

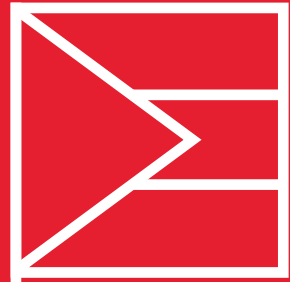
Silencing and Legitimising of Palestinian Men's Suffering

Marking Men's Mental
Health Awareness Month

June 2024



London | Washington



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June marks Men's Mental Health Awareness Month.

The irony remains that despite a calendar month dedicated to raising awareness of men's mental health and the associated stigma, the silencing and abject dismissal of the suffering of Palestinian men remains widespread.

That the unprecedented suffering of any people subject to genocide and a carefully orchestrated campaign of extermination is being manipulated and presented as "collateral damage" in an imagined "war" is obscure enough. But recognising that the vilification of Palestinian – and brown and Black men more widely – has been an equally systemic endeavour is essential when there is an abject dismissal of their suffering, particularly in a month dedicated to the visibility of men.

This Men's Mental Health Awareness Month, we ask where the concern is for the mental health of the Palestinian men digging through the rubble with their bare hands to unearth the limbs of loved ones? The men identifying the bodies of their family – sometimes in multiples of 10? The men who are ambulance workers, targeted by Israeli bombs and snipers? The men performing operations under torchlight, without anaesthetic for their patients? The men soothing orphaned, traumatised children, who have no surviving family? The academics, the poets, the teachers, the neighbours, the friends? The men obliterated in their prime? The boys who never got the chance to become men?

We dedicate this briefing to them.

“[There were] almost 70 martyrs [from my family in Jabalia refugee camp]. Extermination, they buried them. I saw them and took them out from underneath the rubble. [He cries] I’m burnt out, my brother, I’m burnt out – I saw it all. This is not a war, my brother. This is a massive earthquake. This is complete destruction. [...] Two days I took to take them all out [from under the rubble].”

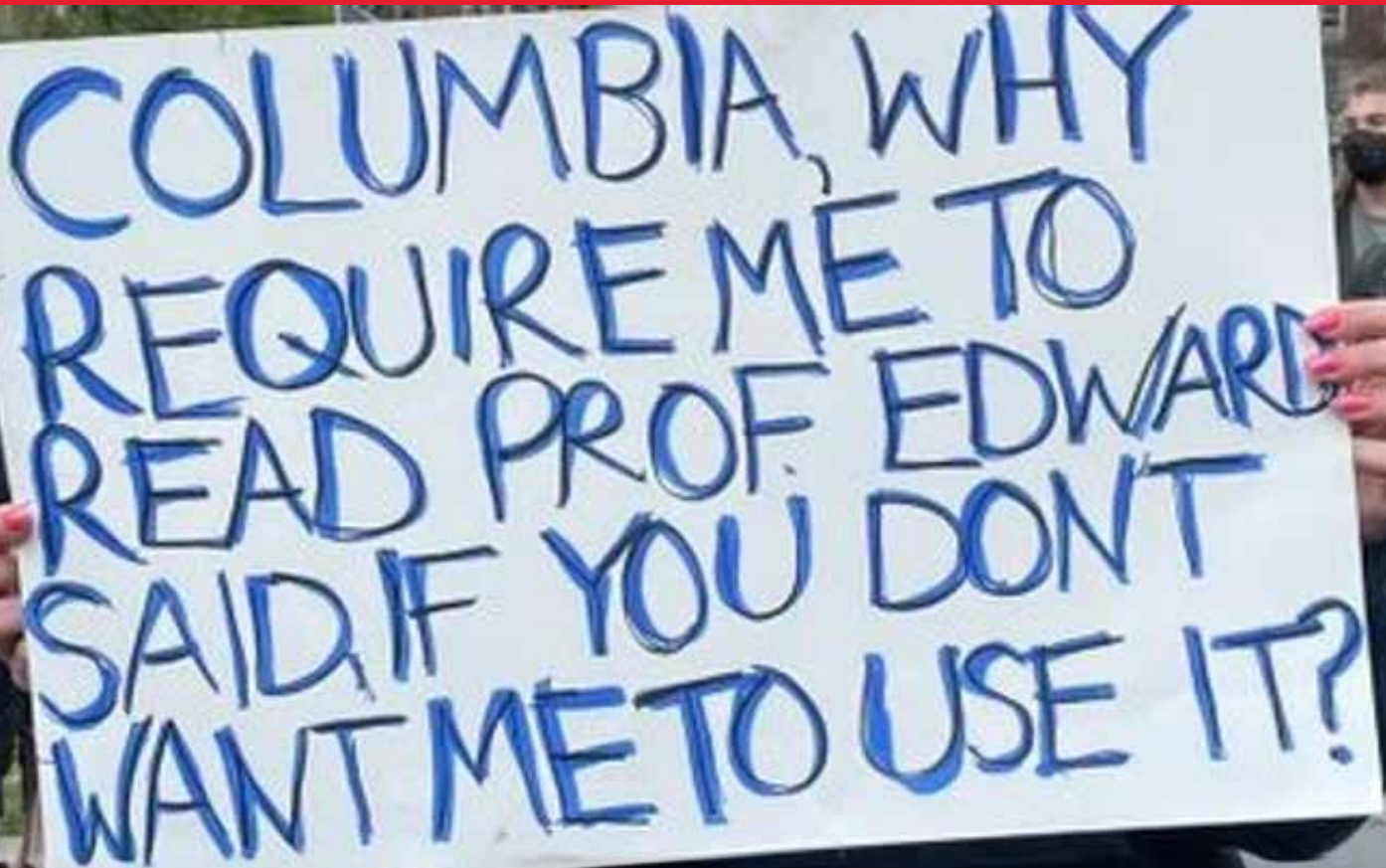
**Unnamed Palestinian man
from Jabalia refugee camp³⁷**



01

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Orientalism and the Vilification of the Arab Man

A photograph of a person holding a large white sign with handwritten text in blue marker. The sign reads: "COLUMBIA, WHY REQUIRE ME TO READ PROF. EDWARD SAID, IF YOU DONT WANT ME TO USE IT?". The person holding the sign is wearing a dark jacket and a black mask. The background is slightly blurred, showing other people and an outdoor setting.

COLUMBIA, WHY
REQUIRE ME TO
READ PROF. EDWARD
SAID, IF YOU DONT
WANT ME TO USE IT?

01

Orientalism and the Vilification of the Arab Man

Before the silencing of Palestinian men's suffering can be unpacked, it is essential to consider that this practice is not new, nor born as a result of the events of 7 October 2023. 'Orientalism' is a term coined by Palestinian scholar Edward Said in 1978, which describes how Arab and Muslim societies are typically portrayed in Western media, and in academic, political, and popular discourses.¹ Orientalists depict Arab and Muslim societies as backwards and barbaric in comparison to so-called Western 'civilisation'.²

In particular, Orientalist discourse portrays Arab and Muslim men as monolithic, inherently violent, deeply conservative, and oppressive towards Arab and Muslim women.³

Western media has perpetuated these racist stereotypes, by showing Arab and Muslim men as terrorists, tyrants, or oppressors in news coverage, films, and television shows.⁴ Films and TV shows often reinforce stereotypes, by typecasting Arabs or Muslims in roles of terrorists or oppressive figures.⁵

Political discourse in the West frequently uses Orientalist tropes to justify policy decisions.⁶ Arab and Muslim men are often presented as a 'threat' to Western civilisation, especially after 9/11, leading to policies that target Arab and Muslim communities, such as Donald Trump's 'Muslim Ban' in the US.⁷

“Reem, she is my darling. My heart is broken. I sleep and wake up and my eyes are full of tears. We lived in the same house with Reem. I used to play games with her every day. I wouldn’t just call her ‘darling.’ I would call her ‘my heart, my eyes.’ I miss her very much. Since my grandchildren were martyred, I have been going to their graves. It’s as if they’re sleeping.

**I ask them: ‘how are you?’
I talk to them. It’s impossible
to forget this pain.”**

Khaled Nabhan

Grandfather of Reem and Tareq, who were murdered by an Israeli airstrike at 3 and 5 years old, respectively³⁸



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Orientalism and 'Saving' Brown Women and Children



02

Orientalism and ‘Saving’ Brown Women and Children

At the same time as vilifying Arab men, Orientalism portrays Arab and Muslim women as passive victims of Arab and Muslim men’s aggression and conservatism, and who require ‘saving’ by white men – through military and colonial intervention.⁸

This saviour discourse was heavily instrumentalised in both media and politicians’ justifications for the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan and the 2003 invasion of Iraq, and often features in media discourse around conflict zones, refugee rights, and aid organisations.⁹

In 2014, scholar Cynthia Enloe created the term ‘womenandchildren’ to describe this white saviour discourse in conflict and aid zones, which portrays women and children as a homogenous block worthy of support.¹⁰ This focus on ‘womenandchildren’ excludes and delegitimises the suffering of non-white men who are positioned as the instigators of violence and never as victims themselves.¹¹

This discourse was demonstrated after 7 October 2023, when *The Washington Post* published an Orientalist cartoon of a Hamas official with Palestinian children and women strapped to him saying: “How dare Israel attack civilians”.⁴⁰

“In the wake of such tragedy, I have lost my passion for life. I am left with nothing but painful memories and the haunting echo of my children begging me to stop working so I could be safe at home with them. What did my children do to deserve to die like this? What did my brothers and my nephews do? What crime did they commit to deserve to die like this – to be bombed at home as they slept? What did I do to deserve the pain of having to search for my family under the rubble? [...] Israel is killing journalists and our families, hoping to break us and prevent us from continuing to report the truth.

And I am broken. I have nothing left in Gaza.”

Mohammed Alaloul
Palestinian photojournalist in Gaza³⁹



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How Media Discourse Silences and Delegitimises the Suffering of Men in Gaza



How Media Discourse Silences and Delegitimises the Suffering of Men in Gaza

The persistent reiteration in Western media that the death toll in Gaza includes a large proportion of women and children suggests that only the deaths of Palestinian women and children are horrific, and that Palestinian men are not entitled to be civilians, to suffer, or to mourn and be mourned.¹² The repeated emphasis only on the killing of Palestinian women and children in Gaza positions Palestinian men as dangerous and ‘legitimate targets’ of Israel’s genocide.¹³

Use of this discourse has been widespread. For instance, it was present in French President Emmanuel Macron’s demand that Israel stops bombing “these babies, these ladies, these old people”.¹⁴ Similarly, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau stated that Israel must end the “killing of women, of children, of babies” in Gaza.¹⁵

Orientalist depictions of Palestinian men as being ‘violent’ influences media and political reporting on the genocide in Gaza, evident in how Western media fails to challenge Israel’s assertion that the Palestinian men killed in their genocide are Hamas fighters.¹⁶

Orientalist depictions of Arab and Muslim men also influence how Palestinians are spoken to in media interviews.¹⁷ For example, when journalist Julia Hartley-Brewer interviewed the Palestinian

politician Mustafa Barghouti, she shouted at him: “maybe you’re not used to women talking”, after he tried to respond to her racist line of questioning.²⁰ She then concluded the interview by saying: “sorry to have been a woman speaking to you”.²¹ Her racist and Islamophobic remarks are part of a broader pattern of an Orientalist bias in Western media when interviewing Palestinian men.²²

The delegitimization of Palestinian men’s suffering also influences media language.²³ One such example is how Palestinian men are referred to as ‘prisoners’, whilst Israelis are ‘hostages’ – suggesting that there is a crime for which Palestinian men are being imprisoned – despite thousands of Palestinians being held in indefinite detention without any charge or evidence against them.²⁴ This difference is built on the racist and Islamophobic ideology that Palestinian men are inherently violent and therefore legitimately imprisoned.²⁵

Orientalist perceptions of Palestinian men as violent also explain why Israeli lies, such as the myth that resistance fighters beheaded babies, gain credence in Western media without any evidence.²⁶ This illustrates that Western publics and politicians already hold the racist and Islamophobic belief that Palestinian men are violent and therefore capable of such horrific crimes.²⁷

“We want people to stand with us! We’re sick of this! [...] Look upon the Palestinian people with mercy! Come and see what’s happening in Gaza! This is wrong! Wrong! The Palestinian people are getting destroyed!

**Everyone has been cut up!
Everyone has been injured!
Everyone has gotten sick!”**

**An unnamed Palestinian man
South Gaza⁴¹**



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Impact of the Silencing and Delegitimising of Men's Suffering on Palestinian Men



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Impact of the Silencing and Delegitimising of Men's Suffering on Palestinian Men

Western media's extensive focus on Palestinian women and children's suffering, to the exclusion of Palestinian men, allows Israel to intensify and prolong Palestinian men's suffering due to the minimal media coverage that the deaths of Palestinian men garner, and the media's legitimisation of their suffering as justified.²⁸

The ongoing murder, maiming, and imprisonment of Palestinian men is allowed to continue precisely because they are Palestinian men.²⁹ Palestinian men's gendered and racialised status, specifically Israel's blanket designation of Palestinian men as " Hamas terrorists" (or "terrorists in the making"), is used to excuse and justify the ongoing massacres of Palestinian men as Western "counterterrorism" against Islamic armed groups.³⁰

For example, photos of Israeli soldiers forcibly imprisoning Palestinian men kneeling on the ground, stripped naked, with their hands tied behind their backs was met with very little outrage.³¹ Israeli officials and media claimed that the arrested men were Hamas members who had surrendered, describing them as "military-aged men who were discovered in areas that civilians were supposed to have evacuated".³²

Israel's justification based on the men's gender and age shows clearly how the suffering of young and middle-aged men is deemed permissible by the international community on the baseless accusation that they could enact violence.³³

The delegitimising of Palestinian men also serves to undermine the voices of Palestinian men who are survivors of genocide.³⁴ For example, Israel's false claims that Al-Shifa Hospital was being used as a Hamas command centre, and therefore legitimate to attack, was repeated verbatim by many Western media outlets.³⁵

This racist and immoral statement can only gain currency when all Palestinian men have been dehumanised and demonised as violent terrorists, including doctors and patients in a hospital.³⁶

“I put all of my money and energy here [in my destroyed home]. Now it’s gone in the blink of an eye, all gone. [He cries] Everyone around here is gone, along with everything they have. I’m 78 years old.

**God save us,
God help us.”**

**An unnamed Palestinian man
Gaza⁴²**



Footnotes

- 1-2 'Orientalism', Edward Said (1978) available at <https://www.penguin.co.uk/books/57454/orientalism-by-edward-w-said/9780141187426>
- 3-7 'Orientalism: Violent Arab Muslim Men' Muslim Public Affairs Committee UK (26 November 2023) available at <https://mpacuk.org/2023/11/26/orientalism-violent-arab-muslim-men/>
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- 9 'Gendered practices of counterinsurgency' Laleh Khalili (2010) available at <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/review-of-international-studies/article/abs/gendered-practices-of-counterinsurgency/7226869010B937A9A36D15DFCD92041F>
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- 28 'The Dehumanization of Palestinian Men by Western Media' *Berkeley Political Review*
- 29-30 'Palestinian men are not 'terrorists in the making' *Al Jazeera*
- 31-33 'The Dehumanization of Palestinian Men by Western Media' *Berkeley Political Review*
- 34-36 'HRW: Israeli evidence so far insufficient to revoke Shifa's protections' *Reuters* (16 November 2023) available at <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/hrw-israeli-evidence-so-far-insufficient-revoke-shifas-protections-2023-11-16/>
- 37 'An elderly Palestinian man from Jabalia refugee camp says he has lost nearly 70 members of his family and extended family since the start of the ongoing Israeli genocide in Gaza.' *Quds News Network* (12 June 2024) available at <https://x.com/QudsNen/status/1800777359643349497>

Footnotes continued...

- 38 “My heart, my two eyes’: Palestine man keeps grand-daughter’s earring to mourn loss in Israel strike’ *Middle East Monitor* (30 November 2023) available at <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20231130-my-heart-my-two-eyes-palestine-man-keeps-grand-daughters-earring-to-mourn-loss-in-israel-strike/>
- 39 ‘Israel-Palestine war: I used to cry for other people’s children. Now I cry for my own’ *Middle East Eye* (10 November 2023) available at <https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/israel-palestine-war-i-used-cry-other-peoples-children-now-i-cry-my-own>
- 40 ‘Analysis: how the UK and US media dehumanise Palestinians’ *Declassified UK*
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