

# Why Is Israel Bulldozing Cemeteries in Gaza? Mike Whitney

By [Mike Whitney](#)

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Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [Law and Justice](#)

In-depth Report: [PALESTINE](#)

*According to CNN:*

**The Israeli military has desecrated at least 16 cemeteries in its ground offensive in Gaza,... leaving gravestones ruined, soil upturned, and, in some cases, bodies unearthed...**

In Khan Younis, in southern Gaza, where fighting escalated earlier this week, Israeli forces destroyed a cemetery, removing bodies in what the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) told *CNN* was part of a search for the remains of hostages seized by Hamas during the October 7 terror attacks. [CNN](#)

Why are they doing this?

The IDF has produced no evidence of hostages, land mines, tunnels, weapons-caches or Hamas militants. It's all an excuse to destroy the plots of land where people bury their loved ones. But, why? These graveyards pose no security threat to the IDF or to the Israeli state. They're just cemeteries.

*CNN* has reviewed satellite imagery and social media footage showing the destruction of cemeteries and witnessed it firsthand while traveling with the IDF in a convoy. Together **the evidence reveals a systemic practice** where Israeli ground forces have advanced across the Gaza Strip.

**The intentional destruction of religious sites, such as cemeteries, violates international law**, except under narrow circumstances relating to that site becoming a military objective, and legal experts told *CNN* that Israel's acts could amount to war crimes. *CNN*

You can tell that the journalist covering this story is disturbed by what he's seen. He's disturbed because plowing up the withered remains of loved ones –and leaving them to rot in the sun among clods of dirt and broken headstones– is a shockingly callous and evil thing to do. We don't expect humans to behave this way. We expect them to show some small amount of respect for the dead. But, here, we see the exact opposite. Here, we see corpses treated like garbage that must be disposed of so the settlement project can move ahead.

Here's *CNN*'s televised report:

The israelis have destroyed 16 cemeteries in Gaza, & unearthed dozens of bodies, under the pretext they were looking for the remains of israelis

[pic.twitter.com/1LZMxyE4oy](https://pic.twitter.com/1LZMxyE4oy)

— Sarah Wilkinson (@swilkinsonbc) [January 19, 2024](#)

It's worth noting, that other cemeteries in Gaza, that contain the bodies of Christians and Jews, have not been disturbed, which suggests that the policy is directed at a particular ethnicity, Arabs.

It's also worth noting that the destruction of cemeteries is a clear violation of international law under the Rome Statute. This reinforces the claim that Israel is conducting a genocide, in fact, South Africa has referred to the IDF's destruction of cemeteries in Gaza as evidence of genocide in its case at the International Court of Justice. Keep in mind, the definition of genocide goes beyond the mass killing of a particular ethnic group. It refers to "a policy to destroy a group, in whole or in part." Raphael Lemkin's Definition of Genocide helps to clarify this point:

... genocide does not necessarily mean the immediate destruction of a nation.... It is intended rather to signify **a coordinated plan of different actions aiming at the destruction of essential foundations of the life of national groups, with the aim of annihilating the groups themselves....**

The crime of genocide should be recognized therein as a conspiracy to exterminate national, religious or racial groups.... The formulation of the crime may be as follows:

**"Whoever, while participating in a conspiracy to destroy a national, racial or religious group, undertakes an attack against life, liberty or property of members of such groups is guilty of the crime of genocide."** [Raphael Lemkin's Definition of Genocide](#), genocidewatch.com

Does the deliberate destruction of Palestinian cemeteries "signify a coordinated plan (aimed) at the destruction of essential foundations of the life..... with the aim of annihilating the groups themselves?

It does.

And is the destruction of cemeteries "an attack against life, liberty or property" of the Palestinians with the intention of "destroying the group in whole or in part"?

Yes, it is.

Then Israel's actions meet the legal definition of genocide. This is from an article at The Atlantic Council:

**When the IDF razes Gazan cemeteries, it also razes Palestinian heritage, culture, and claims to the land....**

white settlers in the United States frequently desecrated Indigenous burial grounds in a centuries-long campaign of cultural destruction and ethnic cleansing. Likewise, **Nazis desecrated and destroyed countless Jewish cemeteries during the Holocaust, often using headstones as construction materials in a blatant effort to excise**

## **both Jewish people and Jewish heritage from occupied German territories....**

the IDF's alleged treatment of cemeteries outside of direct conflict with Hamas is also noteworthy, given **cemetery desecration's well-established place in the history of genocide**. Cemetery desecration and genocide are so intimately linked that Raphael Lemkin, coiner of the term "genocide," even recommended outlawing the practice in early drafts of the 1948 Genocide Convention. [Razing the dead: Contextualizing IDF cemetery desecration in Gaza](#), The Atlantic Council

The desecration of cemeteries is such a malignant act, it's hard to fully grasp. What sinister impulse motivates a nation's leaders to direct their troops to obliterate their adversary's burial grounds? It's an act of pure barbarism bordering on criminal psychoses. The only conclusion we can draw is that Israel is not satisfied with merely obliterating the schools, hospitals, universities, mosques and vital infrastructure. They are not satisfied with merely slaughtering tens of thousands of civilians who are not connected in any way to the attacks of October 7. No. **They are determined to eradicate any trace of the people who have occupied the land for the last two thousand years in order to concoct a fabricated history in which Zionist Jews are at the center of the narrative.** This is from an article titled Necroviolence in Palestine:

...Jason De Leon brought forward the concept of necroviolence ..He defines it as:

"Violence performed and produced through the specific treatment of corpses that is perceived to be offensive, sacrilegious, or inhumane by the perpetrator, the victim (and her or his cultural group), or both." – Jason De Leon in *The Land of Open Graves*, p.69[2]

...

## **The Zionist regime's use of necroviolence.... Demolition of historic gravesites**

The Zionist regime has made the demolition of cemeteries a key arena for necroviolence **to facilitate colonial expansion and historical erasure....** The regime has not only prevented the burial of Palestinian bodies, it has also gone to the extent of attacking the already buried, violating their bodies for further territorial expansion.

This also marks a step towards the complete erasure of the Palestinian experience, as many of these grave sites are centuries old, holding within them not only a history of Palestinian belonging, but one of resistance through the presence of martyrs who resisted decades of occupation. The Zionist regime thus denies Palestinians agency in one of the few forms it has left to exercise; that is, the traces of their heritage, identity, and history on ground.

## Conclusion

Here, we gain insight into the logic of Zionist colonialism, which **necessitates full control over every aspect of the Palestinian individual, both in life and death; in all forms of existence....**, the regime's exercise of necroviolence is a confirmation that Zionist colonialism continues long after death... **Erasing all traces of Palestinian culture, heritage, and identity works as an attack on the legitimacy of the Palestinian experience....** [Necroviolence in Palestine](#), Words of Solidarity

That pretty-well sums it up. Israel's destruction of Palestinian cemeteries is a critical part of

the ethnic cleansing campaign the goal of which is not simply to physically remove the native population but to expunge any trace of their historic existence.

It would be hard to imagine a more diabolical plan.

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*Featured image: One of the hundreds of 'targets' bombed by Israel during its latest war on Gaza. (Photo: Mahmoud Ajjour, The Palestine Chronicle)*

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