# The Colonizer Within: Exploring Facets of Internalized Oppression in Palestine

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## Introduction

### *Internalized Oppression*

Internalized Oppression (IO) refers to the psychological process by which individuals from marginalized or oppressed groups adopt and incorporate the negative beliefs, stereotypes, and attitudes imposed by the dominant, oppressive group. This internalization occurs unconsciously, as people absorb the dehumanizing, prejudicial, and violent messages of the society around them (Gale et al., 2020; Pyke, 2010; William, 2012).

The concept of internalization, central to understanding IO, involves the unconscious process of incorporating traits, beliefs, and attitudes from one's surroundings into the self (Behrends & Blatt, 1985). It plays a pivotal role in human development, shaping psychological functioning and relationships. Freud (1938) identified internalization as essential to superego formation, where external rules and expectations become internal guides. Melanie Klein (1950) expanded this idea, introducing internal object representations, in which emotionally charged images of caregivers are internalized as either "good" or "bad" objects. These internalized objects influence adult psychology, represented in dreams, behavior, and self-concept. While the internalization of stable, nurturing objects fosters security and coherence, the internalization of harmful or neglectful objects may lead to anxiety and psychopathology (Mitchell & Black, 2016; Klein, 1950).

On a societal level, Vygotsky (1978) argued that internalization extends beyond interpersonal relationships to include the internalization of cultural and social norms, linking social and psychological domains. In colonial contexts, IO mirrors the developmental concept of the "False Self," where colonized individuals adopt the oppressor's language, values, and behaviors to navigate a hostile environment, often at the expense of their authentic identity (Winnicott, 1960; Bulhan, 1985). Unlike children in non-colonized settings, who find congruence between family and societal structures, the colonized child emerges into a world that negates and marginalizes their native culture. Proximity to the colonizer demands the abandonment of native

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identity, reinforcing IO and stifling the development of the True Self. This psychological phenomenon highlights the need to address the layered impacts of colonialism on individual and collective identities, as IO perpetuates both personal distress and societal disempowerment (Fanon, 1967; Bulhan, 1985). Subsequently, the internalization of oppression happens when individuals in marginalized groups take on the perceptions and judgments of their oppressors. Du Bois (1903) coined the term "*double consciousness*" to describe the condition of oppressed individuals who see themselves through the eyes of their oppressors, leading to an internal battle between their true self and the internalized oppressor. This internalization of oppression is not limited to individual experiences but also shapes collective identity and societal roles. It becomes entrenched in the psychic structure of the oppressed, distorting their sense of self-worth and identity.

Research confirms the widespread and profound consequences of IO. Gale et al. (2020) demonstrated its significant associations with negative mental health outcomes, including depression and anxiety ($r = .26$). Jaber et al. (2022) further highlighted how lateral violence—aggression within marginalized groups, often covert and fueled by IO—undermines community cohesion and psychological well-being. These dynamics underscore the role of systemic oppression in perpetuating cycles of disempowerment and harm (Jaber et al. 2022).

### *IO, Emotions and Interpersonal Relationships*

IO significantly influences emotional experiences and expressions, often manifesting in altered affective states. Williams (2012) noted that oppressed groups tend to experience heightened emotional repression, shame, and self-doubt as central affective states. These emotional consequences arise from the internalization of inferiority and dehumanization by the dominant culture.

Jaber et al. (2022) and Whyman et al. (2021) identified horizontal violence as a significant emotional and social outcome of IO. In Indigenous communities, individuals often experience shame, guilt, and diminished self-esteem resulting from intragroup conflict and aggression. Similar patterns are observed across other marginalized groups, where IO fosters persistent feelings of inadequacy and emotional disconnection (Baily et al. 2011; Choi et al. 2017). These emotional struggles contribute to depression and anxiety, as seen in David's (2008) findings on Filipino Americans and Gale and colleagues' meta-analysis with data from over 38,000 participants across different studies from various marginalized ethnic and racial groups including African Americans, native Americans and Latino communities.

IO also deeply affects interpersonal relationships, often giving rise to horizontal hostility. This term refers to the tendency for individuals within an oppressed group to direct their anger, frustration, and feelings of inferiority

toward others in their own group, rather than against the external oppressors. Williams (2012) observed that IO creates divisions within oppressed communities, causing people to project their internalized feelings of worthlessness onto each other.

Lateral violence, a manifestation of horizontal hostility, is particularly pervasive in Indigenous communities. Jaber et al. (2022) documented common behaviors such as gossiping, shaming, and intimidation that disrupt social cohesion and perpetuate intragroup conflicts. Whyman et al. (2021) identified similar patterns in Aboriginal Australian communities, where systemic colonial pressures, identity disputes, and resource competition exacerbate lateral violence. These dynamics reinforce divisions and hinder collective resistance against oppression. Addressing this hostility requires fostering unity and recognizing the systemic roots of such behavior.

### *IO and Colonial Systems: The Case of Palestine*

IO within colonial systems is particularly profound and insidious, as it is often institutionalized and systematically reinforced over extended periods. The colonized people, under constant subjugation and dehumanization, are compelled to internalize a fabricated sense of inferiority crafted by their oppressors. This process distorts their self-identity and worldview, compelling them to view themselves through the lens of the colonizer's narrative.

In the context of Palestine, the Zionist settler-colonial project provides a clear example of how IO operates within a colonial framework. As Fanon (1967) and Memmi (1965) argue, colonial systems create a "mythical portrait" in which the colonizer defines themselves as superior and human, while the colonized are dehumanized and portrayed as inferior.

The history of Palestine has been shaped by settler colonialism, which began with the Ottoman Empire's rule over the region until 1920, when the British Mandate was established (Doumani 1992). The British actively altered Palestinian social, legal, and educational systems, paving the way for the Zionist movement, which promoted the idea of a Jewish-only state in Palestine. In 1917, following the Sykes-Picot Agreement, Zionism collaborated with the British mandate to facilitate the mass immigration of European Jews, which led to a significant increase in the Jewish population in Palestine by 1948 (Salamanca et al. 2012). The Zionist narrative depicted Palestine as a land "without people," justifying the displacement and violence against the native Palestinian population, with approximately 90% of Palestinians losing their homes by 1948 (Pappé 2007). The settler colonial process led to the destruction of hundreds of Palestinian villages, leaving behind a large population of displaced refugees and creating a violent foundation for the establishment of Israel (Sayegh 1965; Salamanca et al. 2012). This ongoing settler colonial project has shaped not only the physical

landscape of Palestine but also its people's identity, with Palestinians often portrayed as inferior or as "the Arab," a label that contributes to the erasure of Palestinian culture and history (Peteet, 2005).

The ongoing fragmentation of Palestinian communities under settler colonialism has created distinct groups: Palestinians in Israel, Gaza, the West Bank, Jerusalem, and the diaspora, each facing different forms of oppression. Palestinians in Israel, often referred to as "48-Palestinians," are subject to over 65 discriminatory laws, and those in Jerusalem face the threat of residency revocation (Hammoudeh et al. 2016). In the West Bank and Gaza, Palestinians endure severe restrictions, including checkpoints, military incursions, and home demolitions, effectively living in an apartheid system (Jabr and Berger 2016). The political division between these groups, exacerbated by the ongoing occupation, has further fragmented Palestinian society. This fragmentation has also led to internalized social hierarchies, where Palestinians from different regions view each other's circumstances differently, complicating efforts toward unified resistance (Al Sakka 2017). These divisions mirror patterns identified by Jaber et al. (2022) in indigenous communities, where colonial legacies perpetuate lateral violence and intragroup conflict. In Palestine, identity disputes and structural inequalities similarly undermine solidarity, preventing a cohesive resistance against the settler-colonial system.

Addressing the manifestations of IO in Palestine is crucial for fostering collective resilience and decolonization. Just as Indigenous peoples must reclaim authentic identities and challenge the narratives imposed by oppressors, so too must Palestinians confront the psychological and cultural effects of settler colonialism. Jaber et al. (2022) highlight the importance of dismantling the internalized legacies of colonialism to rebuild solidarity and empowerment within oppressed communities. For Palestinians, this process involves recognizing the psychological impact of colonialism and creating frameworks for resistance that prioritize unity and self-determination. IO, which manifests as both emotional distress and lateral violence, must be examined to fully understand its role in maintaining colonial control and to foster healing and empowerment.

## The Present Study

### *Context*

The context for this study centers on the experience of Palestinians living in Jerusalem, a city that holds significant political importance and has been at the forefront of the Zionist settler colonial project. Following the 1967 annexation of East Jerusalem by Israel, the city has been subjected to ongoing efforts to displace Palestinian residents and further entrench Israeli control. These efforts include the expansion of Israeli settlements, land confiscation, and

strict restrictions on Palestinian movement. The conditions in Jerusalem present a particularly intense manifestation of settler colonialism, with Palestinian residents facing systemic legal, social, and psychological violence that distinguishes the city from other Palestinian territories such as Gaza and the West Bank, each with its own profound struggle against Zionist settler colonial brutality.

Given the specific nature of colonial violence in Jerusalem, this study aimed to focus on the experiences of Palestinians living in the city, examining how IO manifests among this group. By limiting the study's scope to Jerusalem, the researcher was able to isolate the distinct forms of colonial violence faced by Palestinians in this area and explore the particular psychological and emotional effects of settler colonialism. This approach allowed for a more focused examination of the impact of colonial practices on identity, self-worth, and social dynamics within the Palestinian community in Jerusalem. To gain deeper insights, the study involved open-ended interviews with 10 Palestinian participants from Jerusalem, providing a qualitative perspective on the ways in which IO shapes their lives under occupation.

### *Sample*

All ten participants were recruited through community-based organizations and contacts in Jerusalem. Participation criteria for the study included limiting the age range between 21 years old to 40 years old, holding a residency permit to live in Jerusalem (excluding Palestinians holding an Israeli citizenship), and identifying as Muslim, to limit for any religion-based variability in experiences of IO. All participants met inclusion criteria. An equal number of male and female recruits were interviewed, with education levels varying from High school diplomas to advanced master's degrees and came from socioeconomic backgrounds that ranged between lower middle class and upper middle class. One male participant had been imprisoned by the Zionist settler colony on several occasions, and one female participant was 7 months pregnant at the time of the interview. Only two participants were unemployed at the time of the interview.

### Interview Method and Analysis

This research was granted approval by the university's ethics committee, and all participants were fully informed about the study's purpose. Consent forms for the use of interview content, which was audio-recorded, were provided to participants. The interviews employed a semi-structured format, allowing for flexibility while ensuring that key areas were covered. Conducted in Arabic, each interview lasted between 1.5 to 2 hours and consisted of open-ended questions designed to explore various aspects of IO, drawing from insights found in prior research. Questions such as "What is it like to interact

with an Israeli? How does it feel?" and "What have you heard Israelis say about Palestinians that resonate with you? Are there things they say that feel true about Palestinians?" were crafted to encourage participants to reflect on and articulate subconscious material related to their perceived inferiority as both individuals and members of a colonized group.

The interviews were transcribed and translated into English for analysis. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was employed to analyze the data, with the aim of uncovering recurring themes of IO across participants' experiences. IPA was chosen because it allowed the researcher to examine the data with multiple layers of interpretation, focusing on the participants' lived experiences while also considering the underlying subconscious content they expressed (Smith & Osborn 2004). This approach gave the study a "bottom-up" quality, allowing the theory to emerge from the participants' own voices rather than imposing pre-existing theoretical frameworks onto their experiences. By prioritizing the participants' lived realities, the study created the space for the truth of their experiences to shape the researcher's understanding of IO within the specific context of Palestinians in Jerusalem. This method ensured that the analysis was deeply grounded in the participants' perspectives, offering a more nuanced and authentic understanding of the phenomenon in this unique setting.

**Key Findings**

This article is derived from a comprehensive doctoral research study on IO (IO) that examined how this phenomenon manifests in the Palestinian community in Jerusalem. The research used a qualitative approach to explore the ways in which colonial oppression shapes both the individual and collective psyche. The study involved in-depth interviews with Palestinian participants, offering valuable insights into how IO is experienced and expressed. From the broader scope of the research, twenty-one themes were identified, spanning across eight distinct domains. For the purposes of this article, three interrelated themes were selected for deeper exploration: horizontal hostility, suppressed rage, and helplessness. These themes were chosen because they consistently emerged in the interviews and offer profound insight into the ongoing manifestations of IO within Palestinian society. They highlight not only the emotional consequences of colonization but also how these emotions influence interpersonal relationships and group dynamics.

***Horizontal Hostility***

Horizontal hostility, a critical manifestation of IO, refers to the tendency for individuals within an oppressed group to direct their frustration, anger, and violence toward other members of their group, rather than toward external oppressors. This distortion of interpersonal relationships occurs as individuals

internalize both the violent relational dynamics they have been subjected to by the oppressor and the negative perceptions the oppressor holds of them. Williams (2012) explains that horizontal hostility often involves subconscious contempt, where individuals project their internalized sense of inferiority onto others who share similar experiences of oppression.

Participants in this study spoke with evident frustration when describing instances of horizontal violence in their communities. Many expressed a sense of social distance from those involved in the violence, perceiving them as "*defective*" or lacking in basic human qualities such as compassion. For example, Huda (pseudonym) described the frequent outbursts of violence she witnessed, especially over seemingly trivial matters like parking spaces, illustrating how these conflicts escalated into life-threatening situations:

> The fights… they'll kill each other over a parking spot. Over a parking spot they'll ruin each other's lives, and this has happened a lot here. These aren't just occasional stories. Over a parking spot: 'Move your car,' 'You move your car' … they kill each other. (Huda, interview by author, Jerusalem, August 9, 2020)

Huda's description conveys not just the frequency of violence but also the perceived absurdity of these confrontations, suggesting an underlying frustration and hopelessness that has taken root in the community. This horizontal hostility is not only about physical violence but also the emotional toll it takes on participants. In describing similar incidents, Ward (pseudonym) highlighted the inevitability of retaliation, framing the community's violent responses as an ingrained cultural norm:

> The other day they killed someone by Damascus gate over a parking spot. And they burned someone's house over another thing the other day… then of course there's the response, the revenge. Nothing happens without a response, with us it's blood for blood. Or it's dealt with in money, or they want them out of the town. So the Palestinian ends up exiling his fellow Palestinian over a moment of stupidity. (Ward, interview by author, Jerusalem, August 12, 2020)

Ward's account points to a cycle of violence that is deeply embedded in the community, where retaliatory actions are seen as both a necessary response and a tragic outcome of IO. These violent acts are not merely isolated incidents but are symptomatic of broader societal patterns shaped by colonialism. The emotional tone in Ward's statement—marked by resignation and frustration—reveals the sense of futility that often accompanies these cycles of vengeance,

with participants unable to break free from the violence that has become ingrained in their lives.

Omar (pseudonym) offered a more reflective perspective on this issue, attributing the prevalence of violence to what he perceived as the community's loss of faith and empathy. His lamentations underscore the internalized beliefs that Palestinians, as a group, are somehow undeserving of God's favor, a belief fostered by the oppressor and internalized by the oppressed: "You see the fights breaking out during the holidays. There's no compassion or fear of God. The neighbor doesn't care about his fellow neighbors anymore, we're not united anymore" (Omar, interview by author, Jerusalem, August 10, 2020).

Omar's statement links the internalization of colonial ideologies with a broader loss of communal bonds, where Palestinians no longer act in solidarity with each other. He expresses the belief that these violent outbursts are a reflection of the moral decay without naming the root of the cause, where empathy and unity are lost, and the once-shared sense of community is replaced by distrust and division.

The recurring themes of selfishness, ignorance, and lack of compassion emerged throughout the interviews, with participants like Lamees (pseudonym) describing these behaviors as "*selfishness*" or "*ignorance*." These statements reflect how participants internalize negative stereotypes about themselves and their community, attributing violence and social fragmentation to perceived Palestinian deficiencies rather than recognizing the role of colonialism in fracturing their society. By repeatedly attributing these violent behaviors to their fellow Palestinians, the participants illustrate the pervasive nature of IO, where the colonized group sees itself as responsible for its own suffering, rather than recognizing the systemic forces at play.

Through these narratives, the study provides an in-depth look at the psychological impact of settler colonialism on Palestinians in Jerusalem, demonstrating how horizontal hostility not only shapes individual behaviors but also undermines collective solidarity. The internalized perceptions of Palestinians as "defective" or "violent" are rooted in the violent relational dynamics imposed by the colonizer, reinforcing the divisions within the community and perpetuating cycles of violence that hinder resistance against colonial domination. These findings highlight the urgent need for a deeper understanding of the manifestations of IO within Palestinian society and the importance of addressing these dynamics in efforts toward decolonization and community healing.

### ***Suppressed Rage***

Emotional suppression refers to the conscious and unconscious inhibition of emotional expression, particularly emotions that arise in response to environmental stimuli. It can be best understood as a form of motivated

ignoring (McWilliams 2011). Under conditions of severe colonial oppression, emotional suppression is driven by self-preservation, as the threat of violent, often lethal, punishment for acts of protest or resistance makes emotional expression dangerous (Bulhan 1985). Over time, with prolonged oppression, the colonized community comes to normalize repressive tactics in response to emotional experiences and begins to perceive emotional expression as a sign of weakness (Williams 2012).

Participants consistently described the life-threatening circumstances under which they had to suppress their anger and frustration. Wisam (pseudonym) described the psychological defenses he employed to ensure he did not express his emotions in the face of the Zionist colonial forces:

> As you know, they're generally in packs of at least 6 soldiers, all armed and all carrying tear gas, so you can't say a word to upset them. You just silence your nerves, let your insides burn and let your nerves fry, and keep your mouth shut and silence the anger and rage because there is no room for you to protest. Because if you protest, they could kill you just like that, they could shoot me. (Wisam, interview by author, Jerusalem, August 7, 2020)

The constant threat of violence and the swift, unthinking nature of the oppression under which Palestinians live is evident in Sameer's (pseudonym) account, where he contrasts the past and present situation:

> In the past, the soldier used to think twice, he'd be worried to hit or shoot. Now he shoots without a thought. In the past, a soldier wouldn't dare lay a hand on a woman, but now we routinely see them beating women. You're asking me to tell you, I am in a rage inside. I am boiling but completely helpless. The Israelis today have orders to kill and not think twice. (Sameer, interview by author, Jerusalem, August 15, 2020)

Sameer's words highlight the desensitization and brutalization of the occupying forces, which have escalated in recent years. He emphasizes the deep internal conflict— rage against oppression, coupled with a complete sense of helplessness. His expression of being "*boiling but completely helpless*" speaks to the profound psychological toll of living under such constant threat.

Sameer further explains the emotional cost of this suppressed existence, echoing a cry for freedom and liberation that resonates globally among oppressed communities: "Life here is so tough, one is always suffocating,

suffocating you can't breathe" (Sameer, interview by author, Jerusalem, August 15, 2020).

By invoking the metaphor of suffocation, Sameer articulates the psychic strangulation caused by prolonged colonial oppression. The inability to express oneself or even breathe freely becomes symbolic of the larger struggle for freedom. This statement underscores the urgent need for liberation, as freedom is portrayed as vital to life itself—just as necessary as air.

Ward (pseudonym) described the impact of emotional suppression on her physical and psychological wellbeing:

> It's all the pressure buildup. We see all of this and can't say anything. This makes one ill, I swear it makes one sick. We're sad. And when you're sad, you get sick because you can't speak up, you can't express that what you're seeing, what is right and wrong. You have to live through it in silence and can't speak up. That's the greatest illness! Because you're silent over something you're not ok with, but you have to stay silent, or you die. There's no solution. Not necessarily death in real death, they can bury you alive; they cut you off from all resources and take any rights you have left. What do you have to live for then? Can anyone live without money? Can you live without money? Can you live without a home? You can't, right? These are the primary things. A person without a home, without a family, without a community, without your necessities, what use are you? You just sit there. They can take everything from you, they kill you slowly and agonizingly. (Ward, interview by author, Jerusalem, August 12, 2020)

Ward articulates the immense toll that emotional suppression takes on both the psyche and the body, noting how it leads to sickness, sadness, and a feeling of complete helplessness. The suppression of emotions, driven by the threat of violence, becomes an adaptive survival tactic, but this survival comes at a significant cost. The metaphor of being "*buried alive*" illustrates the existential death that comes with the denial of basic human needs—such as home, family, and community—rendering the colonized person a mere shell of their former self.

The chronic suppression of rage in response to ongoing, rage-inducing oppression has its own psychological repercussions. While participants in the study were careful to suppress their emotions to avoid violent retaliation, this suppressed rage cannot be eliminated. It is often displaced, as seen in the horizontal hostility described earlier, where anger, frustration, and violence are directed inward or onto others within the oppressed group. The deep

internalized frustration, when not directed at the oppressor, turns inward, contributing to the ongoing cycles of division, infighting, and violence within the community. This phenomenon highlights how the inability to express anger at the source of oppression can lead to displacing that rage onto others, further fragmenting the community and hindering collective action.

Through these reflections, participants demonstrated the high emotional and psychological cost of living under a system that demands silence in the face of grave injustice. The internalized suppression of anger not only affects individual health and wellbeing but also contributes to horizontal hostility within the community, preventing solidarity and collective resistance. This emotional suppression, while an understandable survival mechanism under colonial domination, reveals the deep psychological toll of settler colonialism and its capacity to fragment and weaken the oppressed group from within.

***Helplessness***

Helplessness is another common manifestation of IO identified among oppressed groups (Williams 2012). It is characterized by a pervasive sense of weakness, futility, hopelessness, and disappointment, both with oneself and others. Helplessness functions as both an accurate response to the stark power differential between a heavily armed colonial power and an unarmed colonized population, and as a manifestation of internalizing a false image of the colonizer as omnipotent and all-powerful, while viewing oneself as lacking agency or impact. This aspect of IO was expressed by all participants, with Omar (pseudonym) capturing it poignantly: "You get to a point where you think what can I even do, there's too much to be done and I can't do it" (Omar, interview by author, Jerusalem, August 10, 2020).

Omar's words reflect the overwhelming sense of impotence that comes from living under such oppressive conditions, where the power to enact change or resist seems beyond reach. His statement underscores not only the external powerlessness Palestinians face but also the psychological impact of enduring prolonged colonization. This helplessness, however, is not solely a response to external forces; it is deeply intertwined with internalized perceptions of inadequacy and diminished agency, which are common psychological effects of chronic oppression. The feeling of being unable to act or make a difference can contribute to a cycle of frustration, anger, and ultimately, emotional suppression. The rage that is denied expression in the face of overwhelming oppression slowly transforms into a sense of helplessness, where even the will to resist becomes stifled by internalized feelings of futility.

This sense of helplessness was also powerfully expressed by Hurreyah (pseudonym), who described the profound vulnerability and isolation that Palestinians experience under Zionist colonial rule. Hurreyah highlights the omnipresence of surveillance and the constant fear of punishment,

emphasizing the powerlessness that comes with being watched at all times: "They have us under a microscope, you make any mistakes and you'll be severely punished, and no one will say anything. No one is backing us up, even the organizations that support, they don't have the financial or political power to really help" (Hurreyah, interview by author, Jerusalem, August 8, 2020).

Here, Hurreyah's quote points to the double-edged nature of colonial oppression. On one hand, Palestinians live under the direct threat of violent retaliation for even minor transgressions, forcing them to suppress their emotions and stifle their anger. On the other hand, the lack of support—both locally and globally—only intensifies their feelings of abandonment, which compounds the experience of helplessness. The colonizer's omnipotence is internalized by Hurreyah, as she feels that any protest or outcry would be futile, further deepening her sense of weakness and powerlessness. This IO is amplified by the sense of betrayal from both external allies and within the community, as she recognizes that even those who are supposed to stand in solidarity lack the power or will to effect real change.

Hurreyah's helplessness is mirrored in her belief that no one is standing up for the Palestinian cause, which compounds the emotional burden of oppression. She frames the situation as one of complete isolation: "No one stands up with the Palestinian, Israel has us all to itself and no one is asking any questions about what they're doing" (Hurreyah, interview by author, Jerusalem, August 8, 2020).

This quote emphasizes the internalized isolation that comes from prolonged exposure to colonial violence. Hurreyah perceives the Palestinian struggle as ignored or dismissed by the wider world, fostering a sense of abandonment. This emotional suppression of anger in the face of an unyielding external force contributes to a psychological state of paralysis, where the constant need for self-preservation suppresses any collective desire for resistance. The result is a diminished sense of self-worth and agency, as Hurreyah views herself and her community as invisible and voiceless in the global context.

Lamees (pseudonym) offers another perspective on the emotional cost of this sustained helplessness. In an attempt to cope with overwhelming frustration, Lamees turns to spiritual solace, finding comfort in the belief that God is the ultimate source of justice:

> We have nothing but to pray to God. 'God is the only judge and the best caretaker. We can't do anything else. Nothing but oppression, helplessness, and disappointment at the lack of empathy from others. No one is doing anything, nothing but verbal condemnation. Why don't you take your verbal condemnation and throw it in the sea? It's useless. Even if we try to resist, they come

> and get their revenge and more, for every one of theirs they take 10 of ours. There's no one. (Lamees, interview by author, Jerusalem, August 17, 2020)

Lamees' reliance on prayer reflects a common and effective coping mechanism in situations of extreme oppression, where the individual seeks solace in the higher power that is in control, especially when earthly systems appear indifferent or complicit in perpetuating suffering. Lamees' sense of helplessness deepens as she describes the continuous cycle of revenge and punishment, where Palestinian resistance is always met with a disproportionate response. This frustration is channeled into a feeling of resignation, as she believes that no matter how hard Palestinians try to fight back, the outcome will always be the same—more violence, more loss, and an increasing sense of powerlessness.

As Lamees grapples with the harsh reality of her situation, she is caught between spiritual solace and the crushing weight of helplessness. Her internalized beliefs about the omnipotence of the colonizer lead her to feel that all efforts are futile, and that the very fabric of her identity as a Palestinian is slowly being erased by the oppression she faces. In this sense, emotional suppression—particularly the suppression of rage—contributes to the broader sense of helplessness and diminished self-worth that permeates the experiences of colonized individuals. The recurring theme of helplessness is crystallized by Ward (pseudonym), who succinctly encapsulates the psychic and emotional toll of living under such conditions: "All I feel is weakness, nothing but weakness." (Ward, interview by author, Jerusalem, August 12, 2020)

Ward's words serve as a powerful reminder of the profound effect that IO has on the individual. Her overwhelming sense of weakness is a direct result of the cumulative effects of chronic emotional suppression, where anger, once displaced inward, becomes entangled with feelings of powerlessness. The more rage is suppressed, the more it erodes the individual's sense of agency and self-worth, reinforcing the colonial structures that have deliberately sought to fragment the identity and resistance of the oppressed. This internalized helplessness ensures that the colonized individual remains disempowered, unable to break free from the psychological and physical stranglehold of colonial rule.

## Discussion

This study revealed several distinct manifestations of IO among 10 Palestinians from Jerusalem, three of which were horizontal hostility, suppressed rage, and helplessness. These themes reflect different layers of IO,

and they are deeply interrelated, with each influencing and reinforcing the others in the context of ongoing colonial subjugation. Participants' narratives, grounded in their lived experiences under the Zionist settler-colonial project, provide a window into the complex psychological dynamics at play within a colonized community.

Horizontal hostility has long been recognized as a harmful consequence of oppression, where individuals direct aggression toward each other rather than the external oppressor. This phenomenon has been documented in multiple marginalized groups, such as among Black women in the United States, who experience disproportionately high rates of violence from intimate partners (Frazer et al. 2018), or within Indigenous populations, where high rates of domestic violence and substance abuse have been linked to colonial legacies (Poupart 2003; Swaim and Stanely 2018) and to overall increased intracommunity competition and aggression (Whyman et al. 2021). In Palestine, horizontal hostility arises as a byproduct of the internalized violence imposed by the colonizer. Participants shared vivid accounts of violence within their community, often over minor disputes, such as parking spaces, highlighting how internalized rage manifests in misdirected aggression. These accounts align with the work of Jaber et al. (2022), which found similar patterns in Indigenous communities, where colonial violence led to infighting and the reproduction of destructive relational patterns. In the Palestinian context, horizontal hostility further fragments the community and hinders collective resistance against the true source of oppression—the Zionist colonizer.

The connection between horizontal hostility and suppressed rage is significant. As Williams (2012) notes, emotional repression in oppressed groups is often a survival mechanism to avoid punishment. For Palestinians, repressing their anger is a necessity, as expressing rage in the face of brutal colonial violence can result in severe, even lethal, consequences. Suppressed rage becomes a coping mechanism, allowing individuals to avoid physical harm, but it also creates an emotional burden that accumulates over time. This normalization of violence, coupled with the inability to express anger, fosters a profound sense of helplessness, where individuals feel as though their resistance is futile. The internalization of this helplessness leads to the belief that their suffering is both invisible and insurmountable.

This helplessness is compounded by feelings of isolation and abandonment. Participants expressed the belief that no one—neither their own community nor external actors—would intervene to support them in the face of colonial violence. As Phetereson (1986) notes, IO leads to estrangement from one's culture, community, and authentic self. This alienation is evident in participants' accounts, which exacerbates feelings of helplessness, reinforcing the perception that their suffering is invisible, and their fight is hopeless. It

also contributes to the internalization of the view that Palestinians are morally defective or undeserving of support, further isolating them from their community.

The themes of horizontal hostility, suppressed rage, and helplessness form a self-reinforcing cycle of IO. Repressed rage, while temporarily safeguarding individuals from direct violence, leads to emotional fragmentation and a diminished sense of agency. The displaced anger, manifesting as horizontal hostility, further divides the community and prevents solidarity. This cycle perpetuates the status quo of colonial subjugation, where resistance is undermined by the inability to unify against the colonizer (Bulhan 1985). Understanding these interconnected manifestations of IO is essential for developing effective strategies for healing and liberation. Addressing one aspect of IO requires addressing the others in tandem, as they work together to reinforce the psychological toll of colonization.

Moreover, the sense of isolation and helplessness is intricately linked to the ongoing trauma experienced under protracted oppression. Participants described their abandonment by both the international community and their own people, which made their suffering feel invisible and insurmountable. This resonates with Stevens et al. (2013), who argue that prolonged exposure to oppression can replace a belief in justice with a sense of futility and passivity. This sense of abandonment, compounded by the trauma of continuous violence and suppression, contributes to the pervasive helplessness felt by the colonized individual.

This study highlights the complexity of IO within the Palestinian context, where the themes of horizontal hostility, suppressed rage, and helplessness intertwine to create a debilitating cycle that stifles individual well-being and collective resistance. By understanding how these themes function together, we gain insight into the profound psychological and emotional toll of colonization. Addressing these manifestations requires a comprehensive approach to healing and decolonization, where both individual and collective processes are engaged to challenge and transform the internalized effects of oppression.

**Practical Implications**

This study sheds light on the urgent psychological needs of Palestinians in Jerusalem, particularly those experiencing the chronic effects of IO, and highlights the importance of culturally appropriate mental health services. Fanon (1967) posited that mental illness among the oppressed must be understood as pathologies of liberty, a concept that has been supported by David (2010), who found that depressive symptoms were strongly linked to IO. The findings from this study validate these claims, showing that Palestinians, particularly in Jerusalem, suffer from feelings of suffocation,

helplessness, and isolation, all exacerbated by living under brutal and prolonged colonial violence. As Williams (2012) emphasized, IO significantly influences the psychological well-being of marginalized groups, as it leads to emotional suppression, rage, and helplessness, and further reinforces feelings of disempowerment within the oppressed community.

Given the profound psychological impact of living under the Zionist settler-colonial regime, mental health service providers working with Palestinians must consider the pervasive detrimental effects of IO on their clients' mental and emotional states. Therefore, there is a pressing need to recruit and train Palestinian mental health professionals, particularly those working in Jerusalem, to provide culturally competent care that acknowledges the broader political context and the psychological effects of colonial oppression. This would be a vital first step in addressing the mental health needs of the Palestinian community. Research among other marginalized groups, including Filipino Americans (David 2010) and Native Americans (Duran and Duran 1995), has found that IO is often linked to symptoms such as depression, anxiety, rage, and substance abuse (Swaim and Stanely 2018). Given this, IO must be integrated into the clinical understanding of Palestinians' psychological needs.

As Paulo Freire described, the process of "*conscientização*"—the critical awareness and self-reflection of oppressed communities—could be a powerful tool in facilitating liberation through psychological practice (1970, 67). This self-reflection process could help Palestinians confront and dismantle the internalized violence and dehumanization imposed by the colonial system, ultimately empowering them to reclaim their sense of self-worth and agency. With this principle in mind, future research should focus on experiential interventions with Palestinian communities to bring conscious awareness to the internalization of colonial violence. By engaging Palestinians in these reflective practices, the research would contribute to the broader decolonization of the psyche. This approach not only has therapeutic value but also plays an active role in the struggle for justice and liberation by confronting the psychological toll of living under an oppressive regime.

Lastly, it is essential to recognize that while IO is a deeply ingrained psychological phenomenon, it is not static. The recent escalation of violence by the Zionist settler-colonial project has prompted a shift in Palestinian resistance, revealing a growing clarity and reclamation of identity and human dignity. The resilience and resistance of Palestinians in the face of intense suffering offer a powerful reminder that psychological healing and decolonization are not only possible but also actively taking place. This presents a crucial opportunity for clinical work to support the ongoing liberatory efforts of the Palestinian community while helping them reclaim their full humanity and self-determination.

***Study Limitations***

While the findings of this study shed important light on the psychological impact of IO within the Palestinian community in Jerusalem, there are several limitations that must be acknowledged. One key limitation is the small sample size, consisting of only ten participants. This sample size is not representative of the broader Palestinian population in Jerusalem and, as such, the findings cannot be generalized to all Palestinians living under the Zionist settler-colonial regime. The experiences of the ten participants are valuable in providing in-depth insights into the manifestations of IO in this specific group, but caution should be exercised when attempting to extrapolate these findings to larger or different groups within Palestine, especially given the diversity of experiences across regions.

Another limitation lies in the highly sociopolitical nature of the phenomenon being studied. IO is deeply intertwined with the political and social context in which it occurs, and the political climate in Jerusalem and Palestine at the time of data collection may have influenced participants' experiences and expressions of IO. Given that the data was collected four years ago, it is important to note that the findings may no longer fully reflect the current state of Palestinian psychological and interpersonal dynamics, as the sociopolitical context in Palestine has changed significantly during this time. The intensity of the occupation, changes in the resistance movement, and fluctuating policies towards Palestinians may all affect how IO manifests within the community today, making these findings time-sensitive and potentially subject to shifts in the broader political landscape.

Moreover, the study utilized an interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) methodology, which inherently places the researcher's subjectivity at the forefront of data analysis. In this study, the researcher's dual position as both a Jerusalemite Palestinian and a clinical psychology researcher trained to identify pathology and suffering influenced the way the findings were interpreted and presented. While this insider perspective provided unique insight into the lived experiences of the participants, it also meant that the analysis was shaped by the researcher's own biases and pre-existing assumptions about the psychological and emotional consequences of IO.

As such, while the study provides a compelling and detailed exploration of IO in the Jerusalemite community, the findings should be understood as indicative of trends within the sample studied, rather than definitive statements about the psychological functioning of all Palestinians in Jerusalem or broader Palestine. Future research with larger, more diverse samples and multiple coders would help strengthen the validity and generalizability of these findings. Additionally, research conducted in different sociopolitical climates, especially after significant changes in the political landscape of Palestine,

would be important to understand how IO continues to evolve in response to shifting power dynamics.

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