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Gaza's Tempest: From Prosperian Anglosphere to Calibanesque *Sumud*

Abstract I: Questo saggio, partendo dall'interpretazione della *Tempesta* di Shakespeare come un testo proto-coloniale che anticipa le dinamiche dell'imperialismo europeo attraverso il rapporto tra Prospero e Calibano, arriva a considerare la questione coloniale della Palestina. Su questa base, viene introdotto il concetto di "anglosfera prosperiana" per descrivere la continuità storica e ideologica del potere imperiale anglosassone, dai primi anni del '900 fino all'attuale genocidio a Gaza (Hübner 2026). Andando oltre il dominio imperiale, il tentativo è quello di teorizzare un'"anglosfera calibanesca" come spazio contro-egemonico in cui soggetti subalterni anglofoni si appropriano della lingua del padrone per resistere e ridefinire i rapporti di potere. Con particolare riferimento alla Palestina, viene sviluppato il concetto di *sumud* calibanesco, che combina la metafora shakespeariana con la nozione araba di perseveranza, per rappresentare pratiche culturali, artistiche e digitali di resistenza sotto occupazione coloniale.

Abstract II: This essay, starting from an interpretation of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* as a proto-colonial text that anticipates the dynamics of European imperialism through the relationship between Prospero and Caliban, goes on to consider the colonial question of Palestine. On this basis, it introduces the concept of a "Prosperian Anglosphere" to describe the historical and ideological continuity of Anglo-Saxon imperial power, from the early 1900s to the current genocide in Gaza (Hübner 2026). Moving beyond imperial domination, the aim is to theorise a "Calibanesque Anglosphere" as a counter-hegemonic space in which Anglophone subaltern subjects appropriate the master's language in order to resist and redefine power relations. With particular reference to Palestine, the concept of Calibanesque *sumud* is developed, combining the Shakespearean metaphor with the Arabic notion of steadfastness to represent cultural, artistic, and digital practices of resistance under colonial occupation.

Keywords: *The Tempest*, colonialism, Anglosphere, Palestine, *sumud*, Zionism.

1. Colonial Tempest?

The interpretation of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* has ranged from viewing it as concerned only with the humanistic issues of the Old World of the Mediterranean/Great Britain – aristocratic political turmoil, Renaissance humanism and magic, reconciliation and forgiveness

– to interpreting it as fundamentally about the New World of the Atlantic and, consequently, a play resonating with early colonial encounters[1].

In the mid-twentieth century, Frank Kermode argues that "there is nothing in the play fundamental to its structure of ideas which could not have existed had America remained undiscovered" (1954: xxv). A couple of decades later, Northrop Frye likewise maintains that the play "has nothing to do with the New World", apart from Ariel's reference to the "still-vexed Bermoothes" (1970: 22-23). Also, for Tristan Marshall, the play includes passing mentions of the New World, such as the jester Trinculo's reference to Caliban as a potential "dead Indian" to put on display as a curiosity: "Yet aside from being topical echoes there is no sense that this makes the play specifically set in or indeed about the Americas" (1998: 376). In 1979, however, a first shift can be observed when, while maintaining that the play shows no interest at all in the central concerns of colonial pioneers such as Richard Hakluyt and Walter Raleigh, Philip Edwards adds that "*The Tempest* is in a great many respects a New World play, but it is not a colonial play" (1979: 109). Some years later, many doubts seem to have faded: notwithstanding its ambiguous Neoplatonic allegory, the play unintentionally "provides insight into an early stage in the formation of colonialist ideology" (Cohen 1985: xx). A compromise was later proposed in these terms: "If the play is 'colonialist', it must be seen as 'prophetic' rather than descriptive" (Skura 1989: 58). Indeed, Leslie Fiedler had earlier famously called Caliban "the first drunken Indian in Western literature" and, as a result, in Shakespeare's play "the whole history of imperialist America has been prophetically revealed to us in brief parable" (1973: 238).

As a matter of fact, British colonisation of America officially started in 1607, when the Virginia Company set up the first permanent English settlement: Jamestown. Thus, when Shakespeare wrote *The Tempest* some years later, around 1610-1611, colonisation had not yet developed enough for its full complexities and ethical implications to be revealed. Therefore, the parallels between *The Tempest* and colonial discourse cannot be drawn in clear-cut, univocal terms. Ultimately, "*La Tempesta* ha a che fare col colonialismo, ma non era *già* colonialismo" (Coronato 2025: 14).

Nevertheless, it may be argued that, whether interpreted as descriptive or prophetic, *The Tempest* fundamentally encompasses all the essential elements of the European colonial enterprise. It stages the entire process of colonisation, albeit in microcosm: European arrival → dispossession → enslavement → acculturation/deculturation → othering and dehumanisation → legitimising master narrative → native resistance. The following are some quotes from Act I, Scene 2 of the play (Shakespeare 2026) for each of the aforementioned steps:

– European arrival:
  "*Miranda:* How came we ashore?
  Prospero: By Providence divine […]"

– Dispossession of the native:

[1] This reflects what Cantor (2006) calls the Atlantic view of Shakespeare, as opposed to the Mediterranean or Renaissance view of his theatre.

"*Caliban:* This island's mine by Sycorax my mother,
Which thou tak'st from me.
[…]
For I am all the subjects that you have,
Which first was mine own king. And here you sty me
In this hard rock, whiles you do keep from me
The rest o' th' island"

– Enslavement:
"*Prospero:* Thou most lying slave,
[…]
Hag-seed, hence!
Fetch us in fuel, and be quick thou 'rt best,
To answer other business"

– Acculturation/deculturation:
"*Miranda:* Abhorrèd slave,
[…]
I pitied thee,
Took pains to make thee speak, taught thee each hour
One thing or other. When thou didst not, savage,
Know thine own meaning, but wouldst gabble like
A thing most brutish, I endowed thy purposes
With words that made them known"

– Othering and dehumanisation:
"*Prospero:* Thou poisonous slave, got by the Devil
himself
Upon thy wicked dam, come forth!"

– Legitimising master narrative:
"*Prospero:* I have used
thee,
Filth as thou art, with humane care, and lodged thee
In mine own cell, till thou didst seek to violate
The honor of my child"

– Native resistance:
"*Caliban:* You taught me language, and my profit on't
Is, I know how to curse. The red plague rid you
For learning me your language!"

The only difference from the historical colonial process is Prospero's promised departure from the dispossessed island: "And thence retire me to my Milan, where / Every third thought shall be my grave" (Act V, Scene 1). Almost four centuries later, in Aimé Césaire's

A Tempest (1969: Act III) Prospero does not leave the island: "Sans moi cette île est muette. / Ici donc, mon devoir. / Je resterai".

Indeed, quoting Césaire's adaptation of Shakespeare allows us to bridge early modern Europe and present-day Palestine. The Caribbean playwright's attempt to "strike back" at the European cultural canon paves the way for the central concepts of our analysis: Prosperian Anglosphere and Calibanesque *sumud.*

2. Prosperian Anglosphere

After five centuries of colonialism and a century of decolonisation, the enduring legacy of colonialism can still be painfully observed in present-day Palestine. A significant portion of historical responsibility lies with Britain. The phrase *"Prosperian Anglosphere"* foregrounds the centrality of the lexeme "*Anglo"*, which primarily denotes a geopolitical and linguistic formation. At the same time, the term inevitably carries cultural and ideological weight that has played a significant role in shaping the Question of Palestine (Cazzato 2025). This role, despite its importance, has frequently been overlooked, minimised, or effectively erased from broader discourse. Even postcolonial studies have neglected Palestine, to the point that it is considered a "strange omission" (Williams & Ball 2014: 128) within an academic field inspired, paradoxically, by a Palestinian scholar, Edward Said. This may help explain why the substantial and far-reaching British (Prosperian) historical responsibility for the Question of Palestine has remained largely unrecognised (Cazzato 2024). It can be traced back to what has often been described as the "original sin" of the infamous Balfour Declaration in 1917, when the British Foreign Secretary pledged support for "a national home" for European Jews in Palestine – then commonly framed through the false Zionist myth of "a land without a people for a people without a land".

The Anglosphere may be defined as that sphere of influence in which imperial power has English as its language, a sphere that has exercised its absolute dominance without interruption from the beginning of the twentieth century to the present day. Let us briefly examine its emergence. Although the concept of the Anglosphere is at least a century old, the term itself entered mainstream Anglo-American debate towards the end of the Cold War, when the earlier late nineteenth-century notion of Anglo-Saxonism experienced a revival. This renewed form no longer rested on claims of racial superiority, but rather on assertions of cultural superiority. It is important to note that both moments of debate – the late nineteenth century and the late twentieth century – coincided with periods of American ascent and British decline. It is equally important, and indeed revealing, to consider the terms in which the concept first emerged.

John Randolph Dos Passos (the novelist's father), one of the early twentieth-century theorists of Anglo-Saxonism, proposed the Anglo-American path as a means to achieve peace, using a messianic rhetoric similar to that of present-day Zionism. The question was: "Are we the chosen race of Israel? Are we the peoples of the earth, elected to lead the van of civilisation and peace?" (Dos Passos 1903: 62). It follows that Anglo-Saxons were, like the Israelites 3,000 years ago, God's chosen people – and that the Promised Land was thus the entire planet.

Such proclamations had already begun to multiply by the end of the nineteenth century. In 1895, the Secretary of State for the Colonies Joseph Chamberlain asserted that it was

the duty of the British to establish and maintain permanent bonds of friendship with their kin across the Atlantic, since they had many things in common: origin, history, language, literature, a "love of liberty and law", and – above all – "common principles to assert" and "common interests to maintain" (1897: 77). A decade earlier, Chamberlain had already suggested that the alliance of the "Anglo-Saxon race" was "infallibly destined to be the predominating force in the future history and civilisation of the world" (1897: 6).

Famously, for his part, in *The White Man's Burden* (1899), Rudyard Kipling declared that Americans, too, should take up the task of bringing civilisation to their "new-caught, sullen peoples, / Half devil and half child" (1903: 79). Once they had reached "manhood" (81), they would then be judged by their peers – namely, the British.

The future of the Anglospheric alliance was fully envisioned by Winston Churchill (1946), who called this geopolitical entity "the fraternal association of the English-speaking peoples". In his well-known 1946 address, delivered in the U. S. shortly after the conclusion of the Second World War, Churchill stated: "If all British moral and material forces and convictions are joined with your own in fraternal association, the high-roads of the future will be clear, not only for us but for all, not only for our time, but for a century to come". Historical events soon confirmed his prediction and, above all, the Anglosphere subsequently emerged as a space of the "special relationship", initially centred on London and later, after the decline of the British Empire, on Washington, leaving behind a community of peoples furiously committed to delivering liberty, democracy, the rule of common law, and, of course, the English language. Nowhere was this commitment more evident than in Palestine, where the Anglospheric "fraternal association" enabled Zionist forces to pursue their colonial project both at that time – somewhat anachronistically, given the broader phase of decolonisation – and in the years that followed.

3. Calibanesque Anglosphere

That said, the concern here is with a broader conception of the Anglosphere, one that moves beyond Atlanticist or British imperial nostalgia and encompasses all subaltern English-speaking peoples seeking to "strike back" in that same language. In Shakespearean terms, it is a space of power relations in which a few Prosperos impose their language on the many "savage and deformed" Calibans (as the dramatis personae of *The Tempest* have it), whose only profit is to "know how to curse" their masters in that very tongue. It constitutes a Calibanesque sort of "imagined community" (Anderson 1983) – anti-colonial, anti-imperial, anti-racist – spanning dozens of postcolonial countries, from Canada to Australia, including the region commonly referred to as the "Middle East".

In the Prosperian Anglosphere, the Zionist lobby has worked since the nineteenth century to gain power across the Atlantic. In the Calibanesque Anglosphere, Palestinians have resisted Anglo-Zionist power by postcolonially articulating their response in the very language of that power. They have "written back" (Rushdie 1982), employing English in their artistic production both to resist oppression and to appeal to a global audience.

At this stage, the concept of Calibanesque *sumud* should be clear, too. The Arabic word *sumud* literally means "steadfastness" and originally referred to the institutional-political sphere. Over the decades, however, it has evolved from a political and institutional concept

into a quotidian mode of life, embodying the everyday way of life of Palestinians resisting Zionist colonialism, both individually and collectively. *Sumud* is enacted by men, women, and children alike, each striving in their own way to endure and resist the pressures of life under colonial occupation. The Palestinian writer from Ramallah, Raja Shehadeh, defines it as follows: "*Sumud* is watching your home turn into a prison […] Living like this, you must constantly resist the twin temptations of either acquiescing in the jailer's plan in numb despair, or becoming crazed by consuming hatred for your jailer and yourself, the prisoner" (1982: viii). But between submission and violence, Shehadeh claims, there is a third option: *sumud* as nonviolent resistance. Interestingly, since the start of the millennium, with the Second Intifada, *sumud* has expanded more and more to encompass cultural and artistic forms of resistance worldwide – through literature, cinema, music, graffiti, memes, and more – both in Palestine and across the diaspora.

One of the most challenging aspects of the Question of Palestine concerns the use of the term "colonialism" with reference to the State of Israel, both within the Anglosphere and, more generally, across the Western world. The characterisation of Israel as a colonial entity remains the elephant in the room – difficult to name and, consequently, seldom articulated or acknowledged. This considerable outcome has been achieved through an enormous amount of effective "enunciation" (Mignolo 2000) – what is often referred to as *hasbara* (variously understood as strategic communication or propaganda). Indeed, what has been at work is a double process of erasure: on the one hand, Israel has been obscured as a colonial entity; on the other, the Palestinians have been erased as a people.

During the British Mandate (1922-1948), Palestine undeniably existed. It disappeared from maps in 1948, when the State of Israel was born out of the Nakba (the Arabic word corresponding to the Hebrew term "Shoah"). That is to say, about 700,000 Palestinians (two-thirds of the population at that time) were driven from their homes through terror and mass killings. However, contrary to historical evidence, in 1969, Prime Minister Golda Meir notoriously stated that "there was no such thing as Palestinians […] It was not as though there was a Palestinian people in Palestine considering itself as a Palestinian people and we came and threw them out and took their country from them. They did not exist" (Giles 1969).

4. *Sumud*

One may say that all Palestinian art has existed – and continues to exist – to contradict the absurd non-existence axiom through what can be called Calibanesque *sumud*, articulated in multiple artistic forms and modes, above all through both resident and diasporic digital activism aimed at generating networked counterpublics (Ponzanesi & Habed 2018).

One instance has been the use of the Zionist advertising campaign "Visit Palestine" in the 1930s, demonstrating that Palestine existed, as the slogan itself suggests. Following the Oslo Accords in the early 1990s, Franz Krausz' poster (1936) – depicting the iconic landmark of Jerusalem's Old City, with the Dome of the Rock in the foreground – was subsequently reprinted and went viral across the Occupied Territories sixty years after its initial publication (see Figure 1; Cazzato 2025).



Figure 1. Franz Krausz, *Visit Palestine* (1936), Wikimedia Commons.

This recovery from the dusty archive of Zionist propaganda has served to debunk at least three enduring myths: Palestine as "a land without a people" (the picture shows the vast city of Jerusalem); Palestine as a barren desert awaiting transformation into a garden (the lush tree in the foreground suggests that the landscape surrounding Jerusalem was far

from an empty wilderness); Palestine as non-existent (on the contrary, it clearly did exist and was explicitly referred to as such in a Zionist poster). Subsequently, a form of grassroots visual "guerrilla" emerged – both locally and transnationally – targeting Zionist posters, particularly that of Krausz[2]. Among the various reinterpretations, one may consider Wiz's intervention, which operates as a twofold appropriation: its target is not only the original Zionist image but also Banksy's mural on the West Bank barrier, commonly known as "Beach Boys"[3] (see Figure 2).



Figure 2. Banksy, *Beach Boys* (2005), Wikimedia Commons.

Wiz's poster, called *Visit Palestine – Banksy Tribute*[4] (see Figure 3), can be understood as a dual parodic operation, insofar as it simultaneously parodies both Banksy and Krausz, in a sort of postmodern and postcolonial manoeuvre: postmodern insofar as it draws on the characteristic parodic impulse of postmodern art (Hutcheon 1988); and postcolonial insofar as it enacts a "writing back" strategy (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin 1989). If Banksy's *trompe-l'œil* mural disrupts the wall by offering a fictional glimpse of liberation through a Caribbean paradise, Wiz replaces the Beach Boys motif with the recognisable landmark of Krausz' poster, thereby re-signifying the image: rather than an imagined exotic escape, the "paradise" evoked becomes the return to historical Palestine.

[2] https://www.palestineposterproject.org (consulted on 15/06/2026).

[3] https://electronicintifada.net/content/well-known-uk-graffiti-artist-banksy-hacks-wall/5733 (consulted on 15/06/2026).

[4] https://www.palestineposterproject.org/poster/visit-palestine-banksy-tribute (consulted on 15/06/2026).

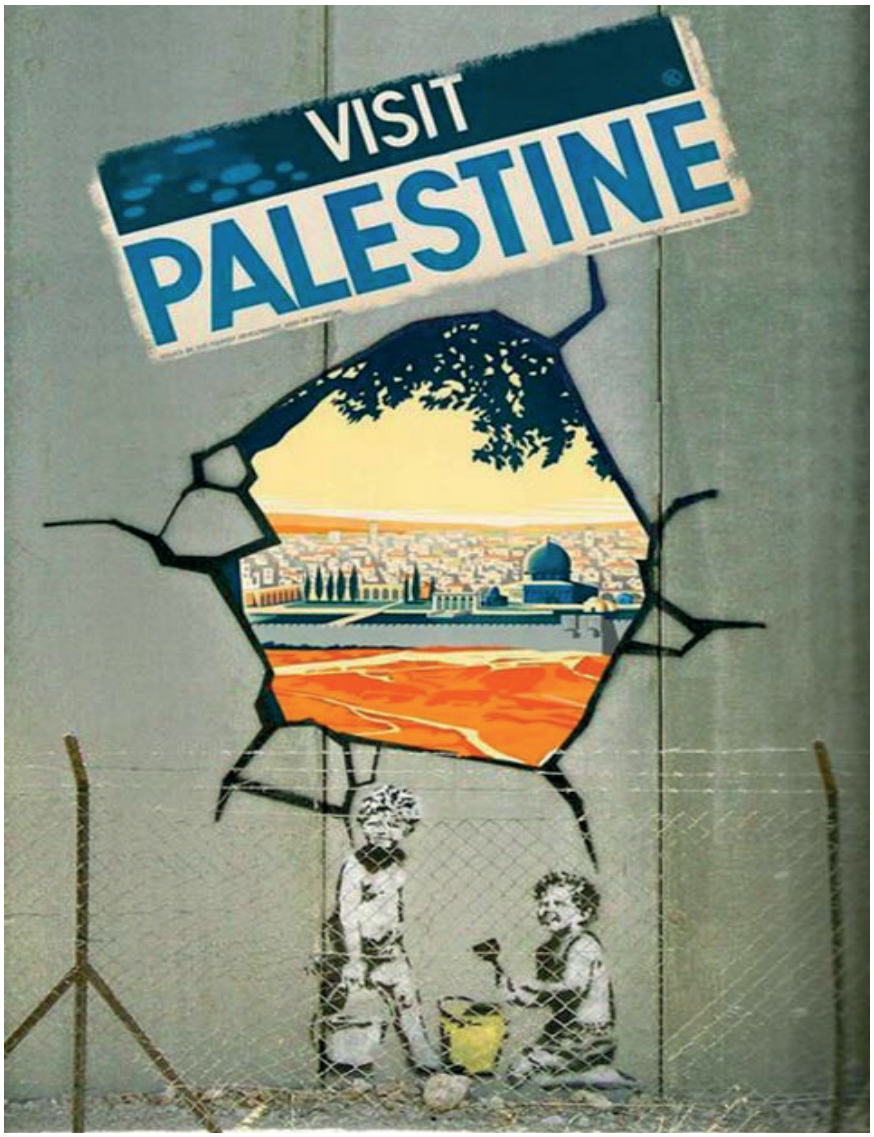


Figure 3. Wiz, *Visit Palestine – Banksy Tribute* (2013).

Another form of Calibanesque *sumud* is embodied through music, as DAM (a Palestinian-Israeli hip-hop group) do, by drawing on the global music language – a Prosperian genre that nevertheless constitutes a historical expression of marginalised cultural voices in the West – and transforming musical production into a site of political struggle (Cazzato & Taronna 2023). Their work asserts Palestinian cultural identity in the face of its systematic denial and challenges processes of erasure, exclusion, and ongoing dispossession under Israeli occupation. In doing so, their music emerging from Western contexts operates not only as a local artistic expression but also as a performative practice of *sumud*, articulating resilience and collective memory within a transnational cultural framework.

Furthermore, Calibanesque *sumud* may be performed through spoken word, as in the work of Rafeef Ziadah, a London-based Palestinian-Canadian poet, who draws on the Ar-

abic oral poetic tradition while powerfully delivering English-language performances of her poems, which have been viewed millions of times on YouTube (see Cazzato 2018)[5]. Or it may be performed through creative writing, as exemplified by the work of Refaat Alareer, poet, editor, and educator from Gaza, who edited, among others, a book, unsurprisingly titled *Gaza Writes Back* (2014). He created a platform for young Palestinian writers to tell their own stories in English, asserting narrative agency through the transformation of personal and collective memory into acts of resilience. Let us recall his heartbreaking and widely celebrated poem "If I Must Die", which, originally written in English, mobilised a global audience in the aftermath of his death on 6 December 2023, allegedly resulting from a surgically targeted strike.

Calibanesque *sumud* is also Bisan Owda's MoJo (*mobile journalism*) from Gaza. She is a Palestinian reporter and filmmaker whose widely circulating videos (shared by major global media and awarded major journalism prizes) often begin with "Hi, this is Bisan from Gaza, and I'm still alive". She transforms everyday survival into a powerful expression of resistance, blending immediate reporting, embodied testimony, and moving storytelling. Unlike conventional war correspondents, she is not "embedded"; if anywhere, she is embedded only in a shared condition of vulnerability.

Palestinian-American gaming influencer Hamzah Saadah, who has nearly eight million followers across social media and is known online under the pseudonym "Absorber", fully embodies the digital activism of the Palestinian youth diaspora (Saadah 2026)[6]. By leveraging global – arguably Prosperian – social media platforms, he engages directly with Israeli audiences. By minimising role-play, rhetorical aggression, and visual mediation, he produces what audiences perceive as a "non-performance", thereby forcing the interlocutor – and the audience watching the video – to confront the ideological violence within Israeli civil and military society as it unfolds, without journalistic filters. Rather than directly contesting dominant narratives, Saadah creates conditions in which his interlocutors, often young members of Israeli civil and military society, become participants in what could be described as a form of flagrant discursive self-exposure of the Zionist genocidal ideology.

Another distinctive instance is Shehadeh, who deploys English as a strategic linguistic medium to articulate the hardships of life under occupation and to foster a potentially sympathetic network of human solidarity. "Our struggle for survival", he states, "is totally consuming. It was to break out of this silence that I began writing about my life and the lives of the samidin [steadfast people]" (Shehadeh 1982: viii). Thus, by blending memory and language through a medium that enhances the likelihood of being heard and understood, Shehadeh offers his own path of Calibanesque *sumud*: a kind of personal therapeutic engagement with the reality of occupation that manifests itself in the act of writing in the language of an "other" self. Because, as he affirms, "we cannot unpick our life or the history of our nation" (Shehadeh 2017: 227) – despite what the bleak present may suggest – a chan-

[5] Her best-known poem is *We Teach Life, Sir*: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aKucPh9xHtM (consulted on 15/06/2026).

[6] Here is an interview at the Sundance Film Festival: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cwch6W495GE (consulted on 15/06/2026).

nel of communication with the "official enemy" must remain open as an alternative to the seemingly endless cycle of violence and revenge. Therefore, through the Prosperian common language, Palestinians and Israelis may potentially cultivate mutual understanding, thereby enabling the growth of trust and respect among sensible humans, even though such an endeavour remains profoundly complex across a deeply violent line of contact.

Ultimately, through Calibanesque *sumud*, these artists appropriate and assimilate the Prosperian language while simultaneously challenging it in an act of anthropophagy, or cultural cannibalisation. Such an act entails the "Absorção do inimigo sacro" (the absorption of the sacred enemy; de Andrade 1991: 43), whereby the culture of the coloniser – the father's taboo in Freudian terms – is metaphorically swallowed, digested, transfigured into a totem, and ultimately subjected to radical contestation and refusal. In conclusion, this act of cannibalisation – or, if we like, of *Calibanification* – can be understood as a process that metaphorically consumes the culture of the coloniser only to re-elaborate and reproduce it in a transmuted form.

It is an act that not only subverts the dominant Prosperian discourse, shaped and sustained by Zionist *hasbara*, but also contributes to the formation of counterpublics, opening up alternative spaces of meaning and cultural resistance. At the same time, it seeks to foster empathy and ethical engagement, as well as to instil a form of cognitive hope – both within the consciousness of the oppressor and among those who bear witness to the spectacle of the prolonged, inhuman, and relentless process of dispossession and ethnic cleansing in Palestine.

Since Shakespeare's time, history has recorded numerous *ante litteram* and *post litteram* genocides. In the early seventeenth century, as Walter Cohen (1985) reminds us, indigenous peoples were often represented as hardly dissimilar "from beasts, hauing no Art, nor science, nor trade" (Robert Gray); resistance to religious conversion was framed as hostility, such that natives were to be "dealt with as enemies of the Commonwealth of their country" (Robert Johnson) and their Indian priests were to be killed as "murtherers of soules and sacrificers of gods images to the Divill" (Thomas Gates in Cohen 1985: 400). In the early twenty-first century, little has apparently changed, as Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant called people in Gaza "human animals" while announcing a complete siege on the Gaza Strip[7]. The only difference is that the present genocide is unprecedentedly and shamefully unfolding in real time before a global audience.

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[7] https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/defense-minister-announces-complete-siege-of-gaza-no-power-food-or-fuel/ (consulted on 15/06/2026).

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