



معهد مواطن للديمقراطية وحقوق الإنسان
Muwatin Institute for Democracy and Human Rights

Muwatin's 30th Annual Conference

"The Impact of the Genocide in Gaza on the Future of the World and the Reading of the Palestinian Question"

Held at Birzeit University (Hall 243 – Muwatin Institute) and online
2-3 December 2025

Abstracts

George Giacaman

The World After Gaza

The paper will deal with aspects of Israel's genocide in Gaza raising some critical questions about what some regard as "Israel is synonymous with the end of rules-based order", not only the International Humanitarian Law but all the rules promulgated in part as a result of the Holocaust after WW2. In addition, the paper will argue that there is a need for a detailed study of the decision-making process during the tenure of the Biden and Trump Administrations, as examples of the role pro-Israel groups play in nominating main advisers for the presidents including members of the National Security Council which has a significant role in the formulation of foreign policy in the US. The paper will argue that this in part has enabled Israel to continue the genocide, and that the view common in Arab media that Israel is a "strategic asset" from the perspective of the US, and secondarily most European Countries, is largely inaccurate, even if at times, historically speaking, interests were similar, but not in all aspects of the genocide in Gaza.

Haris Damianidis

Palestine as a Focus of Global Conflict

The Palestinian issue remains an unresolved and evolving issue within the global system, with responsibility being shared among a wide range of actors for over many decades. One of its most critical dimensions is its geopolitical importance, as Palestine is strategically located near key energy corridors that influence global markets and regional alliances.

During the recent escalation, which is widely described as genocide and unfolded before the eyes of the international community, a wave of solidarity manifested itself in various forms. At the government level, regional and international actors avoided supporting the Palestinian people, adopting a pragmatic and seemingly "neutral" stance towards Israel's actions. However, countries such as South Africa diverged, appealing to the International Court of Justice in The Hague. Contrary to government positions, there was massive popular mobilization worldwide, with demonstrations and solidarity events. In several cases, protesters—particularly students in the United States—were targeted by their governments.

Furthermore, the Gaza crisis and subsequent famine are examples of how crises in capitalism manifest themselves in multiple forms, such as war and systemic deprivation. In today's global environment, characterized by intense competition between capitalist states, the prospect of forming a new international order that transcends these crises remains uncertain. Therefore, the transition to an alternative economic system seems like a more realistic and sustainable solution.

Elif Durmuş

Palestine as a Turning Point of "Ownership" of International Law

"Westphalian" international law was built and "owned" by European, imperial, colonial powers, to govern the relationship between themselves – the only sovereign equals. The engagement of Eastern imperial powers with the West in the language of international law, as well as (and more importantly) the decolonisation waves of the decades following WWII, showed a pluralisation of sovereign states representing peoples of the so-called "Global South". Many of these peoples and their states not only sought and acquired degrees of sovereignty, but also claimed co-ownership of the body of norms, the discourse, and the language of "international law"; and contested

and progressively developed its content, shaping what is considered positive international law today. While TWAIL rose both as scholarship and as state-practice, the West, until recently, enjoyed a privileged, self-referential “owner” status of international law, in both its own and in global eyes. Palestine, today, its live-streamed genocide and illegal occupation taking place in a time of historically-low appetite in the West for liberal internationalism, has shattered any remaining illusions of the West and its institutions still representing the core of international law. Departing from the history of international law as well as the sociology of norms, this presentation will examine the historical turning point Palestine has triggered in its suffering and resistance: a historical shift of global (self-)perceptions regarding the ownership of international law – from imperialist states to students, Special Rapporteurs, and sailors.

Salam Butmeh

Shared Genocide: Humans and Nature in the New Global Order

This paper analyses contemporary global transformations as the structural generator of the transforming capitalist system, which transcends classic liberalism, and legitimizes violence against humanity and the environment alike. Despite abundant international funding and growing number of environmental initiatives, the world is witnessing a horrific collapse of the legal and normative frameworks established since the end of the Second World War, including the body of environmental law that has evolved over the past six decades.

The paper attempts to demonstrate that failure to halt the destruction of the Amazon rainforest, the acquiescence to the environmental harm resulting from the Russian-Ukrainian war, and genocide and ecocide in the Gaza Strip all manifest a single phenomenon: global silence in the face of annihilatory logics reflects not mere impotence, but a deliberate refusal to confront them when market imperatives and capitalist sovereignty are permitted to function as the ultimate arbiters.

The world that remained silent about the genocide in Gaza is the same world that stands helpless before environmental genocide, revealing the structural alliance between political and environmental violence under the umbrella of the global capitalist system.

This paper poses a fundamental question: What do these transformations signify for the world and for the nature of future wars? Are we witnessing the onset of a ‘normalization of genocide,’ in which the destruction of human communities and ecological systems becomes routine?

The paper situates these questions within a broader drift toward fascist oligarchy and considers how environmental justice might be reclaimed as part of a global liberation project that transcends the divide between resistance against colonialism and ecocide. It ultimately asks: What must be done to stop this destruction.

What is happening in Gaza should not be interpreted as an exceptional or local event, but rather as a concentrated model of what is happening throughout the world. Gaza is not merely a victim of war, but a mirror reflecting the collapse of the modern world order in the monstrous neoliberal moment.

The world that participated—either actively or through silence—in the genocide of Gaza is the same world that allowed this kind of violence to become ‘possible’ and even imaginable within its moral, political, and environmental structures. What happened in Gaza was not possible two decades ago, but today it has become a natural, commonplace logic in a global system steadily moving towards moral and environmental disintegration. Silence against the genocide in Gaza and genocide and ecocide globally stem from the same motive. Once again, the question arises: Where are all these transformations headed?

Khalida Jarra

Capitalism and Violence in the Israeli Carceral System in the Time of Genocide

This paper explores the relationship between capitalism and the violence within its prisons, including Israeli prisons, on the basis that prisons are capitalist spaces that generate profit from repression. (Davis 2013)

It does so by examining the historical context of capitalist colonial violence, and drawing parallels with its violent manifestations, such as torture, killing, erasure, and enslavement, often legalized and sanitized via liberal frameworks.

It also examines the global police state, on one hand for its reliance on barbaric and fascist methods of accumulation through violence to manage surplus capital and populations, and on the other for the involvement of monopoly corporations, particularly the security and military industries that seek profit, revealing a pattern of colonial domination now known as racial colonial capitalism.

Palestine is considered a laboratory where a global system linking military occupation with financial profit is developed, representing the convergence of colonialism and neoliberalism, in which old colonial technologies of control are recycled within a new capitalist system that cloaks violence in the language of security and stability.

We will examine this based on the situation in the prison, and the experiences of the prisoners, particularly women prisoners in Zionist fascist prisons, focusing on colonial sexual violence as a fundamental component of capitalist colonial violence.

The paper will also examine the current human rights system and its capacity to provide protection and accountability for perpetrators of war crimes and other crimes against humanity. The system has revealed its subordination to colonial capitalist power relations, rendering it both incapable and complicit in defending the oppressed from the predations of capital and its material manifestations in colonialism. This underscores the need for a global struggle for change, rooted in the collective social practice of the free peoples of the world. Similarly, the prison system, as a mechanism of global capitalist repression, demands an interconnected global liberation struggle that confronts all forms of oppression and fascism to achieve equality, justice, and freedom, not only for Palestine but for the world as a whole.

Deenah Tsai

The Criminal Liability of Judges and Prosecutors in Israel's Military Courts: Assessing Complicity in Torture and Ill-Treatment of Palestinian Detainees

Israel's military court system serves as one of the central systems enforcing the occupation of Palestinian territory and subjugating Palestinians. Palestinians are subjected to a dual legal system under which they are prosecuted based on military orders and tried before military courts where judges and prosecutors are drawn from the IDF. The structural position where legal and military objectives are intertwined compromises the independence and impartiality of judges and prosecutors. Moreover, judges actively facilitate abusive interrogation and detention practices, rather than serving as checks against them. By processing these cases through legal channels, judges provide legitimacy to practices that are clear violations of International Law, despite knowledge of the widespread and systematic torture and ill-treatment Palestinian detainees face in Israeli prisons and detention centres. Israel's High Court of Justice, which functions as the ultimate body over both administrative detention and military court appeals, has the greatest responsibility in this regard. Despite extensive research on the conditions of detainees and the Israeli military court system, no research has been conducted regarding available accountability mechanisms for the actors in this system. Our research finds that there are several legal bases in the Rome Statute of the ICC, based on which judges and prosecutors may incur individual criminal liability based on aiding and abetting in the commission of genocide, crimes against humanity, or war crimes, even though to date no individual has been charged based on aiding and abetting under Article 25(3)(c) for the crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity, or war crimes. Finally, our research addresses third-state responsibilities deriving from the potential individual criminal liability of judges and prosecutors.

Michael Roberts

The Economic Role of Imperialism in the 21st Century in the Middle East

Imperialism is intensifying its extraction of value from the Global South through trade and financial flows. This paper will provide estimates of the transfers of value, particularly from the Middle East.

A special feature of the role of imperialism in the region is using the Israeli state as battering ram against any opposition whether from other resistant states or against the populations. In return, Israel gets 'protection money' in the form of private and state aid and military funding. This paper will provide estimates of these financial flows.

The disparities in income and wealth between and within the countries of the Middle East allow imperialism and the Israeli state as its agent to sustain its control of the region and its people. This paper will provide the latest data on inequalities in the region.

Salim Abu Thaher

Gaza Between Genocide and Reimagination: Transformations of Space and Reconstruction Discourse

This paper examines the profound structural and political transformations Gaza has undergone since October 2023. It approaches the subject through three frameworks that illuminate the spatial dimensions and geographies of control, global discursive shifts, and the challenges of reconstruction and urban policy in the context of the ongoing genocide. The paper seeks to integrate these axes in a comprehensive analysis that highlights Gaza's position in the current global landscape and opens a critical horizon for considering its political, urban, and rights-based future.

The first axis analyses the structure of spatial control in Gaza, viewing it as a globalized model of “spatial incarceration.” It focuses on analysing the system of control in Gaza through dismantling the spatial, security, and legal structures that constitute a complex apparatus of subjugation and confinement. The paper examines how Gaza has transformed into a central node within transnational security and development networks, where the tools of occupation intersect with mechanisms of international funding and technocratic governance to produce an urban–political system governed by exception and continuous control.

The second axis explores the gradual shift in global political and media discourse regarding the crimes committed in Gaza. Since late 2024, notable changes have emerged in Global North countries, including increased use of terms such as “genocide” and “crimes against humanity.” These shifts have been driven by the cumulative efforts of Palestinian human rights advocacy, independent investigations, and legal actions, most prominently South Africa’s case before the International Court of Justice, alongside widespread grassroots mobilization and solidarity movements. While structural political barriers remain, this discursive shift opens new possibilities for legal and diplomatic accountability.

The third axis highlights reconstruction as a central arena of struggle over the city’s future. In contrast to international neoliberal initiatives that separate reconstruction from its political context, local, academic, and grassroots visions seek to link reconstruction with national liberation, social justice, and the strengthening of sovereignty over both the spatial and epistemic domains.

Mohammed Juma Ala

The East Became the Centre of Global Destruction and Forced to Seek a Free Alternative

The question of particularity has always remained an open, Enlightenment-oriented inquiry within the conscience of peoples, including the peoples of the Middle East. What happened more than a century ago, in what has been called the “century of killing,” is that we abandoned that Enlightenment question and defended ourselves through the mirror of the West, the same West that taught us we do not deserve the adventure of being ourselves. But what is happening now is that this unilateral equation has changed and no longer suits those peoples searching for their own selves under their own horizon, without the guardianship of the Big Brother.

The world in its traditional form, shaped by the topography of hegemonic powers, has grown old, especially after the collapse of liberal values and rescue-capitalism, in favour of a vacuum that must inevitably be reconstructed and re-organized. This collapse is accompanied by a deep rupture in the international order, which is no longer capable of proposing solutions to the problems of the Middle East. It has therefore become necessary for us, as a rich component of global anthropology, to propose to our deeper selves the re-structuring of our shared destiny.

It seems that the most urgent question in our present moment is: Who are we? By its nature, this question does not borrow pre-fabricated answers, nor does it attempt to reorder a past we no longer need, and which is no longer capable of leaning on us for its own becoming. Rather, the labour of the question lies in asking: What must be done here and now? It is a question of immediacy and the present time, compelling us to think radically about our present without any predetermined identity or ideological container. Another question is: How do we live? This question does not fulfil its task by relying on a ready-made or imported moral horizon, but rather through an ontological labour infused with a sociological dose. The beauty of this global ruin, of which we, the peoples of the East, have become its centre, is that it compels us to search for an alternative horizon for the possibility of living freely.

Thalia Kruger and Gamze Erdem Turkelli

International Law in National Courts

The situation in Gaza over the past years have put international law, and the law in general to the test. This paper is informed by two recent cases in Belgian courts where the violations of international law by Israel was invoked. Both cases were brought in courts in Brussels (but not the same court). The first (judgment of the Dutch-language court of first instance of Brussels of 17 July 2025) concerned an interdict against the Flemish government not to allow a ship with roller bearings to depart to Israel, where it was destined. The basis for the claim was that there was reason to believe, also on the basis of past deliveries, that these roller bearings would be integrated into tanks used by the Israeli Defense Force in Gaza. The plaintiffs were successful, but the government is envisaging an appeal. The second (judgment of the francophone court of first instance of Brussels in an urgent matter of 24 September 2025) concerned an application to oblige the government to prevent all arms exports to Israel, take actions to ensure the prohibition of all trade and investment in the illegal settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, and give notice of its intention to denounce the EU-Israel Association Agreement. In this case, although the plaintiffs relied heavily on international law as pronounced by the International Court of Justice, they were not successful on any of their claims.

Using the two cases to inform its discussion, the paper analyses the place of international law, and EU law, in Belgian courts and why claims originating from international law seemed to bear fruit in the one case (which was aimed at obliging the government to stop actions by a private company) but not in the other (which was directed at compelling state action).

Dana Farraj

Legal Challenges and Peoples' Tragedies: Change is Possible!

The selection of judges to form the International Court of Justice is linked to international political balances, as they are elected by the UN General Assembly and the Security Council, and a candidate must obtain an absolute majority in both bodies. On several occasions, the Court came close to shifting away from its traditionally conservative approach in examining disputes brought before it. The Court generally adheres to precedent, which makes its legal interpretations largely conservative, particularly in cases related to the application of the Genocide Convention (the first part of my intervention), and closer to broad, compromise-based formulations. However, in some instances, one can observe gradual progress in its views, such as in its advisory opinions concerning Palestine (the second part of the intervention).

While we consider the question of the effectiveness of international law and the absence of enforcement mechanisms to be a political matter, there remains a legal dimension that can still be influenced and improved. It is true that any possible change is slow, gradual, and tied to the global context as a whole. This becomes even more difficult when states that are politically independent are economically dependent, as powerful states and their instruments can exert pressure on them. Nevertheless, the solidarity of the Global South, supported by its peoples, will inevitably impose change sooner or later, just as occurred during the 1960s.

Wouter Vandenhoele

Universities as Emancipatory Forces? (De-)Constructing University Human Rights Policies

The gross human rights violations and genocidal violence in Gaza over the past two years have boosted discussions within universities across the world about their human rights responsibility. While some universities continue to adhere to institutional neutrality, many others have adopted or strengthened human rights policies. Often, those human rights policies are informed by an inward-looking perspective: how to move away from institutional neutrality without endangering academic freedom on campus? How to avoid the risk that the own university becomes complicit in gross human rights violations? This paper asks the question what it takes to design university human rights policies from an outward-looking perspective: when and how can university human rights policies provide leverage for emancipation and liberation? What is to be avoided? What is to be prioritized?

Osama Diab

The Economic Ontologies of the Palestine Solidarity Movement

This paper hypothesizes that the boycott campaigns of the Palestine solidarity movement is partly driven by a desire to confront the moral and material foundations of both a decaying neoliberal globalization, and a rising big-capital far-right order. This can be considered an intensification of an internationalist counter-globalization project against both orders, which aim to deprive big capital of surplus value by keeping it circulating at a local small-scale level.

For the movement, this level represents economic realms that are grounded in communal ownership, mutual support, and decolonial ethics of production. In other words, realms where value is re-signified as solidarity rather than monetary. Despite this small-scale focus, the movement's outlook is clearly international, linking consumption, production and exchange with local economic sovereignty and decolonization at an internationalist scale.

The paper's objective is not to quantify achievements or measure impact of the boycott campaign. Rather, the goal is to explore the movement's aspirational and structural drives. Put differently, the paper will explore whether the Palestine boycott movement acts as a floating signifier to carry various meanings of moral and structural intervention that seeks to establish new ontologies of exchange—reconfiguring the meanings and relations of production and consumption around ethical, local, and solidaristic values—against transnational big-capital modes of surplus extraction and accumulation.

To achieve this, the paper will methodologically combine trade analysis of boycotted goods, discourse analysis of boycott narratives, and network analysis of pro-Palestine movements. In addition to consumption campaigns, it will also examine pro-Palestine production networks.

Hazem Jamjoum

Changing our Theories of Change: A Re-examination in Light of Fascist Intransigence

This paper is concerned with the theories of change operative within the Palestine liberation movement, and particularly its international (“solidarity”) tributaries, in light of what I am calling ‘regime intransigence,’ the decreased susceptibility of state institutions and governance regimes to popular and civil society agitation and pressure. My overall contention is that the state and society responses to Israel’s genocidal war on the Palestinian people, focused particularly on the people of Gaza, since 2023 has played a foundational role in enabling and accelerating a transition and deepening of global fascism, that central to this shift is regime intransigence, and that this necessitates a shift in the theories of change (and by extension, a shift in strategies and tactics) adopted by popular movements for justice and against settler colonial genocide.

The first part of the paper offers an outline of what I see as the theories of change adopted by the largest swathes of popular movements for Palestinians’ liberation. Reading these through the types of actions and campaigns (BDS, civil society institutional agitation, use of international legal forums, popular education and mobilization) I argue that these movements have by and large adopted theories of change that assume functioning institutions of the bourgeois democratic order. Characterising the movement against Israel’s genocide in Gaza as the largest sustained popular mass mobilization in modern history, I argue that the failure to stop the genocide has been the clearest proof of the inadequacy of such theories of change, that it has unmasked fascism as the fundamental facet of the international political system today. The paper concludes by examining moments of success in the first two years of the anti-genocide movement to suggest paths towards theories of change that reckon with the reality of global fascism.

Bayan Arqawi, Munice AlFar, Tareq Sadeq

Political Economies of Protest: Student Activism in Western and Arab Universities amid the Gaza Genocide

The Gaza genocide triggered a global outrage where university campuses became key hubs of global solidarity and contestation. In many Western countries, students staged encampments, occupations, teach-ins and divestment campaigns aimed at exposing universities’ financial and research ties to the military-industrial complex; these mobilisations provoked mass arrests, suspensions and violent police interventions in the spring of 2024. Conversely, despite deep emotional cohesion for Palestinians among Arabs and despite the political threat including occupation, military attacks and demographic threat to Arab countries, comparable campus protests were sporadic; most Arab universities remained institutionally silent or tightly controlled. This paper adopts a Marxist political-economy framework to explain this striking asymmetry in the form, intensity and visibility of campus protests over the Gaza genocide between Western and Arab universities. The paper aims to answer this question by conducting a comparative analysis across five dimensions: institutional autonomy and governance; forms of repression and the public sphere; state–capital–university nexus; economic precariousness and student risk; and neoliberalism of higher education.

Susan Abulhawa

Stories and Streets: Harnessing Indigenous Power

Like many colonized peoples, Palestinians have repeatedly sought relief through arenas structurally tilted against us—namely, diplomatic tables set by colonial actors and their financiers. From the Hussein–McMahon Correspondence to the Oslo Accords, these “closed rooms” produced outcomes that deepened dispossession rather than restored agency. Our moments of strategic gain came not from participation in imposed frameworks, but from disrupting the very narratives that uphold occupation. Since the 1936–39 Great Revolt, power has emerged in moments that challenged Israel’s legitimacy and shifted global perception. The First Intifada, for example, posed no material threat to their military dominance—its true force was in the televised image of children confronting tanks, which fractured the occupier’s narrative monopoly. These were not just symbolic gestures; they imposed reputational cost and forced a recalibration of power dynamics. Israel’s ultimate victory in that era was not in their military confrontation of the population, but in succeeding to pull Palestinians away from our space of power (the open streets and stories) back into theirs (elite rooms and diplomatic secrecy).

This presentation will map the power that the occupying regime cannot replicate: mass mobilization, unfiltered narrative, and indigenous legitimacy. The street is not just a site of protest—it is a field of structural power. To win, Palestine must be fought and narrated there.