

# In Israele è possibile uccidere "animali in forma umana"

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Nel mezzo dei combattimenti nella Striscia di Gaza, due psicologi politici di prestigiose università americane hanno condotto un sondaggio tra 521 israeliani. Agli intervistati è stato presentato uno scenario ipotetico: un soldato israeliano ferito giace in un'area controllata dalle forze palestinesi. Per salvarlo, è stato detto agli intervistati, sarebbe necessario bombardare un quartiere civile palestinese. Quanti civili palestinesi sarebbero giustificati a uccidere per questo scopo? Gli ingenui ricercatori hanno proposto una scala tra 0 e 1.000, sperando di osservare un'ampia gamma di risposte. In pratica, circa la metà degli intervistati ha selezionato il numero massimo: 1.000. Sebbene il campione non fosse stato progettato per essere rappresentativo, le inclinazioni politiche degli intervistati erano solo leggermente più a destra rispetto a quelle riportate in un sondaggio condotto tre mesi dopo dall'Israel Democracy Institute. Inoltre, anche tra coloro che si identificavano come di sinistra o di orientamento di sinistra, circa un quarto ha scelto il numero massimo.

Qualcuno potrebbe pensare che "dopo lo shock della crudeltà di Hamas del 7 ottobre, gli israeliani abbiano perso la capacità di provare empatia verso i palestinesi". Se non fosse stato per quel massacro, potrebbero dire, i numeri sarebbero stati diversi. Ma Emile Bruneau e Nour Kteily, due psicologi politici, hanno condotto [questo sondaggio](#) all'inizio di agosto **2014**. Casualmente, è stato condotto la stessa settimana in cui Israele ha massacrato centinaia di civili palestinesi a Rafah (un episodio noto come "Venerdì Nero"), un episodio che ha reso concreto lo scenario del sondaggio. L'esercito israeliano è l'esercito del popolo e si è comportato in linea con l'opinione pubblica. Il Procuratore Capo Militare si è astenuto dall'avviare un'indagine penale. In ogni caso, la sequenza degli eventi mostra chiaramente che il 7 ottobre **non** è la ragione della svalutazione della vita palestinese agli occhi degli israeliani.

Others might say—that in a situation of violent, prolonged conflict, it is only natural for hatred to develop between the warring sides and for the enemy's life to lose value. After all, the principle that "Charity begins at home" is a common human sentiment. This claim is valid but insufficient to explain the extreme results.

Just a few weeks after that survey, the researchers conducted another one, this time among 354 Palestinians from the West Bank, representing a range of political views. The Palestinian participants were presented with a scenario in which they witness two cars plunging into a ravine—one carrying four Israeli settler children, and the other carrying a Palestinian man. They only have time to stop one of the cars. The researchers asked: to what extent is it morally right to save the Israeli children at the expense of the Palestinian? (on a scale of 0 to 100). About half of the respondents said, with more than 50% certainty, that saving the Israeli children would be the right thing to do. One in six

respondents was 100% certain this was the morally correct choice. It is important to note that this survey was conducted shortly after what was then the deadliest assault on Gaza, which killed more than 550 Palestinian children—15 times more than the number of Israeli children killed on October 7. In other words, at least in 2014, the bloody conflict and high death toll did not sweep the entire Palestinian public into a vengeful and merciless mindset.

Furthermore, both groups were shown what is known as the “Ascent of Man” scale. On the right side appears a modern human, while the left side shows a Neanderthal-like figure walking on all fours. Respondents were asked to rate both themselves and members of the rival nationality on a scale from 0 (ape-like human) to 100 (fully evolved human). The gap between self-rating and rating of the other is regarded by political psychologists as a measure of dehumanization. The results showed that Israeli dehumanization of Palestinians was six points higher than the reverse. In fact, the dehumanization of Palestinians by Israelis was the highest measured using this tool up to that point (similar studies had been previously conducted in Hungary, the United States, and England).

The view of Palestinians as ape-like creatures has echoed chillingly over the past two years. “Animals in human form [*hayot adam* in Hebrew]!! Erase Gaza from the face of the earth!!” “Animals in human form, from baby to old man—wipe out all of Gaza.” Quotes like these appeared in countless variations on social media in the days after October 7, posted by normative Israelis. Many echoed the statement of the then-Defense Minister, who expressed a similar idea. Demanding the annihilation of millions requires distancing the victims from the human family, thereby overriding social norms that regard the killing of civilians and especially children as immoral.

Jews are not inherently more or less cruel than members of other groups. But in Israel, Jews live in a colonial political context that demands ever-increasing dehumanization and a continual depreciation of Palestinian life. The need to justify the ongoing dispossession since 1948, the regime of Jewish supremacy, and the deadly repression of the resistance that followed—all require Israelis to diminish the humanity of Palestinians. For this purpose, a unique vocabulary was developed in contemporary Hebrew: the “mehabel” (loosely translated as “terrorist,” but used almost exclusively for Palestinians) – a person without history and without personality, whose “hisul” (elimination) is permitted and even desirable, and anyone who enters the “shithei hashmada” (“extermination zones”) will be “neutralized”.

Therefore, since the founding of the state, it has been rare for a Jewish Israeli to be properly punished for killing an Arab. Dehumanization enabled the killing of thousands of Palestinians who tried to return to their lands in the early years of the state, without trial or process. All those convicted for the Kafr Qasim massacre in 1956 were home within less than three years and some of them were rewarded with public sector jobs. Those responsible for the massacres in Khan Younis and Rafah in the following weeks were never tried, nor were those who carried out the massacre in Qibya a few years earlier. A direct line runs from these massacres to the pardon of members of the Jewish

Underground in the 1980s, to the absurdly light sentence of the soldier Elor Azaria who murdered and injured a Palestinian man in front of the cameras in 2016, and to the recent de facto license to kill granted to settlers in the West Bank. Legal leniency has created a normative world in which Palestinian lives are forfeit.

The current days of horror, with images of starving children in the Gaza ghetto, and the late awakening of even the remnants of the Zionist left to name the crime—genocide—are rooted in decades of dehumanization and blood-permission that brought us to this point.

How would the responses have been distributed if the 2014 study had offered a higher ceiling than 1,000 Palestinian casualties? Another zero? Another two? Or perhaps a well-known seven-digit number? The widespread indifference to the genocide Israel is now committing offers us a clue.

*An earlier version of this article was published in Hebrew by [Siha Mekomit](#).*