much less find them, is to waste one's time (Said, 1980, p. 65).

On the other hand, in her quite recent novel *Pachinko* (2017), the Korean American author Min Jin Lee revisits *Daniel Deronda* in a Tokyo seminar-room setting in 1960, to explore how Eliot's early Zionist themes resonate with questions of nationalist homogeneity. Through Akiko, a bold and politically conscious student, Lee critiques the idea that persecuted people must leave their country of birth to realize their identity. Akiko resists the interpretation that Daniel and Mirah must go to Israel, challenging Eliot's implication that nobility lies in departure rather than in claiming one's place in a multicultural society. Her statement—"this nobility argument or a greater nation for a persecuted people is a pretext to eject all the unwanted foreigners"—echoes Said's critique in *The Question of Palestine*, showing how redemption narratives can mask exclusionary logics.

The horror of antisemitism and the atrocities of the Holocaust have historically been used as a justification for the emergence of Zionism. Europe's guilt for the centuries long persecution of the Jews culminated in its support for the establishment of the State of Israel in Palestine. The birth of Zionism coincides with a peak in European antisemitism and a period of extended European colonization and feeds on the same colonial logic. It drew on European concepts of the civilizational mission, while absorbing orientalist perspectives on the "empty" or "undeveloped" nature of Palestine and its native Arab population.

The trauma of antisemitism and the fear that the horrors of the Holocaust might be repeated have historically been mobilized to justify the reproduction of colonial frameworks in *Eretz Israel*. In the wake of the violent escalation that followed the events of October 7th, 2023—including the massive destruction of Gaza and what many human rights organizations and scholars have characterized as the genocidal targeting of the Gazan population—antisemitism has once again emerged globally. Figures 1 and 2 below show Kanye West's, the famous North American rapper and fashion designer, merchandise page. He recently declared on X that he "loves Hitler," and his website features black and white T-shirts printed with a black or white swastika. Meanwhile, Elon Musk, the wealthiest businessman on earth and a senior adviser to United States President Donald Trump, made a Nazi salute, which he later claimed was accidental. These actions do more than provoke outrage—they reanimate historical traumas tied to antisemitism and help sustain narratives that present the Jewish people as perpetually endangered. In doing so, they reinforce the ideological foundation of Zionism that continues to justify the occupation and militarized protection of the Israeli state.

Figure 1: Kanye West's merchandise page	Figure 2: Elon Musk's Nazi salute

Kanye West's merchandise page. For the first time since World War II, the Nazis no longer represent absolute evil; you can learn from them and look up to them, and turn them into a T-shirt. Credit: STR / NurPhoto via AFP

Elon Musk gestures as he speaks during the inaugural parade inside Capitol One Arena, in Washington, DC, on January 20, 2025. Credit: AFP/ANGELA WEISS

Source: Haaretz newspaper[2]

The occupation of Palestine and the ongoing resistance of the Palestinian people reactivate within the Jewish historical consciousness the profound trauma of exclusion, persecution, and extermination. For many, being targeted for annihilation simply for being Jewish remains a defining trauma. In the context of Zionism, this trauma is often projected outward, transposing the fear once associated with Nazi genocidal violence onto the figure of the Palestinian. The Palestinian, rather than being recognized as a dispossessed and colonized subject, is instead cast as a perpetual threat and a stand-in for the anti-Semite. In this way, the unresolved trauma of historical antisemitism becomes entangled in the structures of Zionist domination.

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[2]   https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2025-02-20/ty-article-opinion/.premium/from-kanye-wests-swastika-swag-to-elon-musks-salute-its-a-good-time-to-be-a-nazi/00000195-24b5-d293-a1d5-e6b78dea0000

For Palestinian thinker Edward Said, the West homogenized and exoticized the "Orient," laying ideological groundwork for its domination:

> Until roughly the last thirty years of the nineteenth century, everything to the east of an imaginary line drawn somewhere between Greece and Turkey was called the Orient... the Orient represented a kind of indiscriminate generality for Europe, associated not only with difference and otherness, but with the vast spaces, the undifferentiated masses of mostly colored people, and the romance, exotic locales, and mystery of 'the marvels of the East" (Said, 1980, p. 3)

Thus, Orientalism paved the path for both Zionist and Western discourses to erase Palestinian identity. Said wrote in 1980 that: "In Israel today it is the custom officially to refer to the Palestinians as 'so-called Palestinians,' which is a somewhat gentler phrase than Golda Meir's flat assertion in 1969 that the Palestinians did not exist" (Said, 1980, p. 4-5). Said goes on to tie Western disregard for Palestinians to older orientalist prejudices embedded in cultural and intellectual traditions:

> Most of all, I think, there is the entrenched cultural attitude toward Palestinians deriving from age-old Western prejudices about Islam, the Arabs, and the Orient. This attitude, from which in its turn Zionism drew for its view of the Palestinians, dehumanized us, reduced us to the barely tolerated status of a nuisance (Said, 1980, p. xiv).

Said (1980) shows how colonial logic—rooted in Western superiority—underpins political acts like the Balfour Declaration that led to the establishment of the State of Israel.

> The declaration was made (a) by a European power, (b) about a non-European territory, (c) in a flat disregard of both the presence and the wishes of the native majority resident in that territory, and (d) it took the form of a promise about this same territory to another foreign group, so that this foreign group might, quite literally, *make* this territory a national home for the Jewish people (Said, 1980, p. 15-16).

Western media frames the perpetual war and violence of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in a way that favors Israeli narratives and marginalizes Palestinian suffering: "Could anything be less honest than the rhetoric of outrage used in reporting "Arab" terror against "Israeli civilians" or "towns" and "villages" or "schoolchildren," and the rhetoric of neutrality employed to describe "Israeli" attacks against "Palestinian positions"?" (Said, 1980, p. x). Clearly, the term *"Palestinian positions"* functions as a rhetorical device that militarizes the targets of Israeli attacks, effectively erasing the civilian nature of the homes, shops, streets, and buildings being destroyed, and obscuring the human cost of such violence.

The ideological merger between Zionism and Western liberalism excludes Palestinian humanity by representing their identity as inferior, underdeveloped and formed by the wrong values:

> The identification of Zionism and liberalism in the West meant that insofar as he had been displaced and dispossessed in Palestine, the Arab had become a nonperson as much because the Zionist had himself become the *only* person in Palestine as

because the Arab's negative personality (Oriental, decadent, inferior) had intensified. In Zionism, the liberal West saw the triumph of reason and idealism, and only that (because that is what liberalism wishes principally to see); in liberalism, Zionism saw itself as it wanted itself to be. In both cases, the Arab was eliminated, except as trouble, negation, "bad" values (Said, 1980, p. 37-38).

The "terrorist" label attributed to all Palestinians and widely to Arabs is an expansion of the Orientalist view of the West in relation to the East. Amira Hass (2000), a Jewish Israeli journalist who lived for years in Gaza, in her book *Drinking the sea at Gaza: an Israeli woman's journey to the other side* offers a personal and critical reading of how Israelis perceive Palestinians and how Palestinians perceive Israelis. Many Israeli Jews see all Palestinians as perpetual suspects and view them with mistrust, fear and dehumanization. Moreover, the Gaza Strip is imagined as a chaotic, violent place:

> A slight turn of one's head and the view changed—it was the sea hugging the horizon. Just before signing the Oslo Accords, the late Yitzhak Rabin said of Gaza, "If only it would just sink into the sea." His harsh words reflect a widespread Israeli attitude toward the Gaza Strip and its one million inhabitants. Numerous articles by Israeli writers have used even stronger language, calling it a "hornets' nest" and a "dunghill." To Yitzhak Shamir, the former prime minister, Gaza represented the eternal untrustworthiness of Palestinians: "The sea is the same sea, the Arabs are the same Arabs," he said. The Israeli point of view is best summed up by the local variant of "Go to hell," which is, quite simply, "Go to Gaza." (Hass, 2000, n.p).

Hass (2000) portrays the relationship between Palestinians and Israeli Jews as deeply entangled and marked by asymmetrical power dynamics. Palestinians experience Israeli Jews primarily through the roles imposed by the occupation—soldiers, jailers, employers, and, occasionally, neighbors. These interactions are rarely neutral; rather, they are shaped by the violence of domination, which has bred mistrust and antipathy between Palestinians and Israeli Jews. Hass (2000) gives various examples of these on both sides:

> Skewed perceptions are held on both sides, however. At one of my stays in Aouni's home in Shabura, his children, who were all born during the *intifada,* pointed to the TV screen where UN soldiers were driving around Sarajevo. "Jews, Jews," they cried out. Their mother apologized, explaining that the children say the same thing about Egyptian soldiers as well. Until May 1994, at least, uniforms, guns, death, and shooting were all associated with Israelis—Jews—and the occupation (Hass, 2000, n.p).

Adwan *et al* (2016) examined how Israelis and Palestinians present their narratives related to the conflict in school textbooks used by the state educational system and the ultraorthodox community in Israel and by all Palestinian schools in Palestinian National Territories and they point out that:

> the rivals are far apart in socializing the new generation more towards the continuation of the conflict than preparing it for a new era of peace. Moreover, the continuous mutual accusation strengthens this observation signifying that the struggle over the narratives proceeds instead of trying to move towards mutual acceptance (Adwan; Bar-Tal; Wexler, 2016, p. 214).

In this context, Hass (2000) and Said (1980) expose how Palestinian resistance, particularly when armed, is routinely framed by Israeli authorities and much of the international community as terrorism. Hass (2000) is particularly critical of the way the Israeli public, media, and institutions collapse all forms of dissent—armed struggle, civil disobedience, journalistic critique—into the singular category of "terrorism." This framing serves to delegitimize Palestinian aspirations for self-determination and obscures the structural violence of the occupation itself. Rather than acknowledging the historical and political context that gives rise to acts of resistance—dispossession, military rule, denial of basic rights—such actions are stripped of their political meaning and reduced to criminal or fanatical behavior. Palestinian resistance deflects attention from systemic Israeli violence: "For this "terrorist," Israel seemed to have only a very narrow, and singularly unimaginative definition— he was supposed to be an enemy of the state's security— but the important thing about him was that he kept turning into a nationalist patriot" (Said, 1980, p. 137-138).

The images of the Israeli hostages' release (Figure 3) and the handover of the Bibas family's bodies (Figure 4)—a family that became the symbol of the October 7th Hamas attacks on Israeli civilians—serve to visually reinforce the framing of Palestinians and Hamas as terrorists.

Figure 3: Release of Israeli hostages

Israeli hostages Ohad Ben Ami, left, Eli Sharabi and Or Levy being paraded by Hamas gunmen in Gaza prior to their release on Saturday. Credit: Abdel Kareem Hana/AP

Source: Haaretz newspaper[3]

Figure 4: Handing over the bodies of Israeli hostages

Hamas hands over what they claimed were the bodies of four Israeli hostages to the Red Cross in Khan Yunis, in the southern Gaza Strip, on Thursday. Credit: Eyad Baba / AFP

Source: Haaretz newspaper[4]

In the photograph published in an article by the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* after the release of three Israeli hostages, we can see armed Hamas militants escorting the three emaciated Israeli hostages onto a stage in central Gaza, just before their release to the Red Cross on February 8, 2025. The militants are dressed in dark uniforms, wear balaclavas that conceal their faces, and are carrying rifles. Their stance is assertive, standing close to the hostages who appear visibly frail and malnourished after 491 days in captivity. In the backdrop, we can see a phrase written in Arabic,

[3] https://www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/palestinians/2025-02-10/ty-article/.premium/emaciated-freed-israeli-hostages-elicit-little-sympathy-from-palestinians-online/00000194-eeef-d168-a3bf-eeef1e370000
[4] https://www.haaretz.com/us-news/2025-02-21/ty-article/.premium/scenes-of-bibas-family-release-proves-hamas-must-be-destroyed-top-trump-advisor-says/00000195-2947-d05a-ab9f-2d5fe74a0000

Hebrew and English: "WE'RE THE FLOOD…THE WAR'S NEXT DAY. The presence of the armed militants in balaclavas reinforces the visual and symbolic codes widely associated with terrorism in the popular imagination and mainstream media, perpetuating a cycle of fear and legitimizing violent responses framed as retaliation against terror. The skinny and pale hostages bring back to the mind the horror of the Holocaust and the fear of it happening again.

3. *RE-MEMBERING* THE PALESTINIAN IDENTITY: THE POLITICS OF GAZAN NARRATIVES ON INSTAGRAM

Demuro and Gurney (2021, p. 2), two female educators from Oceania with extensive experience in teaching and research across languages, experiment "with language ontologies based on practices, as instances of *worlding*" as they seek to challenge theorists not only to perceive three ontologies on language: language as object, languaging as practice, and language as assemblage, but also to stop presuming "that we are all talking about the same thing when we use the term 'Language'" (p. 2). The aforementioned scholars, who are also female educators, try to think of the ontological register "as *worlding*, that is, ways of creating and enacting reality" (p. 2). Demuro and Gurney (2021) theorize from within the field of linguistic anthropology in order to explain the concept of assemblage:

> The assemblage is contingent on relations of exteriority between component parts; that is, these component parts may be detached and reattached to other assemblages without compromising their integrity (DeLanda, 2006). Assemblages produce possibilities for 'becoming' – as an alternative to the more static 'being' – and channel affect. Affect, per Fox and Alldred (2015), concerns the 'capacity to affect or be affected' (p. 401), and can lead to 'a change of state of an entity and its capacities' (Fox and Alldred, 2013, p. 773). (Demuro; Gurney, 2021, p. 10)

In this article, rather than using the analytical concepts usually used by the traditional media, we use digital ethnography of Gazan posts on Instagram to rethink our analytical concepts, trying to see different things in the languaging that constructs Palestinian identities that project "the fact of multiple, simultaneously existing, and at times conflicting, worlds" (Demuro; Gurney, 2021, p. 5) where "worlds come into existence, ontologically, through practices and enactments. Actions, performances, stories, and so forth, bring particular ontologies into being" (Demuro; Gurney, 2021, p. 5).

Palestinian identity is marked by multiplicity and conflict. In the aftermath of October 7th, images of Hamas releasing hostages have reactivated within Israeli and Jewish consciousness the deep-seated traumas of European antisemitism and the Holocaust. As Demuro and Gurney (2021) argue, an assemblage is constituted through relations of exteriority—its components retain autonomy and can be detached and recombined within new assemblages. Figures 1 to 4 above illustrate this dynamic, featuring elements such as swastikas, Nazi salutes, frail Jewish figures, balaclavas, rifles, and the figure of the threatening Arab. These visual components operate as

signifiers that are rearticulated and projected onto a shared semiotic field, collectively constructed as manifestations of antisemitic discourse. In the assemblages of Figures 3 and 4 above, more specifically, Palestinian identity is portrayed as a perpetrator of historical trauma traditionally associated with European fascism, particularly through the frail figures of the liberated hostages. Such associations contribute to a reductive portrayal of Palestinians, framing them primarily through the lenses of extremism, threat, and hatred. These visual representations not only simplify complex geopolitical realities but also cast Palestinian identity as inherently violent, by promoting a monolithic narrative of extremism and Orientalism.

However, the context of social media, such as Instagram researched in this article, provides communities that are marginalized and oppressed with a tool that can offer a more nuanced understanding of these identities by promoting the notion of Linguistic Citizenship (Holmes, 2024, p. 78)

> Linguistic Citizenship emphasises the ways in which semiotic practices and representations of semiosis can work to challenge many of the ideas we have about language and multilingualism, while contributing towards a transformative understanding of citizenship…It concerns itself with situated linguistic and semiotic practices, as well as representations of speakers, firmly located within spaces of socio-political struggle in which typically marginalized agencies and voices might endure and determine a new set of relations and values. (Holmes, 2024, p. 78)

We have been following the Instagram accounts *@m7md_vo* by Mohamed Al Khalidi and *@lama_jamous10* by Lama Jamous. In this article, we will approach Mohamed Al Khalidi Instagram account as a vehicle of Linguistic Citizenship for Palestinian/Gazan identities. Although Mohamed, before October 7th, posted mainly images of himself in peaceful Gaza and posts of his voice reading Muslim prayers that were mainly motivational, after the war on Gaza started his reels changed. The language he uses in the written part of the reels is not anymore only in Arabic but also in English. Some of the themes are: We live proudly in tent, We are Palestinians, We are proud of being Palestinians, Tall guy problems in a tent, Beautiful sky but destroyed city, When life was beautiful, One of the hardest nights I've ever seen, We love life despite suffering, What do you dream about, We will never be broken and other inspiring and motivational mottos.

Mohamed Al Khalidi (@m7md_vo) is a Palestinian content creator whose Instagram account chronicles life amid conflict. With over 2 million followers, his account offers a window into the daily realities faced by Palestinians, blending personal narratives with broader social commentary. Those Instagram posts become audiovisual archives that contribute to a decolonial perspective on the conflict and on Gazan identities.

The question of Palestinian national identity has been intertwined with the region's historical and political dynamics. Palestinian identity emerged in the midst of colonial interventions, such as the Ottoman Empire, the British Mandate and the Zionist movement, and has been in the formation since the beginning of the 20th century. Gordon (2008, p. 93) affirms that:

> Although scholars disagree about when exactly Palestinian national identity evolved — whether it already existed with the demise of the Ottoman Empire, whether it was formed as a result of the interaction with the Zionist movement, or whether it emerged only after the British mandate was in place — they tend to concur that by the mid-1920s and 1930s it had become a central form of identification among the Arab inhabitants of Palestine.

The expansion in Palestine of the educational system between the two world wars, along with the dissemination of nationalist ideas through this system, played a crucial role in politicizing rural areas, serving as a vehicle for nationalist sentiments and strengthening the Palestinian national movement. Nevertheless, there was a shift in the opposite direction after the establishment of the State of Israel:

> All this changed, however, following the 1948 War, which prompted a process of de-Palestinization. The name "Palestine" disappeared geographically and politically, and the Palestinian people were scattered throughout numerous countries, including Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria, with a minority remaining within the territory that had become Israel. Khalidi confirms that, after 1948, the Palestinians, as independent actors and indeed as a people, seemed to have vanished from the political map (Gordon, 2008, p. 94).

The re-emergence of Palestinian national identity occurred after the defeat of the Arab armies in 1967 and the loss of trust in Arab regimes among many Palestinians. Following the war, Israel decided not to integrate the Palestinian population living in the two captured regions, Gaza and the West Bank, in the Israeli society, fearing this would threaten the process of Judaization of the land. At the same time, the absence of a recognized territory called Palestine complicated the Palestinians' ability to assert a national identity based on the principle of one people, one nation. As a result, "all expressions or manifestations of Palestinian nationalism were accordingly prohibited, punished, and suppressed" (Gordon, 2008, p. 94-95).

In the digital archive created by Al Khalidi' content on Instagram, his followers witness the resilience of Palestinians in challenging situations and their capacity to persevere spiritually. Palestinians are not shown solely as being terrorists or victims, but as identities that are capable of maintaining their hope and dignity in the middle of a devastating war. His posts document everyday acts of perseverance: the care taken to keep makeshift tents clean and orderly, the preparation and distribution of meals for Gazan children when food is scarce (Figures 5, 6, and 7), and moments of communal solidarity. Alongside these glimpses of daily life, Al Khalidi also shares stark images of the widespread destruction of Gaza and calls for humanitarian support. Together, these images serve a dual purpose — raising global awareness of the humanitarian crisis while affirming the humanity of Palestinians.

The development of visual literacy is crucial in contemporary societies increasingly mediated by images, as visual representations play a central role in shaping how individuals perceive, interpret, and engage with social realities. Mizan and Ferraz (2021) argue that images are not mere

illustrations, but potent semiotic devices capable of producing micropolitics of intervention in the dominant epistemologies and fostering epistemic disobedience against the normative, universalist frameworks dominant in traditional media. Moreover, in educational contexts, the inclusion of visual literacies challenges learners to critically read, question, and produce meanings beyond textual forms, promoting agency and resisting the reproduction of hegemonic subjectivities. Thus, visual literacies become an essential tool for cultivating critical consciousness, particularly in contexts of conflict and marginalization where images can either reinforce dominant narratives or become instruments of resistance and re-membering.

Figure 5 and 6: We live proudly in a tent   Figure 7: Pizza out of available ingredients
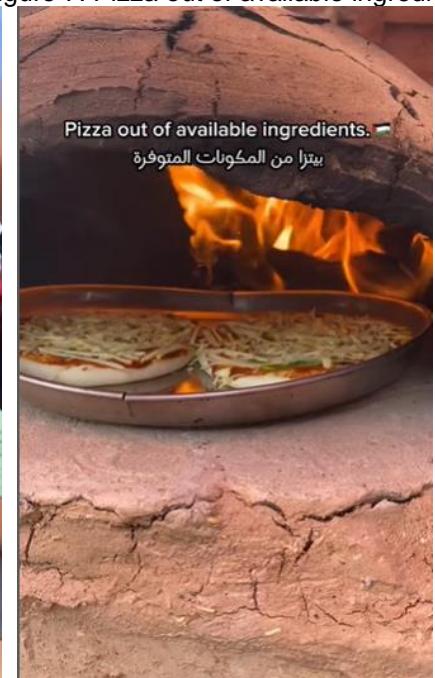
Source: Mohamed Al Khalidi's Instagram account[5]

Demuro and Gurney (2021, p. 5) argue that "there is, ontologically, no single existing reality 'out there' but rather performances and rituals carried out in specific locations (and presumably at particular times)." In this sense, reality is constituted through situated practices and enacted experiences rather than existing as a fixed, external truth. The visual narratives posted by Al Khalidi on Instagram exemplify this ontological perspective, as they capture and construct a lived reality grounded in everyday acts of resistance to adversity and community. His posts bring to the forefront stories of love, solidarity, and perseverance among Palestinian/Gazan citizens: the communal efforts to prepare food amidst scarcity, the thorough care taken in nurturing children even in the most adverse conditions, and the celebration of small moments of joy and dignity despite the devastation surrounding them. Through these storied practices, Al Khalidi not only documents survival but also

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[5] https://www.instagram.com/m7md_vo/

reaffirms the humanity of Palestinians, challenging dominant narratives that dehumanize them and often reduce them to figures of violence.

Following the ceasefire of January 15, 2025, Al Khalidi shared several reels (Figures 8, 9, and 10) cooking and sharing meals, preparing coffee and gathering with friends amidst the devastation. In makeshift tents and among the ruins of their homes, Gazans demonstrate an extraordinary will to endure. Despite profound loss and destruction, these small acts of everyday life reflect a powerful form of perseverance and resistance. The portrayal of these moments of fleeting peace and the joy they bring to these people who have known no lasting peace.

Figure 8: After the ceasefire   Figure 9: We are human, world   Figure 10: Going home

Source: Mohamed Al Khalidi's Instagram account[6]

The humanization of Gazans in the digital archive produced by Al Khalidi (@m7md_vo) m emerges as civilian activism, in the midst of the awareness that the world has turned its back to Palestinian civilian lives. His work goes beyond mere documentation; it actively engages in the process of *re-membering*—a conscious reassemblage of what it means to be Palestinian. Through his reels, personal narratives and social commentary, Al Khalidi restores visibility and humanity to his people, who have been rendered invisible by mainstream media, countering narratives that reduce all Gazans to terrorists.

(IN)CONCLUSIONARY COMMENTS

The notion of *re-membering* the humanity fragmented by colonialism (Deumert & Makoni, 2023) emerges in the digital archive by Al Khalidi's content on Instagram and makes clear that any

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[6] https://www.instagram.com/m7md_vo/

effort toward decolonization must involve reweaving connections among peoples, knowledges, and experiences. A southern and decolonial approach demands ethical complicity with the struggles of the oppressed and intercultural translation as an ethical imperative for coexistence, and for an ethical becoming: a radical openness to otherness and a commitment to learning from epistemologies that exceed the familiar.

We develop in this article a "solidarity-based epistemology" (Deumert & Makoni, 2023, p. 6) that seeks to *re-member* the humanity of the oppressed Palestinians *dis-membered* by colonialism.

> I like Santos' concept of intercultural translation. We need the concept of intercultural translation because we're all speaking from ethnocentric positionalities or ego-centric positionalities. We need to ethically cohabit the same space or cosmos and co-exist. I think the most important thing at the moment is co-existence. Frantz Fanon talked about coming back into existence; now we need co-existence, otherwise, with our current polarizations, we're going to end up eliminating each other. The most important thing in co-existence is understanding that we don't understand. And to understand that we don't understand ethically obliges us to adopt an imperative towards understanding. This requires recognizing one's incompleteness and adopting an openness to things that you didn't know before and that you still don't understand. It requires, more importantly, stepping down from your desire for hegemony; these are problematic things, which are also things that are very impor-tant in southern theory or decolonial theory. (Deumert; Makoni, 2023, p. 196-197)

Deumert and Makoni (2023) claim that southern theory is framed as a project deeply intertwined with decolonization. In this perspective, southern theory is the epistemological ground from which decolonization as political endeavor unfolds. Canagarajah (2023, p. 285) treats "'Southern' as including both autochthonous Indigenous peoples and diverse native communities colonized by Europe in modernity and subject to continuing forms of domination through the hegemony of its ideological, state, and economic structures. In this light, Al Khalidi's digital activism can be read as a southern practice of *re-membering* and resistance, reclaiming the visual narrative on Gazan identity against colonial dehumanization and dis-membering.

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