Metaphors They Kill by: Dehumanization of Palestinians by Israeli Officials and Sympathizers

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Abstract: Within the cognitive paradigm, metaphors are said to play a key role "not just in language but in thought and action" (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: p. 3). As a form of action, genocide in recent human history has been incited by metaphor, with Holocaust Jews as "parasites" (Musolff 2010), Iraqis as "rapists" (Lakoff 1991), Rwandan Tutsis as "cockroaches" (Hintjens 1999; Mowarin 2014), Bosnians as "Islamic fundamentalists" (Karčić 2022), etc. The aim of the present study is to investigate the ongoing genocide committed by Israel against the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip by bringing political ideology to bear on cognition both in thought and action (Gibbs 2017). In particular, it will be shown that the conceptual metaphor POLITICS IS RELIGION (Charteris-Black 2004) in the Christian Zionists' in-group's socio-cultural cognition, acts in tandem with and motivates the "animalized dehumanization" (Sevillano and Fiske 2023) of Palestinians. Such an ideology, which is tainted by psychological essentialism (Leyens et al. 2001) of the Jews supremacy, is instrumentalizing the deliberate, superordinate conceptual metaphor (Steen 2023) HUMANS ARE ANIMALS and other basic-level metaphors such as PALESTINIANS ARE RATS, ANTS and COCKROACHES, therefore stripping the Palestinian outgroup of their humanity (Leyens et al. 2000; Leyens et al. 2003; Haslam 23.2.2024, 2006; Haslam, Loughnan and Sun 2011; Harris and Fiske 2011) in order to legitimize the Palestinian genocide. Animalized dehumanization, which is a blue print for genocide, will be accounted for using Lakoff and Johnson's (1980, 1999) Conceptual Theory of Metaphor together with Lakoff and Turner's (1989) Great Chain of Being Metaphor.

Keywords: cognition, dehumanization, genocide, metaphor, political discourse, social psychology

1. Introduction

Fierke (2008: 35-6) sums up the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as based on a paradox: "The paradox of the Middle East is that the traumatic experience of the Holocaust gave impetus to the construction of Israel, which is the background against which the on-going trauma of the Palestinians, the collective identity emerging from this, and the violent conflict between Israel and Palestine and the larger Arab world, was constructed". This paradox translates differently for Jews and Muslims. Jews cherish good memories of the "War of Independence" in 1948, and celebrate the foundation of the State of Israel. In the collective memory of Palestinians and

Arabs, the same date stands for "the 'ethnic cleansing' of Palestinians that occurred during *al Nakba* (the Catastrophe), with the dispossession of over 750,000 indigenous inhabitants of Palestine and their descendants" (ibid: 33). The age of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is 75 years, which has been fraught with destruction of property, expulsion, dispossession, displacement, and killing of Palestinians by Israeli IDF. The official situation is that Israel is recognized by the United Nations as a state, offered by imperialistic Britain in 1948 to Israelis as a promised homeland, at the expense of the Palestinian land owners. The conflict is locked into a dilemma. On the one hand, Palestinians consider Israel a colonizer to be resisted and evicted from Palestinian land despite its recognition by the PLO in the Oslo accord; on the other, Israel believes it has historical rights over Palestine as their "promised land" plus the surrounding Arab lands as part of its expansionist ideology (see Amaireh 2024).

On October 7, 2023, Al-Qassam Brigades, the military wing of the Palestinian resistance movement Hamas, launched Operation Al-Aqsa Flood, which was an incursion in the Jewish settlements in the Gaza envelope. The Brigades brought with them back to Gaza Israeli hostages of all ages and nationalities to negotiate an exchange deal of Palestinian prisoners and detainees with the Israeli government. Hamas dubbed the operation "flood" by analogy to Noah's flood, which engulfed disbelievers as mentioned in the Qu'ran. Israel responded to it by Operation Iron Swords, and called it a "black day" since it suffered hundreds of casualties – one of the costliest event in terms of loss of Israeli soldiers and civilians and humiliation. Operation Al-Aqsa Flood has shown the true colonialist and imperialistic nature of the West. It has also shown the duplicity of the West in action. What Russia's Putin has been doing in Ukraine is perceived as brutality by the West but the massive destruction of North Gaza and brutality against Palestinians is considered by the same West as Israel's right to self-defence.

As a background to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, we will invoke Gideon Levy (2023), a columnist in Israeli daily *Haaretz*, who cited three principles or values that have enabled Israel to live in peace.

1. Most of the Israelis not all deeply believe that we are the chosen people. But if we are the chosen people, we have the right to do whatever we want.
2. There was never in the history of occupation where the occupier presented himself as the victim, not only the victim but the only victim around.
3. The systematic dehumanization of the Palestinians… If they are not human beings like us, then there is not really a question of human rights… Almost no one will treat the Palestinians as equal human beings like us.

We think these are the key concepts that explain Israel's savage, brutal, and terrorist treatment of the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip before and after Operation Al-Aqsa Flood. We will revisit these principles in the Discussion section. In particular, we show how Christian Zionism represents the unbreakable marriage of Zionism's extreme and expansionist political program with the religious convictions of Christianity, which are based in biblical prophecy. This unbreakable relationship

gives rise to the conceptual metaphor POLITICS IS RELIGION, which denotes the legitimacy of military activities based on biblical readings as well as the use of religious terminology in political discourse. We will also provide an analysis of animal metaphors used by Israeli officials and sympathizers to dehumanize Palestinians, categorising them into two types, i.e. superordinate and basic-level metaphors. Our analysis is guided by Lakoff and Johnson's (1980, 1999) Conceptual Theory of Metaphor together with Lakoff and Turner's (1989) Great Chain of Being Metaphor.

2. Methods

In this study, our aim is to illustrate the animal and insect metaphors utilized by Israeli officials and sympathizers to dehumanize Palestinians. Specifically, we examine the source domains employed in these metaphors and discuss their implications. Therefore, our focus lies on the types of metaphors used in the context of the Israeli-Gaza war, rather than on their frequency, following a type-based analysis approach as outlined by Kövecses et al. (2019). Specifically, we categorise the animal metaphors into superordinate and basic–level metaphors, in line with Lakoff (1987) and Lakoff and Johnson (1980), and discuss the implications of both types in the context of the study (see section 4.2). According to the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), metaphors make use of basic-level categories, which are carried on the surface of discourse by "linguistic metaphors," which are encompassed by a portmanteau concept residing in the conceptual system and called "conceptual metaphor" (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 7). Basic-level categories are considered basic, because it was found that it is at this level that we have most knowledge about categories (Rosch 1978). Basic-level categories are, thus, "human-sized," i.e., "they depend not on objects themselves, independent of people, but on the way people interact with objects: the way they perceive them, image them, organize information about them, and behave toward them with their bodies" (Lakoff 1987: 51). On the other hand, the superordinate category is found on the surface of discourse, which is representative of all the basic-level categories embraced by the knowledge domain. We additionally employed the framework proposed by Lakoff and Turner (1989), which provides an insightful structure for evaluating the cognitive processes at work in the context of our study. This framework, known as the Great Chain of Being Metaphor, categorizes various domains of knowledge in the world hierarchically based on their characteristics and actions. Particularly pertinent to the objectives of our study are the sub-chains pertaining to HUMANS and ANIMALS. We utilize these concepts to elucidate the process of dehumanization experienced by Palestinians.

To compile a comprehensive dataset, keywords such as *dehumanization, human animals, inhuman animals, Palestinians are animals*, and related terms were employed (cf. Hamdan, Madanat and Hamdan 2022; Zibin and Altakhaineh 2023). These keywords were essential in manually extracting metaphorical expressions from publicly available news websites and speeches given by Israeli officials and sympathizers on the Israel-Gaza war, eliminating the need for consent forms. The metaphorical expressions were collected from various news websites and opinion

articles, including *Middle East Eye, New York Post, Politico, AA, Honestreporting* and related political speeches\statements found on *YouTube*, ensuring a diverse representation of Israel-Gaza war. The collection spanned news articles from October 7, 2023, to December 31, 2023.

Metaphor identification Procedure MIP was employed to identify metaphorical expressions in our data (Pragglejaz 2007). The following is an illustrative example:

1) "Palestinians are **drugged cockroaches**."
   Stated by former IDF Chief of Staff and MK Rafael Eitan.
   Source: https://honestreporting.com/sharon-and-the-wrong-drugged-cockroach/

Using MIP, we employed the following steps: (1) textual analysis: we conducted a close reading of the text to identify language that deviates from literal meaning or contains figurative language, i.e. the phrase "drugged cockroaches" stood out as figurative; (2) contextual understanding: Understanding the historical and social context of the Israeli-Palestinian war helped interpret the figurative meaning behind the words; (3) Domain mapping: we established conceptual mappings, i.e. the target domain is HUMANS and the source domain is INSECTS. In our case, PALESTINIANS ARE COCKROACHES; 4) linguistic analysis: we analysed the linguistic features, namely, the use of the verb *are* to equate Palestinians with cockroaches and the adjective *drugged* to modify the cockroaches; finally, 5) Interpretation: we interpreted the metaphor as a form of deliberate dehumanization, depicting Palestinians as pests that need to be eradicated. This metaphor strips Palestinians of their humanity; it implies that they are not worthy of compassion, empathy, or consideration, and justifies violence towards them. Using the adjective, *drugged*, intensifies this dehumanization, implying that Palestinians are not only pests but also impaired or subjugated in some way, making them easier targets for oppression or violence.

3. Overview of Christian Zionism

The relentless defence and support of Israel by the Western bloc cannot be made sense of by Easterners without understanding what Christian Zionism is. Even though atrocities have been committed by Israel against Palestinians for decades, the brutality and mass murder of innocent children and women in the Gaza Strip after Operation Al-Aqsa Flood, seem to have taken the young generations in the West by surprise due to their indoctrination by the Western media against Arabs and Muslims. Some of them were not able to explain and understand such atrocities, presumably because they are not aware of the Christian Zionist project for the Middle East. Part of what Christian Zionism is could be captured by Said's (1995) conception of orientalism as "a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (p. 3). Christian Zionists' behaviours vis-à-vis Palestine and the Middle East in general cannot be understood as purely political since "this approach often fails to take the role of theology seriously" (Lewis 2021: 1).

But, this is not all. Christian Zionism is about unconditional support of Israel's colonial project and its excelling in displacing and evicting Palestinians through colonial expansionism by proliferating settlements and installing apartheid rule. According to Christian Zionism, Jewish settlements and the control of Palestine should be commended by Christians as part of biblical prophecy to prepare for the Messiah's return at the end of time. However, this blessing of settlements is done out of self-interest on the part of Christians to ensure their own salvation, convert part of the Jews to Christianity, and see to it that Jews and non-Christians are destroyed while they ascend to heaven. Christian Zionism is nourished by anti-Semitism towards the Jews, grouping them in one state (Israel) out of fear from their power and influence (Ahmad and Kirk 2023). The mystery in all this is the opposition to the project by many present-day Jews, including rabies, who think that the existence of a state of Israel as a promised land for Jews is against the teachings of the Torah. They favour living amongst Muslims and Arabs in the state of Palestine.

Support for Israel's project from its inception took many forms, including financial, military, and political, together with giving incentives for Jews to join Palestine. Finney (2016) noted that "in terms of funding, since 1976 Israel has been the largest single recipient of foreign US assistance and since 1985 has received over $3 billion annually. Between 1949 and 1995, US aid to Israel amounted to $65 billion" (p. 26). Boer and Abraham (2007) sum up the basic tenets of Christian Zionism in terms of four contradictions:

> 1) The antinomy of religion and politics: Christian Zionism wants to stay biblical and theological, whereas mainstream Zionism wants to stay political.
> 2) The antinomy of Realpolitik: this is the problem of Zionists using Christian Zionism to influence US policy.
> 3) The antinomy of anti-semitism: Christian Zionism is the only full realisation of anti-semitism, for the proponents of Christian Zionism want to obliterate Arabs first, and then they want to annihilate the Jews.
> 4) The antinomy of this version of biblical liberalism: unable to hold onto the tension between 'Old Testament' and 'New Testament', Christian Zionism must resolve it through violence. (p. 194)

Boer and Abraham (2007: 204) fear that "perhaps the antinomies will begin to break up Christian Zionism from within. Perhaps the politics will swamp the theology and they will annihilate themselves before anyone else". Here, they allude to the fact that in Christian Zionism theology is bending politics to its own purposes. In our own terms, this is captured in the conceptual metaphor, POLITICS IS RELIGION. Christian Zionism reflects a non-dissociable marriage between Christianity as theology (biblical prophecy) and Zionism as an extremist, expansionist political ideology. Such an impossible divorce suggests the conceptual metaphor, POLITICS IS RELIGION, not just in terms of the kind of political rhetoric adopted from religion, but also the military action implemented and legitimized on the ground from biblical prophecy. Haynes (2009) characterizes rule by religion as follows:

- Religion is focused on the absolute and unconditional and as a result can adopt totalitarian characteristics.
- When claiming both absolute and exclusive validity, religious conviction can lead to intolerance, over-zealous proselytisation and religious fragmentation.
- Religion can increase aggressiveness and the willingness to use violence.
- Leaders within faith-based organisations may seek to legitimise abuses of power and violation of human rights in the name of religious zeal (p. 53).

Christian Zionism crystallizes theology into the political institution in the West, legitimizing political decisions on the basis of exclusionary faith issues. According to Isaac (2022: 5), one of the tactics of Christian Zionism is "the employment of God". Based on biblical prophecy, such an abusive employment takes the form of a syllogism: (i) Israel is God's chosen land, (ii) Because I am a Christian, I stand with Israel, and (iii) To stand against Israel is to stand against God. Christian evangelical fundamentalists, who make up the bulk of Christian Zionists, believe this, thinking that not supporting Israel is standing against God. When non-Christians show their lack of support to Israel's agenda in the Middle East, they are taxed with anti-Semitism even if they are of Semitic origin such as Arabs. There is, however, an enigma about Christian Zionism, whereby Zionists in Israel have been killing members of the Catholic Parish in Gaza, which was denounced by Pope Francis as "war and terrorism" on the part of Israelis.

4. Steps prior to genocide

The actual genocide is preceded by a few preparatory steps marked by the use of language. Such steps may include (i) polarization, which helps build up an in-group and an outgroup with necessary qualifications appropriate to the circumstances of the genocide, and (ii) self- and other-construal, which serves the purpose of filling in the in-group and the outgroup with the adequate construal operations.

4.1. Multiple polarization in the Middle-East conflict

Operation Al-Aqsa Flood has polarized the world at large into supporters of Israel to defend itself against supporters of a free Palestine, with a State and self-determination. Though not more numerous, the supporters of Israel are powerful and possess an armada of weapons, which have been urgently shipped to Israel. The US called one submarine and two fleets to the Mediterranean; France also sent its aircraft carrier; Britain showed relentlessly support for Israel, and the German Chancellor staunchly opposed a ceasefire. The Americans represented by President Joe Biden, Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin, all visited occupied Palestine to shake hands with Netanyahu and promised him unconditional moral, financial, and military support. Antony Blinken pointed out that he visited Israel as a Jew not as an American. The President of France, the British Prime Minister, and the Canadian Prime Minister were also of the party. Their visit is part of an in-group solidarity as against a Hamas/Palestinian out-group. All of them talked about Hamas as a savage and terrorist group.

Al-Aqsa Flood also polarized many Western countries from within, creating a divide between governed and governors. In spite of bans of protests, the capitals of many Western countries have seen massive demonstrations in support of a free Palestine. This defiance and support can be seen as a shift in group allegiance, which consisted in literally leaving their traditional national in-group, and joining a new in-group in which they identify with Palestinian rights to an independent state. Their newly formed in-group obviously does not include their governments and the people with whom they do not share the same political ideology and human values. In a massive demonstration in San Francisco, Americans demonstrated against sending aid to Israel by US and European countries. The atrocities committed by Israel against Gaza civilians reshuffled, so to speak, the contents of "WE" and "THEM" in "what WE think about THEM" (van Dijk 2003: 210) as said by Westerners in such a way that demonstrators have been relocated by their own governments from the Western in-group "WE" into the new out-group, "THEM," which cost some of them imprisonment, fines, and their categorization as traitors. It can be predicted that such a cleavage in Western societies will have far-reaching religious and political consequences in the future.

Though decades old between Palestine and Israel, polarization has been reinstated when Operation Al-Aqsa Flood happened. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said in a video message from military headquarters in Tel Aviv (Aljazeera 2023): "Citizens of Israel, we are at war. The enemy will pay an unprecedented price." Here, an in-group has been constructed around the citizens of Israel, and the out-group made up of Hamas is called "the enemy." Netanyahu also conceptualized the children of Israel as "the children of light" whereas the children of Palestine are construed as "the children of darkness." Talking about discriminating against people based on a different essence than one's own, Leyens et al. (2000: 187) write that "the people in these groups are others; they are radically different from 'us,' and as such, they lack typically human characteristics, and, therefore, are considered infrahumans". Importantly, this political ideology is manifested by what van Dijk (2003: 218) calls othering or otherness, arguing that "one way of doing this is to represent the Others in terms of a Problem-for-Us at all social levels: jobs, housing, welfare, crime, attitudes, and so on".

4.2. Self- and other-construal

Construal is the ability of language users "to construe the same content in alternate ways, resulting in substantially different meanings" (Langacker 2000: 5). Construal does not entail that alternate ways of construing the same scene or situation all co-exist on the surface of discourse. What should transpire from the concept of construal is that in language processing language users have available in cognition alternate ways that they have internalized as part of language acquisition. Construal also implies that it occurs in non-metaphoric situations such as the active-passive duality, and metaphoric scenes. Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 221) explain metaphoric construal as follows:

> There is a good reason why our conceptual systems have inconsistent metaphors for a single concept. The reason is that there is no one single

> metaphor that will do. Each one gives a certain comprehension of one aspect of the concept and hides others. To operate only in terms of a consistent set of metaphors is to hide many aspects of reality. Successful functioning in our daily lives seems to require a constant shifting of metaphors. The use of many metaphors that are inconsistent with one another seems necessary for us if we are to comprehend the details of our daily existence.

Since conflicts are about inevitable polarization, they create their own in-group and out-group configurations. Each in-group in a conflict makes use of positive self-construal, both non-metaphoric and metaphoric, and negative out-group construal.

Israelis construe themselves as victims of Operation Al-Aqsa Flood, hence, the invocation of self-defence as retaliation. Israelis construe their army as IDF, where D stands for Defence, but the IDF are used in attacking and slaughtering Palestinians. Israelis call what is happening "war" but it is not; it is an asymmetric warfare, where Israel is carpet-bombing the Gaza Strip with a powerful army. They call the war a "sacred enterprise" to bring hostages back home (Natenyahu, News Conference on 2-12-2023 on Aljazeera). In contradistinction, Palestinians are construed by Israelis as terrorists even though they defend themselves against an occupier. Palestinians are construed as Nazis in remembrance of the holocaust. Palestinians are also variously construed as animals (i.e. infrahumans) and Hamas members as savages (Gallant). Hamas members are also construed as ghosts of Gaza, monsters, and barbarians. Hamas is also construed as Satan that killed the children (Natenyahu, News Conference on 2-12-2023 on Aljazeera, to counter the image that Hamas presented of itself during the hostage exchange deal with Israel). On the other hand, Palestinian self-construal is that of victims of Israeli's colonization and brutality. Hamas is construed as part of the national liberation movement. Palestinian construe Israelis as a colonial power and an enemy.

5. Animal metaphors for Palestinians after Operation Al-Aqsa Flood

In this section, it will be proposed that animal metaphors with Palestinians are used to evaluate them negatively, which negativity is, in turn, used to dehumanize them. After they are dehumanized, Palestinians are taken to genocide.

5.1. Animal metaphors as evaluation

In anthropomorphism, cognition maps human behaviour and characteristics onto non-human entities (Gomez-Imbert 1996; Horowitz and Bekoff 2007; Epley and Waytz 2008 and Chartrand, Fitzsimons and Fitzsimons 2008). The conceptual metaphor, NON-HUMAN IS HUMAN, is informed by such a conceptualization of non-humans. Berger (1980: 5) defined the human-animal relation as a contradictory dualism, whereby animals were "subjected *and* worshipped, fed *and* sacrificed" (italics in original). However, the focus of this study is what happens when animal behaviours and characteristics are mapped onto humans. This practice is known as "zoosemy" (Kiełtyka and Kleparski 2007), which builds on the conceptual

metaphor, HUMANS ARE ANIMALS. As Kövecses (2010: 19) noted, "the domain of animals is an extremely productive source domain", not just because animals are a familiar sight in the socio-physical environments of humans, but also, more importantly, because of the use of animals to psychologically and negatively evaluate others (Li and Dreyfus 2023) and offend them.

For long, zoosemy has been a very common practice in human societies. Nesi (1995), for instance, showed how animal names such as CAT, COW and MOUSE are used to convey figurative meanings to assess the other in different cultures (38 different geographical regions). Nesi also addressed the learning and translational problems deriving from these different metaphoric uses. Within the same society, zoosemy may be either negative or positive. Looking at animal names from the perspective of the perception of gender, Hines (1999) pointed out that women are conceptualized negatively by men in the American society as "foxy chicks" and "playboy bunnies". Prażmo (2020) studied the discourse of *incels* ("involuntarily celibate" men), who use hate speech to dehumanize women, alleging that women's behaviours are responsible for their problems. By far, animal names are extensively used to conceptualize women unfavourably world-wide (Pace Nilsen 1996; Barasa and Opande 2017).

Different approaches can be used to analyse animal metaphors. For example, Talebinejad and Dastjerdi (2005) conducted a cross cultural examination of animal metaphors in English and Persian adopting the GREAT CHAIN OF BEING metaphor (Lakoff and Turner 1989), together with the principle of metaphorical highlighting (Kövecses 2002). The study found many similarities between the two languages, suggesting that some metaphors can be culture-specific. The analysis of animal metaphors also extends beyond static interpretations, encompassing diachronic perspectives that not only characterize individuals or groups but also serve to represent entire nations or countries, for example, Solopova, Nilsen and Nilsen (2023) investigated the evolving use of wild animal metaphors to shape the portrayal of Russia in American media discourse from the 19th to the 21st centuries. The results indicate that the metaphors RUSSIA IS A BEAST and RUSSIA IS A BEAR are commonly employed in 21st-century American media discourse to create a sense of othering. However, their interpretations have shown flexibility and adaptation during periods of friendship and collaboration between the two nations.

Animal names can be used favourably. For instance, Bame et al. (2013: 51) argued that animal metaphors are used in their study based upon animal behaviours "to offer suggestions for avoiding the subsequent high costs of recruiting new employees, increased litigation costs, and injury or death caused by inappropriate behaviors in the workplace". Why do people use animal metaphors to conceptualize other people? Ekman (2000: 91) explains that "they may be called animals, to show how little they matter". Goatly (2006: 25) argues that the "widespread and persistent view that humans are somehow at the pinnacle of creation has given rise to a general pattern among HUMAN IS ANIMAL metaphors: the great majority are negative and pejorative". What makes animal metaphors offensive? Haslam et al.'s (2011) answer to the question comes from two factors: content and context. Content predictors of offensiveness center around choosing

disliked animals, dehumanizing animals, animals known for more animality, accurate description of animals, literal equation with a particular animal, and more genetically distant animal. The pragmatic context responsible for the offensiveness of animal metaphors is largely a function of the speaker's intention in using the metaphor in that particular social context (ibid: 3).

5.2. From animalization to dehumanization

As has been shown, animal metaphors may be used as evaluative expressions to encode endearment and pejoration. Even as pejoration, some animal metaphors keep the humanity of targets of pejoration. However, some other uses of animal metaphors may take their targets lower than humanity, thus reducing humans to non-humans. Discussing their findings in two empirical studies about the offensiveness of animal metaphors, Haslam et al. (2011: 12) argued that "metaphors were offensive to the degree that they implied a view of the target as less than human", concluding that "animal metaphors offer a revealing window into human prejudice and social judgment" (ibid: 13). The conceptual metaphor HUMAN IS ANIMAL as used by Israelis about Palestinians does not emerge from their "cognitive unconscious;" it is a deliberate metaphor (Steen 2023) on the part of Israeli government to signal the "animalized dehumanization" (Sevillano and Fiske 2023) of Palestinians. When the Defence Minister conceptualized Hamas combatants as "animals in the form of humans," he issued a deliberate metaphor by which he meant to exclude humane treatment of Palestinian civilians during warfare and legitimize genocide against them. The logic of the genocide is: Because Palestinians are "animals in the form of humans," therefore "we are acting as such," which is a way of blaming the genocide on Palestinians, who should assume the consequences of their being animals. Specific examples of animal and insect metaphors as used by Israeli officials and sympathizers to dehumanise Palestinians were found in our search, we present them below:

2) "The Western world must stand with Israel as it fights the "**bloodthirsty animals**" of Hamas."
   Stated by Israel's Ambassador to Berlin Ron Prosor
   Source: https://www.politico.eu/article/ron-prosor-israel-evoy-hamas-animals-must-be-destroyed/

3) "Palestinians are **blood thirsty morally depraved animals**."
   Stated by Israel sympathizer who is a top doctor at Johns Hopkins University.
   Source: https://nypost.com/2023/11/17/news/johns-hopkins-doc-on-leave-after-calling-palestinians-animals/amp/

4) "Palestinians are **rats and human animals**"
   Stated by Pro-Israel protestors
   Source:https://www.reddit.com/r/PublicFreakout/comments/17x05lu/proisrael_protestors_calling_palestinians_rats/?rdt=44782&force_seo=1

5) "Palestinians are **horrible, inhuman animals**"
Stated by Former Israeli ambassador to the United Nations Dan Gillerman
Source: https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/israel-s-former-ambassador-to-un-calls-palestinians-inhuman-animals/3034022#:~:text=Former%20Israeli%20ambassador%20to%20the,a%20tightened%20blockade%20on%20Gaza.

6) "Palestinian prisoners are just **a bunch of ants**."
Stated by rieh King", the deputy mayor of occupied holy Quds
Source: https://en.mehrnews.com/news/209358/Israeli-official-likens-Palestinians-to-ants

In example (2), the metaphor HAMAS MEMBERS ARE BLOODTHIRSTY ANIMALS is used to portray members of Hamas as savage and dangerous animals, which implies that they are devoid of humanity and civilized behaviour. It suggests a justification for military action against them. The dehumanisation is not only used with members of Hamas but with all Palestinians, suggesting a larger systemic issue of bias and discrimination. It implies a pervasive prejudice toward Palestinians in general, independent of particular political or military circumstances. This widespread dehumanization has exacerbated structural inequities, impeded attempts towards peace and reconciliation, and lead to the marginalization and abuse of Palestinians in many spheres of society. In example (3), the metaphor dehumanizes Palestinians by equating them with immoral and vicious animals. It suggests that Palestinians are inherently violent and lacking in moral values. Emphasizing the moral depravity of animals in this context serves to reinforce the negative characterization of Palestinians, implying that they are not only subhuman but also inherently wicked or evil. In example (4), PALESTINIANS are portrayed as RATS. Comparing Palestinians to rats conveys strong implications of dehumanization and degradation. Since rats are frequently connected to filth, illness, and annoyance, drawing this analogy implies that Palestinians are likewise unclean, ill, and unwanted. This analogy aims to dehumanize Palestinians by placing them in the same category as an animal that is typically found unwanted. It also suggests that Palestinians are not deserving of respect or consideration. Using superordinate metaphors like HUMANS ARE ANIMALS or HUMANS ARE INSECTS to describe a group of people carries connotations of dehumanization, as it implies a lack of civility or sophistication (see examples 2, 3, and 5). However, when specific source domains like RATS, COCKROACHES or ANTS are used, the dehumanization becomes more pronounced and targeted as specific animal\insect comparisons often evoke more visceral and negative associations, such as filth, disease, or insignificance.

Furthermore, specific animal comparisons may carry cultural or historical baggage that amplifies their impact. As part of their propaganda and legitimization of Jews' extermination, the Nazis issued in German-occupied Poland a poster with "Jews are lice; they cause typhus." (Perspectives 2023) Likewise, the perpetration of a Palestinian holocaust by Israel is accompanied by its own animal metaphors. Animal metaphors about Jews have revolved around lice, vermin, insects, etc.,

those about Palestinians after Operation Al-Aqsa Flood mainly consist of the generic word animal together with specific source domains INCLUDING RATS, COCKROACHES and ANTS. It is Netanyahu who used the general, generic lexical item "animal" to conceptualize Palestinians. His Defence Minister, Yoav Gallant, copied him, declaring: "We besieged Gaza. We cut power, food, water, and fuel. All cut. We are fighting animals in the form of humans, and we are acting as such." Conceptually, Gallant was not actually saying ANIMALS ARE HUMANS and HUMANS ARE ANIMALS, but meant that Palestinians are literally animals or HUMANS ARE NON-HUMANS. Haslam et al. (2011: 3) argue that "some metaphors may imply a literal equation of the target with a particular animal rather than a mere figurative similarity".

Lakoff and Turner (1989) offered a useful scheme that could be used to assess the construal operations at play in Gaza. This is what is known as the Great Chain of Being Metaphor (the Chain, for short):

- HUMANS: Higher-order attributes and behaviour (e.g. thought, character);
- ANIMALS: Instinctual attributes and behaviour;
- PLANTS: Biological attributes and behaviour;
- COMPLEX OBJECTS: Structural attributes and functional behaviour;
- NATURAL PHYSICAL THINGS: Natural physical attributes and natural physical behaviour (170-1)

This Chain organizes domains of knowledge existing in the world hierarchically in terms of their attributes and behaviours. Of more relevance to the purposes of the current study are the HUMANS and ANIMALS sub-chains. What is particularly interesting about this scheme is that when Israelis conceptualize Palestinians as less than human, Palestinians see themselves go DOWN on the Chain, thus losing their humanness and the attributes attached to it, which legitimizes their inhumane treatment by Israelis.

As arising in Netanyahu and Gallant's thought processes, and by extension in some, if not all, other Israelis holding the same Christian Zionist ideology, the conceptualization of Hamas members, and by extension all Palestinians, as animals, operates in the minds of the Israeli belligerents a sense that unwanted animals should be indiscriminately slaughtered, shot, or fired at. As championed by the West, the World Animal Protection International works towards ending animal cruelty and suffering. Palestinians do not seem to deserve a treatment similar to that of animals in the West, and the international community does not owe them protection. The vote for ceasefire in Gaza proposed on 8 December 2023 to the United Nations by the UAE, was blocked by the American veto as a sign of support for Israel's self-defence. The American government is indifferent to the cruelty championed by Israel against the Palestinians, does not show any mercy to traumatic mass killing, collective punishment, and the suffering of Palestinians. Thought of as animals, Palestinians are deemed to have no right to life. When he sensed this, the Secretary-General of the United Nations mobilized Article 99 of the Charter to protest against threat to international peace. According to Lakoff and

Turner's (1989) Chain, the Palestinians have been stripped of their humanity and human attributes since they have been scaled down the Chain of Being, thus becoming animals with corresponding attributes attached to them. In practice, while the life of an Israeli is considered priceless, that of a Palestinian is not worth a penny. When Netanyahu and Gallant conceptualized Palestinians as non-humans, they did not select a basic-level category from the domain of the animal kingdom (e.g., dog, pig, elephant, etc.) similarly to what other Israeli officials and sympathizers did (see examples 1, 4 and 6); instead, they adopted the superordinate category on the surface of discourse, which is representative of all the basic-level categories embraced by the knowledge domain of ANIMAL.

What is the significance of resorting to such a superordinate category to express a linguistic metaphor instead of a basic-level category? As Rosch et al. (1976: 383) pointed out about human principles of categorization, "the greater the inclusiveness of a category within a taxonomy, the higher the level of abstraction". Since the superordinate category, ANIMAL, is the highest in the hierarchy, it involves a higher degree of abstractedness. One immediate inference from this is that the makers of such a metaphor are announcing that they are not dealing with human beings with a soul and a body but with non-human entities tending towards abstractedness. As a confirmation, at one point in the narrative about the dehumanization of Palestinians, the IDF have been described as pursuing "ghosts" in the streets of Gaza. An immediate effect of such a use is for the receivers of the animal metaphor to perceive an abstract concept that strips Palestinians of their existence as concrete objects in the world, therefore of their humanity. Concretely, the animal metaphor enables and empowers Israel to decimate Palestinians as unwanted animals and ghosts.

5.3. From dehumanization to genocide

Raz Segal (2023), an Israeli professor of Holocaust and genocide studies, argues that what we are seeing in front of our eyes in Gaza is "a textbook case of genocide." According to the UN 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, genocide is "the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such." Netanyahu's "We will destroy Hamas" (WSJ News 2023) actually turned out to be an indiscriminate mass murder of Palestinian civilians, mostly children, women, and the elderly. The genocide is the enactment of the infamous Zionist slogan "a land without people for a people without a land," whereby Israel seeks to decimate Palestinians to make Palestine without people in order for Israel to fully take hold of Palestine.

To try to understand how Israelis arrived to genocide with Palestinians, the theory of psychological essentialism will be invoked. As conducive to racism, essentialism consists in humanizing the in-group because it possesses typically human characteristics and infra-humanizing the out-group as lacking in these (Leyens et al. 2001: 395). Leyens et al. (2003: 705) argue that "infra-humanization conveys the meaning that some humans are considered less human than other ones". Leyens et al. (2000: 188-189) investigated the human essence based on emotions, which they distinguished into primary and secondary. Primary emotions, which are

instinctual and shared with animals, include joy, sadness, anger, fear, disgust, and surprise. Secondary emotions, however, include affection, admiration, pride, conceit, nostalgia, remorse, and rancor, and are considered typically human. According to essentialism, racism consists in thinking that "not only should people associate more easily their ingroup than an outgroup with secondary emotions, but they also should tend to deny the possibility that outgroup members have secondary emotions" (189). While the aforementioned studies did not link "infra-humanization" to animal names and animal metaphors, Haslam (2006) did (252).

Harris and Fiske (2011: 175) point out that there are cases where "people spontaneously fail to consider the minds of other people – they fail to engage social cognition – perceiving them instead like disgusting objects," arguing that "dehumanized perception may be related to the dehumanized target eliciting disgust instead of the at least partially positive social emotions generally felt in the presence of other people". Indeed, owing to their exclusionary Christian Zionist ideology, Israelis have actually embarked on an ethnic cleansing of Palestinians from all the territories of Palestine. Genocide Watch published on its website a ten-stage scheme to genocide. This scheme is a revised list of Gregory H. Stanton's previous 8-stage of Genocide Watch. The revised one will be used here in Table 1 to test whether what has been taking place in Gaza is a genocide committed by Israel against Palestinians.

Table Ten-stage scheme to genocide committed by Israel against Palestinians

Classification	Civilization/civilized world (Israel and the USA, Canada, Australia, UK, France, and Germany) vs. Barbarism/barbaric (Hamas, Arabs, and Muslims) Children of light (Israelis) vs. children of darkness (Palestinians)
Symbolization	Although Israel did not force Palestinians to wear anything as Jews were forced to wear the yellow star under Nazi Germany, yet the symbolization is geographical with those living in Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Tel Aviv. Palestinians are symbolized by poor housing in particular locations, whereby they do not live with Israelis in the same neighbourhood. Very recently, released detainees have been marked by bracelets in the hand.
Discrimination (new)	"While Palestinian citizens of Israel are allowed to vote in Israeli national elections, they are denied a nationality, establishing a legal differentiation from Jewish Israelis, and are discriminated against in their access to civic space." (p. 82) "In 2002, the Israeli government passed Government Resolution 1813 prohibiting Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza from gaining status in Israel or occupied East

	Jerusalem through marriage, thus preventing family unification." (p. 98) (Amnesty USA 2022)
Dehumanization	Hamas/Palestinians are construed as "human animals," "savages," "ghosts," etc.
Organization	Israeli settlers have been armed and trained to kill Palestinians in the West Bank, Tel Aviv, and Jerusalem, with the support and protection of the IDF.
Polarization	US (in-group) vs. THEM (out-group)
Preparation	The army projects to decimate/eradicate Hamas and destroy Gaza as a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
Persecution (new)	Palestinians from the north of Gaza have been displaced to the south, with their abodes utterly pulled down by airstrikes. They have been deprived of water, food, electricity, and medical aid. Hospitals have been bombarded, and most of them are out of work. In spite of international reactions against these practices, the perpetrator continued, considering the international community a bystander.
Extermination	While Israel declares that it is after the decimation of Hamas, in actual fact its airstrikes are indiscriminately bombarding civilian agglomerations in north Gaza and groupings on their way to the south, mostly comprised of women, children, and the elderly.
Denial	While the international community is shouting in vain against the massacre of women, children, and the elderly, Israel denies doing the killing, and talks about having neutralized hundreds of Hamas targets, and blames the brutality on Hamas.

The political rhetoric of genocide among Israelis is publicly displayed in videos on Facebook. For instance, the Israeli Minister of Heritage, Amihai Eliyahu, stated that "one viable option for Israel is to drop an atomic bomb on Gaza Strip," which is a call for a genocidal action against Palestinians in Gaza and elsewhere. In a recent statement (January 17, 2024), the same Minister said: "Israel should find ways more painful than death for the Palestinians." A literary man said: "Win and annihilate them … those animals and shoot them." An Israeli Rabi advised Israelis to spare no opportunity to kill Palestinians:

> There is no mercy. You may think you are being merciful to a child but you are not being merciful to the child. You are being vicious to the ultimate victim of this child who will grow up and kill because the ideology of this child is even worse than his father… Rules of war: Do not allow anyone to remain alive. Nothing. No mercy. Completely erase any memory of

> Amalek, which means men, women, children, they do not have the right to exist.

On Aljazeera, the leader of the Israeli opposition justified the killing of 14,000 Palestinians, arguing that most of them were part of Hamas terrorists.

The use of language, in particular ANIMAL metaphors, has shown how Israel and the West supporting it, have legitimized a Palestinian genocide during the 2023 Israel-Palestinian conflict. In a press conference, UN chief, Antonio Guterres, stated that "we are witnessing a killing of civilians that is unparalleled and unprecedented in any conflict since I have been Secretary-General." The same UN chief stated that "Gaza is a graveyard for children." Josh Paul, former director at US Department of State, exhorted Americans to react to the genocide by calling "their Representatives and Senators to ask them to follow the recommendation of Human Rights Watch and so many other NGOs, and to suspend lethal military assistance to this conflict, including by supporting H. J. Res. 102 to block the sale of further precision guidance munition kits." In spite of these calls, Israel is adamant to stop the war, announcing in December 2023 that it can continue for months.

6. Conclusion

In this paper, we showed how Christian Zionism embodies an inseparable union of Christianity's theological beliefs, rooted in biblical prophecy, with Zionism's radical and expansionist political agenda. This unbreakable bond illustrates the conceptual metaphor, POLITICS IS RELIGION, signifying not only the incorporation of religious language into political discourse but also the justification of military endeavors based on biblical interpretations. Israeli philosopher Yeshayahu Leibowitz, who is nicknamed "the conscience of Israel," was reported to have warned that if Israel did not separate church and state it would give rise to a corrupt rabbinate that would warp Judaism into a fascistic cult (Hedges 2023). His prophecy has come true, since Israel has conflated religion and politics, thus living by the conceptual metaphor POLITICS IS RELIGION. As an immediate result, Israel has for long tried to decimate a whole population of Palestinians, denying them means of subsistence and human rights.

The analysis of deliberate animal metaphors used to describe Palestinians in the context of the Israel-Gaza war reveals a disturbing pattern of dehumanization and infra-humanization. The deliberate use of such metaphors by Israeli officials and sympathizers serves to portray Palestinians as less than human, thereby justifying discriminatory treatment and violence against them. The metaphorical equation of Palestinians with animals, particularly through specific source domains like RATS, COCKROACHES, and ANTS, carries significant implications. These metaphors not only degrade Palestinians but also evoke visceral and negative associations, reinforcing stereotypes and prejudices. The perpetrators of these metaphors seek to justify their own actions and absolve themselves of responsibility for the suffering inflicted upon Palestinians. It was also argued that the use of superordinate categories like ANIMALS instead of basic-level categories from the animal kingdom by High-ranked Israeli officials, namely Natenyahu and Gallant suggests a higher degree of abstraction, signalling a denial of Palestinians' humanity

and existence as concrete beings. This abstraction enables and empowers Israel to perpetrate violence against Palestinians with impunity, treating them as unwanted animals to be exterminated.

Israelis' memories as an in-group do not even include Palestinians as an out-group since Palestinians do not exist for them, their out-group being Jews in the diaspora. Their propaganda spreads an amnesia of the existence of a people known as Palestinians as if they inherited a country from a landless people. On the other hand, Palestinian memories have been intentionally fractured by Israel's forbidding the right of return to Palestine to many Palestinians who become part of the diaspora, separating the West bank from the Gaza Strip, and enclaving Palestinians living in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. Attempts have been made to shatter Palestinians' cultural memories by destroying "Palestinian archives in the various wars" (Fierke 2008: 36). Bernard (2019: 2) explains that "traumatic memories cause severe suffering among those who experience war, including survivors directly affected by violence, those who have been uprooted, and the families of people who remain missing long after a conflict has ended". Thus, if Israel continues its deep-seated biases, prejudices, and violence against Palestinians, the situation in Palestine does not augur for a peaceful resolution of the conflict or the purported two-state solution.

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