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Collective Study in Times of Emergency



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Introduction: Collective Study in Times of Emergency. A Roundtable	9	Until Liberation II: Learning Palestine	65
Nick Aikens, Sara Buraya Boned, Charles Esche, Martin Pogačar, Ovidiu Țichindeleanu, Ezgi Yurteri		Learning Palestine Group	
15 Nov 2024		12 Jan 2024	
Editorial: Towards Collective Study in Times of Emergency	23	Troubles with the East(s)	71
L'Internationale Online Editorial Board		Bojana Piškur	
29 Nov 2023		22 Jan 2024	
The Repressive Tendency Within the European Public Sphere	27	Song for Many Movements. Opening Performance Live on Radio Alhara	89
Ovidiu Țichindeleanu		Jokkoo with Miramizu, Rasheed Jalloul & Sabine Salamé	
6 Dec 2023		23 Feb 2024	
Until Liberation I: Learning Palestine	35	We Have Been Here Forever. Palestinian Poets Write Back	95
Learning Palestine Group		Rana Issa	
8 Dec 2023		4 Mar 2024	
Body Counts, Balancing Acts and the Performativity of Statements	41	Diary of a Crossing	111
Mick Wilson		Baqiya and Yu'ad	
20 Dec 2023		27 Mar 2024	
Right now, today, we must say that Palestine is the centre of the world	55	The silence has been unfolding for too long	127
Françoise Vergès		The Free Palestine Initiative Croatia	
21 Dec 2023		11 Apr 2024	
		Everything will stay the same if we don't speak up	133
		L'Internationale Confederation	
		17 Apr 2024	

One day, freedom will be Françoise Vergès 19 Apr 2024 143
Live Set: A Love Letter to the Global Intifada Precolumbian 13 Jun 2024 153
The Genocide War on Gaza: Palestinian Culture and the Existential Struggle Rana Anani 10 Sep 2024 157
Forget 'never again', it's always already war Martin Pogačar 3 Oct 2024 169
Broadcast: Towards Collective Study in Times of Emergency(for 24 hrs/Palestine) L'Internationale Online Editorial Board, Rana Issa, L'Internationale Confederation, Vijay Prashad 16 Oct 2024 185
Beyond Distorted Realities: Palestine, Magical Realism and Climate Fiction Sanabel Abdel Rahman 14 Nov 2024 189
Contributor Biographies 207
Colophon 214

Introduction: Collective Study in Times of Emergency. A Roundtable

Nick Aikens, Sara Buraya Boned, Charles Esche, Martin Pogačar,
Ovidiu Țichindeleanu, Ezgi Yurteri

15 Nov 2024



Photo: Nick Aikens, July 2024

Collective Study in Times of Emergency brings together nineteen contributions published by L'Internationale Online since November 2023 under the strand 'Towards Collective Study in Times of Emergency'. Unlike previous publications assembled and edited by L'Internationale Online, the publication was not preconceived as a book. As the first editorial from November 2023 articulates, the impulse, urgency and necessity for this work was to try to understand the implications of the genocide unfolding in Gaza for the cultural sphere, from the places in which L'Internationale's partners operate.

Working with members of our editorial board, we invited contributions as a means to engage with what Fred Moten describes as 'collective study' – what he and Stefano Harney have expanded on as a form of 'study without an end' – as both a means to work beyond the limitations and pitfalls of the 'statement', the single utterance, and to come into relation with practitioners, communities and contexts affected by the genocide.¹ The commissions have come out of long-term relationships, friendships and new encounters: from within the confederation, through the programmes of some of our partners, and most importantly, with peers and allies within the Palestinian cultural ecosystem.

In this light, we are incredibly grateful to the many conversations that have resulted in the writing, music and broadcasts you will find here: to Waad and the Learning Palestine Group; to the people and projects we encountered, including Rana Anani, The Institute for Palestine Studies and the 24 hrs/Palestine project, during a trip to the West Bank in July 2024 hosted by the A. M. Qattan Foundation; to the artists, performers and activists who have taken part in programmes in our institutions including 'Song for Many Movements' (MACBA), 'Critical Thinking Gatherings – International Solidarity with Palestine' (Museo Reina Sofia), and 'Gathering into the Maelstrom' and 'Red, Green, Black and White' (both Institute of Radical Imagination, the latter in collaboration with the Free Palestine Initiative Croatia at MSU Zagreb); to the individual academics and practitioners working without institutional support, like Rana Issa, Sanabel Abdel Rahman and Françoise Vergès, for their powerful articulations during moments of intense personal and collective trauma; to L'Internationale colleagues Bojana Piškur, Ovidiu Țichindeleanu and Mick Wilson for their precise contributions; to the members of the wider editorial board for their valuable input; and to all those who must remain anonymous but whose vital work across organizing, research and practice has been so crucial for Collective Study. Thank you.

We, members of L'Internationale Online editorial board, feel this is one of the most transversal publications we have worked on – one that, we hope, has the capacity to connect with a broad set of audiences and publics, across student, activist, artistic and institutional communities. Our intention in putting these contributions together in a publication is for it to circulate and be used within and beyond the circuits of the arts and academia.

1. On 25 October 2023, Moten gave a talk in which he described the need to study together in the wake of the onset of the genocide and to go beyond the pervasive dissemination of statements. See 'Fred Moten on Palestine and the Nation-State of Israel', [youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...). The wider exploration of study is central to Moten and Harney's long-term collaborative work. See Fred Moten and Stefano Harney, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study*, Brooklyn, NY: Minor Compositions, 2013.

Rather than offer a formal introduction, the following roundtable, which took place in October this year, forms a group reflection by the editors on the motivations for and process of Collective Study. Like the other contributions, it came into being at a specific moment through specific subjectivities. It is partial and inconclusive but nonetheless a beginning, a way in, for what we will hope will be a valuable resource for those invested in the process of study during times of emergency.

Nick Aikens: We are speaking a year on from 7 October 2023. Since then, as our former colleague curator Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez reported in the recent 'Climate Forum' seminar, following an Instagram post by Palestinian writer Susan Abulhawa, Israel has dropped the equivalent of six times more bombs per square kilometre than the weight of the atomic bomb dropped by the US on Hiroshima in World War II.² Gaza is 40 percent the size of Hiroshima; 14.4 tonnes of bombs per square kilometre of Hiroshima versus 219 tonnes per square kilometre in Gaza.³ The scale and intensity of Israel's violence is unprecedented, compared to anything in my lifetime. And we are seeing it almost on livestream. It is overwhelming.

Sara Buraya Boned: We are witnessing it every day.

NA: We just published Martin's essay 'Forget "never again", it's always already war' on the platform, which, among many things, outlines the performative emptiness and selective nature of the phrase 'never again', which, today, seems clearer than ever. Would anyone like to begin by reflecting on this time, after one year of genocidal war on Palestine?

Charles Esche: It's important to hold another narrative in which 7 October is part of a sequence of events. The attacks by Hamas on Israeli soldiers and citizens, however awful, were the result of keeping Palestinian people in an open prison for decades, of Israel's blockades on the Gaza Strip with increasing severity since the early 1990s, of even earlier events. You can say this began in 1948, with the founding of Israel and the Nakba. Or you can say this began in the Holocaust. Or, with the British Mandate of Palestine following World War I and the colonial inheritance it passed to Zionism. Many of these histories are touched on in the two twelve-hour listening sessions by the Learning Palestine Group that we published on the platform early on in the process. There are longer trajectories still, going back to the nineteenth century, back to the roots of religious modernity. 7 October is part of a narrative of hitting back or breaking out after decades of oppression. History does not begin on a day of people's choosing.

Martin Pogačar: Any event in the present should be looked at from both synchronic and diachronic perspectives. I realize this is a difficult task. 'Looking back' alone is destined never to come to the initial root of the problem, given the palimpsests of history layered and skipped and interwoven over any historical process and its narrative. At the same time, and as became viscerally clear after 7 October, the imposition of a think-order that hinges on a very recent, and in this case atrocious, event, is also unproductive.

2. Susan Abulhawa's Instagram post of 6 July 2023 ([instagram.com](https://www.instagram.com)) follows – and, given the many months of bombing between, exceeds – statistics in an early report by the Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor, 'Israel hits Gaza Strip with the equivalent of two nuclear bombs', 2 November 2023, euromedmonitor.org.

3. For more on this comparison, see the statement by Toshiyuki Mimaki, who survived the Hiroshima atomic bombing and represents the organization of survivors Nihon Hidankyo: 'Nobel winning Hiroshima survivor's Gaza comparison angers Israel', Middle East Eye, 14 October 2024, [middleeasteye.net](https://www.middleeasteye.net).

For meaningful understanding, there needs to be a balance between a historical view and observing the unfolding of events in the present. This balance helps to prevent obscuring historical complexities and delegitimizing prior and recent atrocities and trauma. *Anno zero* narratives are guilty of these things; they discredit the individual suffering of one group or person on account of the individual suffering of another group or person, and 'pedestal' one event above another, which only reinforces the binarism of 'good' or 'evil'. Nationalist mythologies feed on such binarisms, perpetuating polarization, but they do not reflect the entanglements of real life. What the post-7 October events – the war and the genocide, as well as the discrediting of debate and diplomacy – did contribute in this sense was the final trashing of binary mechanisms (also East/West, democratic/authoritarian, liberal/illiberal), revealing their ultimate inability either to describe or analyse social and political conflict or to conceive any meaningful approach towards outlining solutions.

Ovidiu Țichindeleanu: One thing we can observe is a sort of internal transformation taking place within the European reception of and reaction to the events. Yes, the repressive tendency I wrote about has worsened; there is more militarization, a proliferation of wars; the scale of violence is indeed exploding. But what is happening also exceeds the censorship and narrowing of possibilities for free expression. We've entered into a regime of acceptance: accepted lies and accepted violence. This already goes beyond the normalization of dehumanizing violence or the interpellation of dominant narratives. The lies and violences are taken in as downright necessary, temporarily justified, or as a de facto reality.

The push for acceptance often takes the form of snapping or desperate gestures. A hit here, a reaction there. And I would say that within this one-year frame, we are seeing a radicalization of eurocentrism in all its drunken righteousness, where many prominent figures seem to like to believe that finally Europe is on the right side of history, in the way it is acting in relation to the war in Ukraine, and even in its support of Israel's government.

Even Kant in his time protested against 'a recently prominent tone of superiority in philosophy', just before writing a piece that pleaded for 'perpetual peace'.⁴ Specifically, he was protesting against an appropriation of his philosophy into a crude mixture of Christian elitism and Enlightenment values by a retired administrator with too much time and wealth on his hands. Today, a version of that particular mix is rehearsed as 'European values' by other administrators with dubious critical reason. A tone of superiority sweeps through this new-found righteousness, for which others are paying the price.

Against the simultaneous radicalization of liberal eurocentrism, settler-colonial narratives and right-wing narratives of autochthony, the project of Collective Study is an attempt to claim an altogether different European public sphere. What we are proposing is a secession, in a sense – a secession from the current European public sphere, from its

4. Immanuel Kant, 'On a recently prominent superior tone in philosophy' and 'Proclamation of the imminent conclusion of a treaty of perpetual peace in philosophy' [both 1796] in *Theoretical Philosophy after 1781*, Cambridge University Press, 2002, pp. 425–446 and pp. 451–460.

tendencies of repression and superior posturing; yes, from the vantage point of post-7 October, but moreover, by keeping a long and diachronic perspective. Either we claim and build another European public sphere, or, very soon, we will succumb to the pressure of acceptance and will repeat grave mistakes.

SBB: I try not to crumble under complaints but I feel that, one year on, it's now much harder to make room for speech, to find the energy and drive to speak up. It's easy to become stuck in the grip of sadness, unable to find one's voice. The original proposal of Collective Study was a move to counter all this and to make space for voices that might help us understand the present and be able to imagine possible futures, futures where 'one day, freedom will be' as Françoise Vergés so poignantly phrased it. But it has been difficult for me to contemplate this conversation at this moment. Not that I want to give in to despair, but I have to acknowledge the difference in how I feel today, compared with the impulse we had to initiate this project a year ago.

Spanish journalist Olga Rodríguez has been covering Palestine all her career. In the last weeks, full of rage and sadness, she has been repeating a phrase from her writing, '*Nadie podrá decir en el futuro que no lo sabía*' ('No one will be able to say in the future that they did not know').⁵ None of us will be able to say that we did not or could not see this genocide, when future generations ask. In the Spanish context, there is strong support for the Palestinian cause and now for Lebanon. Stronger, at least, than in most countries in Europe. Last weekend tens of thousands demonstrated all over the country. At the same time, like in other European countries, there is now a space for violence to be expressed against those who are asking for peace. The far right, the extra-neoliberal subject, has been allowed to be the protagonist of the public sphere. Yesterday was the first time I was harassed for wearing a keffiyeh in the street. Although this was one incident, it speaks to the connections between various levels of violence. All these thanato-politics that the far right embrace, with no regrets and no embarrassment.

A day after the demonstrations, the State of Israel called this 'a glorification of terrorism', saying that Spain is allowing a public 'apology for terrorism'.⁶ If wanting 'peace' now means supporting 'terrorism', we need to rethink our common vocabularies for the future. In these respects it feels important to keep a record of what has been going on over the past year in the cultural ecosystem we share. This publication allows us to track it.

NA: Yes, we have kept the original publication date of the articles so that readers can understand in what moment a certain piece was commissioned or came out.

I am glad you re-emphasize the question of language, Sara. This was important to some of the early contributions in November and December 2023, and to the fundamental question of how to speak as L'internationale confederation – to the very articulation of statements. It's one focus

5. '*Nadie podrá decir en el futuro que no lo sabía*' is the title of Rodríguez's prologue to Mahmoud Mushtaha's *Sobrevivir al genocidio en Gaza* (Surviving Genocide in Gaza) Madrid: Ágora ctxt, 2024. See: ctxt.es, 2024.

6. See '*El Gobierno de Israel acusa a España de haberse convertido "en un paraíso para sembrar el odio"*', elDiario.es, 6 October 2024.

of Ovidiu's piece 'The Repressive Tendency Within the European Public Sphere', which identifies a failure to use the words 'genocide', 'apartheid' and 'occupation', as well as of Mick Wilson's essay 'Body Counts, Balancing Acts and the Performativity of Statements', where he gives a close analysis of how language is deployed to varied rhetorical and political ends.

Sara, what you seem to be saying is that we're actually in a much worse place now than a year ago, in terms of how language is being misappropriated and reused. What does that mean for publishing and study, I wonder, when the words we use hold different meanings for different people, or cease to hold meaning. Where do we turn?

CE: Perhaps we can return to and build on Ovidiu's idea of secession. My sense is that we have to form a different kind of relationship to the state and to Europe. It seems that the state in Western Europe is retreating from its post-war social role, where it acted with the broad intention of improving people's lives. It is shifting to a disciplinary authoritarian role in which elite, super-rich control is made acceptable by dehumanizing minorities or outsiders and by staging nationalist or media distractions. This means that the cultural field – and civil society at large – has to find a new way to negotiate with it. That might be avoidance, camouflage or secession, depending on the time and place.

The privatization of media, extreme wealth and rising inequality, the isolation of individuals all play their part in this, and the actual contours of this emerging state are still not clear, at least to me. But secession would be from the public (and in our case cultural) sphere that seeks to negotiate with or influence the state while being financially dependent on it. And that secession feels also to be a secession from the language the state uses.

OT: It's our responsibility to show this, to signal this, and to point out the potential of secession or, to bring in another way to describe this, of delinking, as being ethically motivated by our rejection of the ongoing movement towards a spectre of total war.

From my perspective, this has dragged me back to reflections on the thirty-five years of transition to capitalism. What did the dismantling of the East European socialist bloc bring with it, actually? What did this bring to the world, and what did the fall of socialism bring to Europe?

This signals the need to reclaim different standpoints within Europe and to form alliances with a common goal of transformation, against the monodirectional view that Eastern Europe is fighting against one empire and is allied with the other. We need to express internal pluralism and bring visibility to standpoints from southern Europe, marginal Europe, rebellious Europe, to build international alliances across differences and above disagreements.

CE: There's a recent interview with Eyal Weizman in which he talks about how the German state is the main funder of culture, and therefore how

culture is under almost complete control by the state.⁷ There aren't so many spaces to escape from the state, which do exist to an extent in the Anglo-Saxon sphere, ironically. Maybe the break I'm conceiving is a break with this close relationship to the state and its various arms. To try to ask: Is it possible for there to be a European civil society in parallel with that state apparatus?

NA: Going back to the beginning of Collective Study, the diverse cultural and geopolitical stakes of the partners of L'internationale meant there was an initial inability or unwillingness to make a pronouncement in the immediate aftermath of the onset of the genocide being committed by Israel. The group of individuals on the editorial board was then tasked with publishing, commissioning, speaking, because the confederation as a whole was unable to. What became apparent in that early moment was the very different histories and circumstances of L'internationale's institutions and how this affected their relation to the question of Palestine, whether that was the extreme situation of our then partner Haus der Kulturen der Welt (HKW) in Berlin, where the removal of funding and the cancellation and censorship of pro-Palestinian voices was (still is) endemic across the German cultural sphere, or of our partners in Ljubljana speaking from the Slovenian context and former Yugoslavia's historical alignment with Palestinian liberation, as Bojana's essay 'Trouble with the East(s)' elaborates.

MP: The contradiction that emerged in response to the two most foregrounded recent wars of 'the West' – between condemning the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the silence or even approval of the Israeli assault on Gaza – illustrates, at best, the final end of the 'post-war dream', and at worst, the collapse of an international order and how we think about a global, planetary or earthly community. It was so clear that there are double standards, and this demonstrates quite clearly the limits, incapacity and unwillingness of western liberalism to act in the face of humanitarian crisis and a prospect of eternal war.

This also opens onto another more critical question: How far can you withdraw before you become a collaborator in resisting to speak? I understand there are some situations where you cannot put yourself out in the open. There's the question of funding, the question of one's job security.

SBB: One of the things we felt imperative to address, not only among the editorial board but across L'internationale, was censorship in the art system. To be able to articulate the existence of censorship, how this was and is operating. The most vivid manifestation of this was our collective reading of 'Everything will stay the same if we don't speak up', with over fifty colleagues in Venice in April this year, pronouncing the words aloud together, on the effects that censorship has on us as individuals, as a confederation as a whole, and as people who work in the art field. There was some personal comfort in that moment, but more importantly it was a collective voicing, on an international level.

7. Maximilian Probst and Tobias Timm, 'Eyal Weizman: "Wir sind nicht neutral"', *Zeit Online*, 3 October 2024, [zeit.de](https://www.zeit.de).

In these times, I am more aware than ever of who can speak or which institutions can speak. One aspect of L'internationale that has now become especially meaningful is this possibility to have a collective voice that goes beyond our individual institutions. Making the public programme at the Museo Reina Sofía that was initially titled 'From the River to the Sea. International Solidarity with Palestine', we experienced the pressure and tensions of discussing this theme.⁸ We were accused of putting Hebraic communities at risk in Spain because of the use of this phrase from the Palestinian struggle, which has been around since the sixties. We were able to keep the programme intact in terms of content but we decided to change the title, in order to stop the accusations and continue doing our job, which is to create spaces for critical thinking.

It is very important that the museum can be a space for critical discussions in urgent times. And we can no longer take this for granted. I feel that our words are not only our own anymore but may be shared by many other people who do not have a place or possibility to articulate them aloud.

CE: We shouldn't forget that collectivity failed at a certain point. We were unable to make a collective statement as a confederation, certainly with the German context.

OT: Our initial failure meant the impossibility of becoming public witnesses. The failure of collectivity meant the impossibility of becoming witnesses to this genocide, to this absolute violence. Then, the consequence of this impossibility is letting things happen: oblivion, forgetfulness, perpetuating injustice – from complicity to worse. Learning from this failure is part of a process of becoming a witness, of becoming part of the struggle from the position we are in, while acknowledging the destruction elsewhere. This cannot happen when collectivities break.

Collective Study, as a publication, tries to reclaim a collective voice. The process of Collective Study is about getting into a slower process, to repoliticize ourselves in a nonreactive way, against the quick and desperate gestures of reaction. To send out a message with an alternative sense of politicization.

Ezgi Yurteri: I agree that the reclaiming of politics is crucial at this moment, which is what many initiatives, collectives and other forms of alliances in the cultural field are actively engaging in. On the one hand, there is a strong movement of protests around the world; on the other, there are even stronger tendencies of repression, violence, radicalization and criminalization. Just as social movements and grassroots organizations learn from each other, authoritarian regimes learn from one another how to legitimize or justify their actions, how to operate with impunity and how to marginalize dissident voices.

Perhaps there is no point in trying to find a common ground with that kind of populist politics as its language, upheld by mainstream media, only serves to assert its power. Not even for 'manufacturing consent' but for

8. 'Critical Thinking Gatherings – International Solidarity with Palestine', Museo Reina Sofía, 8 May – 30 September 2024, museoreinasofia.es.

manufacturing an image of consent that seems to suffice to legitimize or normalize destruction, censorship, measures of control and states of exception.

So the question with reclaiming politics is about how to get beyond reactivity and create a transformative capacity on a wider scale. Reclaiming another kind of language is crucial in that sense, as we are currently working towards with Collective Study.

NA: Yes, and this is reflected in the forms of collective study we were keen to initiate. To understand the limits and pitfalls of language and rhetoric meant to study through Palestinian poetry and literature, as we did with the contributions of Rana Issa and Sanabel Abdel Rahman. Through art, music and performance, too: we tapped into the extraordinary programme of 'Song for Many Movements' (MACBA), featuring the opening and closing performances. Not to try and snap back, to use Ovidiu's term from earlier, but to use different registers and forms to resist the weaponizing of language. The trajectory of Collective Study, and of this past year more widely, has prompted a rethinking of what the L'Internationale confederation is or wants from itself.

CE: The faith in an international order that has sustained certain situations, whether through the UN or through a certain capacity for the world to talk through its problems rather than resorting to violence, has fallen apart with Palestine, and largely with Ukraine. Remembering that this order has operated as a defence of the priorities of the Global North with economic oppressions of the global majority, the fact that there has not been a full-scale world war since 1945 is something that, I think, should be recognized and acknowledged as an achievement.

With Palestine, the hypocrisy of the white west is laid bare. If the West's integrity was fairly ragged before, now its double standards has been completely exposed. The consequence for us as organizations that are funded by and complicit with the EU and with the various states that we work in – except maybe for Turkey – is that we are prompted to rethink these relationships and what it means to have funding. This climate might also make us more wary of speaking in public in certain ways, as Sara expressed, as state actors discourage voicing a diversity of opinions. Modernist artistic expression relied on the idea that an individual artist can be provocative and speak in the public sphere, that they could enter into that space. But when the public sphere becomes toxic and violent, even verbally so, you need to reassess things. The nature of the public sphere, including its economics and our relationship with the state – these are all things that this genocide, and the response from the US and the EU, has reframed.

EY: Within the cultural field, public funding was supposed to be a safer option than privately funded initiatives in terms of ensuring diversity, freedom of speech and accountability. But this kind of relationship with the state, and the nature of the public sphere, was already different

in Europe than in many parts of the world. There has never been a stable relationship with the state in the so-called Middle East or other geographies. State funding has never been an option in the cultural field in Turkey, for example, and most cultural institutions are either privately funded or have relied on EU funding programmes. Given the totality of central state mechanisms of repression and censorship, this seemed the only viable option. Yet the EU funding structures implemented in the region have mostly prioritized maintaining the international status quo rather than addressing the necessities and urgencies on the ground, as Rana Anani discusses in 'The Genocide War on Gaza: Palestinian Culture and the Existential Struggle'.

Intergovernmental organizations almost always existed to maintain a certain order in the West. Of course, such entities managed to prevent a number of conflicts post-World War II, but there have been several fragmented wars since 1945, with no resolution. We have repeatedly seen social democratic parties in Europe or the Democrats in the US following and normalizing nondemocratic foreign policies when it comes to certain conflict zones. What is laid bare now, perhaps, is that it's not even about sustaining the sociopolitical order for a very small part of the world; it's about maintaining power structures and maximizing profits with little or no accountability. This is most pronounced in the way that corporations increase profit as the genocide continues. Then we should ask how international organizations are funded and how that affects their decision-making processes and control mechanisms.

NA: I think you're right, Ezgi. Martin touches on this in his essay, when he writes that the violence being adopted by state actors is the outcome of capitalist logic.

OT: It's indirectly related to the perversion of state institutions behaving as private corporations. And to their growing impunity.

EY: I really don't know what we can expect from international organizations or humanitarian law – the UN, the International Court of Justice – today. But we still need to figure out how to address our demands to these institutions.

As Martin wrote in his piece, a world without conflict is impossible, but as the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) showed us, it is possible to work towards a peaceful coexistence and to seek ways to resolve conflicts without war and violence. We seem to have lost that capacity in terms of the international political order, but the legacy of NAM's ideals still exists in various social movements, or in transnational solidarity within the cultural field. It also manifests in the very existence of L'Internationale and a multitude of alliances formed within and through the confederation.

Turning back to the question of funding, there is also the issue of how the resources at hand are allocated. One of the crucial aspects we prioritize

with Collective Study – and perhaps we should cultivate it even further – is the redistribution of resources, even on a micro level.

SBB: I feel we are living in a time in which institutionality is under attack and faces complete delegitimization. I actually think there is a direct relation between this negating of institutionality and the different levels of violence I mentioned before. Still, we need to be critical of these international institutions, we need to rethink them in order to give them new value, because they should be performing a significant role right now. If they are legally erased from the public sphere, we are lost.

CE: The consequences of this discussion for how the institutions of L'internationale perceive themselves, ourselves, and the space for action in light of this, are crucial. Palestine has clear consequences for how we think about and act under the current terms, from our particular places and positions. It could be simply understanding that what we're doing is much more compromised than we realized. Then, how do you live with that compromise and/or how do you create spaces where it is possible to feel and be less compromised, while still maintaining the possibility for action?

OT: In preparing for this conversation I found my notebook from Edward Said's lecture in Berlin in 2001 at the Renaissance-Theater. Said was fifty-five years old and was already dying, and he was aware that it was perhaps his last visit to Germany. In the packed theatre hall, the day after some neo-Nazi demonstrations in Berlin, Said reminded the audience that Europe holds responsibility for the origins of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, and argued that the Israeli state represents the debt of European anti-Semitism. He asked the German public: Why are the Palestinians paying your bill? It was possible for Said to state this in Berlin in 2001, in a public lecture sponsored by a major German private media company. This would be impossible today.

One thing that struck me in my notes from his speech was how he said that what worried him at that time – more than two decades ago – was not just the situation of the Palestinians who will be hurt but will resist, but the fact that the Israelis are learning to live as if the Palestinians do not exist. And he asked simply: What will happen when they are forced to open their eyes?

Maybe today we are seeing this opening. Many are opening their eyes. But in this process, some are choosing the path of violence, or of trying to push away the disturbing truth, while there are others who choose other paths. Through practices like Collective Study we might open up more space for the latter. Collective Study and other practices of solidarity are a direct effort to refuse to live as if the Palestinians do not exist.

NA: I was speaking to artist Yazan Khalili in Brussels recently. He was talking about the need for him to focus on very specific, manageable micro achievements, small victories or tasks – like helping a single family

in Gaza, or publishing something through Learning Palestine – in order to have goals to get through the day, the week, all the while working towards the wider project of Palestinian liberation, or in his words, 'changing the world'.

I think there has been a vast shift in focus over the past year. I remember, for example, reading Françoise Vergès's first piece for *Collective Study*, 'Right now, today, we must say that Palestine is the centre of the world', where she highlights that what's at stake in confronting the settler colonialism of Israel is the very logic of western imperialism. And I remember thinking that if this crumbles, which it must because the violence and impunity is so viscerally transparent, then so much will crumble with it. In that sense it felt like a tipping point with far-reaching consequences. But now, alongside thinking in these macro terms, one has to think pragmatically about what to do day-to-day from one's own location and position. What does one do in one's own institution, in one's network?

CE: That makes a lot of sense. It also relates to the readers of *Collective Study*, and what to do with or make from this publication. I'm thinking in terms of teaching: If you're teaching a new generation and you say the institutions that we built up and that we tried to maintain are actually no longer adequate tools, as educators we have a responsibility to say how we try to negotiate this issue for ourselves. Does one try to rescue them? What does abandoning them mean? These are the questions we should address in pedagogy, together with students. I think other generations have faced such questions at other times and places, but we haven't had to ask them in Western Europe for a while. And we need to find at least some provisional answers.

SBB: That makes me think of the piece 'Diary of a Crossing', about all the violent micropolitics the two [pseudonymous] authors encountered at every step of their journey from Amsterdam to Ramallah. Through everyday gestures and raw instances we come to understand the apartheid imposed by Israel and how the reality in Gaza has become an apocalypse – their narrative has so many layers of meaning. The piece is an example of how to place attention on the details of life and death in Gaza as a way of being in some kind of solidarity with those experiences. How it is these details that transmit the reality of survival.

CE: I agree: the difficulty in navigating that text is part of the difficult experience of reading its content.

NA: Yes. As an editorial group, we have tried to think through different voices, different registers, trying to respond or react as best we could to the shifting conjuncture. The publication at hand is a kind of mid-punctuation point – it presents the process of the Collective Study strand so far, rather than being a full stop or an ending. The times of emergency are ongoing and so too is this work.

Editorial: Towards Collective Study in Times of Emergency

L'Internationale Online Editorial Board

29 Nov 2023

This hope no doubt seems naive, even impossible, to many. Nevertheless, some of us must rather wildly hold to it, refusing to believe that the structures that now exist will exist forever. For this, we need our poets and our dreamers, the untamed fools, the kind who know how to organise.

– Judith Butler, 13 October 2023¹

Since 7 October, across European public spheres, rampant censorship and self-censorship has infected institutions and been internalised by cultural producers. The refusal by Western governments and media to use words pronounced by the world's leading human rights bodies to name the decades-long occupation and apartheid and the unfolding genocide of the Palestinian people also pervades the cultural sectors. The expression of grief, anger and sadness at the killing in Palestine and Israel is even contested, while the basic humanitarian appeal for a lasting ceasefire has been opposed. Consequently, the agents of the European political and public spheres are restricting freedom of expression, rather than mediating conversations across differences.

Censorship and a heightened contestation of language reveals how interpellation is acting on, and within, public spheres, whereby the ideological positions of state and media infrastructures become internalised by citizens and articulated as their own. As this interpellation takes hold and actors are reduced to passive rather than thinking subjects, the capacity of public spheres to be shaped or moved by discourse and debate is at stake. At the same time, the global role of Europe has come under question, as it has failed to adopt any constructive or even meaningful position, either displaying its underlying acceptance of dehumanization or actively taking the side of colonial domination. International alliances and relations – including those within our network of museums, universities and arts organizations – are confronted anew with how the traces of coloniality and imperial violence, exerted from multiple directions, cross their structures.

This is where we all are – even as we are touched in different ways and to different degrees. We, the editors of L'Internationale Online, are unwilling, or unable, to write with an institutional voice, assumed or imposed. That voice, wherever it may be located, is alien. We write, however, in an attempt to find some common expression among specific, situated and generational experiences, with the aim to mobilise critical voices and to work and think collectively, beyond the interpellation of governments and the media.

1. Judith Butler, 'The Compass of Mourning', *London Review of Books*, vol. 45, no. 20, 19 October 2023, lrb.co.uk.

The demands of the Palestinian liberation movements on cultural sectors are clear. If our institutions cannot meet them, we must acknowledge the failures and limits of our spaces, entangled as they are in broader political mechanisms. The immediate path, then, for a publishing platform like L'Internationale Online, is to utter, to speak, to work with subjectivities and situated knowledges – our own and others'. The material we plan to publish over the coming weeks and months will not be able to adequately address the extent of the daily tragedies, the contortions of debate, the historical implications of witnessing and speaking to genocide. Still, the texts, films and sounds offer a possibility to work in excess of institutional positions and to contribute to an ongoing reshaping of public spheres and critical discourses.

In addition, we see the long-term task for the cultural sphere to be to reformulate the vocabularies that have acted as the scaffolding for rhetorical frames and political positions within artistic fields, in order to overcome the weaponizing and imposed foreclosure of language. Any attempts at this will have to foster a wide appeal, building a popular front that could have the approach, the attention and the drive to effectuate such change, while knowing that such moves might lead to a fragile, tumultuous phase of in-betweenness.

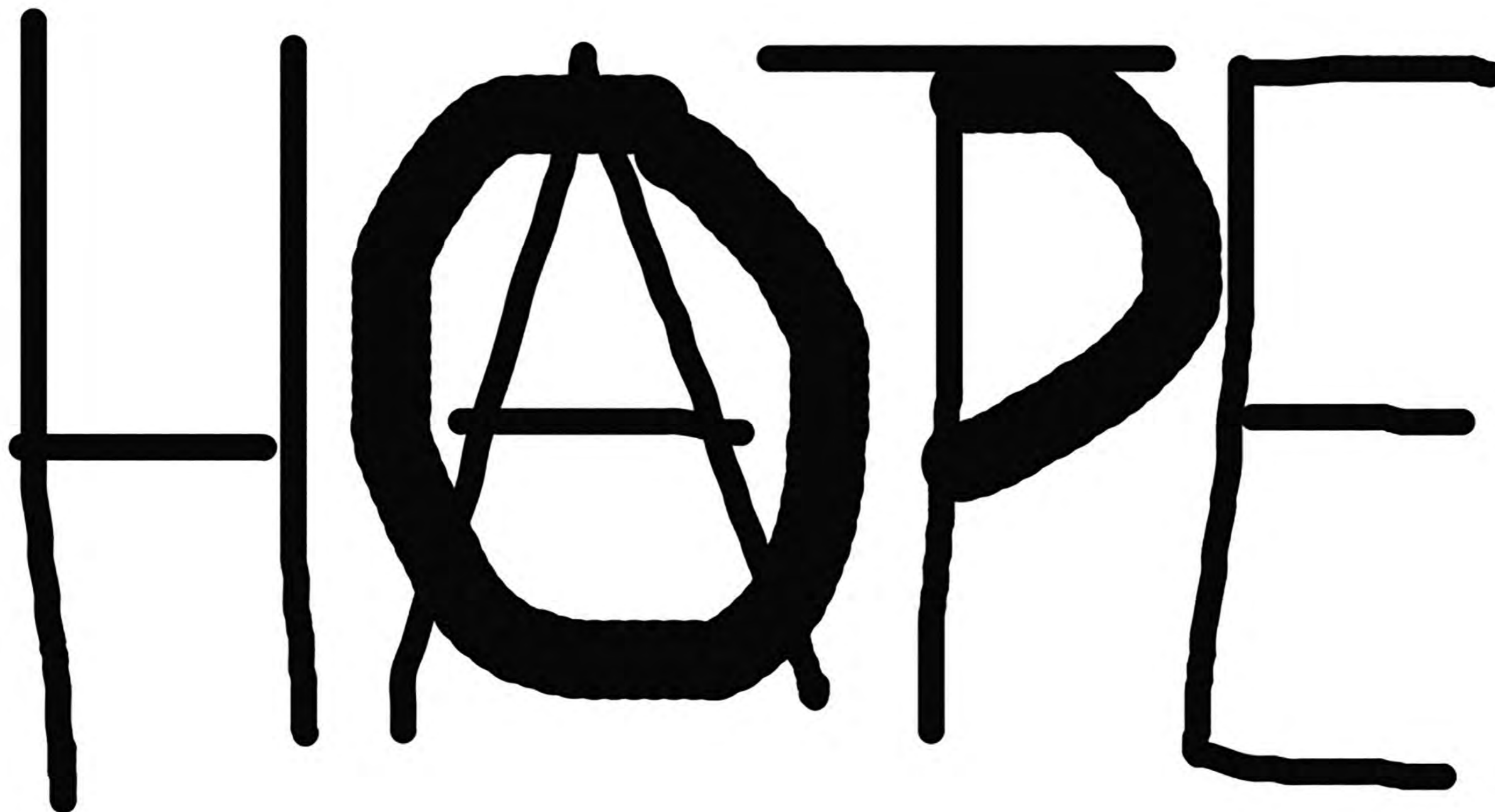
Following Donna Haraway's call to 'think we must; we must think' – as a struggle against *Denkverbot* and the shutting down of discursive spaces and practices – and after Fred Moten's summoning of 'collective study', we embark on multiple lines of inquiry to navigate the shifting grounds and registers of the present conjuncture. Among these many trajectories we will turn to feminist decolonial thought and praxis to analyse the ongoing case of Israeli settler colonialism and its military and carceral regimes. We will seek to draw attention to the asymmetries in power relations and the instrumentalization of rhetorical frames, their origins and their consequences in the European context. And in a forthcoming article Ovidiu Ţichindeleanu outlines the repression within European public spheres and the entanglement of this with imperial histories. As acts of solidarity, we will platform the work of artists, poets, musicians and film-makers working past the limits of language to think through the present and its myriad implications and inflections. The publishing here will be necessarily partial and incomplete. It is not approached as a declaration, or an answer. Rather, to recall Audre Lorde, we approach it as an exercise in finding the words we do not have.

The Repressive Tendency Within the European Public Sphere¹

Ovidiu Țichindeleanu

6 Dec 2023

1. This text builds on arguments in the editorial 'Towards Collective Study in Times of Emergency', to which the author contributed.



Dan Perjovschi, *Hope after Hate (US)*, 2020. Courtesy the artist

The official term used by the United Nations to name the political condition of the Palestinian territories is 'occupied'.² The terms used in Amnesty International's 2022 report to characterize the political condition of the Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territories is 'apartheid against Palestinians'.³ The term is contested by supporters of Israel,⁴ and corresponds to the way in which the Palestinians themselves have named their political condition.⁵ The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) report from 2017 pointed to the transition from the 'risk of apartheid' to 'practices of apartheid' in Palestine.⁶ In March 2022, after a conjugated analysis by Palestinian, Israeli, and international human-rights organizations, the UN Special Rapporteur also named the political condition of Palestinians 'apartheid', citing the 'deeply discriminatory dual legal and political system'.⁷

These are not 'fighting words',⁸ but terms used by the highest bodies defending human rights in the field of international relations. In turn, 'apartheid' and 'Occupied Territories' refer to a particular mode of exerting power by way of racial domination and colonial occupation. This way of exerting power is not the appanage of one nation but has recognizable and direct roots in the European history of colonialism and imperial aggressions. In the nineteenth century, politicians and activists from the British Empire created the colonial illusion of an empty land of Palestine, calling it 'a country without nation'.⁹ In the dark days between the World Wars, the European imperial powers opted not to name the Palestinians, or worse, talked about 'the dog in a manger',¹⁰ and even explicitly stated that they were not going through 'the form of consulting',¹¹ the result being that Palestinians were excluded from talks regarding the future of the territories on which they lived. All modern colonial occupations have had a dimension of racial domination and have produced doctrines of superiority or supremacy, which have proved even more persistent than the actual appropriation of land resulting from colonial occupations. The persistence of this mode of exerting power points to specific choices of governance, and through them, to the persistence of the logic of colonialism, not only in Palestine but in the common space of international relations, in which we all operate. Dehumanization and violence exerted against entire peoples or communities is a world problem, not a local problem.

The situation in Palestine and Israel entered a deadly next phase as a consequence of Hamas's terror attack and of the choice of Israel's government to respond by way of the politics of revenge, with a military campaign of aerial bombing and a ground invasion in Gaza. Both military operations inflicted de facto collective punishment, in a grotesque escalation of disproportionate violence. The resulting mass death of civilians in Gaza has been named a genocide and a humanitarian tragedy.¹² The public sphere in Israel has been cut by strident statements that have openly dehumanized Palestinians (like 'human animals'),¹³ and with it extremist calls that openly promised atrocities in the name of ancestral spiritualities (a biblical response).¹⁴ It is self-evident that there is continuity between the use of dehumanizing insults in the public sphere and the action of killing humans. Raz Segal, an expert scholar of genocide studies,

2. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 'Occupied Palestinian Territory', ochaopt.org.

3. Amnesty International, 'Israel's Apartheid Against Palestinians: Cruel System of Domination and Crime Against Humanity', submission to the UN Human Rights Committee 134th session, 28 February – 25 March 2022, [amnesty.org](https://www.amnesty.org)

4. See Tristan Hopper, 'It Is Not Apartheid: A Quick Debunking of the Most Obvious Lies about the State of Israel', *National Post*, 11 April 2023, [msn.com](https://www.msn.com).

5. See Nadia Hijab and Ingrid Jaradat Gassner, 'Talking Palestine: What Frame of Analysis? Which Goals and Messages?', *Al-Shabaka: The Palestinian Policy Network*, 12 April 2017, [al-shabaka.org](https://www.al-shabaka.org).

6. 'ESCWA Launches Report on Israeli Practices Towards the Palestinian People and the Question of Apartheid', 15 March 2017, United Nations ESCWA, [unescwa.org](https://www.unescwa.org).

7. 'Israel's occupation of Palestinian Territory is "apartheid": UN rights expert', *UN News*, 25 March 2022, [news.un.org](https://www.news.un.org).

8. See definition of 'fighting words', Legal Information Institute, [law.cornell.edu](https://www.law.cornell.edu).

9. 'Anthony Ashley-Cooper, 7th Earl of Shaftesbury', Wikipedia, [wikipedia.org](https://www.wikipedia.org).

10. Andrew Roberts, *Churchill: Walking with Destiny*, New York: Penguin, 2018.

11. 'Balfour Declaration', Wikipedia, [wikipedia.org](https://www.wikipedia.org).

has argued that the extremist drive to dehumanize and to inflict genocidal violence is a distinct phenomenon stemming from a radicalized doctrine of supremacy.¹⁵

In their reaction to the aggravation of the situation, mainstream political institutions and the mass media in Europe have, for the most part, opted to avoid all these loaded terms, as well as the issue of the radicalization of extremism, and to restrict language in reports and statements. Instead, they have primarily stressed Israel's right of self-defence and the terror of Hamas. In this regard, the words of the European Council,¹⁶ and of the President of the EU Commission,¹⁷ stand in stark contrast to statements from the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa).¹⁸ Neither the critical terms from the language of international relations, such as 'Occupied Territories' or 'apartheid', nor the issue of an expanding political extremism, have come to the fore in most political statements or media reports. Such a reduction of the context narrows the possibilities of finding common ground, and by being cautious today, makes tomorrow more dangerous. Moreover, by implicitly accepting extremism, it is brought closer, normalizing it at the centre of the political sphere. Such acceptance of extremism will only abet the return or rise of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia.

As a result, the current state of the European political and public spheres is plagued by a distinct tendency to restrict freedom of expression, rather than creating meaningful dialogues across different positions. At the same time, these spheres are becoming increasingly isolated within global debates.¹⁹ The violence of meaning produced by the tendency to restrict language has been generalized in practices of interpellation, censorship and self-censorship throughout Europe, to such an extent that even the call for a ceasefire on humanitarian grounds has fallen subject to this restriction, which is in itself egregious. The normalization of extremism within the political centre ground (not only at the far-right margins), and the acceptance of militarism, reminds one of Simone Weil's warning articles from the early 1930s,²⁰ when she observed in Berlin the narrow vision of politicians, and reflected that the modern state has a tendency to develop the apparatus of repression. Accompanying such repressive tendencies, the global role of Europe is being questioned. It is unable to adopt a meaningful position, signalling either a tacit acceptance of the humanitarian catastrophe or willingly siding with colonial domination. This is a step backwards in efforts to face the colonial past and define a positive role for Europe internationally.

Very different positionalities are now confronted with the fact that, in the dark light of recent years, by way of war and diplomatic failures, the international space is inflected by coloniality and imperial violence that is exerted from multiple directions.

The cultural sector – which should, by definition, be the domain where the wealth of all humanity is defended, alongside freedom of expression and creativity – is now under immense pressure from the highest points in

12. 'Gaza: UN experts call on international community to prevent genocide against the Palestinian people', press release, United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 17 November 2023, [ohchr.org](https://www.ohchr.org). For a definition of genocide see 'Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide', General Assembly resolution 260 A (III), United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 9 December 1948, [ohchr.org](https://www.ohchr.org).

13. See Tamar Pileggi, 'New Deputy Defense Minister Called Palestinians "Animals"', *Times of Israel*, 11 May 2015, [timesofisrael.com](https://www.timesofisrael.com).

14. See 'Netanyahu's references to violent biblical passages raise alarm among critics', transcript, *NPR*, 7 November 2023, [npr.org](https://www.npr.org).

15. See Raz Segal, 'Opinion: Here's what the mass violence in Gaza looks like to a scholar of genocide', *Los Angeles Times*, 19 November 2023, [latimes.com](https://www.latimes.com).

16. See 'Statement of the Members of the European Council on the situation in the Middle East', press release, Council of the European Union, 15 October 2023, [consilium.europa.eu](https://www.consilium.europa.eu).

17. See Jorge Liboreiro, 'Ursula von der Leyen defends trip to Israel and says civilians must be protected from "fury of war"', *euronews*, 18 October 2023, [euronews.com](https://www.euronews.com).

18. See 'BRICS urges immediate Gaza truce, South Africa slams Israeli "genocide"', *AFP*, 21 November 2023, [msn.com](https://www.msn.com).

19. See United Nations, 'UN General Assembly adopts Gaza resolution calling for immediate and sustained "humanitarian truce"', *UN News*, 26 October 2023, [news.un.org](https://www.news.un.org).

political and public spheres. The firing of *Artforum* editor David Velasco,²¹ following the publication of a statement of solidarity signed by thousands of art workers, the cancellation of an award ceremony to honour the work of Palestinian author Adania Shibil for novel *Minor Detail* (2001) at the Frankfurt Book Fair,²² before having a chance to speak, and the forced collapse of the documenta 16 Finding Committee, before even making a selection, are only some of the most visible effects of this tendency.²³ In a sector already plagued by the predominant condition of precarious work, the atmosphere of threats to one's livelihood amounts to the rise of systemic censorship.

It is necessary to struggle for a different condition and orientation. For that to be possible, it is necessary to name the problem of repressive tendencies within the European public sphere. It is necessary to name the problem of the persistence of coloniality in international relations, and to point to the rise and normalization of extremism and militarism within the political centre ground. It seems to me, that it is only common sense to manifest solidarity against silencing, to struggle for spaces of conversation across differences, and to ask for a lasting ceasefire and for a distinct type of humanitarian aid linked to positive peace and reconstruction, and not simply as an afterthought to war and destruction. When wars and conflicts are spreading beyond the frontline and creating societal polarizations, it is only common sense, nothing more, to hold the spaces that defend freedom against hierarchical divisions, colonial occupations and imperial violence. And to advocate for a turn towards the politics of nonviolence and compassion, and for the right to work in an international horizon free of dehumanization.

War is a fake simplifier. It simplifies only in the mode of destruction, which it then generalizes. The cultural sector can only survive if it breaks from this death drive.

20. See Simone Weil, *Écrits historiques et politiques*, Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1960 [1943], dx.doi.org.

21. See Zachary Small, 'Artforum Fires Top Editor Afters Its Open Letter on Israel-Hamas War', *New York Times*, 26 October 2023, nytimes.com.

22. See Philip Oltermann, 'Palestinian voices "shut down" at Frankfurt Book Fair, say authors', *Guardian*, 15 October 2023, theguardian.com.

23. See 'Documenta 16 selection committee collectively resigns', *ArtReview*, 17 November 2023, artreview.com.

Until Liberation I: Learning Palestine

Learning Palestine Group

8 Dec 2023



Courtesy Learning Palestine Group

Dear listeners, friends, comrades in this world,

Hope you are fine wherever you are listening to this twelve-hour session on Palestine. It is made of songs, music, chants, talks, discussions, presentations, and conversations by singers, intellectuals, academics, researchers, poets, students, fighters, from all around the world to teach, to learn, to tell, to inform, and to understand the history, the present, the reality, of this ongoing struggle for liberation and justice for Palestine.

Palestine isn't only the land, but it is also the accumulation of all the struggles of oppressed people against settler colonialism, imperial history, and capitalist domination in this world.

Palestine is the Past, Palestine is the Future.

Until Liberation I: Learning Palestine
Learning Palestine Group

[Listen online](#) →



Timecodes:

00:00:00	Introduction, Learning Palestine Group
00:01:14	A wedding chant (live recording, anonymous)
00:12:00	John Berger reading a story by Ghassan Kanafani (inaugural Palestine Festival of Literature, 2008)
00:28:54	A song: George Kirmiz, <i>I'm the mountains of Galilee</i> (1980s)
00:34:35	Kwame Ture on Zionism and Imperialism (University of Minnesota, 1990)
00:38:17	A song: A Dabkeh chant from Termos Ayya (1986)
00:42:20	A poem: Mahmoud Darwish, <i>The Speech Before the Last by the Red Indian</i> (date unknown)
00:49:50	Edward Said: The Interview (1986)
1:44:04	A song: Sabreen, <i>Smoke of Volcanos</i> (1999)
1:48:36	A song: <i>The Flower of Fire</i> (artist and date unknown)
1:51:46	Deep Dive: A history of Black Palestinian solidarity
2:02:55	Angela Davis speaks at Oranienplatz, Berlin (2022)
2:51:37	A song: Al Fajer, <i>(The Dawn), 3aneed Ana</i> (Majazz Project, 2023)
2:54:20	A Dabkeh chant: 'The Village Leagues Don't Represent Us' (date unknown)
2:57:48	Mohammed El-Kurd on CNN (2021)
3:02:43	Basel Al Araj: Details of an Operation
3:12:00	A song: Marcel Khalifa, <i>Freedom Fighters without an Address</i> (date unknown)
3:15:36	A song: Abdallah Haddad and Martyrs Children Group, <i>I'm the Child of Sumod</i> (date unknown)
3:17:54	Ghassan Kanafani interview with Richard Carleton (1970)

3:23:04	French Students Stand up to Israeli Ambassador (Science Po, Rennes, 2017)
3:29:06	Amer Zahr, 'Palestine Fully Furnished', 'Akhaduha Mafroosheh'
3:33:34	A song: Al Ashiqeen group, <i>A Child Walks on Embers</i> (Yemen, 1984)
3:36:50	Judith Butler on BDS and anti-Semitism (Jewish Voice for Peace, Oakland, California, 2017)
3:58:00	A song: Fairouz, <i>One Day We Shall Return</i> (date unknown)
4:02:50	Fred Moten speaks on solidarity with Palestine (American Studies Association Annual Meeting, Washington DC, 2009)
4:11:35	A song: Haneen Odet Allah & Jowan Safadi, <i>This Monster</i>
4:14:24	A song: Sabreen, <i>Love on the Palestinian Way</i> (date unknown)
4:22:30	A song: Marcel Khalifa, <i>Ahmad Al Arabi Musical</i> (date unknown)
5:28:40	Rashid Khalidi, 'The Hundred Year War in Palestine' (SOAS, University of London, 2016)
7:06:40	A song: Fairouz, <i>The Bridge of Return</i> (date unknown)
7:24:30	A song: Marcel Khalife, <i>Promises from the Storm</i> (date unknown)
7:30:20	A song: Sabreen, <i>On Wishes</i> (date unknown)
7:35:20	Ilan Pappé: On 1948, Interview Part I (2018)
8:39:30	A song: Daboor/Shabjdeed, <i>Inn Ann Prod Al Nather</i> (2023)
8:42:36	A wedding chant: For Dalal Maghribi (date unknown)
8:44:31	A song: Al Ashiqeen group, <i>Sour</i> (Yemen concert, 1984)
8:50:30	Podcast: Ali Habib Allah, Nakba in the social lexicon
10:02:00	A song: <i>Stay Away from the Army</i> (date unknown)
10:06:30	Dabkeh at a wedding: Birzeit (date unknown)
10:14:40	Rana Barakat, 'Decolonial Futures in Palestine and the Global South' (2021)
11:10:40	A song: Kofia group, <i>Palestinian Struggle Songs</i> (date unknown)
11:14:25	On Tragedy Resistance: Israel's Apartheid System in Hebron (PALFEST, 2013)
11:20:00	Amnesty: Israel Palestine Apartheid Explainer (2022)
11:33:54	Suheir Hammad, <i>On the Brink of... for Rachel Corrie</i> (Olympia, Washington, 2007)
11:40:50	Ultras Rajawi chant for Palestine in Morocco (2021)
11:44:06	Mohammed El-Kurd, 'Palestine' (Double Down News, 2023)
11:54:00	A song from Sweden: <i>Leve Palestina</i> (Kofia, 1972/2023)

Body Counts, Balancing Acts and the Performativity of Statements

Mick Wilson

20 Dec 2023

This text considers the rhetorical conditions of formation and circulation of statements issued from within the contemporary art field on the current violences of state, para-state and non-state actors across Israel-Palestine. Such statements include not only condemnations of violence and calls to end it, but also statements of solidarity with various peoples and positions caught within the machinations of violence. These pronouncements by institutions, networks and individuals have churned out a cascading flow of denunciations and counter-denunciations.

The making of statements has been disdained by some as mere posturing or virtue signalling, waving its self-regarding semaphores while parading itself over the corpses, obscuring atrocity even as it claims to denounce it. Others point to the importance accorded such statements by different constituencies caught within the frames of conflict, when those subject to dehumanization experience a moment of humanization through affirmations of solidarity from others. Statements of this kind may also be seen as ideological arenas where competing accounts of the cultural, the political and the nature of violence are rehearsed and critiqued.

The production of these statements is enacted at various degrees of spatial and locutionary proximity or remoteness to slaughter and suffering. The following describes some aspects of the fundamentally contested rhetorical frameworks within which such statements are formed; though it does so without any hope of resolving or settling these contestations. The rhetorical mode of the statements under consideration here is epideictic, 'distributing blame', and its performative agency is that of shaming. For some decades now, the advocates of international humanitarian law have described their modus operandi as 'mobilizing shame'.¹ To condemn is, etymologically, to forcefully inflict a loss – in one sense, this is the loss of standing within a discursive community. Epideictic rhetoric proposes a delimiting of the edges of that community, placing some speakers just beyond the threshold of belonging, and radically excluding others, in a speech act that seeks to expel the condemned actor(s) from the charmed circle of those who are in good standing. This way of speaking is also an attempt, through the affect of public shaming, to modify or bring an end to the offending behaviour.

The following extracts are from art-world statements appearing in the US art press, here placed together to indicate the recursive and cascading dynamics of these condemnations.

The art world's silence speaks volumes. As a Jewish woman who's been writing about art, artists, galleries, museums, auction houses, foundations, fairs, lawsuits for more than 17 years, I feel a mix of pain, disappointment, rage, and fear. Why are the Jews being slaughtered and the art world turns a blind eye—and goes on shopping at Frieze London as

1. Thomas Keenan, 'Mobilizing Shame', *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 103, no. 2/3, Spring/Summer 2004, pp. 435–49.

if nothing happened? Where is the solidarity? Where is the empathy? Where is the moral compass?²

We demand that the institutional silence around the ongoing humanitarian crisis that 2.3 million Palestinians are facing in the occupied and besieged Gaza Strip be broken immediately ... Silence at this urgent time of crisis and escalating genocide is not a politically neutral position ... *We, the undersigned, reject violence against all civilians, regardless of their identity, and we call for ending the root cause of violence: oppression, and the occupation.*³

The decision to decry Israel's defensive actions without acknowledging this heinous act not only lacks balance but veers dangerously close to anti-Semitism ... We are distressed by the open letter recently posted on *Artforum*, which does not acknowledge the ongoing mass hostage emergency, the historical context, and the atrocities committed in Israel on October 7, 2023—the bloodiest day in Jewish history since the Holocaust. We denounce all forms of violence in Israel and Gaza and we are deeply concerned over the humanitarian crisis. We—Dominique Lévy, Brett Gorvy, Amalia Dayan—condemn the open letter for its one-sided view. We hope to foster discourse that can lead to a better understanding of the complexities involved.⁴

There is a recursive operation in how the above address the conditions, stakes, meaning and impacts of speaking and/or not speaking: 'silence speaks volumes'; 'silence ... is not a politically neutral position'; 'the decision to decry ... without acknowledging'; 'we ... condemn ... for its one-sided view. We hope to foster discourse ... lead to a better understanding of the complexities'. The action of condemnation rebounds upon itself as the speakers condemn those who have not condemned, or those who, in their condemnations, appear to have misspoken or even morally degraded themselves. Thus, these performative utterances tend towards a *mise en abyme*.

2. Katya Kazakina, "'Where Are You, People?'" The Art World's Deafening Silence After the Hamas Attack in Israel', *Artnet*, 12 October 2023, news.artnet.com.

3. By the undersigned, 'An Open Letter from the Art Community to Cultural Organizations', *Artforum*, 19 October 2023, artforum.com. Emphasis in original.

4. Dominique Lévy, Brett Gorvy, Amalia Dayan, 'A Response to the Open Letter of October 19', *Artforum*, 20 October 2023, artforum.com.

The wider discursive context of the convulsed art system – what we might, with some caution, call ‘the international public sphere’⁵ – is riven by extraordinary fault lines of moral and legal contestation and rhetorical misdirection with respect to Palestine-Israel. ‘Rhetorical misdirection’ here is used as shorthand for the way that the use of terms such as ‘apartheid’, ‘occupation’ and ‘war crime’ to designate dimensions of Israel-Palestine by ‘the highest international bodies defending human rights in the field of international relations’ is systematically downplayed within dominant global north media discourses. This effectively renders use of these terms as merely tendentious rather than as critically reasoned positions based on profoundly compelling *prima facie* evidence or clearly documented breaches of law.⁶ Such wider frames of contestation shape the discursive and affective resources deployed in art world statements. Here, it may help to pick out three fault lines: genocidal violence as the paradigmatic event demanding moral condemnation; the moral hazards of historical contextualization; and the demand for balance in what is proposed as a symmetrical rhetorical arena.⁷

Genocidal violence as the paradigmatic event demanding moral condemnation

Recently, *TIME* magazine published a piece entitled: ‘Is What’s Happening in Gaza a Genocide? Experts Weigh In’.⁸ Noting the specificities of genocide as a crime within international law, the piece concludes with contrasting views on whether a theoretical adjudication of genocide according to international law is useful or not within the horizon of a mass killing’s actual unfolding. Some scholars say it is a ‘bad use of focus’ to dwell on whether these events can be called a genocide because ‘proving whether something is a genocide takes time, and does not actually stop people from being killed.’⁹ Another commentator, Dirk Moses, writing

5. This phrase ‘the international public sphere’ is used with caution, as a general indication of a fragile nexus of public-ness that is not simply the accumulation of national public spheres. Ovidiu Țichindeleanu, in ‘The Repressive Tendency Within the European Public Sphere’, a compressed work of sharp clarity, describes the current state of ‘the European political and public spheres’ as ‘plagued by a distinct tendency to restrict freedom of expression, rather than creating meaningful dialogues across different positions’, noting that ‘these spheres are becoming increasingly isolated within global debates.’ Ovidiu Țichindeleanu, ‘The Repressive Tendency Within the European Public Sphere’, L’Internationale Online, 30 November 2023, internationaleonline.org. See also Mick Wilson: ‘This address to “the international art community” proposes an imaginary of relation, solidarity and co-responsibility that is echoed in many other controversies unfolding in the context of international contemporary art exhibitions. In referring to an imaginary of relation and solidarity, it is not meant to suggest that this is an illusory or false construction, rather it is pointing to the agency of imagination in acts of affiliation, relationship and co-belonging, in imagining community. ... This discourse and this imaginary of community are not simply the productions of statecraft, nor are they – I would propose – simply the repetitions of Eurocentric cosmopolitanisms; nor indeed are they merely pragmatic, although they may include these factors.’ Mick Wilson, ‘Other Contexts Other Conversations’, *Expo-Facto: Into the Algorithm of Exhibition*, Utrecht: Metropolis M Books, 2022, p. 35.

6. By speaking of rhetorical misdirection, I do not mean that it is wrong to suggest that these terms are fully contested by some speakers. Rather, the misdirection lies in the decentring of institutional consensus across the international community by simply framing these matters as entirely moot, or in extreme cases as if designating aspects of the regime as apartheid was an intrinsically hateful and ill-motivated speech act. See Țichindeleanu, ‘The Repressive Tendency Within the European Public Sphere’.

7. One such axis, not centred here, is the weaponization of accusations of anti-Semitism, especially through the misuse of the IHRA expanded description of anti-Semitism and its appended examples. This is currently well-attested and helpfully parsed elsewhere. See ‘Human Rights and other Civil Society Groups Urge United Nations to Respect Human Rights in the Fight Against Antisemitism’, Human Rights Watch, 4 April 2023, hrw.org; and Kenneth Stern, ‘I drafted the definition of antisemitism. Rightwing Jews are weaponizing it’, *Guardian*, 13 December 2019, theguardian.com.

8. Solcyre Burga, ‘Is What’s Happening in Gaza a Genocide? Experts Weigh In’, *TIME*, 13 November 2023, time.com.

9. Ibid.

specifically in response to the current violence in Palestine-Israel, recently argued in the *Boston Review* that: ‘The point of genocide claims is not only legal and strategic but—as with the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the Chinese treatment of Uyghur citizens—urgent and moral, concerned both with saving lives or stemming humanitarian disaster.’¹⁰

‘Genocide’ as a term is not limited to its juridical construction as a specific crime within international humanitarian law. It is also a symbolic ‘crime of crimes’ that points to population-scale killing, biopolitical projects of ethnic purification and territory acquisition, and the destruction of conditions of life. The term has a complicated genealogy. Although the Ottoman genocide of the Armenians was an important precedent for the elaboration of the term in international law, it is the Nazi genocide of the Jews that serves as the preeminent instance and the fundamental image of genocide in the international public sphere. Despite scholarly debate, this image of genocide is constructed in terms of modalities of hatred rather than as a specific form of systematically reasoned political violence.¹¹

Genocide is popularly construed as a crime of collective affect as epitomised by the hatemongering anti-Semitic animus of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* rather than the calculation and legal niceties recorded in the Protocol of the Wannsee Conference.¹² Thus even the industrial, bureaucratic and thoroughly rationalized methodologies of slaughter are seen as secondary to the primary logics of hatred and cruelty. This modelling of genocide as the extreme terminus of an arc of hate crime has a bearing on the latitude created in international law for states to slaughter civilians and non-combatants during war.

Proving ... acts of genocide is extraordinarily difficult given the parameters set by international law. That is no accident. When state parties to the UNGC negotiated in 1947 and 1948,

10. A. Dirk Moses, ‘More than Genocide’, *Boston Review*, 14 November 2023, bostonreview.net.

11. There is a longstanding arc of debate on these issues that at one time was cast as an historiographical debate between ‘functionalists’ and ‘intentionalists’, and which is also contingent upon the question of the uniqueness and incomparability of the Holocaust. This has been most recently reprised in an exchange between Saul Friedländer and A. Dirk Moses, where the stakes of Holocaust historiography are explicitly tied to contemporary international relations and the repression of public dissent on these matters in Germany. The salient point here is the contested ways in which historical analysis posits ‘hate’ as a motive force and primary explanatory device in respect of mass violence. Rather than hatred as exclusively a matter of *explanans*, it would seem that it in turn requires to be treated as *explanandum*. See Saul Friedländer, ‘A Fundamentally Singular Crime’, *The Journal of Holocaust Research*, vol. 36, no. 1, 2022, pp. 39–43, and A. Dirk Moses, *The Problems of Genocide: Permanent Security and the Language of Transgression*, Cambridge University Press, 2021.

12. See ‘Protocol of the Wannsee Conference, January 20, 1942’, Yad Vashem, The World Holocaust Remembrance Center, yadvashem.org, and ‘Wannsee Protocol’, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Holocaust Encyclopaedia, encyclopedia.ushmm.org.

they distinguished genocidal intent from military necessity so that states could wage the kind of wars that Russia and Israel are conducting today and avoid prosecution for genocide. The high legal standard stems from the restrictive UNGC definition of genocide, which was modelled on the Holocaust and requires that a perpetrator intend to ‘destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such’ (the *dolus specialis*) in at least one of five prescribed ways (the *actus reus*). The words ‘as such’ are widely regarded as imposing a stringent intent requirement: an act counts as genocide only if individuals are targeted solely by virtue of their group membership—like Jews during World War II—and not for strategic reasons like suppressing an insurgency. Despite many assertions of Palestinian collective guilt by Israeli leaders, they also insist that the IDF targets Hamas as a security threat, and not Palestinians ‘as such.’ If the Holocaust is unique, as commonly asserted, how are other cases of mass violence against civilians supposed to measure up? The point is that it is very difficult to do so.¹³

Genocide, as the target of moral condemnation, is fraught, then, not only as something that must be tested against a highly particularised, contingent and demanding definitional framework, but one that also intersects with the specificity of the Holocaust.

The legal ambiguation of the latest violence is not limited to questions of genocide. The International Bar Association recently reflected on the appropriate juridical framing of the 7 October Hamas attack, also described by some as genocidal in its indiscriminate attack on civilians and its framing in terms of hatred of the Jews, underlining that this too is a matter of disputed legal categorization, because: ‘there’s no universal agreement as to what law applies to the conflict between Israel and Hamas’, the 7 October attack included. Some argue that ‘the law of occupation applies in all occupied Palestinian territories’ and that ‘Israel, which disputes that Palestine is a state to which Geneva Convention IV and the law of occupation could apply, rejects this position.’¹⁴ Others argue that the ‘attack falls under the law of non-international armed conflict between Israel and Hamas, a non-state actor’, and yet others ‘argue that the attack doesn’t fall under international humanitarian law at all, but constitutes a lesser form of collective violence, such as internal disturbances or terrorism falling within the ambit of domestic Israeli

13. A. Dirk Moses, *The Problems of Genocide: Permanent Security and the Language of Transgression*.

14. John Balouziyeh cited in Yola Verbruggen, ‘The Israel-Hamas conflict’, *IBA Global Insight*, 30 November 2023, ibanet.org.

law, which in any case prohibits murder, kidnappings and the taking of hostages.’¹⁵ Regardless of intentions, this proposed or generated uncertainty of legal construction contributes to a rhetorical framing of violent events as somehow undecidable or unknowable and further exacerbates the sense that a clear moral pronouncement is both required yet somehow obstructed and obfuscated.

The moral hazards of historical contextualization

Condemnations are typically caught up in multiple axes of contestation, not just in terms of what precise moral or juridical categorization applies to the violence condemned, but also with regard to which forms of historicization or contextualization are allowed or acceptable. For example, when the Secretary-General of the UN António Guterres asserted that the 7 October attacks by Hamas were ‘appalling’ but ‘did not happen in a vacuum’ he was accused of giving a ‘justification for terrorism and murder.’¹⁶ Guterres noted that the Palestinians ‘have been subjected to 56 years of suffocating occupation’ and ‘have seen their land steadily devoured by settlements and plagued by violence; their economy stifled; their people displaced and their homes demolished. Their hopes for a political solution to their plight have been vanishing.’¹⁷ His explicit condemnation – ‘the grievances of the Palestinian people cannot justify the appalling attacks by Hamas. And those appalling attacks cannot justify the collective punishment of the Palestinian people’ – appeared to some to be diluted or negated by this historical contextualization. The Israeli ambassador to the UN, Gilad Erdan, declared that everyone ‘understands well that the meaning of the words is Israel has guilt for the actions of Hamas or at the very least it shows his understanding of the “background” leading up to the massacre that Hamas perpetrated.’ Again, the accusation of moral failure is not only an attempted act of shaming and exclusion, it is also a reflexive move, proposed to delimit what is, and what is not, the correct way to parse another’s utterance of condemnation.

Judith Butler, in a measured and precisely formulated text in the *London Review of Books*, published in the immediate aftermath of 7 October, has written of the frameworks that are available when one wishes ‘to speak about the violence, the present violence, the history of violence and its many forms.’¹⁸ Butler describes how the impulse to speak hits an immediate obstruction as the available frameworks make ‘it nearly impossible to say what one has to say’. Butler questions how the narrative framing of current violence within a larger arc of histories and systems of violence is seen by some as necessarily standing ‘in the way of strong moral condemnation’. As an example of a proposed contextualization or historical narrative that proceeds in error, Butler cites the Harvard Palestine Solidarity Committee who made a statement that ‘the apartheid regime is the only one to blame’ for Hamas’s deadly attacks. This is identified by Butler as an error in moral reasoning. Butler’s own position is clear: ‘Israeli violence against Palestinians is overwhelming:

15. Ibid.

16. Patrick Wintour and Ed Pilkington, ‘UN chief “shocked” by “misrepresentation” of comments in row with Israel’, *Guardian*, 26 October 2023, theguardian.com. See also 9451st Meeting, UN Security Council: ‘Amid Increasingly Dire Humanitarian Situation in Gaza, Secretary-General Tells Security Council Hamas Attacks Cannot Justify Collective Punishment of Palestinian People’, United Nations Meetings Coverage and Press Releases, 24 October 2023, press.un.org.

17. Ibid.

18. Judith Butler ‘The Compass of Mourning’, *London Review of Books*, vol. 45, no. 20, 19 October 2023, lrb.co.uk.

relentless bombing, the killing of people of every age in their homes and on the streets, torture in their prisons, techniques of starvation in Gaza and the dispossession of homes'; however, to use this 'to exonerate Hamas' is 'corrupt' moral reasoning since 'nothing should exonerate Hamas from responsibility for the hideous killings they have perpetrated'. Butler asserts that a condemnation may contextualise, historicise, make meaningful, but still not in any way seek to exonerate those responsible for atrocities.

Historical contextualization and narrative, even without claiming a causal sequence, disrupts a reductive account of violence as a spontaneous outburst of evil. Any approach that places the event of violence in relation to questions of meaning or a context of emergence may seem especially troubling to victims of that violence or to those who wish to denounce it as simply the eruption of 'pure cruelty'.¹⁹ Saying that murderers are human agents with human purposes that unfold in extreme and all-consuming violations of other humans seems inconsistent with the idea of a 'sheer evil' that erupts from a reservoir of timeless hatred.²⁰ Identifying contexts, histories or frames of legibility for atrocity is seen as diluting condemnation. It may even appear to some to give succour to the bearers of violence. A judgement on violence, a condemnation that is supplemented, prefaced or structured by a contextualization of that violence, appears for some not to augment its moral force but rather to dilute it. When speaking of violence, anything that nuances atrocity is already seen by some as an apology or equivocation rather than effective condemnation.

The rhetorical struggle over what is acceptable and unacceptable in contextualising the 7 October attacks can be contrasted with how the Holocaust is invoked as a referential field in other accounts of these atrocities. The number of people killed in the Hamas attack of 7 October has been consistently transposed into the figure of 'the single largest murder of Jews since the Holocaust', most influentially perhaps in Biden's 'I would argue it's the deadliest day for Jews since the Holocaust.'²¹ Likewise, CNN carried a headline that read: 'October 7 was the deadliest day for Jews since the Holocaust. The Shoah Foundation is now documenting it.'²² The rhetorical force here is not simply in communicating the enormity of the number of fatalities in a single day. The invocation of the Holocaust positions Hamas as an agent of violence in continuity with the genocidal project of Nazism. This framing reactivates the construction of Hamas, the Palestinians or the Arabs as anachronistic proxies for the Nazis, already a well-established trope within discourse on Israel-Palestine.²³ This construction activates a powerful semantic nexus of world-historical criminality and archetypal evil, proposing a moral equivalence between Nazi genocidal violence and Palestinian violent *and* nonviolent resistance, all reduced to interchangeable instances of virulent, all-consuming anti-Semitism.²⁴

In most other contexts, the use of explicit or implicit analogy with Nazism and the Holocaust is viewed as deeply problematic. Indeed, for some,

19. 'This attack was a campaign of pure cruelty – not just hate, but pure cruelty – against the Jewish people.' President Joe Biden, 'Remarks by President Biden and Second Gentleman Douglas Emhoff at Roundtable with Jewish Community Leaders', The White House, Briefing Room Speeches and Remarks, 11 October 2023, [whitehouse.gov](https://www.whitehouse.gov).

20. 'Terrorist groups like Hamas brought not only terror, but sheer evil – sheer evil to the world.' President Joe Biden, *op. cit.*

21. *Ibid.*

22. Nick Watt, 'October 7 was the deadliest day for Jews since the Holocaust. The Shoah Foundation is now documenting it', CNN, 10 November 2023, edition.cnn.com.

23. Ilan Pappé, *The idea of Israel: A History of Power and Knowledge*, London: Verso, 2014, pp. 153–78.

24. This rhetorical move seems to equivocate the moral significance of the non-Jewish victims of Hamas, such as the Thai migrant labourers murdered on 7 October. For some

it is, in a profound sense, unholy. However, in this rhetorical framing of the body count of 7 October, such correlation serves to mobilise the Holocaust as a suasive resource, at once describing the enormity of violence and decontextualising it from proximate conditions of emergence such as dispossession and occupation.

The rhetorical instrumentalization of the Holocaust is a highly contested space. B'Tselem – The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, has consistently avoided invoking the taboo images of the Holocaust or Nazism in its condemnations of Israeli state violence. Instead, it itemises and evidences human rights violations in their immediate specificity and factuality, rather than through analogy or relay to other historical events. Even B'Tselem's use of the term 'apartheid' in relation to the Israeli territorial regime avoids analogical reasoning in favour of a definitional approach: "Apartheid" has long been an independent term, entrenched in international conventions, referring to a regime's organizing principle: systematically promoting the dominance of one group over another and working to cement it.²⁵ However, B'Tselem has challenged what it sees as the leveraging of the Holocaust for political purposes. In 2020, in anticipation of the possibility that Netanyahu might use the seventy-fifth anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz and the Fifth World Holocaust Forum in Jerusalem as an opportunity to call on the International community to back Israel's claim that the International Criminal Court has no jurisdiction in the Occupied Territories, Hagai El-Ad, the executive director of B'Tselem asserted: 'Netanyahu didn't invent the idea of leveraging the Holocaust for political gain. Yet he is taking even that low to new depths, stripping Palestinians of basic human rights in the name of the survivors of the Holocaust.'²⁶

In an attempt to operate a different historical contextualization, some have asked the question as to whether the current Gaza bombardments and wave of intensified West Bank settler violence constitute a second Nakba.²⁷ Francesca Albanese, UN special rapporteur on human rights in occupied Palestinian territories has said that: 'There is a grave danger that what we are witnessing may be a repeat of the 1948 Nakba'.²⁸ 'Al Nakba', meaning 'catastrophe' in Arabic, refers to the massacres, mass displacement and dispossession of Palestinians during the 1948 Palestine war and within the establishment of the Israeli state. This contextualization attempts to position current violence within a decades-long narrative of dispossession.

Here, invoking the Nakba may be understood as a countermove to the Holocaustal framings of Palestinian resistance in general and Hamas's attacks of 7 October – and indeed all anti-Zionist and anti-Israel mobilizations – as simply the continuation of Nazi anti-Semitism: The figure of Al Nakba seeks to reinstall the story of dispossession and ethnic cleansing into the foundational moment of the Israeli state and into the ongoing matrices of political violence. For some the Nakba is not a completed historical event, but the open horizon of contemporary violence in Israel-Palestine. The figure of 'a second Nakba' then seeks to position current violence not as an episodic outburst of ongoing violence, but

speakers the call for balance is a request for all deaths being equally grievable, while for other speakers the call for balance seems to mean adherence to the symmetrical construction of two opposing forces, constructed in diametrical opposition without any middle or third terms: two sides, the Jews and the Palestinians.

25. 'A reign of Jewish supremacy from the Jordan river to the Mediterranean sea: this is Apartheid,' B'Tselem, 12 January 2021, btselem.org.

26. Hagai El-Ad, 'Netanyahu Exploits the Holocaust to Brutalize the Palestinians', *Haaretz*, 23 January 2020, [haaretz.com](https://www.haaretz.com). It appears from the published transcript in the *Times of Israel* that while Netanyahu did seek to mobilize the Holocaust as both an overwhelming rationale for the existence of Israel, and as a reason to mobilize against 'the Tyrants of Tehran', he did not make the specific anticipated rhetorical move in his main speech at the congress. See Benjamin Netanyahu, cited in Toi Staff, 'The world turned its back on us: Full text of Netanyahu's Holocaust Forum speech', *Times of Israel*, 23 January 2023, [timesofisrael.com](https://www.timesofisrael.com). However, see also Noa Landau, 'Netanyahu to Use Holocaust Forum to Boost Support for Israel Against the ICC', *Haaretz*, 21 January 2020, [haaretz.com](https://www.haaretz.com).

rather as a repetition and extension of the violence that established the current territorial, demographic and conflict dynamics of Palestine-Israel.²⁹

The different ways of invoking historical contexts, frames and resonances identified in the preceding paragraphs might seem to suggest a simple symmetry of rhetorical moves or devices deployed within a dichotomous universe of discourse: two sides, two views. However, this reduces the possible positions of all speakers to two in an absolute binary. This is to misconstrue the rhetorical dynamics. It feeds a reductive identitarian framing of conflict divorced from an analysis of the ongoing redistribution of resources and the basic conditions for life. Describing rhetorical agency is not simply a matter of itemising tropes or assigning utterances to appropriate rhetorical categories of genre, figure, theme, device, mode of address, and so forth. The suasive power of different rhetorical manoeuvres is calibrated by extra-discursive factors such as the material and infrastructural resources that are deployed in the mediation and dissemination of a given rhetorical gambit. The assignment of a differential ethos and legitimacy to speakers within a given discursive arena is also a key dimension in shaping the suasive potentials of different rhetorical moves and delimiting the repertoire of possible utterances available to a given speaker.

Balance: the demand for symmetrical rhetorical responses

When a speaker picks some human horror so as to denounce it as atrocious, they will on occasion be challenged for their selectivity. Why is this particular violent actor and action chosen for moral condemnation but not another? Why is this scene of violation a target of empathy and moral outrage when another comparable scene is not specifically itemised and named? Why do passions flow here and why are they restrained there? These questions are also rhetorical devices used within the formulation of condemnation. They propose a special kind of moral calculus that interrogates the selective distribution of outrage, empathy and identification. This appears as an extraordinarily difficult challenge to anyone who utters a condemnation, as the world has no shortage of horror, atrocity and surpassing violences. However, this moral calculus is usually diverted by the invocation of a covering statement: 'We condemn all violence.'³⁰

With respect to Hamas's violence of 7 October, the violence of the occupation, and the current wave of slaughter of children and non-combatants in Gaza, 'we condemn all violence' is usually not sufficient to meet the demand that condemnations be equally distributed, i.e., be 'balanced'. The *Artforum* letter of 19 October 2023, that concludes: 'We, the undersigned, reject violence against all civilians, regardless of their identity', was met, in the 'Response to the Open Letter of October 19', by the challenge that the letter 'does not acknowledge the ongoing mass hostage emergency, the historical context, and the atrocities committed

27. Mohammed R. Mhawish, "'A second Nakba': Echoes of 1948, as Israel orders Palestinians to leave', Al Jazeera, 14 October 2023, [aljazeera.com](https://www.aljazeera.com), and Kyle Rempfer, 'Israeli operations uprooted Palestinians in 1948. Many fear a repeat', *The Washington Post*, 3 November 2023, [washingtonpost.com](https://www.washingtonpost.com).

28. OHCHR, 'UN expert warns of new instance of mass ethnic cleansing of Palestinians, calls for immediate ceasefire', United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, Press Releases | Special Procedures, 14 October 2023, [ohchr.org](https://www.ohchr.org).

29. It is notable that in the last decade, the word 'Nakba' has been established as a familiar term within the international public sphere. The growing currency of the term and its use in framing the founding of the Israeli state as a day of mourning is apparent in the 2011 formulation of a so-called Nakba law: 'Fundamentals of Finance – Amendment No. 40'. This law authorises the Israeli Minister of Finance to withhold transfer of state funds if the primary goal of the funds is to refer to the Israeli Independence Day or the founding day of the country as a day of mourning for Al Nakba.

30. It is not possible here to unpack this wider moral calculus; however, it is important to register the specific rhetorical challenge that it enacts.

in Israel on October 7, 2023'. The 'Response' also includes a covering condemnation of violence: 'We denounce all forms of violence in Israel and Gaza', but makes no specific reference to any atrocity other than those commissioned by Hamas, and makes no reference to violence in the West Bank. The refusal to accept a covering denunciation of violence as adequate to demonstrate some imagined moral objectivity while invoking the same device points again to the strange *mise en abyme* of the condemnation genre.

Proposing an absolute polarity within the discursive field – two sides, two views – is also at work in the demands for balance in condemnations of violence. Calling for balance entails a difficult calibration when it comes to the grim ledger of body counts. Elsewhere, I have attempted to discuss how the body count appears paradoxically as a way to speak truth to power and as a technique of biopolitical governance.³¹ The counting of the dead is again shaped by rhetorical means, as we have seen already in the numbering of the dead of 7 October. The rhetorical latitude in specifying the scale of a massacre is clear if we contrast Lévy, Gorvy and Dayan's reference to 'the bloodiest day in Jewish history since the Holocaust' with Lior Haiat's count, in an official statement from Israel's foreign ministry: 'Around 1,200 is the official number of victims of the October 7 massacre'.³² The scale of subsequent killing by the IDF in Gaza of civilians and non-combatants is far greater; this body count is unfolding in a different register, and still rising. That the infrastructure of health, education and public archive are systematically targeted for reduction to complete rubble also speaks to a strategically different order of democidal violence. There are many sources that disclose the comparative volumes of deaths between the 'two sides'. This Manichaeic logic of 'two sides, two views' discloses the radical asymmetries in casualty rates – a radical asymmetry that is not limited to the current phase of violence, but is rather a structural feature of the decades of ongoing violence in Israel-Palestine. This is just one of many asymmetries that intersect with the challenge of achieving the requisite balance in framing condemnations.

The body count also brings us back to the question of the ethos assigned to different speakers. The numbers of fatalities for 7 October have been revised down from 'more than 1,400' to 'around 1,200', a revision that took place on 10 November. The numbers of the dead and injured being provided by institutional sources in Gaza have been framed as subject to doubt and unreliability because of the overwhelming destruction within which the body counts are produced, but also, and more decisively, because they are authored by what is termed as 'the Gaza-based Ministry of Health – an agency in the Hamas-controlled government',³³ or 'the Health Ministry in Hamas-run Gaza'.³⁴ There is an asymmetric distribution of ethos here as Israeli state institutional sources are accorded more reliability or trustworthiness than Gaza-based institutions in the dominant media. Given the strategic importance of disinformation campaigns, and given the institutional asymmetries between Israeli state and Palestinian quasi-state (and dependent) apparatuses across Palestine-Israel it would seem to recommend against according a differential ethos of truthfulness

31. The counting of the dead, as with the census of the living, is of course a central technique within that great European project of biopolitics and the management of populations, identified in the historico-philosophical analyses of Michel Foucault. Enlightened state husbandry and care for the life of populations have long since grown to become the earnest engines of 'vital massacres' that shape the dispossessions, the famines, and the genocides that compose colonial modernity. See M. Wilson, 'To Live the Coming Death', M. Hlavajova & W. Maas (eds.) *Propositions for Non-Fascist Living*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2019, pp. 165–79.

32. 'Israel revises Hamas attack death toll to "around 1,200"', Reuters, 10 November 2023, [reuters.com](https://www.reuters.com).

33. Isabel Debre, 'What is Gaza's Ministry of Health and how does it calculate the war's death toll?', AP News, 6 November 2023, [apnews.com](https://www.apnews.com).

34. Saskia O'Donoghue, 'Israel-Hamas war: Death toll surpasses 15,000 and new truce deemed "unlikely" as talks break down', Euronews, 2 December 2023, [euronews.com](https://www.euronews.com).

or trustworthiness here. Especially given the ample evidence for a systematic misrepresentation of the violence of occupation by the Israeli state as extensively documented by 'Breaking the Silence', an organization of veteran soldiers who have served in the Israeli military since the start of the Second Intifada and have taken it upon themselves to expose the public to the reality of everyday life in the Occupied Territories.³⁵

You are speaking about the conditions of speaking, but people are dying

Returning to Butler's piece for the *LRB*, they note that 'almost immediately, people want to know what 'side' you are on, and clearly the only possible response to such killings is unequivocal condemnation'. It is striking that, in identifying frameworks that both enable and limit speaking, and in identifying the demand to 'take sides', one of the first limits pronounced by Butler is that a speaker must unequivocally condemn 'such violence'. This opens a question as to where the perpetrators of such violence are placed, with respect to the community of speakers that is speaking or that is spoken for, by Butler. Where does pronouncing this 'unequivocal' limit place the bearers, advocates, apologists and strategists of such violence with respect to 'our' community of speakers?³⁶ The killers presumably cannot both enact such violence and condemn it unequivocally. So, because 'the only possible response to such killings is unequivocal condemnation', they are in a place of impossible response, beyond the community of speakers. There seems to be a misfire, an infelicity, in the condemnation, which in seeking to denounce violence somehow slips towards disavowing it as an event, positioning it as something always already beyond the pale, out there behind the wall that gathers us within the charmed circle of communicative reason.

We have seen how some speakers are caught in the knot of what must be condemned, of what must be condemned as unspeakable evil, and the rhetorical frameworks that make it 'nearly impossible to say what one has to say.'³⁷ There are others, caught immediately and mediately within the nexus of violence, who are placed, in different ways, among the unspeaking: the infants not yet able to speak, and so many that never will; the many newly dead who do not speak; those made speechless by atrocity; and those who will not speak though they can, because they fear to say something wrong, something cruel or hateful, or somehow to misspeak and so to summon a condemnation upon themselves as the bearers of the unspeakable, as the agents of violence, as hateful speakers with hate-filled speech. No itemization of speaking and unspeaking positions will be adequate or comprehensive. No speaker,³⁸ regardless of position, can speak so as to encompass all other speakers and unspeakers.

In speaking myself (and at some length) about the conditions of speaking, it may be pointed out that I have lost sight of what needs to be spoken about. The statements that I began with speak of systematic violences,

35. See 'About', *Breaking the Silence*, breakingthesilence.org.

36. The discursive constituency.

37. Butler, 'The Compass of Mourning'.

38. Perhaps especially a foolish speaker who might moot the possibility.

calculated death-making, the slaughtering not just of persons but of whole peoples. They speak of a need to say something. Yet in trying to map how such speaking is contested, perhaps my words simply obscure the world-murdering violence that seems, at first, to call out to us to speak.

So what does all this speaking seek to accomplish? To disclose the truth of the world? To delimit what is legitimate and what is illegitimate violence? To indicate who may be killed and who should not be? To calculate the proportionality of body counts? To narrativise and contextualise eventual violence? To mourn the dead? To valorise the living? To negotiate the untruth, disinformation and propaganda of the agents of violence? To address the targets of violence as fellow beings, to propose to be in relation with the killed and the wounded, to be in solidarity with those of 'us' who are being, and have been slaughtered? To produce the speaker as complicit, or as innocent, or as enraged bystander? To call attention to those who are not allowed to speak? To stop the violence? To delegitimise the demand to stop the violence? To describe the frameworks that limit the possibility of what may be spoken? To equivocate violences? To speak over and drown out the voices of those targeted for killing?

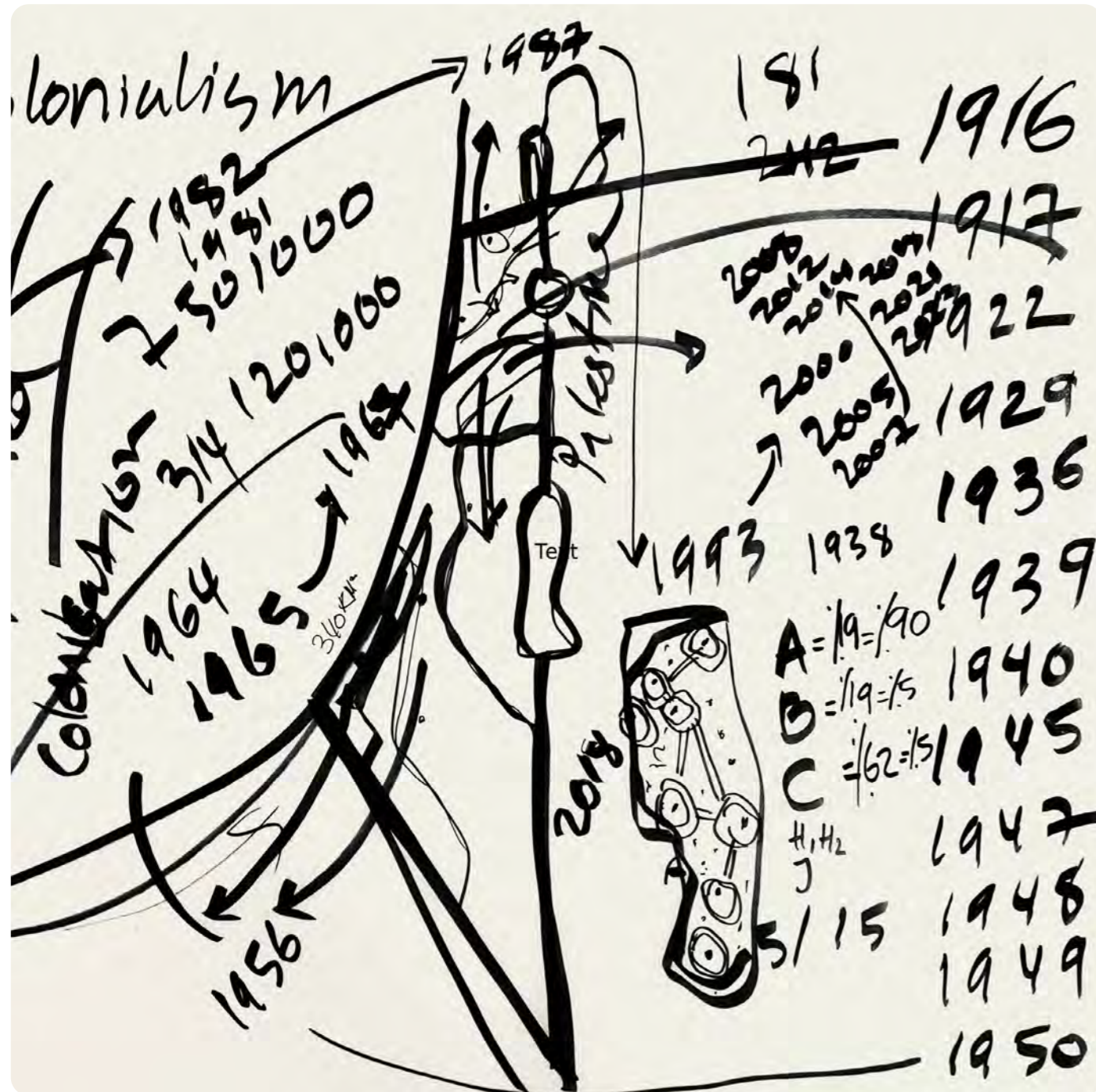
I have attempted to speak about some of the rhetorical conditions that enable and limit speaking. I have done so, perhaps naively, imagining that this might marginally adjust such frameworks, at least for some speakers. More broadly, I would like to propose that the act of speaking could become part of the work of listening. This is not to evoke the listening rhetoric of the men of letters, nor to call for 'understanding' between 'two sides'. But rather to call for listening to these wretched violences as themselves so many speech acts: violences articulating grievances, lies, self-righteous rages, vicious bloodlusts, vengeful spites; violences that may be speaking in bad faith, but are speaking nonetheless. It is an integral part of the atrocity of these endlessly cruel acts that – vile, extreme, mendacious and unspeakable as they are – they are not simply meaningless. They are acts not of *pure* cruelty but cruelty adulterated with meaning, perhaps even as saturated with meaning as they are saturated in blood.

The impulse towards utterance that we experience in response to the mediated address of violence – mediated, that is, for those of us not already cast into the killing zone – is more than an unfolding of position or moral judgement. It is the force of affect pulsing through our broken collective body as it is battered and addressed by violence, and confounded as to what it suffers in the suffering of others. Perhaps we end up merely vocalising in the impossibility of reciprocal call and response. Perhaps we end up not speaking at all. Perhaps we mutter dumbly amid murdered and murdering worlds. Yet still, these violences hail 'us' – the 'us' that is to be counted among the living and the dead.

Right now,
today, we must
say that
Palestine is
the centre
of the world

Françoise Vergès

21 Dec 2023



Courtesy Learning Palestine Group, 2023

They said they were victims. They said you were Arabs.

They called your apartments and gardens guerrilla strongholds.

They called the screaming devastation that they created the rubble.

Then they told you to leave, didn't they?

– June Jordan, 1982¹

In 1982, June Jordan, African American poet, playwright and essayist, wrote 'Apologies to All the People in Lebanon', after the Israeli-backed massacre of Palestinian refugees in the camps of Sabra and Shatila (Lebanon). The poem made Jordan the target of vicious charges of anti-Semitism. Between the mid-1980s and mid-1990s, she could not publish. Jordan taught us what it means to be in the world, rather than merely observing it, which acknowledges the messiness of the practical, of the not-perfect; in other words, when principles – love of life, demand for dignity and equality – must live within contradictions. The refusal to consider that we live within contradictions led to the silencing of debate, smearing, distortions and censorship. Weaponizing anti-Semitism has long been used to silence the criticism of the politics of the State of Israel. This is what we are witnessing again since Hamas's 7 October attack in Israel, which led to 1,200 deaths and around 240 hostages taken to the Gaza Strip.

At the time of writing, on 7 December 2023, Israeli bombing of Gaza has led to the death of more than 17,400 Palestinians – babies, children, women and men of all ages – and an estimated 7,600 missing under the rubble.² On 8 December 2023, a ceasefire resolution in Gaza backed by more than ninety member states at the United Nations was vetoed by US Ambassador Robert A. Wood.³ After the vote, he declared that a ceasefire 'would only plant the seeds for the next war – because Hamas has no desire to see a durable peace, to see a two-state solution'.⁴ Demands for a ceasefire have been systematically rejected by the State of Israel and its allies. A ceasefire is simply a *temporary* suspension of fighting, a truce. It is certainly not *peace*. For decades now, ceasefires have been replacing peace in military conflict, but even that moment of truce is presented as a threat to an order founded on systemic violence, censorship, and repression. Rosa Luxemburg called that moment 'armed peace', militarism by other means,⁵ in a state of permanent war, imperialism and settler colonialism. Gaza today brings to light the necessity of war for a settler colony masked as a war for civilization.

1. June Jordan, 'Apologies to All the People in Lebanon', in *Directed By Desire: The Collected Poems of June Jordan*, Port Townsend, WA: Copper Canyon Press, 2005 [1982], poetryfoundation.org.

2. See Virginia Pietromarchi and Usaid Siddiqui, 'Israel-Hamas war updates: Gaza death toll surpasses 17,700', Al Jazeera, 9 December 2023, aljazeera.com; BBC Verify team, 'How the dead are counted in Gaza', BBC News, 16 November 2023, bbc.com; and Julian Borger, 'Civilians make up 61% of Gaza deaths from airstrikes, Israeli study finds', *Guardian*, 9 December 2023, theguardian.com.

3. The vote took place on 12 December and was passed by a majority of 153 in favour and 10 against, with 23 abstentions. 'UN General Assembly votes by large majority for immediate humanitarian ceasefire during emergency session', UN News, United Nations, 12 December 2023, news.un.org.

4. Mallory Moench, 'U.S. Receives Backlash for Vetoing U.N. Resolution Calling for Gaza Ceasefire', *Time*, 9 December 2023, time.com.

5. 'Peace Utopias', 1911 (first published: *Leipziger Volkzeitung*, 6 and 8 May 1911, reprinted in shorter form in *Die Internationale*, January 1926), marxists.org.

Liberal democracy and settler-colonial regime

When Isaac Herzog, president of Israel, declared on MSNBC, 'This war is not only a war between Israel and Hamas, it's a war that is intended, really, truly, to save western civilization. To save the values of western civilization',⁶ he could not have been clearer. Western wars have long been waged to impose, enforce, and save western 'values'. These values just *are*, immediately comprehensible and recognizable, evidently principled, moral, and noble. Herzog's understanding of the necessity of waging war to save western civilization against an essentialist threat belongs to the long history of the fiction that sustains settler nation-states. Settler colonialism seeks 'to obscure the persistence of colonialism as anything other than a historical trace, as well as to ostensibly naturalize settlers by habitation and descent'.⁷ States such as the United States, Canada, New Zealand and Australia, which have been founded on genocides, ethnic cleansing, segregation, land theft and structural racism present themselves as liberal republican democracies. The US, Canada and Australia have been able to claim to defend freedom and human rights while their cities were built on the corpses and villages of the peoples they exterminated, while they stole Indigenous children from their families and took them to horrendous boarding schools where they were harassed, beaten, tortured, killed and subjected to forced assimilation. While not the focus of this text, there are many who work to resist or bypass these regimes founded on genocide. The purpose of reiterating the ramifications of these regimes is to underscore how they are shaping the response to Palestine now. These nation states possess internationally acclaimed museums with prestigious collections of stolen objects from colonized or exterminated peoples. They have a veto right at the United Nations Security Council. Their decisions about climate disaster and militarism affect the whole world. They launch devastating wars with total impunity. But their declared love of liberty, of women's rights, of children, of freedom of expression, they claim, is limitless. They love children more than any other people. Why would the State of Israel not feel entitled to follow their example? If these states had succeeded in hiding their crimes, if they had been able to protect each of their criminals from being tried, why not Israel? These countries are the embodiment of a benevolent and civilized order, while the crimes of other states have tainted their reputation. Colonial occupation inevitably contaminates liberal democracy, laws must be adopted to protect property rights over stolen land, to distinguish between citizens, to militarize society, and a feeling of being under constant threat must be nurtured. That sentiment is not wrong, settlers know that those whom they discriminate against, humiliate, criminalize, hold dreams of revenge, as Frantz Fanon has shown, but they also entertain a sense of omnipotence that when it is shattered push them to terror and violence. Interests are economic, ideological and psychic. In a 1986 speech, then US Senator Joe Biden, now president, said it well: 'Whether or not [there was] an Israeli State, the US would have to invent an Israel to protect our interest in the region.'⁸ Indeed, the US has largely contributed to making Israel into 'the only democracy in the Middle East', where gays and women enjoy full rights. Biden was not talking about a land for the Jews, but about a militarized front post of

6. See 'Israeli president: War against Hamas intended to "save the values of Western civilization"', MSNBC, YouTube, 5 December 2023, [youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com).

7. Alyosha Goldstein, 'Where the Nation Takes Place: Proprietary Regimes, Antistatism, and U.S. Settler Colonialism', *South Atlantic Quarterly*, change to: vol. 107, no. 4, Fall 2008: p. 834.

8 'Joe Biden says if Israel didn't exist, the US would have to invent one to protect US interests', Senate Session, YouTube, 6 June 1986, [youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com).

imperialism, with its homo-nationalism and femo-nationalism. Supporting Israel is for the West the proof that the European genocide against the Jews is forgiven while delegating them the task to get rid of Palestinians. The double move innocents the West.

What is urgent is total ceasefire, the withdrawal of Israeli troops from Gaza, and the end of brutal repression in the West Bank. Killing has to stop. People are dying, entire social infrastructures are being destroyed with the goal of forbidding social life. Around the world, immediate ceasefire has been a rallying cry, especially among the youth. Despite defamatory accusations, incredible social pressure, threats, and punishment, huge protests are taking place. This is why it is important to document in Europe and North America, acts of censorship and witch hunt, their vocabulary and representations for what they reveal in the current moment of the rise of far-right parties and libertarianism. Further, there is a Left that has not undertaken a process of decolonization, adhering to the old argument of a civilizing mission as justification for colonization. Little has changed since 1956, when Aimé Césaire resigned from the then very powerful French Communist Party, denouncing its deafness and blindness to the colonial question, and to racism, writing:

This is not a desire to fight alone and a disdain for all alliances. It is a desire to distinguish between alliance and subordination, solidarity and resignation. It is exactly the latter of these pairs that threatens us in some of the glaring flaws we find in the members of the French Communist Party: their inveterate assimilationism; their unconscious chauvinism; their fairly simplistic faith, which they share with bourgeois Europeans, in the omnilateral superiority of the west; their belief that evolution as it took place in Europe is the only evolution possible, the only kind desirable, the kind the whole world must undergo; to sum up, their rarely avowed but real belief in civilization with a capital C and progress with a capital P (as evidenced by their hostility to what they disdainfully call 'cultural relativism').⁹

9. Aimé Césaire, 'Letter to Maurice Thorez', *Social Text* 103, vol. 28, no. 2, Summer 2010: p. 149, [abahlali.org](https://www.abahlali.org).

For this reason the liberation of Palestine (and this has nothing to do with deciding for the Palestinians which political movements they chose to follow) strikes at the heart of a western modernity built on racialization and colonization. What is at stake is the abolition of the colonial as an ideological, economic, and visual regime of oppression, extraction, dispossession and exploitation.

‘Palestine is the centre of the world at this moment’

If I am talking here about another example of censorship, it is to contribute to the documentation of a moment: the weaponization of anti-Semitism. At the beginning of 2023, I was in a group of friends who thought that we – decolonial, feminist, anti-racist intellectuals, artists and activists – had to intervene against the weaponization of anti-Semitism and feminism by the right, the far right and some on the institutional Left.¹⁰ We decided it was essential that this analytical work should be done in public with the voices of intellectuals and activists. We thought of inviting Judith Butler for her writing and her membership in the important organization Jewish Voice for Peace; Jeremy Corbyn, for his persistent solidarity with the people of Palestine that led to his expulsion by the Labour leadership and anti-Zionist French Jewish organizations.

Following the attack by Hamas on 7 October, organizing a public meeting along what we had imagined at the beginning of 2023 became more urgent than ever. Despite divergent opinions of Hamas, we were critical of the total adhesion, without any restrictions, by European and Northern American states to Israel’s punitive, brutal and murderous military offensive. We witnessed the ban or repression of pro-Palestine protests, state-funded institutions disinviting artists and writers, the interdiction of wearing keffiyehs, of using the phrase: ‘From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free.’ The outsourcing of European responsibility and guilt in historic and murderous anti-Semitism to Arabs, Muslims, migrants, refugees, leftists, to anyone critical of colonial occupation manifested itself in maintaining a colonial State. We had to resist these thanatocratic times, this loss of ethics when the French institutional Left accepts in its march against anti-Semitism the presence of the National Front, a far-right party funded by former Waffen-SS, or men nostalgic for colonial Algeria, or members of fascist groups.¹¹

We secured a place for a public meeting.¹² The first part of the evening would have included Judith Butler. I had reread her books and interviews on the topic of anti-Semitism and its instrumentalization and chosen excerpts that would serve as prompts for the conversation that we sent her. We wanted the French public to reject the tit for tat imposed by media and governments and reflect, think critically, and be disturbed, questioned, and reassured that opposing colonial occupation is right and nothing to do with anti-Semitism. We needed that public conversation with Butler who had declared on 31 October that what was being done in Gaza was ‘genocide’, that ‘Zionism has from the start engaged in a racist project’, adding: ‘This is not a “conflict” between two parties, but a form of violent dispossession that dates back to 1948, if not before, and constitutes not a new Nakba, but the continuation of one that has never stopped for millions of people.’¹³ In the second part of the programme, French Jewish organizations for peace and revolutionary organizations would have spoken. As soon as the meeting was announced, we received tens

10. See Michele Wieviorka, ‘Anti-Semitism, an old demon of the French left’, *La Tribune*, 13 October 2023, latribune.fr; Arthur Chevalier, ‘The origins of left-wing anti-Semitism’, *Le Point*, 14 November 2023, lepoint.fr; Pascal Meynadier, ‘Left-wing anti-Semitism: “The socialism of fools”’, *Le Journal de Dimanche*, 12 November 2023, lejdd.fr; and Camilla Brenni, Memphis Krickeberg, Léa Nicolas-Teboul and Zacharias Zoubir, ‘The non-subject of anti-Semitism on the left’, *Revue Vacarme* vol. 1, no. 86, Summer 2010, cairn.info.

11. Among the women and men who founded the National Front (now the Rassemblement national) in 1972, stood, side by side with former collaborationists (Emmanuel Allot and Jean Marie Demarquet), Waffen-SS (Léon Gaultier), members of the OAS (Organisation action civique, which opposed Algerian independence and assassinated Algerian nationalists and their allies, such as Roger Holeindre), former resisters of Nazism (Rolande Birgy and Serge Jeanneret), and members of post-WWII fascist groups.

of thousands of messages of support, and many people expressed their desire to attend the meeting.

On Friday 1 December, the City of Paris called the venue, ordering that the meeting be cancelled, threatening to cut subventions and adding that this was non-negotiable. The City invoked potential threats to public order and polemics that would threaten public peace. Aurélie Filippetti, a feminist and former Minister of Culture under a socialist government, now Director of Cultural Affairs of the City of Paris, first claimed that we had ‘manipulated’ Butler whom she ‘loved’ and admired. Confronted with a large protest, the arguments shifted – now it was the presence of some organizations, then the physical presence of decolonial activist Houria Bouteldja in the audience, and the fact that ‘extremist organizations’ were among the organizers. It was no longer about what would be discussed but about who had the right to attend a public meeting. Culture ‘contributes to the construction of a common future, not to the exacerbation of antagonisms’,¹⁴ a Paris communiqué said. They had nothing against the meeting, only against Bouteldja, and even if she was not speaking, the fact that she would have been there as well as her collective was enough.

We looked for other venues, but either they were unavailable due to prior programming, or they feared the cutting of subventions. We reluctantly cancelled the meeting, posted online the filmed message of support that Angela Davis had given us when she went through Paris on 19 October, and the questions we would have asked Butler. In her message, which is worth quoting in full here, Davis reaffirmed the centrality of the Palestinian struggle for justice and freedom:

All of us are called together to stand with Palestine, to express our solidarity with Palestine during this moment. People who had fought for justice for so many decades are under attack in Gaza. Palestine is the centre of the world at this moment. It is incumbent on all of us to understand that whatever we are doing, we should stand in solidarity with Palestine. As my friend June Jordan, the phenomenal Black feminist poet always used to say: ‘Palestine serves as a measure of what we are capable of doing with respect to changing the entire world.’ Stand together with the people of Gaza, of Palestine, and if we come together, stand together, we will one day be free. There is a reason Palestine is under such attack at this particular moment. Palestinians have been involved in the struggle that goes back to the end of the 1920s. There are more

12. For information about the meeting, communiqués and questions for Judith Butler, and clip of Angela Davis, see the blog we created, *Guerre permanente ou paix révolutionnaire, il faut choisir!*, 6 December 2023, guerrepersistente-paixrevolutionnaire.blog.

13. Judith Butler in Georges Yancy, ‘Judith Butler: Palestinians Are Not Being “Regarded as People” by Israel and US’, *Truthout*, 31 October 2023, truthout.org.

14. Juliette Cerf, ‘Annulation du débat sur l’antisémitisme avec Judith Butler: les raisons de la polémique’, *Télérama*, 6 December 2023.

Palestinian refugees than any other people. Their land was taken from them. Israel is a settler-colonial government and not only does it espouse settler colonialism, it is the only settler-colonial government that tries to continue to expand in the twenty-first century. It is our duty, wherever we are, whatever we are doing, whether we are involved in anti-racist struggle, whether we are involved in feminist movements, in trade unions, we must prevent the settler-colonial government from continuing its project of expansion, we must stand with the Palestinian people for freedom and peace for all humanity.¹⁵

This was the message that the socialist majority in Paris censored. On the rare occasion of Judith Butler taking part in a public meeting in France, we would have asked her explicitly about her qualification about what happened in Gaza as 'genocide' and her remarks that 'Zionism has from the start engaged in a racist project. Theodor Herzl said there were no inhabitants on that land so that the Jews, a people without a land, could seize it without compunction. What that meant was that the Palestinians there were not regarded as people – they literally could not be seen as human forms.'¹⁶ We also wanted Butler to expand on the following opinion:

I am not sure that a humanistic appeal to Israeli Jews will do the trick, for the roots of the problem are in a state formation that depended on expulsions and land theft to establish its own 'legitimacy'. There is no resolution to the violence we see until the right of return for Palestinians is honored, and very few Israelis have been able to grasp the legitimacy of that claim, and to be part of imagining how that might come about.¹⁷

This act of censorship is far from exceptional or from being the most punitive. Nobody lost a job. Among the daily instances of censorship against Palestinians, it does not stand either as the most brutal. What matters in the decision of the City of Paris, qualified as 'a farce' by Butler,¹⁸ is that it shows not who has the right to speak, but who is in the public.

As Angela Davis has remarked, Palestine is a defining moment. It shows the urgency of abolishing settler nation states that inevitably wage war

against human and nonhuman lives. Settler regimes require militarization, repression, and censorship. Decolonization in the twenty-first century is the abolition of racial patriarchal capitalism and its intimacy with colonial expansion. There cannot be peace with occupation. A decolonial future in Palestine means the justice and peace for all, hence the end of colonial occupation. The settler disappears, a human being stays. It is the abolition of settler politics because the settler wants the land of the other and the erasure of its presence, and that means permanent war. Our future is linked to the liberation of Palestine.

15. Angela Davis, message of 19 October 2023, recorded by Françoise Vergès, © Françoise Vergès.

16. G. Yancy, 'Judith Butler'. We also took excerpts from Judith Butler's *On Anti-Semitism: Solidarity and the Struggle for Justice* (2017), *Parting Ways. Jewishness and the Critique of Zionism* (2013), and *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (2006).

17. G. Yancy, 'Judith Butler'.

18. Mathieu Magnaudeix, 'Conférence sur l'antisémitisme annulée par la Mairie de Paris: "regrettable, voire une farce", selon Judith Butler', *Médiapart*, 5 December 2023.

Until Liberation II: Learning Palestine

Learning Palestine Group

12 Jan 2024

Learning Palestine



Until Liberation II

Courtesy Learning Palestine Group

Dear listeners, friends, comrades in this world,

This is the second iteration of the twelve-hour programme of Learning Palestine.

As genocide unfolds before our eyes, language falls short, it becomes obsolete and helpless.

Yet we need to continue exploring ways of speaking out and organizing against the grain, against this overdose of destruction and annihilation of life, against warmongering and militarization, against attempts to silence and immobilize us.

And so we return to what has been said and spoken before us to comprehend the history that precedes and informs the current political moment.

We return to the struggles that we belong to and find our roots in, from Algeria to Abya Yala, from South Africa to Asia and back to Palestine.

Despite the differences in our struggles, Palestine remains an embodiment and extension of these and other struggles for life and liberation, against racism, colonialism, imperialism and rising fascism.

In this programme we share lectures, talks and teach-ins, as well as poems, music and chants in the hopes of expanding our political horizons and engagements through study and struggle. To imagine ways of acting together, to tear apart the walls and borders that separate us, for a life in freedom, justice and dignity for all.

Until Liberation II: Learning Palestine Learning Palestine Group

[Listen online](#) →



Timecodes:

- 00:00:00** Introduction, Learning Palestine Group: Until Liberation II
- 00:02:00** A song: *Me, My Brother* (date unknown)
- 00:03:30** A poem: Suheir Hammad, *Gaza Suite 1* (Palestine Festival of Literature, 2010)
- 00:07:14** Film soundtrack: *Kufia: A Revolution Through Music*, Dr Louis Brehony (2021)
- 00:37:00** A talk: Hassan Balawi, '*Soutiens diplomatiques et réseaux de solidarité croisés avant et après 1962*' (Paris, 2023)
- 01:02:00** A song: Djaafar Beck, *Oh! De Gaule* (1960)
- 01:06:10** An interview: Angela Davis, 'Black liberation and Palestinian solidarity' (Democracy Now, 2020)

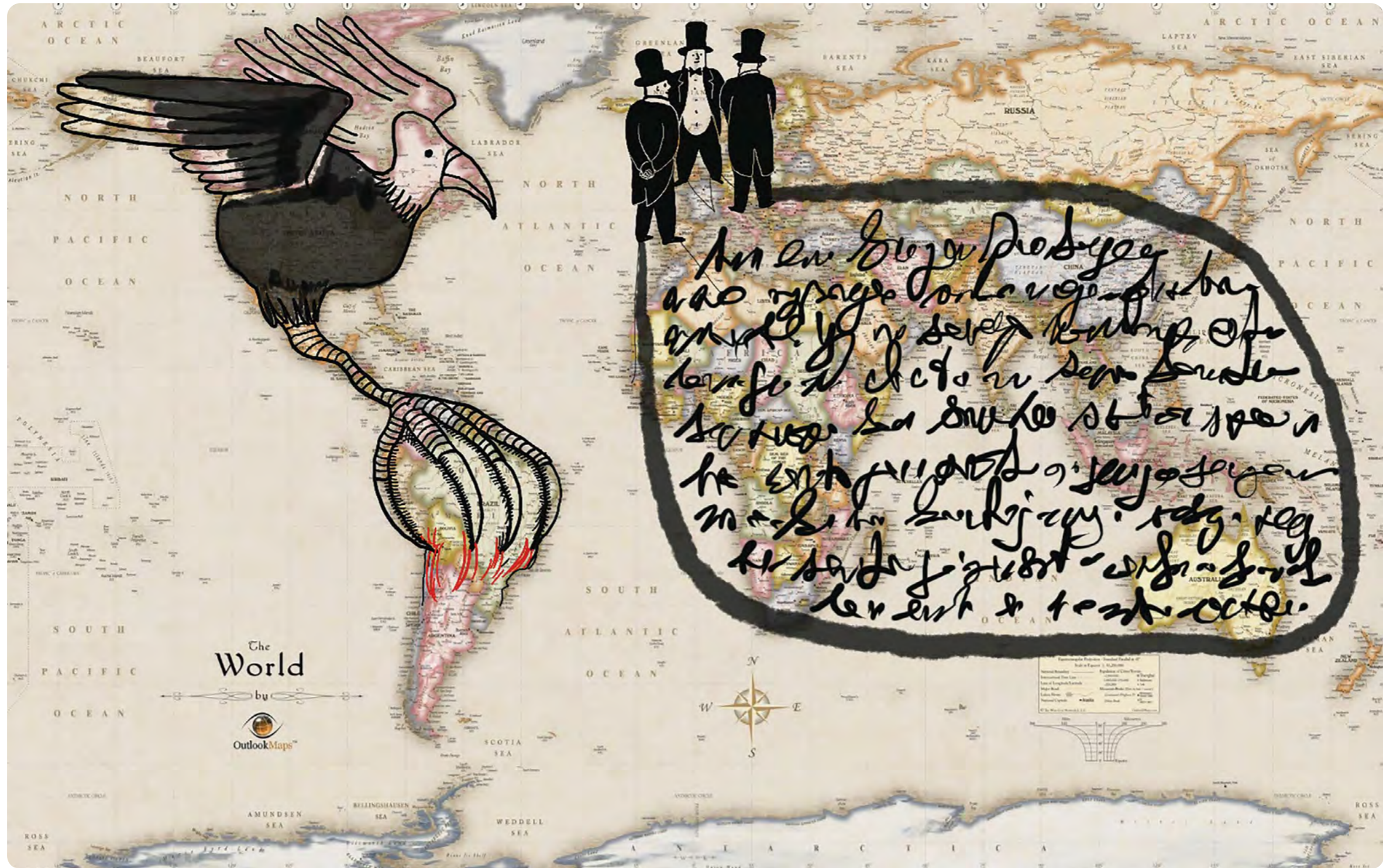
01:11:00 A song: Palestinian wedding, live recording (date unknown)
01:17:50 A talk: Malika Rahal, *'Algérie-Palestine: comment ne pas comparer?'*
01:45:40 A song: Fairouz, *Letter to Djamila Bouhired* (1959)
01:51:40 History lesson: 'The Algerian War for Independence' (Revolution and Ideology, 2021)
02:07:30 A song: Emel Mahtlouthi, *Ya Taleein il Jabal* (date unknown)
02:09:40 A video: Souha Bechara, *Untitled Part 1: Everything and Nothing* (1999)
02:50:20 A song: Marcel Khalife, *Sarkhet Thaer*
02:54:20 A talk: Olivier Hadouchi, *'Le cinéma militant et les révolutions anticoloniales arabes'* (Paris, 2023)
03:03:50 A chant: Football fans chanting in support of Palestine (Cairo, 2023)
03:04:10 A video: Edward Said on Frantz Fanon, from the BBC documentary *The Idea of Empire* (1993)
03:09:30 A song: Nass El Ghiwane, *Palestine* (1998)
03:15:50 Reading: *Il y a 49 ans. Le mossad assassinait l'algérien Mohamed Boudia* (al24news, 2023)
03:17:41 A song: Mohammad Ghaznavian, *Ya Helwa Ciao!* (date unknown)
03:20:03 A lecture: Vijay Prashad, 'Palestine, the Global South and Reacting to the Neoliberal Present' (Williams College, Mass., 2016)
04:35:48 A poem: Rafeef Ziadah, *We teach life sir*, live recording (London, 2011)
04:40:05 A song: Sabreen, *The Sea* (2000)
04:46:24 Film soundtrack: Mustafa Abu Ali, *Scenes of Occupation from Gaza* (1973)
04:59:36 A lecture: Eugène Puryear, 'An Intervention on Gaza 2023' (13 October 2023)
05:04:09 A song: Ska-p, *Intifada* (2009)
05:08:03 A song: Akli Yahyaten, *Yal Menfi* (1965)
05:11:00 A conversation: Edward Said and Salman Rushdie (1986)
06:38:34 A song: Italian Communist pro-Palestinian song written by Umberto Fiori, *Rossa Palestina* (1973)
06:40:50 History lesson: 'Ghassan Kanafani and the era of revolutionary Palestinian media' (Al Jazeera, 2020)
06:49:55 Noam Chomsky, 'Why Does the US Support Israel?' (2016)
06:57:00 A song: *Tal Al Zaatir Chant* (date unknown)
07:02:00 Discussion: 'Palestinian universities under occupation', Mezna Qato and Roger Heacock (UCL, London, 2018)
07:35:30 Live recording: A wedding in the village of Ya'bod (1991)
07:38:40 An interview: Ilan Pappé, *The Myth of Israel* (2023)
07:53:00 A song: Sheikh Imam, *Ya Falastiniyah* (1985)
07:57:20 A chant: *Ya Falastiniyah* in the streets of Tunis (date unknown)
08:01:30 A poem and song: Amin Haddad and Eskenderella, *Ya Falastiniyah*

08:06:40 A song: Sheikh Imam, *Ya Falastiniyah*, live recording (Beirut, 1984)
08:14:11 A lecture: Shahd Hammuri, 'From Allende to Gaza: Claiming the Agency of the People' (Framer Framed, Amsterdam, 14 October 2023)
08:51:20 A poem: *Al Bashiqa, part 5*, performed by Amer Hlehel and Faraj Sulieman
09:01:30 A song: Sabreen in Jerusalem, *A Patriotic Song* (1990)
09:10:00 Teach-in: Linda Quiquívix, 'Contextualizing Palestine within the Genocidal World of 1492' (Los Angeles, 15 October, 2023)
10:11:20 A song: Checkpoint 303, *Gaza Mixtape* (released 7 October 2023)
10:18:30 Talk: 'Munir Fasheh in Palestine: Reimagining Solidarity, A Conference of Butterflies' (16 Beaver Group, 2021)
11:15:20 A song: Tunisian revolution in the streets, inspired by Palestinian song
11:17:40 A lecture: 'Inside Israel's surveillance machine', The Listening Post (2023)
11:42:48 A reading: Lina Soualem, *A Map of Parallel Worlds Between Algeria and Palestine*, read by Reem Shilleh (2023)
11:54:50 A song: Maya Khaldi and Sarona, *Al Daw* (2021)

Troubles with the East(s)

Bojana Piškur

22 Jan 2024



Drawing by Djordje Balmazović

I.

The genocide of the people in Gaza has been allowed to happen, just as the genocide of Bosnian Muslims was allowed to happen in the 1990s. Like the Palestinians today, Bosnians experienced the consequences of the international community's silence in the face of unfolding war crimes and crimes against humanity.¹ Silence in the context of war means turning a blind eye. Silence also means forgetting: 'the world forgets, as it has forgotten Bosnia'.²

'The genocide of the Bosnian Muslims had been allowed to be carried out for so long ... that the basis for believing in law, rights, justice, and democracy became problematic. By denying the Bosnian state the right to self-defense, the fabric of international law was torn apart.'³ Written by sociologist Tomaž Mastnak in 1999, these words equally speak to the decades-long colonial violence carried out in Palestine.

There are, of course, clear differences between the contexts of Bosnia and Palestine. First and foremost on the question of statehood: While Bosnia and Herzegovina received international recognition and became a member of the United Nations in 1992, this is not the case with Palestine; Palestine has not been allowed to become an independent sovereign state. The UN played its role in this, already in 1947.⁴

Writer Lana Bastašić recently published an opinion piece in the *Guardian* calling attention to 'white saviourist hypocrisy' in response to what is happening in Gaza.⁵ In it, she identifies a pattern of extreme violence that can be recognized in the events in her native Bosnia during the war between 1992 and 1995. Her response to the question of why write about Bosnia twenty-eight years after the Dayton Peace Agreement is a grim warning that 'there is no such thing as peace after an ethnic cleansing'.⁶

The war in Bosnia and Herzegovina played a central role in shaping the so-called new world order. In 2023, history repeated itself as tragedy, while the same world order yet exerts itself in Palestine. This war implicates many world powers whose involvement is fuelled by ideological and geostrategic interests, just as it was with the wars in Yugoslavia and in countless wars and conflicts since then, mainly in the Global South and in the East.

At the end of the Cold War, Eastern Europe embraced the new political system and processes of integration with the West with optimism. The Middle East approached the end of an era with certain anxieties and expectations; the following decade would be marked by a mix of conflicts, peace initiatives, economic changes, and the emergence of extremist groups in the region. Thirty years later, the world is a very different place and the only common denominator is that there is no cause for optimism any longer.

1. It would be more accurate to say the silence of liberal Western governments and their institutions, including academic and art institutions. Since October 2023, millions of people have been calling for an immediate end to Israel's destruction in Gaza.

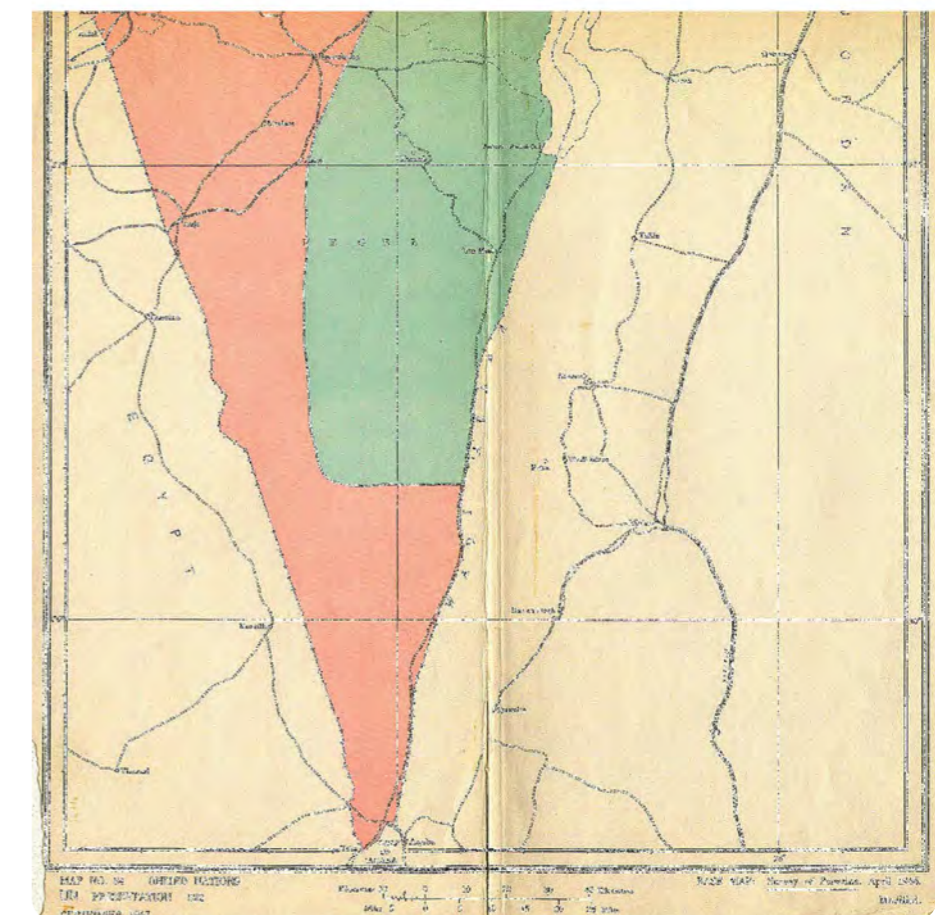
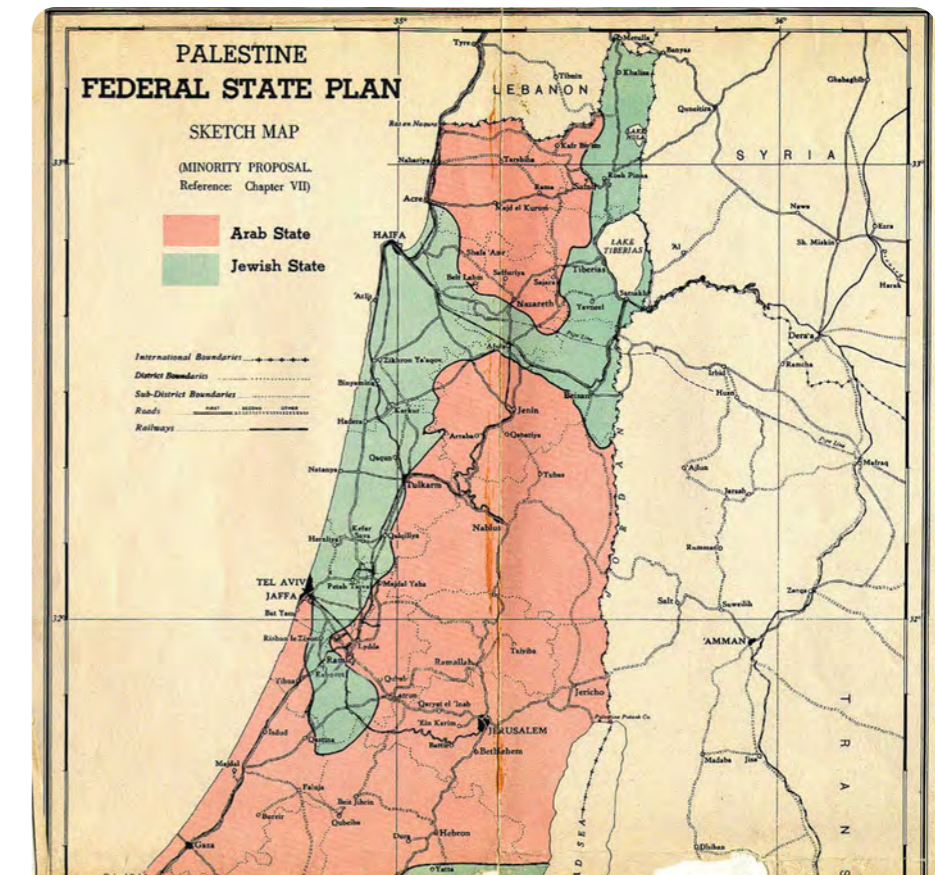
2. Lana Bastašić, 'Opinion', *Guardian*, 23 October 2023, [theguardian.com](https://www.theguardian.com).

3. Tomaž Mastnak, 'Call for Papers: Political Theory and the War in Bosnia', *Living with genocide: art and the war in Bosnia*, M'ARS, Moderna galerija Ljubljana 1999, pp. 21–22.

4. The United Nations Special Committee on Palestine was established in 1947 with the aim to 'solve' the situation in the Middle East after the end of the British Mandate in Palestine. The minority plan, based on a federal state solution, as proposed by Yugoslavia, Iran and India, was not supported by the UN. Instead, the majority plan for a partitioned state but with an economic union was adopted. The partition of Palestine in 1947 was not a 'solution', but, as Ariella Aïsha Azoulay writes, it gave 'the greenlight to some Zionists' armed groups to use an array of genocidal technologies for its implementation. The outcome was the destruction of Palestine and Palestinians as a people, and along with them, their ancestral lands, practices, and heritage.' Ariella Aïsha Azoulay, 'Seeing Genocide', *Boston Review*, 8 December 2023, [bostonreview.net](https://www.bostonreview.net).

5. Bastašić, 'Opinion'.

6. Bastašić, 'Opinion'.



The partition of Palestine: minority or federal plan, map, 1947, United Nations

In order to better understand this complex geopolitical situation, its political and social dynamics, we need to delve briefly into the history not only of Eastern Europe, but, above all, of its very East(s); the Balkans and the Middle East.⁷

7. The term 'Middle East' is problematic as it is a colonial invention. Other suggested terms include 'the Levant' and 'the Arab world', but these have not really entered into common usage, and no other non-Western term has yet replaced the term 'Middle East'. Interestingly, in Slavic languages, the older term 'Near East' is still used.

II.

Disillusionment with Western liberal democracy is nothing new. It has been going on for quite some time, especially in the countries of the former Eastern bloc. Ivan Krastev and Stephen Holmes have analysed how, after 1989, the most influential political leaders in Eastern Europe embraced copycat westernization as the shortest path to reform, only to witness the emergence of anti-Western sentiment and illiberal populism in many of these countries.⁸ This sentiment has recently been given new impetus as a result of the mass destruction and the genocide in Gaza carried out by Israel's apartheid and settler-colonialist politics, which are fervently supported by the very same Western democracies that 'sold' the idea of 'democracy' to Eastern Europe some decades ago.

8. Ivan Krastev and Stephen Holmes, *The Light that Failed*, London: Penguin, 2019, pp. 20–21.

The complexities and contradictions of East–West relations go back a long way, and although there was an illusion after the end of the Cold War that they could finally be resolved, they persist today. In fact, the ideological and cultural dichotomies seem to have become even greater than before. The East and its former socialist states have intensively searched for their national and cultural identities, largely based on their pre-socialist pasts, while still carrying along all their previous historical 'burdens' or distinctions, such as those between the Ottoman and Habsburg Empires, Christian and Muslim religions, 'democracy' and communism, and so on. The former ideological dichotomy between East and West 'has been replaced by "differences" based on long-lasting "historical legacies" and/or culture'.⁹

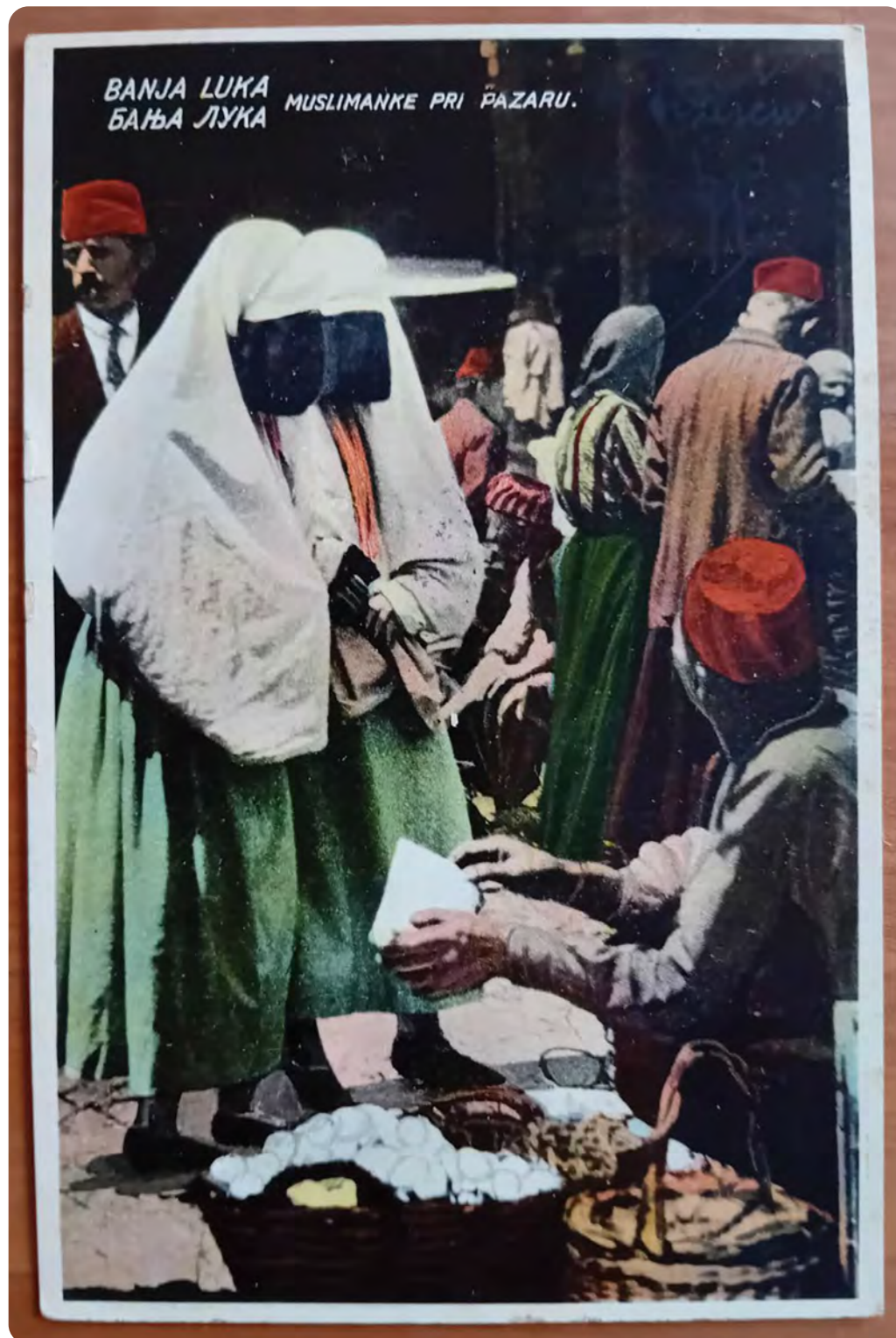
9. See Hannes Grandits, review of *Imagining the Balkans*, 2016, reviews.history.ac.uk.

Many writers and theorists have often regarded Eastern Europe as a 'project' rather than a geographical place: a 'cultural project of demi-Orientalization' and, after the fall of communism, a project that eagerly embraced Western liberal democracy. But 'the East' has always been an elusive concept, constantly shifting or overlapping with other East(s) as, for example, the Balkans and the Middle East: an oriental East in Europe and the imagined Orient, the perennial colonial dream.¹⁰ In both cases, the focus has been on the stereotypical Other as the West has persistently imagined it: its incompletely developed antipode, a European burden, an irrational, violent people from the periphery of the Western world. Negative stereotyping, essentializing and over-simplification is common to concepts of Orientalism (Edward Said) and Balkanization (Maria Todorova). The processes of othering have also been used historically to justify intervention and control in the regions.

10. These 'Orientals' were divided in the nineteenth century based on the Eurocentric colonial perspective: the Near East included the Ottoman Empire and the Balkans, the Middle East stretched from the Persian Gulf to Southeast Asia, and the Far East covered East Asia, North Asia and Southeast Asia.

Rebecca West, famous for her *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon: A Journey Through Yugoslavia* travelogue written at the dawn of World War II, and in general very sympathetic towards the Yugoslav people, commented: 'Violence was, indeed, all I knew of the Balkans: all I knew of the South Slavs'.¹¹ Stereotypes of this kind have been even further reinforced by the patronizing perception of the oppressed from these regions throughout history. Eric Hazan has recently analysed the situation in Palestine. In the eyes of the oppressor, he writes, the oppressed are only good when they

11. Rebecca West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon: A Journey Through Yugoslavia*, London: Penguin, 1994, p. 21.



Muslim women at the market, Banja Luka, Kingdom of Yugoslavia, postcard, 1933 (private archive)

are calm and silent.¹² If he rebels, he is therefore against our (Western) values, is violent without reason or is a member of a terrorist organization.

The 'Eastern question' that emerged in the nineteenth century, when the powers of the Ottoman Empire began to decline, clearly showed the political considerations and the strategic competition of the European powers to exert their influence over the falling empire. Mikhail Pogodin, the Russian imperial historian, wrote a memorandum to Tsar Nicholas I in 1853 saying: 'Russia demands a treaty to protect millions of Christians, and that is deemed to strengthen its position in the East at the expense of the balance of power. We can expect nothing from the West but blind hatred and malice'.¹³ In this context, it is important to note the gradation of 'Orientalism', a pattern that reproduces the original dichotomy on which Orientalism is based, about which Milica Bakić-Hayden has written extensively and in relation to which she has coined the term 'nesting orientalism'. She points out that in this pattern, Asia is more 'Eastern' or 'other' than Eastern Europe; within Eastern Europe this gradation is reproduced with the Balkans perceived as most 'eastern'.¹⁴ In the same line, the Ottoman (oriental) heritage of the (non-Muslim) Balkans has largely been regarded as a kind of 'cultural discontinuity'. The writing of the historian Pogodin could then be understood as a reminder to the West that Russia had stood against the Ottomans as a bastion of Christian faith and Western values, or rather: as the (West's) East against *its* East(s), its Orient.

Nevertheless, the Ottoman Empire played a significant role in shaping the history and the culture of both the Balkans and the Middle East; it was common for various ethnic groups from different parts of the empire to migrate internally. In the late nineteenth century, a large number of Muslim families from Bosnia and Herzegovina migrated to Palestine, settling just south of Haifa, in what is now Caesarea on the Mediterranean coast. These communities were called Bushnaqs (Arabization of the Slavic word 'Bošnjak') and have since been incorporated into Palestinian society as part of the Palestinian people. However, when they arrived in Palestine the Bushnaqs were not granted the same extraterritorial privileges as were granted to the citizens of European states. Under the British Mandate, Bushnaqs were actually classified as Arabs,¹⁵ and during the Nakba they experienced expulsion in the same way as other Palestinians.

12. Eric Hazan, *Zapiski o okupaciji* (Notes on the Occupation), Ljubljana: Založba, 2017, p. 8.

13. Joshua Keating, 'The Long History of Russian Whataboutism', *Slate*, 21 March 2014, slate.com.

14. Milica Bakić-Hayden, 'Nesting Orientalisms: The Case of Former Yugoslavia', *Slavic Review*, vol. 54, no. 4, Winter 1995, p. 918.

15. See Darryl Li, 'Translator's Preface: A Note on Settler Colonialism', *The Herzegovinian Muslim Colony in Caesarea, Palestine*, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, vol. XLV, no. 1, Autumn 2015, Institute for Palestine Studies, p. 75.

III.

This web of interactions, geopolitical shifts, conflicts and entanglements receded into the background in the aftermath of the World War II with the emergence of new political, economic and cultural identities in Eastern Europe, including those of the Balkans and the Middle East. The countries of Eastern Europe became part of the Eastern bloc, with the Soviet Union maintaining varying degrees of direct and indirect military, political, economic and cultural control over them. In the case of the Middle East, the old colonial powers still saw the region as something they were entitled to exert their influence and domination over: after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in 1922, these powers had imposed the state system of government on the region without regard for its ethnically and religiously diverse populations. Immediately after World War II, many countries in the Middle East began the process of decolonization. Almost all of them joined the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) at its formation in 1961.

The political, economic and cultural changes were perhaps the most profound in Yugoslavia, which not only broke with the Soviet Union and consequently with the Eastern bloc in 1948, but also introduced a new type of self-managed socialism and turned its foreign policy towards the Third World, being one of the founders of the NAM. Yugoslavia incorporated the diverse ethnic, religious and cultural identities of its peoples into a new, Yugoslav one, united under a common federal socialist state with an emphasis on equality between nations. It was not only a state but a *project*: so it is no surprise that, in 1947, as many as 200,000 young brigadiers from around the world, including a Palestinian brigade, took part in the building of the new Šamac-Sarajevo railway in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This project was more than a railway; it was a symbol of a new era for the newly liberated countries and their people, who throughout history had been forcibly placed on the margins of the global economic, political and cultural system. The Šamac-Sarajevo railway was an example of how these countries could begin the process of modernization on their own terms and at their own pace. At the same time, it signified the construction of a new, better world based on different, more equal foundations; a world which was emerging as a reality, not just a utopia.

IV.

In 1961, at the height of the Cold War, NAM was founded in Belgrade.¹⁶ In retrospect, we can say that its inauguration represented the first significant disturbance in a world geopolitical arena dominated by the two hegemonic blocs. NAM functioned as a social movement with the aim of changing then current global structures to bring about a more just, equitable and peaceful world order. As such, it was anti-imperialist, anti-colonial and anti-racist: it also supported the National Liberation Movements across the world fighting for independence from colonialism and various forms of occupation, and the Palestinian case was no exception. As the majority of its members were pro-Palestine, NAM strongly promoted Palestinian interests at the United Nations. At the 1973 NAM summit in Algeria, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) was given observer status as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people and their struggle, and at the 1976 Colombo summit the PLO was given full participant status. Support for the Palestinian cause has been expressed at all NAM summits and conferences. In the communiqué of the preparatory meeting for the Colombo Conference in 1964, for example, the members declared the following: 'The Conference condemns the imperialistic policy pursued in the Middle East and, in conformity with the Charter of the United Nations, decides to: endorse the full restoration of all the rights of the Arab people of Palestine to their homeland, and their inalienable right to self-determination; declare their full support to the Arab people of Palestine in their struggle for liberation from colonialism and racism.'¹⁷

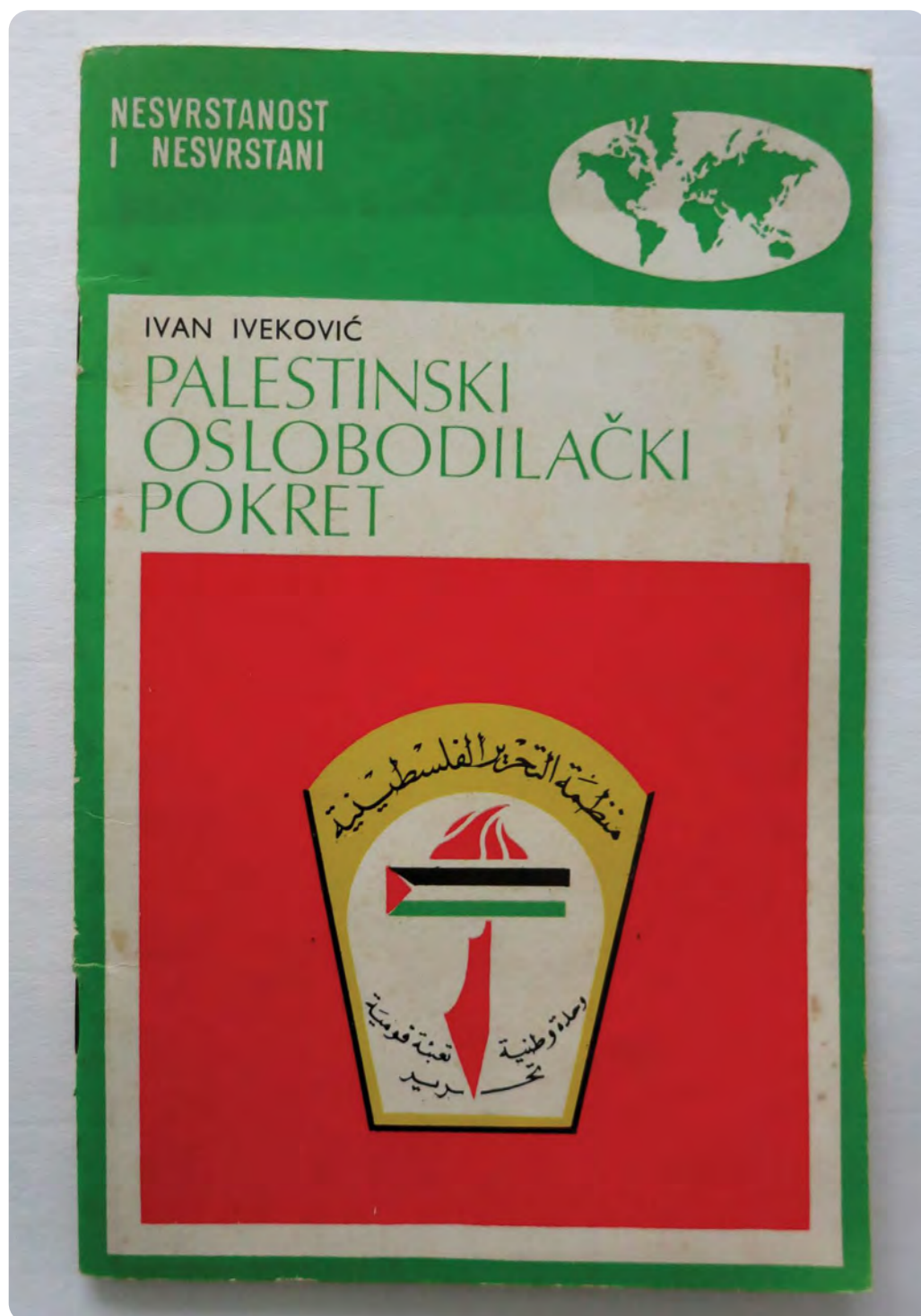
As one of the founding members of NAM, Yugoslavia was fully committed to Palestine, supplying material and logistical support to Palestinian organizations (arms and medical supplies, medical treatment of Palestinian fighters in Yugoslavia, education grants for Palestinian students) and helping to legitimize the PLO's position as the legal representative of the Palestinian people. Following the Six Day War in 1967, Yugoslav officials expressed strong support for the Palestinian right to self-determination and the establishment of an independent state, and were more in favour of the Palestinian armed struggle than in previous decades even though they explicitly condemned terrorist acts such as plane hijackings. In 1967 Yugoslavia severed diplomatic ties with Israel.

Relations between Yugoslavia and Palestine were significant not only politically but also culturally. Manifestations of various kinds – art exhibitions, translation of Palestinian authors (Mahmoud Darwish, Tawfiq Zayyad) and rock concerts in solidarity with Palestine – took place around the country. The Yugoslav people were in general very supportive of the Palestinian liberation movement, and even schoolchildren regularly participated in solidarity actions such as fundraising for their peers in Palestine. The affection was mutual: documents in the Archives of Yugoslavia reveal that many young Palestinian fighters were so impressed by the Yugoslav national liberation struggle in World War II that they nicknamed themselves Tito.¹⁸ In the late 1980s, Yugoslav aid

16. NAM was a coalition of small and medium-sized states, mostly former colonies and developing countries from the Third World. Yugoslavia was one of its founders and key members. At the first summit in Belgrade in 1961, there were twenty-five participating countries, and by 1979 the organization had grown to nearly one hundred members.

17. *Documents of the Gatherings of the Non-Aligned Countries 1956–1989*, Beograd: Međunarodna politika, 1989, p. 26.

18. Žiga Smolič, *Jugoslavija i palestinska revolucija, Reprezentacija nasilja u jugoistočnoj Evropi 20. stoljeća (zbornik radova)*, Sarajevo: Udruženje za modernu historiju, 2022, p. 259.



Palestine Liberation Organization, booklet from the series *Nesvrstanost i nesvrstani* (Non-alignment and the Non-aligned), Beograd: Izdavačko preduzeće 'Rad', 1974 (private archive)

and support for Palestine declined, partly because of the changes in Yugoslav foreign policy after Tito's death but also as a result of a deep crisis within the federation.

In 1989, Palestinian artist Kareem Dabbah donated his work *Composition* (1989) to the collection of the Art Gallery of the Non-Aligned Countries in Titograd. The work, one of the copper engravings for which the artist was known, includes lines from a poem by Iraqi poet Muhammad Mahdi Al-Jawahiri. At the bottom of the engraving, the line, 'Long live the Palestinian-Yugoslavian friendship' stands as a statement of political and collective resistance and of solidarity between the two states – one that, at that time, was already history and one that was still future.



Kareem Dabbah, *Composition*, 1989, copper engraving. Courtesy the Museum of Contemporary Art of Montenegro. Photo: Andy Stagg, courtesy The Mosaic Rooms, London

V.

The events of the 1990s reshaped the political, economic and cultural landscape in the East(s): the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the end of the Eastern bloc; the break-up of, and wars in, Yugoslavia; the Gulf War and the subsequent conflicts and wars in the Middle East. NAM had become an anachronism in international politics; in permanent crisis and unable to resolve any armed conflict or war between its members, including the wars in Yugoslavia. The radical changes of this decade were so profound that their consequences continue haunt us to this day.

So what is left of the idea of Eastern Europe, more than thirty years after the end of the Cold War? Eastern Europe has all but disappeared from the geopolitical map of the world, replaced by Global East, Central Europe, the Baltics, Southeast Europe or the Western Balkans. The overturning of one system (communism) in order to copy another (liberal democracy) left most of the region with 'decades of rising social inequality, pervasive corruption and the morally arbitrary redistribution of public property into the hands of small number of people', as Krastev and Holmes put it.¹⁹ It is accurate to say that there is no longer just one Eastern Europe, but many. And if there is no more Eastern Europe as such, what has become of the East of the former East?

Even if there is no European East, so to speak, the centuries-old hostility towards the other East(s) has not disappeared, but is still present in various guises. Many leaders from the eastern part of Europe, for example, repeatedly use migration as a populist mantra, emphasizing how the region stands as a bastion 'to protect the rights of the threatened white Christian majority who are in mortal danger'.²⁰ Bosnia, Palestine, Syria, Iraq, the East(s) of yesterday, are now more or less 'failed states' whose citizens are leaving en masse.

The West has been accused of double standards; its 'indifference to the suffering and annihilation of those deemed inferior or not human enough' for Western civilization has been pervasive.²¹ One argument is that while the Western world reacted immediately and unequivocally to the invasion of Ukraine with sanctions against Russia, its reaction to the siege of Gaza could not be more different: The West has clearly sided with Israel, supplying arms and resources to the occupying force; Palestine is deemed a threat to the outpost of the 'civilized' world in the Middle East.

After World War II there were alternatives to domination and oppression; anticolonial, emancipatory movements inventing new political languages of liberation. All these past alternatives seem to have failed us. Even though Palestine is still a member of NAM, 'the biggest peace movement in history', it was not until 29 November 2023 that a relatively unnoticed statement was passed on to the UN by the delegation of Azerbaijan on NAM's behalf. What made this statement particularly cynical is that it came via the representatives of the country responsible for 120,000

19. Ivan Krastev and Stephen Holmes, 'How liberalism became "the god that failed" in eastern Europe', *Guardian*, 24 October 2019, [theguardian.com](https://www.theguardian.com).

20. Ibid.

21. Samir Bennis, 'Complicity in Gaza Genocide Unmasks the West's Moral Decay, Inherent Brutality', *Morocco World News*, 2 November 2023, [morocoworldnews.com](https://www.morocoworldnews.com).

Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh being forced to leave the region just a month before, in anticipation of ethnic cleansing.

In contrast, South Africa has recently launched a case against Israel at the UN's International Court of Justice (ICJ), the first state to have done so, accusing Israel of genocide against Palestinians in Gaza and comparing Israel's treatment of Palestinians to apartheid. South Africans have learned from their history; the rest of the world has not.

These questions remain: How to understand these complex histories and demand change that would actually produce a new politics of rupture in this deeply unjust world? How to finally exorcise the demons of war? To paraphrase the title of Eric Maria Remarque's classic novel, nothing is new on the Eastern front. In Gaza, people cannot bury their dead as there are no longer any graveyards. And as we wait for the alternatives, it looks unlikely, tragically, that change will come any time soon.

Song for Many Movements. Opening Performance Live on Radio Alhara

Jokkoo with Miramizu, Rasheed Jalloul & Sabine Salamé

23 Feb 2024



Exhibition view of 'Song for Many Movements: Scenes of Collective Creation', MACBA.
Photo: Miquel Coll, 2024. © MACBA

The performance moves through dislocated soundscapes and geographies, punctuated by free jazz experimentation, deconstructed club sounds and Arabic rap. It gradually evolves into a hybrid, afro-futurist jam session that combines Jokkoo's polyrhythmic electronics and sub-bass frequencies with live drums, clarinet and Rasheed Jalloul's oud. Baba Sy's hypnotic vocal distortion – as he delivers a ritual performance on stage – gives way to Sabine Salamé freestyling on the mic along with fellow queer rappers L-Void and HIND, who made a surprise appearance at the end of the show.

In the artists' own words, 'we are searching for the language, the actions and the emotions which link us in an empathetic struggle for collective liberation'. The pan-Africanist spirit lies at the heart of Barcelona-based collective Jokkoo, whose name is a Wolof word meaning 'making a connection with something that is greater than you'. Since they founded this collective in 2019, the Jokkoos have created strong networks of solidarity within Barcelona's art scene and internationally including collaborations with other platforms in Africa and beyond, from Nyege Nyege (Kampala) to Zilzal (Palestine). They have been active in organising pro-Palestinian gigs and fundraisers in venues such as FOC, the artist-run-space which they co-founded on the outskirts of Barcelona. Jokkoo's musical militancy has placed the non-hegemonic aesthetics – and politics – of the African diaspora at the very centre of Barcelona's nightlife.

**2024 02 09 SESSIÓ JOKKOO X ALHARA
AUDIO COMPLERT EQUILIBRAT**



[Listen online](#) →

Timecodes:

- 00:00–00:58** Miramizu (DJ set/live) feat. 'Neela' by Rasheed Jalloul (oud)
00:59–01:33 Sabine Salamé (MC)
01:33–02:27 Jokkoo live: Pasaporteman / Baba Sy (vocals), Opoku (clarinet and drums), MOOKI6 and MBODJ (electronics) feat. Rasheed Jalloul (oud) Sabine Salamé, L-Void and HIND (MCs)

'Song for Many Movements' is an ephemeral experiment in which the ground floor of MACBA becomes a stage for encounters, conversations and shared listening. Curated by María Berríos and Sabel Gavaldon, it presents moving-image works, sounds, publications and archival materials belonging to over fifty artists and collectives.

Sound engineering and mixing: Jordi Salvadó
 Camera and film editing: Krik Krak

We Have Been Here Forever. Palestinian Poets Write Back

Rana Issa

4 Mar 2024



Mosab Abu Toha, *Where is the rest of me? Shattered in pieces*, 2024 Photo: Mosab Abu Toha, 2024

From the earliest days of their dispossession, Palestinians have recorded their plight in poetry. There is a long tradition for this amongst Arabs who, since long before the birth of Islam, have considered poetry a diwan, a historical record. Unlike historiography, which Arabs are also renowned for, poetry is a mnemonic device that penetrates people's consciousness, registers and shapes their affective state. Palestinian poets are also Arab poets and they find inspiration in a poetic tradition that is geographically expansive and far predates the Zionist project. Palestinians write a poetry of resistance, enshrining poetry as both a diwan and a protest against oppression. They learn and memorize poetry as well as produce it. Through poetry, Palestinians cultivate their political imagination and preserve their collective spirit.

The poems I have selected speak to these aspects of Palestinian poetry, directly responding to the ongoing annihilation of Palestinians. The selection is not meant to be an authoritative representation of Palestinian poetry or the vast legacy of writing about Palestine by non-Palestinians. Indeed important voices in the diaspora, and great non-Palestinian radical poets, writing about Palestine in Arabic and other languages, are not included here. I instead decided to feature poets who have written from Palestine as a modest gesture of solidarity with historic and ongoing land struggles. The exception is the work of Kamal Nasser, who was an exile in Beirut when the Israelis assassinated him in 1973. Through Nasser, I gesture to the need for historical depth when we speak about Palestine. Nasser belongs to the legacy of Palestinian poets targeted through imprisonment and assassination by the colonizers (British as well as Israeli), which goes as far back as Nuh Ibrahim (a poet who was imprisoned several times by the British for his poetry, and who was killed in battle in 1938) and includes famous poets like Mahmud Darwish, Tawfiq Zayyad, Nasser Abou Srour, Dareen Tatour (included here), and many others. Poets, too, sometimes die in battle. Such was the fate of Abdel Rahim Mahmoud who died during the year of the Nakba, while other poets die as civilian casualties, victims of Israeli violence, which is particularly committed to striking civilians and their infrastructures. During this war we mourned the loss of Gazan poet Heba Abu Nada who was killed in October. I include a poem by Abu Nada that questions the dominant Palestinian idea that poetry is an effective tool of struggle. We also mourn thirteen poets who have died in Gaza since the beginning of this war and we acknowledge other poets who we have undoubtedly lost but who are not yet accounted for.¹ They were targeted not because they were poets but simply because they were Gazans.

1. Dan Sheehan, 'These are the poets and writers who have been killed in Gaza', *Lit Hub*, 21 December 2023, lithub.com/these-are-the-poets-and-writers-who-have-been-killed-in-gaza/.

Heba Abu Nada
Trans: Huda Fakhreddine

I learned about the work of Heba Abu Nada through the excellent translations of my esteemed colleague and poetry scholar, Associate Professor of Arabic Literature at the University of Pennsylvania, Huda Fakhreddine. Huda has embarked on translating several Palestinian poets during the current war, and Heba's work has featured prominently. Heba was an award-winning novelist and poet. Her novel *Oxygen is not for the Dead* (2017) is yet to be translated. Learning about this talented author following her murder by an Israeli airstrike on Khan Yunis on 20 October 2023 is piercingly painful. She died five days before my daughter's birthday. Since the genocide began, we did not celebrate any occasion, for the grief is too overwhelming, and the massacres maddeningly ongoing, for any meaningful glimpse of happiness. Woe to us who learn about our poets on the occasion of their death by genocide. How do we recover from such terrible loss? Of the many great poems that Fakhreddine has translated, I decided to include this one to challenge a complacent reader who might be content with protesting genocide through the radical potential of poetry. Poetry is not effective as a tool for resistance in and of itself. Its revolutionary potential derives its energy from the streets and the courage of the oppressed.

Pull Yourself Together

O! How alone we are!
 All the others have won their wars
 and you were left in your mud,
 barren.

Darwish, don't you know?
 No poetry will return to the lonely
 what was lost, what was
 stolen.

How alone we are!
 This is another age of ignorance. Cursed are those
 who divided us in war and marched in your funeral
 as one.

How alone we are!
 This earth is an open market,
 and your great countries have been auctioned away,
 gone!

How alone we are!
 This is an age of insolence,
 and no one will stand by our side,
 Never.

O! How alone we are!
 Wipe away your poems, old and new,
 and all these tears. And you, O Palestine,
 pull yourself together.

Najwan Darwish**Trans: Kareem Abou Zeid**

I am grateful for my more than decade-long friendship with Jerusalem poet Najwan Darwish. Najwan was one of a handful of Palestinian artists who I became good friends with once I decided to leave Lebanon and go into exile in Norway. Beyond our continuous bloodshed, one of the main features of being Palestinian has been the prohibition on our movement and our ability to meet and get to know one another. This prohibition affects us on a social and cultural, as well as personal, level. As the child of a Palestinian refugee (on my mother's side), I have often been struck by the sense of being orphaned, in the absence of Palestinian family members who have been dispersed, incarcerated, separated, rendered insane, or murdered, before I was born.

In my exile, the chance to meet other Palestinians became invaluable to me. When I met Najwan, he was an emerging poet. Today he is one of Palestine's most prominent literary voices. In addition to authoring several books of award-winning poetry, translated into more than twenty languages, he serves as a cultural editor of *al-Araby al-Jadeed (The New Arab)*, and is an active producer of Arab and Palestinian cultural festivals and artistic platforms with a committed interest in emerging voices from Palestine. There are many translators of his work – most prominently, award-winning Egyptian American translator Kareem Abou Zeid who has worked with Najwan on several books of poetry. This poem, which Kareem beautifully renders into English, captures the quintessential Palestinian fear of annihilation, which has become like a shadow to us. Najwan wrote this poem around twelve years ago, long before the genocide we are now witnessing in Gaza. I chose it for how it speaks about being a Palestinian in Jerusalem and the West Bank.

Phobia

I'll be banished from the city
 Before night falls: They'll claim
 I neglected to pay for the air
 I'll be banished from the city
 Before the advent of evening: They'll claim
 I paid no rent for the sun
 Nor any fees for the clouds
 I'll be banished from the city
 Before the sun rises: They'll say
 I gave night grief
 And failed to lift my praises to the stars
 I'll be banished from the city
 Before I've even left the womb
 Because all I did for seven months
 Was write poems and wait to be
 I'll be banished from being
 Because I'm partial to the void
 I'll be banished from the void
 For my suspect ties to being
 I'll be banished from both being and the void
 Because I was born of becoming

I'll be banished

Sheikha Hlewa
Trans: Fady Joudah

Palestinians are proud folk. During this war, I often found myself pained by individuals (children as well as adults) in Gaza who feel indignant about being captured on video in a state of deprivation. They do not want to be remembered like this and tell the person behind the camera so, who nevertheless does not respect their privacy and uploads their protests onto social media. The person behind the camera is probably motivated by the injustice of such destitution and wishes to narrate such injustice in the hope that it might move the monsters to become more humane. As my heart burns with what my eyes are witnessing and my ears are hearing, I contemplate how violated we have become, how we no longer have the power to prevent our immiseration from turning into a spectacle. The pain of overexposing our weakened state to the world led me to choose this poem by Bedouin Palestinian poet, novelist and short-story writer Sheikha Hlewa. To mock the Nakba and master the pain it persistently generates in us, as Hlewa does here, is to take a jab at the organizing concept of being Palestinian. This irreverence is a crucial impulse that must be preserved so as not to turn the pillars of our narrative into dogma.

Hlewa is an award-winning writer living in Haifa, little known outside of Palestine. This is often the fate of Palestinian writers writing in Arabic and living within the 1948 borders of the settler state. Like my experience with my family, the Arab literary scene has been historically cut off from Palestinians who never left the homeland. I first encountered this poem through this translation by award-winning Palestinian American poet, translator and medical doctor Fady Joudah. In addition to being a most sensitive Palestinian poet writing in English, Joudah is a committed curator and translator of Palestinian and Syrian poets. His work has introduced me to many writers I would consequently begin to read and follow.

Nakba

My mother is three years younger than Nakba.
 But she doesn't believe in great powers.
 Twice a day she brings God down from his throne
 then reconciles with him
 through the mediation of the best
 recorded Quranic recitations.
 And she can't bear meek women.
 She never once mentioned Nakba.
 Had Nakba been her neighbor,
 my mom would've shamelessly chided her:
 'I'm sick of the clothes on my back.'
 And had Nakba been her older sister,
 she would've courted her with a dish
 of khubaizeh, but if her sister whined
 too much, my mom would tell her: 'Enough.
 You're boring holes in my brain. Maybe
 we shouldn't visit for a while?'
 And had Nakba been an old friend,
 my mom would tolerate her idiocy
 until she died, then imprison her in a young picture
 up on the wall of the departed,
 a kind of cleansing ritual before she'd sit to watch
 dubbed Turkish soap operas.
 And had Nakba been an elderly Jewish woman
 that my mom had to care for on Sabbath,
 my mom would teasingly tell her
 in cute Hebrew: 'You hussy,
 you still got a feel for it, don't you?'
 And had Nakba been younger than my mom,
 she'd spit in her face and say:
 'Rein in your kids, get'em inside,
 you drifter.'

Haifa

Mosab Abu Toha

I learnt about Gazan poet Mosab Abu Toha and about the Edward Said Library in Gaza through my friend, American poet and translator Marilyn Hacker. But it took a trip to New York at the beginning of this year for me to encounter his poetry, through the book *Things You May Find Hidden in my Ear* (City Lights Publishers, 2022), at Unnameable Books in Brooklyn. I bought the book immediately, despite my scepticism for how poetry addressing war is often thrust into the limelight for commercial reasons. It turned out to be one of the most gratifying poetic experiences I have had for some time. The poet writes in English and has studied at prominent universities in the US. He lived in Gaza until this war, when he was kidnapped by the Israeli Occupying Forces, released through international pressure, and subsequently became a refugee with his family in Egypt. I read poems from this book to my partner and gifted my copy to a dear author friend in New York. I bought a new copy to take home with me to Oslo to read this beautiful collection with my daughter. I chose this poem to honour all poets, like Audre Lorde, who speak up for and write about Palestine. Some years ago, I translated the poem by Lorde that Abu Toha riffs off into Arabic, following the assassination of Lebanese intellectual and publisher Lokman Slim by Iran-backed Hizbullah operatives in South Lebanon. Abu Toha's reference to this poem questions Lorde's famous ending and adds valuable insight on the approach to censorship. As he suggests, we have not been silent in the face of censorship, we have been silenced, for those who are complicit in our censoring have given up their ability to listen.

A Litany for One Land *After Audre Lorde*

For those living on the other side,
we can see you, we can see the rain
when it pours on your (our) fields, on your (our) valleys,
and when it slides down the roofs of your 'modern' houses
(built atop our homes).

Can you take off your sunglasses and look at us here,
see how the rain has flooded our streets,
how the children's umbrellas have been pierced
by a prickly downpour on their way to school?
The trees you see have been watered with our tears.
They bear no fruit.
The red roses take their color from our blood.
They smell of death.

The river that separates us from you is just
a mirage you created when you expelled us.

IT IS ONE LAND!

For those who are standing on the other side
shooting at us, spitting on us,
how long can you stand there, fenced by hate?
Are you going to keep your black glasses on until
you're unable to put them down?

Soon we won't be here for you to watch.
It won't matter if you blink your eyes or not,
if you can stand or not.
You won't cross that river
to take more lands,
because you will vanish into your mirage.
You can't build a new colony on our graves.

And when we die,
our bones will continue to grow,
to reach and intertwine with the roots of the olive
and orange trees, to bathe in the sweet Yaffa sea.
One day, we will be born again when you're not there.
Because this land knows us. She is our mother.
When we die, we're just resting in her womb
until the darkness is cleared.

For those who are NOT here anymore,
We have been here forever.
We have been speaking but you
never cared to listen.

Kamal Nasser**Trans: Rana Issa**

Kamal Nasser used to say that he was too scared to carry arms in his struggle for Palestine. The pen was his preferred weapon. Born in 1924 in Gaza, and growing up in Bir Zeit close to Ramallah, Nasser graduated from the American University of Beirut. He first worked as an Arabic teacher then later as a lawyer, before he dedicated himself to a life of journalism and political activism. He was elected into the PLO Executive Committee and headed its information office, until he became the PLO spokesperson in 1969. Nasser was martyred on 10 April 1973 on Verdun Street in Beirut in a Mossad operation led by Ehud Barak, who became Israel's prime minister in 1999. In this poem, Nasser depicts the harrowing silence following a genocidal storm in an unnamed city. Unusually for him, he dated the poem. This led me to inquire about whether any lesser-known massacre corresponded with the date. I found none. Was he referring to what he witnessed in the massacre and annihilation of Palestinian cities in 1948? Or was he seeing into the future and our present – how the city of his birth was to be rendered a city of the dead?

The Green Light

I walk through the city of the dead
trampling over my shadow
I beg the slain ruins for life
in my land and my people.
This silence, this slumber terrifies me
how the pale casts its long shadow, it frightens me, as if it's all that remains
of the corpses
embracing me
coiling around me... should I walk in the city of the dead

~~~~~

No  
I did not come to bring life,  
to my city, and I did not come to re-member the fragments.  
The big game collapsed  
in the playing fields of the endgame  
Shame offered prayers at the funeral.  
The banquet of conflict is whored  
made wanton by the propagandists  
and the patrons.  
Feeble she stood erect... bringing crumbs

Crumbs will not satisfy  
Crumbs will not satisfy

~~~~~

When I walk in the city of the dead
trampling over my shadow
I beg the slain ruins for life
in my land and my people
I find everything. Died.

~~~~~

And when I walked through the city of the dead  
desolation killing me  
my I wounding me  
proud impotence marching away from survival with me in procession,  
I caught a specter obliterating the emptiness,  
creeping like light on the world.  
I found myself traversing the vast expanse  
walking behind it  
I found myself crossing through life  
Walking like faith itself, in the city of the dead..  
The torment of existence surging through me  
I glimpsed a child... one year old.

15/10/1965

**Dareen Tatour****Trans: Tariq al Haydar**

Nazareth-born Dareen Tatour was arrested on 11 October 2015 for writing this poem and charged with incitement to violence and supporting a terrorist organization. For three years she moved between administrative detention and house arrest, until she was finally released due to international pressure. The Israeli prosecution absurdly built its case (replete with a slew of literature professors) to discredit Tatour as a poet. Was this trial what prompted Palestinian American Noor Hindi to write her famous poem 'Fuck Your Lecture on Craft, My People Are Dying'? The settler state, like many other settler administrations and colonial powers, is petrified of a people's right to defend themselves. To acknowledge this right is tantamount to acknowledging the conditions that lead a people to fight back. Obviously, Israeli society is too radicalized today for such an act of recognition. This leaves Palestinians with no choice other than to continue to resist, for in this self-endangering act, we return to ourselves. Through resistance we become Palestinians, a people that rejects the structures of oppression that victimize us. Tariq al Haydar, a poet and artist, translated this poem in solidarity with her plight, in a gesture of literary activism committed to rescuing one of our own from the grip of the aggressors. You can listen to the poem in the voice of Tatour [here](#).

**Resist, My People, Resist Them**

Resist, my people, resist them.  
 In Jerusalem, I dressed my wounds and breathed my sorrows  
 And carried the soul in my palm  
 For an Arab Palestine.  
 I will not succumb to the 'peaceful solution',  
 Never lower my flags  
 Until I evict them from my land.  
 I cast them aside for a coming time.  
 Resist, my people, resist them.  
 Resist the settler's robbery  
 And follow the caravan of martyrs.  
 Shred the disgraceful constitution  
 Which imposed degradation and humiliation  
 And deterred us from restoring justice.

They burned blameless children;  
 As for Hadil, they sniped her in public,  
 Killed her in broad daylight.  
 Resist, my people, resist them.  
 Resist the colonialist's onslaught.  
 Pay no mind to his agents among us  
 Who chain us with the peaceful illusion.  
 Do not fear doubtful tongues;  
 The truth in your heart is stronger,  
 As long as you resist in a land  
 That has lived through raids and victory.  
 So Ali called from his grave:  
 Resist, my rebellious people.  
 Write me as prose on the agarwood;  
 My remains have you as a response.  
 Resist, my people, resist them.  
 Resist, my people, resist them.

# Diary of a Crossing

Baqiya and Yu'ad

27 Mar 2024

## **Baqiya and Yu'ad**

We are using pseudonyms. The names come from the amazing novel *The Secret Life of Saeed: The Pessoptimist* (1974) by Emile Habibi. Read it.





All photos: Baqiya and Yu'ad



5:00: Although our flight is at 1 p.m., we are up at 5 a.m.. I didn't sleep well. We ordered the Uber for 10 a.m. and we are at the airport early. **We** have a bag full of food for the **trip** ahead.

At passport control the border police speak to us in Dutch and are surprised that we don't speak it. They ask us if we're going on holiday to Amman, we nod and smile and give each other a look.

We are grumpy, we snap at each other. We spend the first half hour on the plane deleting photos on our phones, changing our profile names and deleting **stories on Instagram**. At some point the pilot explains **why the flight takes five hours instead of four** – 'because of the "situation in Israel"' **he says**.

### **we**

The We is sometimes an I. The I is sometimes a We. The I can also be anyone of us, and it can be none of us.

### **trip**

To get to the West Bank we first must get to Amman airport, then we have to get to the King Hussain Bridge compound, which is open only from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m., so as we arrived in Amman at 9 p.m. we had to stay in a hotel until the morning when a taxi took us to the bridge. The bridge is a complex of security and administrative facilities, entering Palestine for the Palestinians is like entering a high security prison compound. On the Jordanian side our bags are checked and then our passports, then we get on a bus which we are not allowed to leave until we reach the Israeli side. On the Israeli side our bags are checked again, and our documents and Israeli re-entry permits are checked, we get a permit to enter, we collect our bags and go by bus to the Palestinian side. There our documents are checked again; we collect our bags and get into a 7-seater van to Ramallah. The journey home cost us 1000 euros each. Compare this to Israeli citizens who travel through Ben Gurion airport, it takes them 6 hours and around 300 euros.

### **stories on Instagram**

We had to delete Signal and Telegram from our phones, and check our Instagram accounts for any posts. Our friends told us that the Israeli soldiers can ask to check your phones and see what we have posted or shared or consumed, it is not only about what we share but who we follow.

One friend told us a story about his friend who was stopped at a checkpoint, the soldiers asked to check his Telegram account, he said he didn't have one, they beat him up, they accused him of deleting it. We were worried. Should we have kept it? Well, we should keep it and not use it as proof of innocence. A Palestinian in Palestine is always guilty.

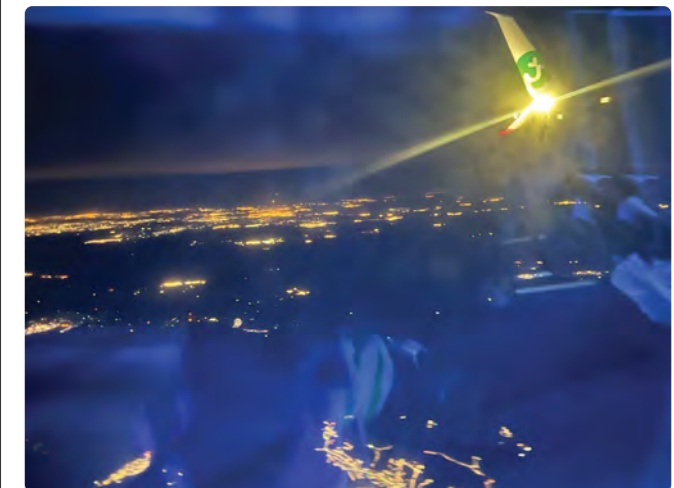
### **why the flight takes five hours instead of four**

On the plane, in the air, the pilot announced the route: 'we will fly over Central Europe, then the Balkans, then Greece, Crete, then across the Mediterranean to Egypt, over Cairo, Sinai, across the Gulf of Tiran, to Aqaba, and then north to Amman airport.' So now you don't fly over Palestine/Israel, you fly around it. In recent years, Saudi Arabia has allowed Israeli planes to fly over its airspace, and since then planes have been flying east over the West Bank from Ben-Gurion airport. Every minute a plane flies over our heads, we see them take off or land, loud and clear. But we are not allowed to be on any of them.

### **Israel**

On that flight we were sitting on the left side of the plane. Once we flew north over Jordan along Palestine's eastern borders, looking through the window into the darkness of the night and the light of the awakened towns, it suddenly occurred to us that Gaza is just there, to the west, and if we gaze hard enough we might see it, or we might actually be looking at it, there, unmediated through a screen or transmitted through signals and cables. There, the genocide is actually taking place, in front of our eyes.

### **he says.**



We arrive in Amman. I open my phone; my sister writes that she's on her way to take my mother to hospital in Jerusalem. The taxi driver who took us from Amman airport to the hotel is angry, he talks about Gaza all the way. He says 'they've humiliated us, the world is conspiring against us, we're all broken'. At the hotel we

are upgraded when we mention that we're leaving early for Palestine in the morning. A gesture of solidarity! We thank them. (Solidarity in the age of neoliberalism always takes the form of money, discounts, funding and donations. This time, money can't reach Gaza, and even if it did, there's hardly anything it could buy.) I venture out to get some sandwiches for dinner, the streets are empty, the air so fresh, I've missed it.

7:00: I've slept very badly for the second night in a row. Breakfast is better than we thought. We eat quickly and rush to the taxi waiting outside the entrance. We're nervous. The streets are empty and we arrive in almost 50 minutes. I needed more time to prepare mentally – suddenly we're there, flies everywhere, people rushing with their bags, trying to be first in line. I'm directed to the women's search room. The guards are all having breakfast, I'm patted down randomly, we fill in the 'white card' with our details and queue again. I give the officer my travel document and my green card. He asks for my Israeli re-entry permit, looks at it, hands it back and tells me to go to the other window to get my passport. We go to the next queue for the bus. Turnstiles! These are new, they must be learning from each other! One of our bags is missing. It's still in their office for an extra check. A young man in front of us is pleading with the officers to let go of his dozen cigarettes, saying, 'Come on, just let

it go, can't you see how tough the situation is?' They do indeed let go after reprimanding him. We get our bags and get on the bus. The bus stops at the exit gate of the Jordanian side and an officer gets in. He asks for our passports and white cards, he takes part of our white cards and checks everyone's passports. We reach the Israeli side.

We argue about whether I should go in without my bags. We hate being separated, but we have different **types of ID**, so it's better that they don't see us together.

We put the bag stickers on all our documents. We go in, I have to pee, I mumble that I'm going to the toilet, Y takes the bags first, I hold them, take the bags from the machines, surprisingly they are not checked. A young 17-year-old Israeli soldier points to the document control window. Y whispers to me to go to the window far away, 'but why is this one empty' I whisper back. We end up at the windows next to each other. The officer looks at me and smiles. I'm breathing fast, nervous, he can see it, he takes his time. He asks me

#### **types of ID**

One of us has green, the other blue. The Israeli authorities issue Palestinians different identity cards, and these cards determine their lives. Some Palestinians who have a blue card have full Israeli citizenship, others who are from Jerusalem, have a blue card but are considered temporary residents in the city and are subjects of the Israeli state. Palestinians from the West Bank have green cards, the same as Palestinians from Gaza, the difference is the address section. If you are from the West Bank you are only allowed to live in Area A in the West Bank, if you are from Gaza you are only allowed to live in Gaza. Even though Palestinians live under the Palestinian Authority rule in Area A, they are still subjects to the Israeli military rule.

Do you know what Areas A, B and C are?

if I was alone, Y hears him, he looks at me. I reply 'no, I'm with him', 'but he has a West Bank identity card'. Yes, I reply. 'Where do you live?' 'In Jerusalem.' 'Where does he live?' 'In Ramallah.' 'Do you live separately?' 'We meet **once a week** in Ramallah.' Yu'ad is whispering right next to me: 'I told you to go to a window far away!' I feel stupid. Our marriage is registered in Jerusalem anyway, they know. But not the details. Yu'ad says there's more to talk about when we're next to each other. Stupid, **I feel stupid.**

We go through the turnstiles into an area with more turnstiles, a guard scans the stickers, 'your bags have passed security', out of the turnstiles, we pick up our bags, we queue for another turnstile, a guard checks that our bags match our stickers, out of the turnstiles. We get on the bus to Jericho. The PA officers check our documents, they fill in the information on paper, I think they throw it in the rubbish afterwards, they give us pink slips, the next guard takes the empty slips. While all the guards stage a performance of power, the Palestinian Authority officers are the most blatant. They don't decide who enters, they can't ban or allow anyone in or out, we all know – our own public secret – that only the Israelis have the power to do that.

#### once a week

Green cards holders are not allowed to be in Jerusalem. Blue cards holders have to prove all the time that Jerusalem is the centre of their lives, otherwise they might lose their right to live in Palestine.

#### I feel stupid

Once, Baqiya called me from Qalandia checkpoint on her way to Jerusalem, saying that she forgot her ID card at home, and that she needs me to pick it up for her and meet her halfway to give it to her, this took around 2 hours due to the enormous traffic. When we finally met, I was furious because she forgot her ID, she replied saying that I shouldn't get angry with her because she forgot, but angry about the existence of the checkpoint. The checkpoint is the problem not her.

We hurry to find a van to take us to Ramallah. We ask the driver about the checkpoint. He says we should go on the **Moa'arajat road**. The **checkpoint** shouldn't be too bad. We are stuck there for an hour. I start writing this text on my phone while waiting. I have this urge to **explain** to friends abroad the **absurdity** of the situation, but also to somehow gain time (and labor) from the time they steal from us. The driver tells us how bad the roads are and that they've changed **today**. It's taking much longer. The DCO checkpoint is closed; we have to pass through several villages instead. Not great news. I'm getting nauseous. But it is also nice to see the **Palestinian countryside**. I have a feeling that we won't be traveling outside of Ramallah **during this trip**.

#### Moa'arajat

Moa'arajat road also means the twisted road, it is one of two roads that connects Ramallah to Jericho. It is a mountainous curvy and steep. People take it when the other main road is closed, which is faster and safer. Moa'arajat road is more beautiful and has less settlers on in, it goes through Palestinian villages and towns. This time of the year it is very green and lush. We miss seeing hills and extended landscape. I was happy that we were taking this road.

#### checkpoint



#### explain

The questions resonate: What is art in the time of genocide? Is it possible to discuss the role of art in such a world? Is there anything that art can say that has not already been said?

A friend in Ramallah said there is nothing art can say or do right now, that artists should become activists, learn how to survive properly without electricity, water and food. Learn how to forage, make fire, how to connect wires for electricity, how to connect to the internet in a genocide, first aid, how to clean a wound



without medicine, how to print on a mimeograph, tell stories to children, learn to farm, know which grass to eat. She said the West Bank is next, we feel it. Another artist said 'even when sheep are slaughtered we usually don't do it in front of the other living sheep'. He felt like a sheep watching another sheep being slaughtered, knowing that he is next.

### absurdity

I almost have an imposter feeling when i chronicle to people the things one goes through in Palestine, I even hear paranoia in my own stories about the unbelievable collective punishment tactics used against the Palestinians daily, until I read David Graeber's text 'Hostile Intelligence: Reflections from a Visit to the West Bank' (*International Times*, 2015). It's sad that a famous writer could affirm one's own lived experiences.

### today

People told us that they haven't managed to do anything since that day. That day. That's what people call it now: that day.

### Palestinian countryside

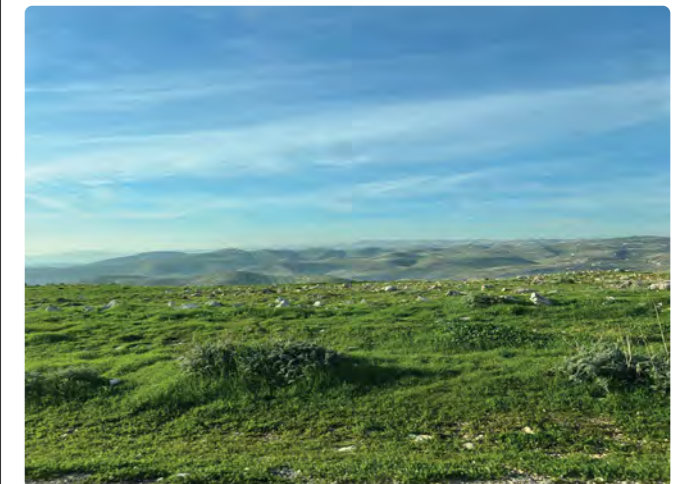


During our visit we picked khobeze. It grows all over the West Bank. By the roadside, in the hills, under trees, always after the rain and the sun. The eastern Mediterranean is famous for spring in the middle of winter and the fluidity of the seasons. I thought about how such a plant came to be part of Palestinian cuisine. People gather it among other plants and eat it in different ways. The land is never far away. My mother fries it with olive oil, some onion, salt and pepper and eats it with bread. A friend says she adds garlic, another friend says with sumaq and olive oil.

Khobeze sounds like khoboz, which is the Arabic word for bread. I wonder if they are related.

Khoboz is rare in Gaza now, people are starving, Israel has bombed all the bakeries and barely allows wheat in. Now people have to invent ways of making bread if they can find the wheat. We saw many videos of people making their ovens out of cans and DIY ovens, burning wood and material they could collect from destroyed homes and from felled trees. The Eltiqa group of artists wrote that their gallery was bombed by an Israeli tank missile, the gallery was looted by residents, they were looking for things to burn, no one touched the electrical equipment, but the paintings and furniture were used to make fires for heat and to bake bread. They wrote that they were sad to see the artworks destroyed, but then they wrote that people's lives are more important than art. Isn't the frame of the painting more important than the canvas in times of war and genocide? What is art in times of genocide?

### during this trip





11:52: another checkpoint at Yabrud village.



Yabrud village



12:25: still stuck at the checkpoint, a white butterfly passes by. We can't manage to see the end of the traffic.

12:38: We can finally see the checkpoint. Yu'ad takes a photo of the soldiers, the driver tells him not

to: they'll see you, better not take a picture of them. Yu'ad returns his phone to his pocket. The soldiers are checking one blue car vehemently, its passengers have been made to squat on the ground while the soldiers points at them with their guns. We're closer, one of the men can't be older than 15, a child.

I stop typing and put my phone in my pocket. **The December sun warms my face.**

13:05: We cross. We see a soldier tightening plastic handcuffs on one of the young men as we finally pass. While we're passing through the narrow streets of Ein Yabrud village Y is discussing the rest of the route with the driver, and whether there's going to be another checkpoint. They talk about how tough this road was back in 2002 when it first opened. It was during the second Intifada, checkpoints were everywhere and Palestinians couldn't travel on the main roads. This road was originally a side road for donkeys to go up hill, taxi drivers began using it to move between villages and later it became a kind of official road with asphalt, it is still hard, very steep.

#### The December sun warms my face

The sun is amazing, it is warm here. At night it is a bit chilly. It is December. It should be cold now. But luckily this year it isn't. A friend said: I hope it doesn't rain this year, the sky shouldn't drop rain and bombs at the same time.

14:00: We **arrive home**. It's been 32 hours since we woke up in Amsterdam.

### arrive



### home

There is a collective sorrow, an overwhelming sadness. We have never seen a city engulfed with such sadness in our life. We don't think we will ever move beyond this sadness... and anger.

# The silence has been unfolding for too long

The Free Palestine Initiative Croatia

11 Apr 2024





'Red, Green, Black and White', Institute of Radical Imagination, MSU Zagreb, 21 January 2024.  
Photo: Anna Rispoli



The silence has been unfolding for too long. The longer it unfolds, the more compelling it becomes. It puts on different coats. Each of them being oddly familiar. We put on our coat of silence for we can't digest what the eye captures. We are silent for we avoid deeper understanding. It would impose a new demand on us. We keep being silent for we look away. Straight looking would mean witnessing, and witnessing calls for accountability. We breathe silence when we don't call out the others for that would mean calling out ourselves. Remaining unaccountable. We are silent for many are. For being ashamed, for perhaps never using our voice for the (O)thers.

We endure the silence for it provides the safety of belonging. To the silent majority. Fenced off the world. The silence is kind. And we don't want to be unkind to kindness. The silence feels good enough. The loyalty to silence doesn't stand out inscribed in our foreheads. The silence thinks no evil. The silence has no thoughts. The silence emerges with a good intention paving a path to someone else's hell. The Free Palestine Initiative understands the silences we are coated into. We tell all the ones who are troubled with showing up in the streets and joining the protests, performances and other public events, that you are not alone and that you don't have to endure the burden of silence solely by yourself.

Not even the burden of not using your own voice!

The system of negation of the individual and collective human experience counts on your isolation as it has long counted on the isolation of Palestinians, whose lives began and ended in a clear awareness that they were born alone, and that the very act of their birth was invisible. Their happiness is invisible, as is their misery. They are invisible and even unknown as human beings, as part of brotherhood and sisterhood in the universe.

Despite all the sophisticated possibilities of witnessing the Palestinian experience of occupation, in its most radical version – erasing not only people from the face of the Earth but also the very face of the Earth – it remains invisible. Parents contemplating strategies for sleeping under bombs are invisible. Names written in Arabic script on the white surface of bags containing mortal remains are invisible.

Dear compatriots, all of you who have not yet said JUSTICE FREEDOM PEACE EQUALITY FOR ALL, we want to say that the choice of not making a choice is still a choice. The decision we have not made is also a decision. Your silence is not neutrality or objectivity but an alignment with the long historical tradition of the so-called bystanders, those who have witnessed the horrors inflicted on others and remained silent.

So we say it again: You are not alone, you don't have to be alone, and the only thing needed is the decision to extend a hand. We intend to be within reach. We are going nowhere, and we judge no one for what cannot be judged, breaking the silence in this moment – on the 106th day of the relentless collective destruction of the people of Gaza – with a song about the ones who were taken away from us.

Zagreb, 21 January 2024

# Everything will stay the same if we don't speak up

L'Internationale Confederation

17 Apr 2024





lumbung press installation, exhibition view of 'Song for Many Movements: Scenes of Collective Creation', MACBA. Photo: Miquel Coll, 2024. © MACBA



We, members of L'Internationale, speak as the genocide of Palestinians is being broadcast to the world while those speaking out against it are being silenced.

We speak as the cultural field is threatened anew by the censorship, self-censorship, pre-censorship, language policing, cancellation, disinvitation and defunding of politically dissenting voices.  
We speak as the cultural field has turned into a battleground.

We see the imperative to overcome our collective failure to find a common voice.

We see the imperative to speak together, which is not always allowed, encouraged or trusted.

We speak with friends and allies whose strength and words empower us.

**To the artists, poets and writers who refuse complicity in silence, who understand that silence is a position.**

**To the cultural workers who reclaim their right to have their own voice and to not echo the position of the institution and the state.**

We see censorship and the criminalization of political dissent returning to so-called liberal democracies.  
We see artists and activists being arrested in the streets.  
We see cancelled programmes everywhere.  
We see artists and cultural workers being disinvited.  
We see artists and activists being shadow banned.  
We see websites being shut down.  
We see contracts not being renewed.  
We see artists and cultural workers being defunded.

*Chronicle: 'The Museum Watch committee is following with concern the dreadful situation in Gaza and its repercussions in the worlds of art and culture—more specifically, its consequences for artists and curators who express their support for the Palestinian people.'*

*Chronicle: 'On Monday April 8, 2024, the executive board of ETH Zurich issued a statement announcing that they were cancelling the lecture of Léopold Lambert who had been invited by ETH students.'*

**To the artists and activists who are cancelled for calling for a ceasefire, for an end to the dehumanization of Palestinians.**

**To the artists who are withdrawing in protest at institutional censorship.**

We see that the ground for silencing was being prepared long before the ongoing genocide in Gaza.

We see the excess of information as having created the conditions for silence and inaction.

We see the impossibility of art during genocide.

We see the necessity of art during genocide.

We see our relationships fracturing.

*Chronicle: 'After giving the matter careful consideration, during which we discussed a number of different options, we have decided to withdraw from the Gorki Theatre's Lost – You Go Slavia programme in protest against its one-sided statement on the cancelling of The Situation.'*

*Chronicle: 'Yto Barrada, Diedrick Brackens, Mounira al Solh, and Cian Dayrit recently withdrew their work from an exhibition at London's Barbican in protest at the cancellation of a talk by Pankaj Mishra.'  
(They were later joined by Zamthingla Ruivah and Art Jameel, who rescinded the loan of a painting by Pacita Abad.)*

**To the directors of cultural institutions who are forced to resign because of unfounded accusations of anti-Semitism.**

**To the Jewish directors of cultural institutions who are forced to resign because of unfounded accusations of anti-Semitism.**

We see artists and cultural workers double guessing what boards might think.  
We see endless open letters.

We see people too scared to sign open letters.

We see lists appearing with 'the good ones' and 'the bad ones'.

We see students asking unanswered questions.

We see Palestinian flags being taken down from universities.

*Chronicle: At the time of writing, there are 129 cases on the Archive of Silence – Cancellation & Silencing Public List (not exhaustive). The latest entry is dated 8 April 2024: 'SWR dismisses Helen Fares from moderating the digital dialogue format "MixTalk" due to "her extreme political positions" after she posted a video on Instagram using the app "No Thanks" which helps identify products by companies that support Israel.'*

*Chronicle: 'A German museum has reportedly canceled a Candice Breitz show planned for 2024 because of the artist's statements on the violence taking place in Gaza, where thousands have been killed in Israeli airstrikes.'*



**To the students who are blocked from organizing a Palestinian solidarity reading group on procedural grounds.**

**To the educators whose contract is not renewed because they support students protesting genocide.**

We see scholars, journalists, artists and poets silenced through escalating disciplinary measures.  
 We see Palestinian scholars, journalists, artists and poets slaughtered in Gaza and beyond.  
 We see Palestinian life and expression in danger all over the world.  
 We see writers resigning from their positions in major media outlets, refusing complicity,  
 leaving holes the size of poetry.  
 Holes in the land of Palestinians.  
 Holes in the hearts of Palestinians.  
 People too thirsty to be able to cry.

*Chronicle: Anne Boyer: 'I have resigned as poetry editor of The New York Times Magazine. The Israeli state's U.S.-backed war against the people of Gaza is not a war for anyone. There is no safety in it or from it, not for Israel, not for the United States or Europe, and especially not for the many Jewish people slandered by those who claim falsely to fight in their names.'*

*Chronicle: 'As we witness the genocide unfolding in Palestine, measures of repression against pro-Palestinian speech around the world are intensifying. Among the latest examples is the suspension last week of Professor Amin Husain from his long-standing adjunct teaching job at New York University for speech-related activity about the U.S.-funded war on Gaza.'*

**To the cultural workers who are too scared to be recorded speaking publicly for fear of reprisal.**

**To the academics who are told not to teach, to keep quiet and stay at home until their contract expires.**

We see a blatant disregard for international law.  
 We see the IHRA definition of anti-Semitism limiting the ability to combat fascism.  
 We see that Palestine shines a light on colonialism across the world.  
 We see how it is deemed acceptable to not address apartheid after seventy-six years of occupation.  
 We see that after the ICJ and UN resolutions, the world, including the art worlds, must not keep silent.  
 We see Palestine looking.  
 We feel Palestine listening.

*Chronicle: 'Dear Professor Dr. Andreas Hoffmann, Managing director, Documenta und Museum Fridericianum gGmbH, We, the remaining members of the Finding Committee [for documenta 16], after the recent resignations of our esteemed colleagues Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger and Ranjit Hoskote, announce hereafter our collective resignation from this honorable task.'*

*Chronicle: 'In the UK, a group called "UK Lawyers for Israel", have pressured the University of Manchester's Vice Chancellor to, and I quote, "consider appropriate disciplinary action" against the director of the Whitworth Gallery, following an exhibition by the collective Forensic Architecture which included a statement of solidarity with Palestine.'*

**To the Jewish cultural workers who are accused of anti-Semitism based on the IHRA definition.**

**To the artists who refuse to sign a document stating their adherence to the IHRA definition of anti-Semitism.**

We see all the art centres, all the universities, and hundreds of schools destroyed in Gaza.  
 We see museums and archives going to crumbs, memories becoming dust.  
 We see children buried under the dust.  
 We see children still dancing in the dust.  
 We see more clearly, despite all the dust.  
 We see too much from above.  
 We see eyes under the rubble.  
 We see that we are privileged to see.  
 We want to stop only seeing.  
 We are done with seeing.

*Chronicle: 'You are speaking about the conditions of speaking, but people are dying.'*

*Chronicle: 'The last of two contemporary arts spaces in the Gaza Strip was completely destroyed in March during Israel's second military incursion on the Al-Shifa Hospital. Shababeek (Arabic for 'windows') for Contemporary Art, a nonprofit arts education center and gallery space in Gaza City that opened in 2009, stood just a few feet away from the medical complex and was left completely decimated after Israeli forces finally retreated.'*

*Chronicle: Lana Bastašić, a Bosnian writer living in Germany, linked her experience of the Bosnian war to the genocide in Gaza. Bastašić left her publisher S Fischer 'citing its failure "to be vocal about the ongoing genocide happening in Gaza".'*

**To the cultural workers who are told to qualify their respect for all human life, as if this should not apply to Palestinians as well as Israelis.**

**To the art and cultural institutions opting to end funding from companies and organizations that serves to culture wash apartheid and genocide.**

We see money determining our political imagination.

We see imagination starved.

We see people starving.

We see that art is dying where life dies too.

We see preventive censorship as a new master's tool.

We hear 'hush-hush, use your words appropriately'.

We see European cultural institutions being used to normalize genocide.

We see inexplicable motives to conceal what is happening.

We see all this happening in the open.

Do you see what we see?

Is only seeing enough?

What are we waiting to see next?

A disclaimer cannot protect us anymore.

*Chronicle: 'David Velasco, who has been at the helm of Artforum for six years, and at the magazine for 18, was fired by the magazine's publishers, who in a statement posted on the magazine's website claimed that an open letter signed by thousands in support of Palestine "was widely misinterpreted as a statement from the magazine about highly sensitive and complex geopolitical circumstances".' Associate Editor Kate Sutton, along with Senior Editors Zack Hatfield and Chloe Wyma, resigned in solidarity.*

*Chronicle: 'The first American retrospective of Samia Halaby, regarded as one of the most important living Palestinian artists, was abruptly cancelled by officials at Indiana University in recent weeks.'*

**To the cultural workers who no longer receive institutional invitations because they signed an open letter naming and condemning genocide.**

**To the cultural workers who want to speak out against genocide but do not know how to because their institutions have fostered a culture of silence.**

We see too many cultural institutions not knowing what to say,  
saying anything at all while saying nothing.

*Are we saying something?*

We see too many cultural institutions doing nothing,  
afraid of the consequences.

*Are we doing something?*

We see art institutions fighting among themselves.

We see the cultural sector faltering.

*Chronicle: 'Freemuse also notes attempts by governments to take administrative control of national museums and cultural institutions to ensure that they favour artworks with nationalistic or pro-government messages in their exhibitions ... The deliberate interference in the programming and leadership of cultural and arts institutions inadvertently places undue restrictions on the rights of those accessing the arts.'*

**To the artists who have their year-long project cancelled by the university that employed them, who are told to keep the money but stay silent.**

**To the lawyers and academics doing pro bono work to expose censorship.**

We see business as usual.

We see colleagues keeping quiet for fear of losing funding.

We see colleagues afraid of losing their jobs and livelihoods.

We see cultural institutions still accepting funds tied to Israel.

We see double standards prevailing at art biennials.

We see our complicity when we participate in events financed by the same capital and supported by the same countries that send arms to Israel.

We see public institutions who are unwilling – or unable – to take a position against genocide.

We see only a few brave public institutions taking a position against genocide.

We see powerful artists' networks taking a position against genocide.

We see that everything will stay the same if we don't speak up.

# One day, freedom will be

Françoise Vergès

19 Apr 2024





Art Not Genocide Demonstration, Giardini della Biennale, Venice, 17 April 2024.  
Photo: Emanuele Braga



**Les enfants, mettez le feu, mettez le feu!**  
**Mettez le feu pour mettre de l'ordre**  
**Mettez le feu, mettez le désordre**  
**Mettez le désordre pour mettre de l'ordre**

– Pebouchfini feminist group, 2018<sup>1</sup>

1. 'Children, set it on fire,  
 set it on fire!  
 Start a fire to bring order  
 Start a fire, create disorder  
 Create disorder to put things  
 in order'

## 1. Dis-Order

Palestine is a lens through which to examine decolonization processes within Western institutions. Despite ongoing discussions about art and the decolonization of cultural and artistic institutions, these entities often struggle to address the issue's root causes. The challenge lies in confronting the foundations of liberal democracies, such as the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, which present themselves as benevolent humanitarian regimes advocating for women's and children's rights, freedom, and equality. Therefore, the concept of democracy is entwined with genocidal violence, land theft and object looting to populate the prestigious collections of Western museums. On the one hand, democracy is portrayed as the pinnacle of global human rights protection, justifying further exploitation of energy, land and objects. On the other hand, it is an ongoing struggle for social, gender and racial justice against imperialism and racial and patriarchal capitalism. Cultural and artistic institutions should start addressing this evident contradiction, which is intentionally avoided in the failed processes of decolonizing Western institutions.

Let's be clear: the term 'Western' is frequently employed, but it requires clarification. In this context, it refers to the West constructed by colonial modernity, colonization and the establishment of racial hierarchies. This process necessitated the erasure of marginalized people, such as nomads and prisoners, along with their Indigenous communities and linguistic diversity, to build monolingual nation states. I draw upon Cedric Robinson's theory of racial capitalism to underscore the construction of racialization processes on Western soil. From this perspective, Palestine holds a crucial role as the Israeli nation state epitomizes the systematic, murderous and brutal violence inherent in the concept of liberal-imperial democracy. This process results in a government that seizes everything: life, land, culture and memory.

Despite facing an unmistakable situation – an ongoing genocide – cultural and artistic institutions hesitate to denounce and address the core issue at hand. Instead, they adeptly conceal it due to their evident complicity with an idea of 'democracy' that avoids confronting its association with the colonial-racial regime. This same reason makes me doubt the feasibility of decolonizing Western cultural and artistic institutions. This scepticism does not negate ongoing struggles, such as demands for restitution,

reparations, improved working conditions, an end to sexual and racial violence, and fair pay for often overlooked workers like cleaners, guards and technicians. However, I believe it is urgent and crucial to channel energy into envisioning new institutions. Nevertheless, this is no easy feat given the entrenched nature of traditional institutions over two centuries (the nineteenth and twentieth), with their profound impact, influence and power. Breaking free from the traditional institutional mindset poses a significant challenge. It is difficult to assert that these institutions are failures, especially considering the unprecedented number of people visiting museums and cultural institutions today. We cannot simply claim that these institutions 'do not work'; they undeniably exert an attraction that merits analysis. Therefore, it becomes crucial to explore what makes them so appealing.

At the core of this fascination is the idea that these spaces represent freedom, beauty, harmony and universal dialogue more than other spaces like academia or unions. Cultural and artistic institutions are often regarded as primary arenas for freedom of thought and criticism. However, the belief that these spaces are the exclusive domains for *natural* critical thinking and imagination is illusory. In reality, spaces of freedom and critical thinking exist everywhere – in Indigenous struggles against land theft, among striking workers, in migrant struggles for water and within refugee camps. These spaces challenge existing norms and serve as platforms where new institutions are envisioned not as something entirely novel but as transformative processes that fundamentally reconsider the foundations of these institutions.

Therefore, while the decolonization framework has become pervasive in museums, integrated into seminars, exhibitions and meetings, activating decolonizing processes that extend beyond aesthetics to structural changes faces hesitation, incomplete implementation, or outright censorship within institutions. There is a reluctance to challenge the foundational aspects of capitalism, particularly the capitalist structure of labour and the relationship between the worker and the extraction of their labour, including the extraction of ideas and forms. Consequently, the proliferation of debates and decolonial exhibitions that do not address the material conditions of the institutional production system can be seen as another façade for extracting the labour force. After all, the machinery of production must continue to generate commodities daily.

## 2. De-Constructing

Art is a realm where 'beauty', the Western construction of beauty, is often used to justify various actions. In this context, economic corruption associated with pursuing beauty does not tend to provoke scandal. In this confusing context, artists seeking representation in collections and exhibitions, such as advocating for 50 percent representation among displayed works, can sometimes clash with denunciations of extraction – when does representation become fair, and when does it become extraction? In other words, if the desire for representation does not

fuel the denunciation of extraction, there may be a need to redirect this desire toward a more fundamental desire for transformative change. Accordingly, this distinction needs clarification, which can sometimes be blurry. In fact, there is a prevailing notion that art should exist above and outside the market, but this clashes with the increasingly prevalent extraction occurring in the art world. The financialization of art warrants more vigorous denunciation or acknowledgement of what it truly is: pure financial speculation. Once again, the art market thrives on the perception of being exceptional and different from other markets, for instance, the market for commodities such as cobalt. Consequently, it does not provoke scandal as speculative activities and extractivism in the cobalt market might be. Demonstrating the extraction of ideas and artworks is not as straightforward as showcasing the extraction of resources.

Moreover, the collaboration with these institutions often stems from the precarious conditions in which artists find themselves and the illusion that museums represent a unique community. Nevertheless, despite the precarious nature of the art sector, artists harbour a strong desire to be accepted and integrated into these institutions. Consequently, a significant movement for the decolonization of cultural and artistic institutions in western Europe, extending beyond calls for increased representation, has to materialize. From this perspective, a crucial practice is exemplified by *Decolonize This Place*, which involves occupying museums to expose their complicity with colonial history, the arms industry, or the occupation of Palestine. This approach distinguishes itself from efforts merely seeking representation. Instead, it sheds light on the foundational aspects of museum institutions. The act of occupying museums, as exemplified by *Decolonize This Place*, should be replicated and evolve into a broader movement.

### 3. In-Visibility

The process of decolonizing artistic institutions necessitates an examination of their structural and material conditions. Where is the institution situated, and in which neighbourhood? The reasons behind its location and the architecture – whether a modern building or a palace – all play a role. Accessibility is another crucial factor. Who comprises the institution's workforce, and under what conditions do they work? Understanding gender dynamics and racial division of labour within art institutions is essential.

Considering all these aspects beyond the cultural and artistic program is crucial. For instance, knowing the individuals responsible for cleaning the spaces and the kitchen is as important as understanding what is taught and by whom. Questioning the disparity in salaries between curators and cleaners is essential – why should curators earn more? Acknowledging that without cleaners, there would be no curation nor curator activity, challenges the conventional equation. Within this framework, exploring the social value of labour becomes imperative. Examining the economy generated by cultural and artistic institutions breaking free from patriarchal

and colonial exploitation is essential. From a materialistic standpoint, it is crucial to delve into how these institutions would function and the financial resources they would require.

If we do not start from these foundational questions but only focus on programming, the undertaken process can result in something akin to pink or black 'quotas'. On the other hand, by starting with these questions encouraging imagining anew, we may paradoxically discover that certain elements from 'old' institutions could still be valuable. The crucial aspect is envisioning something from scratch, starting with foundations that do not yet exist – a process we must embark upon collectively. However, as previously mentioned, this process is challenging because we are not accustomed to imagining. In other words, we struggle to detach ourselves from the existing models. While we can criticize traditional models, the courage to experiment with the unknown is required for imagining and building a decolonial institution. Thus, we need to retrain our imagination by learning to observe not just designated cultural and art spaces but also those less scrutinized – other institutions and diverse spaces, such as marginal schools and dreams. Amílcar Cabral provides an interesting example in this context, emphasizing pedagogy as a process of liberation and decolonization. Unfortunately, much of the work he did in Guinea-Bissau is largely forgotten. The desire to learn from the marginalized and the ignored must be rediscovered. Indeed, a decolonial institution is a collective experiment in knowledge, doing things differently and reshaping our learning and educational paths. For this reason, a decolonial institution can be rightfully defined not just as cultural and artistic but as social.

Moreover, decolonial and social institutions should pay attention to global events, such as the rise of fascist movements, climate disasters and how neoliberalism and authoritarianism shape an increasingly uninhabitable world for billions. Therefore, the main characteristics of a decolonial institution involve a complex exercise of imagination – one of the most urgent tasks in our current reality.

### 4. Un-Liveable

Every struggle concerning land, water, food, air, and the right to inhabit is inherently revolutionary. It fundamentally opposes the technological 'solutionism' employed by green capitalism to define and address the climate disaster. For instance, discussing the right to clean water shows how many people have already lost this essential, vital right for survival. It is no coincidence that the first thing the State of Israel did was to cut off water to Gaza and deprive the Palestinians in the West Bank of water resources for years. Historically, water has been used as a weapon of war, rewarding victors and punishing the defeated.

During colonial periods and wars, military occupation was intricately linked to the weaponization, theft and privatization of water, like the exploitative practices in plantations during slavery (where in Haiti, for instance, sugar cane, coffee and cotton required a lot of water, and

incredible infrastructures were built to plunder water from the river and direct it to the plantations). Water, like land and air, has always been a critical resource, gaining significance, especially in a world where it is increasingly privatized. The issue of the climate disaster brings us back to central themes that have sparked revolts, insurrections, and revolutions throughout history – struggles for habitable land, clean water and fresh air. These struggles have always meant, and increasingly mean, dealing with the conditions of life itself – in other words, the very possibility of life. Without these essential elements, there is no human life, and much of nonhuman life would not survive either.

Fighting against the conditions of the climate disaster stands at the core of twenty-first-century decolonizing movements. This centrality is evident in the struggles of Indigenous peoples for land and migrants for freedom of movement. Although coloniality has evolved since the nineteenth century, its afterlives persist, manifesting in the lack of breathable air and clean water and in the erosion of resources that render parts of the world uninhabitable. In the current era of racist, patriarchal neoliberal capitalism, colonization employs both traditional and sophisticated weapons – laws, guns, contamination, genocides and massacres, alongside advanced tools like artificial intelligence, techno-nationalism and far-right ideologies. New technologies have amplified and disseminated these ideologies, contributing to the resurgence of fascist virilism.

This resurgence reflects the fear generated by the growing power of Indigenous, anti-racist and transfeminist movements. I see these movements promising the present and future for life for human and nonhuman species that do not need to embrace posthumanism. Indeed, while posthumanism questions the white, imperialist, masculinist version of the human, the constitution of the category of the human itself, and the human/nonhuman separation; and while it looks at hybrid formations and the liberatory potential of bioengineered mechanistic futures, it has limitations. Posthumanism entered the debate as an academic conversation that ignored how Indigenous communities and non-Western theories long challenged human/nonhuman separation. Additionally, it inadequately addresses the dismantling of the racial patriarchal capitalist economy of extraction, dispossession and exploitation and the abolition of the afterlives of slavery and colonization. In contrast, abolition theory appears to offer more comprehensive possibilities.

## 5. Pragmatic utopias

The invention of a division between lives that matter (humans and nonhumans) has created a dystopic world for most lives. Since the fifteenth century, colonization has introduced a dystopian temporality. For those who have benefited from this dystopia, it becomes easy to underestimate utopia as a horizon. What is termed as utopia by some is indeed their dystopia. In Western literature, emancipatory utopias often end badly, reinforcing the belief that 'human nature' poses a natural obstacle to peaceful coexistence and that violence is unavoidable and uncontrollable.

Despite this narrative, emancipatory utopias have frequently inspired practices of solidarity. Instances of solidarity have always existed, even within Fortress Europe, where aiding migrants is criminalized. People reject becoming agents of dehumanization and criminalization, and, despite facing challenges, extend basic but vital help: a glass of water, a roof, a lift, a bed, without expecting anything in return. This solidarity challenges the state and market's narrative of 'protection' and redefines it as radical care, requiring contact, shared existence and a political community. It opposes egotistic individualism, revealing our vulnerabilities and interdependencies. We are not alone; we need each other.

In our discussions on decolonization and emancipation, we often consider ourselves as if we were born already adults, young, valid and in good health. Yet, we were all born as babies and children; we will all age and may be deemed 'non-valid'. In other words, we are more vulnerable than when we conceive what liberation is. Recognizing this exposure changes how we think about radical care and the possibility of building emancipatory utopias. The fragility and vulnerability of a child, the need for physical care in the sense of touch and recognition, as the requirements of elderly or sick individuals – all emphasize our shared fragility: vulnerability in the sense of being free together.

From this perspective, emancipatory utopias dare to think that the world, the world in which we live, must end, which is not the same thing as saying the 'end of the world'. This is not meant in an apocalyptic sense, but to pave the way to build a future that allows us to imagine that we will all be free one day. Not all ends of the world are tragic, as Robyn Maynard said. The end of this world can be a non-apocalyptic moment. The struggle will be long and complex but also filled with joy. It took four centuries to abolish the criminal system of colonial slavery, yet the enslaved never ceased fighting for the emancipatory utopia, claiming: 'One day, we will be free.' Yes, one day, we will be free! One day, there will be freedom for all.

For me, the future holds the promise that one day, this world will cease to exist. It must cease to exist.

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# Live Set: A Love Letter to the Global Intifada

Precolumbian

13 Jun 2024



Precolumbian, 'A Love Letter to the Global Intifada', 'Song for Many Movements: Scenes of Collective Creation', 22 March 2024, MACBA. Photo: Anna Fàbrega

**Broadcast on Radio Alhara (live)  
Closing performance for 'Song for Many Movements'  
22 March 2024**

'A Love Letter to the Global Intifada' is Peruvian-born, Philadelphia-based DJ Precolumbian's sonic tribute to anti-colonial resistance and worldwide solidarity movements for the liberation of Palestine. For this set, the co-founder of queer experimental club night Seltzer weaves together archival soundbites and Afro-Peruvian drums as a love letter to global solidarity with Palestine.

The hybrid set was the closing event of 'Song for Many Movements', an ephemeral experiment in which the ground floor of MACBA became a stage for encounters, conversations and shared listening. The set was streamed live on Radio Alhara.

'Song for Many Movements' was curated by María Berríos and Sabel Gavaldon.

**Precolumbian, 'A Love Letter to the Global Intifada'**  
Live at MACBA icw Radio Alhara.  
22 March 2024



[Listen online](#) →

# The Genocide War on Gaza: Palestinian Culture and the Existential Struggle

Rana Anani

10 Sep 2024





Kadhim Hayder, *Fatigued Ten Horses Converse with Nothing (The Martyr's Epic)*, 1965.  
Courtesy Barjeel Art Foundation

This paper focuses on the role played by Western donor countries, after the establishment of the Palestinian Authority in 1994, in weakening the resilience of Palestinian culture.<sup>1</sup> This was done, the paper outlines, by flooding Palestine with funding, then withdrawing it progressively, and restricting it with conditions in an attempt to subject Palestinians to the culture of peace and the Oslo path, severed from the culture of resistance and resilience associated with the reality of Palestinians in the Occupied Territories. When Israel launched its genocidal war on Gaza, the role of Palestinian cultural institutions was weak, as was its resilience structure and programmes. Ambiguity surrounds the role of Palestinian culture in the near future, in light of the heavy losses it has incurred in Gaza, with the martyrdom of dozens of artistic and literary creators and the destruction of cultural and artistic centres, workshops and libraries, on the one hand; and, on the other, the state of shock and paralysis that afflicted the cultural sector in the West Bank and the Occupied Territories, along with the confusion and inability to transform reality into a platform for challenging, and ending the cultural siege imposed by Oslo.

## Oslo and the illusion of culture

The return of the Palestine Liberation Organization to occupied Palestine following the Oslo Accords in 1993, and the establishment of the Palestinian Authority in 1994, opened a new chapter in the Palestinian struggle. The role played by small community and popular institutions, unions and individuals in the Occupied Territories was reassigned to formal and informal institutions that were funded by the Palestinian Authority and donors. The Palestinian Authority pursued neoliberal policies that enhanced individuality over collective action, leading to the dissolution or weakening of trade unions and federations. The role played by the city of Jerusalem and other cities in 1948 occupied Palestine and their institutions in Palestinian culture also faded, as the centre of cultural gravity moved to Ramallah, the city that received the lion's share of foreign funding.

Oslo and the intervention of foreign funding contributed to curbing prevailing cultural life and undermining its organic development. It was amputated for the second time, following the first amputation after the Nakba. Culture became domesticated by foreign funding and was unable to carry out its critical role in taking a position in the face of the occupation. Rather, it merely made an attempt at survival (as opposed to resilience) by sustaining its activities within the limits and policies dictated by foreign organizations. It focused on topics un-related to the reality of the occupation and the existential threat to Palestine, and on spending funds to satisfy donors. Thus, cultural life has moved away from one of resilience and resistance, despite the apparent abundant production taking place. In this respect, Abdul-Rahim Al-Shaikh says:

**The Palestine Liberation Organization succeeded in free-falling into the postcolonial wheel when it turned into an 'authority', turning the page on 'liberation',**

1. This essay was originally published by the Institute of Palestine Studies, 2024, [palestine-studies.org](http://palestine-studies.org).

**without opening the 'independence' page. Between the two pages, which were not validated by a proper conclusion, the Palestinian Authority built its state illusion in happy Ramallah....**

He adds:

**The Palestinian civil society has turned, for the most part, from a participatory role in the national anti-colonial movement into a manicured structure, coexisting with the colonial reality, and seeking, at best, to 'dismantle' (decolonize) it through law, procedure or architecture...<sup>2</sup>**

Meanwhile, the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement set off from Palestine to the world. The academic and cultural boycott campaign was launched, joined by artists and academics from all over the world. It pushed for the cancellation of cultural performances and events in the occupying state, and stood against cultural normalization through which Israel tried, with Western assistance, to clean up its image after Oslo.

After 2001, donors began to follow the example of the United States by putting conditions on aid, censoring terms used by cultural institutions in their publications, including the words 'Nakba', 'colonialism', 'apartheid' and 'right of return', and withholding funding for projects related to the promotion of the rights of Palestinian refugees to return, demanding that the geographical scope covered by institutions be narrowed to the territory occupied in 1967, and directing funding towards projects aimed at 'conflict resolution' and 'peace building'.<sup>3</sup> The European Union also followed the United States' lead in imposing conditional funding on Palestinian institutions, which led to most cultural institutions rejecting European funding in 2020, while others were forced to accept their conditions.

In 2019, German positions wilted and became more extreme against the Palestinians. A decision was taken to criminalize dealing with the anti-Israel Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement in Germany. This led to accusations of anti-Semitism being made against those working in the field of culture that advocated for Palestinian rights, which silenced many voices.

Over the past two decades, foreign funding has gradually withdrawn from the cultural field, leading to the concentration of its funds in a few large, active institutions, which has caused the atrophy of many small cultural organizations and popular community initiatives.<sup>4</sup> In this context, Tariq Dana says: 'the largest and most influential segment of civil society continues to rely on international aid that is largely politically and ideologically conditional, imposing many restrictions on the work of civil society actors.' He adds that the hegemony of this segment 'has depoliticized social sectors and led to the emergence of a new elite alienated from its surroundings,

2. Abdul-Rahim Al-Shaikh, 'The Happy Cemetery', *Al-Adab*, 30 December 2019, [al-adab.com](http://al-adab.com).

3. Badil – Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights, 'Position Paper: Conditional EU Funding: Lack of Legitimacy and Political Implications', April 2020, [badil.org](http://badil.org).

4. Tariq Dana, 'Criminalizing Palestinian Resistance: The European Union's Additional Condition on Aid to Palestine', *Al-Shabaka*, 2 February 2020, [al-shabaka.org](http://al-shabaka.org).



squandering millions on useless projects'. Instead of Palestinian civil society being 'an arena for resistance and mobilization against fragmentation, it has become part of the fragmentation itself.'<sup>5</sup>

## October 2023 War

The genocidal war on Gaza, begun on 7 October, 2023, followed two years in which a large number of martyrs fell in the Jenin, Tulkarm and Nablus camps on an almost daily basis. The number of prisoners in occupation jails increased and the restrictions on them worsened. As for artistic and cultural institutions, they were busy holding archival exhibitions, organizing poetry readings, receiving and handing out prizes, singing the praises of folkloric cultural heritage and legacy, and wasting money producing expensive publications that ended up in garbage bins. Many institutions used the English language – the language of donors – to address their audiences. As for Gaza, it rarely had a share in the programmes of these institutions. It was given at best a marginal position, or else their activities were overlooked entirely.

The conditions imposed by the European Union on Palestinian institutions before the war on Gaza were not sufficient. Merely two days after the declaration of war, the President of the European Commission, the largest supporter of the Palestinians, stressed the necessity of reconsidering financial aid to the Palestinians in light of the events of 7 October, announcing the insertion of more contractual terms related to 'countering incitement', including with the UNRWA, in case a decision was made to continue partnering with Palestinian institutions.<sup>6</sup>

A group of Palestinian NGOs, including cultural institutions, responded by stating that:

**the international financing system is a tool in the hands of colonial hegemony in our region, that the aid system is being used as a weapon to bring the Palestinians to their knees ... and that this policy is an integral part of the Oslo doctrine and control systems imposed on us to maintain the security of the occupation.**

They pointed out that the duty of organizations today is to 'build a system of community solidarity and grassroots action networks, believe in the capabilities and potential of families and youth, remain alert to the hegemony of foreign funding, and deal with international institutions on the basis of full equality'.<sup>7</sup> While these institutions announced their intention to disengage from foreign aid, in reality very few of them took practical steps to do so.

5. Ibid.

6. European Commission, 'The Commission finalises the review of EU aid to Palestine' 21 November 2023, [ec.europa.eu](https://ec.europa.eu).

7. Statement on the position of Palestinian institutions in response to our threat to cut off foreign funding, 16 October 2023.

As the first months of the war successively unravelled, the Palestinian Ministry of Culture issued three reports on the losses in the Gaza Strip in the cultural field. The brutal Israeli bombing affected the lives of forty-one artists, writers, musicians, poets and activists, men and women, in the field of culture,<sup>8</sup> including the following: artists Mohammed Sami, Heba Zagout, Nismah Abu Shaira, Halima Al-Kahlot and Mohammed Qraieqa; poets Refaat Alareer, Saleem Al-Naffar, Hiba Abu Nada, Mariam Hegazy and Nur Al-Din Hajjaj; journalists Mostafa Al-Sawaf and Abdullah Al-Akkad; photographer Marwan Tarzi; and guitarist Yousif Aldawas. Many also lost their entire families, and many more were seriously injured. Their homes, neighbourhoods, workshops and productions were also destroyed. Cultural centres were completely demolished, including the Rashad Shawa Cultural Centre, established in Gaza in 1985, and artistic institutions, such as Shababik Gallery and the Faculty of Arts at Al-Aqsa University. While some institutions were partially destroyed – such as Eltiqa Gallery, with all its artworks damaged – Al Sununu for Culture and Arts Association, which deals with music and included hundreds of musical instruments, and the Gaza Association for Culture and Arts, which was hosting the 'Red Carpet Film Festival', were wholly destroyed. Public libraries were also destroyed, including Gaza Municipality's public library, which contained thousands of books, and Samir Mansour Bookshop, which contained thousands of titles (it was bombed in 2021 then rebuilt), in addition to universities, archaeological sites and archives. The house of artist Taysir Batniji was destroyed in the Shuja'iyya neighbourhood in Gaza City, and a large number of his family were martyred. He lost many works completed in an early period. Artist Fathi Ghaben lost his son, his house, his studio and his works. As a result, his health deteriorated. Artists Mohammed Joha and Hazem Harb also lost members of their families. We saw artist Basel El-Maqosui on social media trying to hide his artwork by wrapping it in blankets and placing it under a table before his displacement. As for artist Maysara Baroud, not only did he lose his home, but also his studio and all of his artwork. The account of the fate of artists, writers and cultural workers is still incomplete in light of continuing destruction and the scarcity of information.

As a direct result of the war, some institutions sought to document and stimulate debate on a number of topics. The Institute for Palestine Studies issued a special issue (no. 137) of *Majallat al-Dirasat al-Filastiniyya* under the title *Salute to Gaza*, with the participation of sixty writers, 'as a historical document and collective testimony to Palestine's major event'. Its online platform was active in publishing through the *Filistin Almaydan* blog, with a large number of penholders, including direct testimonies from Gaza, in addition to discussion panels, videos, and policy papers. *Fasha Taqafiya* magazine was also active in publishing, organizing discussion panels, and producing 'podcast' episodes, despite the restrictions imposed on the Palestinian territory. Birzeit University held a group of weekly seminars to shed light on different aspects of the war.

One of the most prominent events organized at this time was 'This Is Not an Exhibition' at the Palestinian Museum in Birzeit, which brought

8. Palestinian Ministry of Culture, 'The Ministry of Culture Issues the Third Monthly Report to Monitor the Impact of the Israeli Aggression on the Cultural Sector in Gaza', 7 October 2023 – 7 January 2024, [moc.pna.ps](https://moc.pna.ps).



together a large collection of works by artists from Gaza held by collectors in Ramallah, Jerusalem, and other Palestinian cities, in addition to the 'Missing People' exhibition by Gazan artist Tayseer Barakat. The Palestinian Ministry of Culture has documented the damage to the culture sector in Gaza in three reports issued since the beginning of the war, in addition to a series of books of testimonies from Gaza, entitled *Writing Behind the Lines* (2023–24).

As for the voice of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, it has been suppressed since the beginning of the war. No demonstrations or protests were observed, as was the case at the 'Uprising of Dignity' events in 2021. Since the beginning of the war, the Israeli occupation authorities have arrested a number of figures and cultural symbols who dared to stand publicly against the war on Gaza on social media, such as artist Dalal Abu Amneh, actress Maisa Abd Elhadi, and other activists and influencers, in an attempt to silence the crowds. Palestinian students in Israeli universities were also subjected to physical and verbal threats and persecution. Israeli higher education institutions announced that they would not tolerate any publications that incite 'terrorism'. Education Minister Yoav Kisch called for disciplinary measures against violating students.<sup>9</sup> Organized campaigns were launched against university professors, as in the case of Professor Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian. Despite the repressive practices against journalists, a group of cultural media outlets at home continued to cover the war on Gaza, and a series of activities were organized, while being careful not to mention Gaza directly, in addition to a conference attended by eighteen researchers, poets and writers, which was held in Haifa in mid-December 2023, in cooperation with Mada Al-Carmel and the Arab Culture Association in Haifa.<sup>10</sup>

The Israeli aggression revealed the racism of Western cultural and artistic institutions and, for the most part, their subservience to the desires of politicians and donors. At the same time, groups of artists and cultural actors in the world mobilized in an unprecedented way to support Gaza and put pressure on Western artistic and cultural institutions, including the Decolonize This Place group in the United States, which organized protests in museums and art institutions that remained silent throughout the war, including demonstrations at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York City. Hundreds of demonstrators participated. They demanded that the institution break its silence and expel board members involved in supporting the genocidal war in Gaza. The Strike Germany group also contributed to launching a campaign in the Western cultural community, calling for a boycott of German cultural institutions, specifically for their biased positions towards Israel, and for a change in their positions before re-engaging with them. A series of cultural activities in solidarity with Palestine were also held in various places, most notably an art exhibition organized by activists in Barcelona, with Palestinian participation. A large number of artists signed a petition denouncing the barbaric Israeli aggression on Gaza and demanding a ceasefire. A number of celebrities from Hollywood also stood against the Israeli war on Gaza through public demonstrations and solidarity action, including Susan

9. Ali Muwasi, 'Components of Latency: 1948 Palestinians and the Israeli War on Gaza', *Majallat al-Dirasat al-Filastiniyya*, no. 137, Winter 2024, [palestine-studies.org](http://palestine-studies.org).

10. Ibid.

Sarandon, Cynthia Nixon and others, something that Hollywood actors would not have dared to do in the past for fear of the Zionist lobby.<sup>11</sup>

On the other hand, a number of Palestinian artists were subjected to international exclusion. The participation of artist Emily Jacir in a workshop at a university in Berlin was cancelled, a lecture by artist Jumana Manna at the Wexner Museum in Ohio was called off, and the retrospective exhibition of artist Samia Halaby at the Eskenazi Museum of Art at Indiana University was cancelled following three years of preparation. Many artists and cultural actors in the world were excluded because of their opinions on social media, including international Chinese artist Ai Weiwei, whose exhibition at Lisson Gallery in London was cancelled after lengthy preparations and shortly before the opening. Likewise, the tenth edition of the Biennale für aktuelle Fotografie was called off in Mannheim, Germany, over the pro-Palestinian stances of its curator. Wanda Nanibush, an Indigenous curator in Canada, was fired from the Art Gallery of Ontario for her activity on social media due to pressure from the Israel Museums and Arts, Canada. The Whitney Museum of American Art in NYC aroused the ire of American student groups that signed a petition against the Israeli aggression on Gaza, when American billionaire Ken Griffin, one of the museum's major backers, said that pro-Palestinian students should be blacklisted by their universities. An angry student march then headed towards the museum and flooded its entrance with red paint. The editor of *Artforum*, David Velasco, was fired after he published a statement of solidarity with the Palestinians, signed by a large number of artists, in which they called for a ceasefire in Gaza. The next day, the magazine published a letter condemning the 'unbalanced' statement it published. Behind the scenes, the wealthy American art collector Martin Eisenberg put pressure on some of the artists who signed and whose works he owned, leading them to withdraw their signatures from the statement.<sup>12</sup>

## Palestinians in the area of culture

Edward Said spoke of 'the intellectual having to remain faithful to the right standards of human misery and persecution, despite their party affiliation, national background, and innate loyalties', and said that 'nothing distorts the public performance of an intellectual more than changing opinions depending on circumstances, observing cautious silence, and patriotic swagger...'.<sup>13</sup> But the genocidal war on Gaza revealed the fragility of the cultural structure in Palestine, its weakness, how its existence is dependent on foreign funding and partisan biases, its distance from its community, its fragmentation and loss of compass, specifically with regard to collective work towards a national liberation project. While many intellectuals remained silent and went into hiding, institutions suspended most of their programmes without offering an alternative that kept pace with the events and instilled a spirit of resilience in their audiences, without seeking to network with global solidarity movements.

11. David Smith, 'People are Being Penalised: Hollywood Divided over Israel-Hamas Conflict', *Guardian*, 2 December 2023, [theguardian.com](http://theguardian.com).

12. Rana Anani, 'Gaza: The Visual Attempt that Defies Being Reduced to Silence', *Majallat al-Dirasat al-Filastiniyya*, no. 137, Winter 2024, [palestine-studies.org](http://palestine-studies.org).

13. Edward Said, *Representations of the Intellectual: The 1993 Reith Lectures* (trans. Ghassan Ghosn), Beirut: Dar Al-Nahar, 1996, p. 14.

The reaction of the Palestinian cultural scene, with its official and unofficial activities and institutions, in the midst of this unexpected and unprecedented attack, was extremely weak. A shock was felt, and the cultural field was paralysed, revealing a lack of vision. Its main message was to prolong its life under the same Oslo conditions that led to this perdition. While art students at the Bezalel Academy of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem engaged in sewing and weaving belts for the occupation soldiers who were exterminating the people of Gaza, the Palestinian students in the same college stood blinded, in a state of loss. They were not supported by a Palestinian university, and there was no project to guide their efforts towards a specific goal.

In conclusion, it must be said that the duty of any Palestinian intellectual, today more than ever, is to put aside their party affiliations and narrow interests, to look to the future, and find their role and stance. This statement applies even more to Palestinian cultural institutions and levers of an official, semi-official and popular nature. The time has come to unify efforts and respond to the existential threat through a clear vision and practical steps that serve as the nucleus for a 'new type of resurrection'. The days of the Oslo illusion are politically and culturally over. This is a new and decisive phase that requires a unified front. The question is simply: to be or not to be.

# Forget 'never again', it's always already war

Martin Pogačar

3 Oct 2024





Photo by CHUTERSNAP on Unsplash

For a child growing up in mid-1980s Yugoslavia, the future was no elusive dream.<sup>1</sup> Poised against the lingering traces of World War II and the looming threat of nuclear destruction, the idea of the future, paradoxically, entailed a peaceful and just world for all, based on the legacies and ongoing struggles of liberation and anti-colonial movements.

When I imagined the world in 2000, I also saw space travel and flying cars, clichés of tech-progressive imagery (at least, as I recall). Conversely, I never tired of listening to what it had been like in the old times: how it had felt seeing an orange for the first time and biting into it unpeeled, waving to a passing train, or seeing the static flicker of the black-and-white TV...

Most gripping of all were the wartime stories. My grandfather survived Gonars, one of the many (forgotten) fascist concentration camps, and my grandmother was denied her Slavic name in the fascist-occupied Primorska region along the present-day western border with Italy. My other grandmother lost her father in Ravensbrück ... I listened with trepidation to stories about smuggling secret messages through fascist checkpoints, and was saddened by the fact that my other grandfather buried his violin in a forest when he joined the partisans, never to find it again.

These memories from 'the war', re-presencing fear, violence, and imminent death, were invariably interwoven with values of solidarity, respect for human and other life, and the acknowledgement that violence and war are not at all conducive to peaceful conflict resolution.

At the same time, resistance was always seen as the only right thing to do in the face of occupation and destruction. What is more, this attitude was imbued with ethics that transcended 'mere' liberation from the occupation, also entailing a socialist forging of a new and better world.

Looking back, Yugoslav socialism at least tried to conceptualize its own existence, in thought and practice, in wider humanist terms; it emphasized peaceful coexistence, itself perhaps one of the most positive international cultural and political projects to date and a central element of the 'biggest peace movements in history', among those seeking 'post-war alternatives to domination and oppression ... inventing new political languages of liberation'.<sup>2</sup>

1. I would like to thank Tanja Petrović, Nick Aikens, Rebecca Bligh and Hannah Gregory for their comments and suggestions on the text.

2. 'After World War II there were alternatives to domination and oppression; anticolonial, emancipatory movements inventing new political languages of liberation. All these past alternatives seem to have failed us.' Bojana Piškur, 'Troubles with the East(s)', L'Internationale Online, 22 January 2024, [internationaleonline.org](http://internationaleonline.org). See also Ranko Petković, *Nesvrstana Jugoslavija i savremeni svet*, Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 1985; and Leo Mates, *Koegzistencija*, Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 1974.

## Never again

World War II ended when 'peace broke out'.<sup>3</sup> Peace, however, was not (then or ever) evenly distributed. New conflicts were brewing, old ones were being reignited. Some wars are made famous in popular culture, effectively obscuring atrocities deemed less politically relevant, and so afforded less public attention. Even historical cases of genocide, such as that carried out by the Belgians in the Congo, the Armenian genocide, the more recent and relatively visible Rwandan genocide, or the one in Srebrenica, the first to have been committed in Europe after World War II. The suffering of the Kurds, the Rohingya, the Uyghurs and, yet again, of the Armenians, has been only peripherally reported by news media. Currently, coverage of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Israeli genocide in Gaza and now escalating attacks on Lebanon, also due to their highly volatile political and military-industrial stakes, greatly exceeds that of other ongoing atrocities.

After World War II, a vow was (re)made *never again* to allow such atrocities and insanity to happen: a promise to posterity to forever prevent destruction and mass murder, to counteract (in a timely manner) the othering and hatred that led to the killing of civilian Jews, Roma, Slavs, communists, homosexuals and others who perished in the Holocaust, the epitome of industrialized suffering and destruction. *Never again*, the strongest of imperatives to learn from and not to repeat history, also powered, and was powered by, the drive for the material and symbolic reconstruction of what the British historian Keith Lowe calls the 'savage continent' – that is, Europe.<sup>4</sup>

Nevertheless, *never again* has a longer history. As Omer Bartov notes, it was first used after the 'war to end all wars' (what nonsense) – that is, World War I, then in the sense of 'we should do everything we can to prevent another war',<sup>5</sup> which went on to empower notions of pacifism and appeasement. At the same time in the German context, however, Bartov continues, *never again* was used with a different interpretative emphasis, wherein:

**We did not really lose that war. We were stabbed in the back. We were betrayed, and therefore that war has to be fought again. And this time, it has to be won. In that sense, World War I is re-interpreted in Germany, which leads into a National Socialist discourse, into a war that was lost for the wrong reasons and a war that should be won.**<sup>6</sup>

In the Jewish/Israeli context after World War II, *never again* did not mean 'never again war' per se, but rather:

3. 'Peace breaking out' is a reference to the Monty Python sketch 'The Funniest Joke in the World'. It is 'funny' how we tend to say that wars break out, as if they were some natural phenomena outside the sphere of decision-making by individuals or groups in charge. At the same time, Michael Mann notes, one has to contend with the condition that human actors are enmeshed in wider sociopolitical and historical structures that can mask the processes and decisions that lead to wars. See Michael Mann, 'Explaining the Irrationality of War', *New Left Review*, no. 145, 2024, pp. 5–25. Peace, on the other hand, has to be fought for, which in parts of the world that prize democracy, freedom, cooperation and human rights, isn't, or shouldn't be, funny at all.

4. Keith Lowe, *Savage Continent, Europe in the Aftermath of World War II*, London: Penguin Books, 2013.

5. "“Never Again!” Roundtable Organized by Eastern European Holocaust Studies and the Johannesburg Holocaust and Genocide Centre', *Eastern European Holocaust Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2023, p. 54, [doi.org](https://doi.org/).

6. Ibid.

**'Never Again the Holocaust'. It's not even really 'Never Again genocide or mass murder', it's 'Never Again the Holocaust'... . [And if] that thing should never happen again, then we should do everything we can to prevent it. In fact, everything that we would do to prevent it is justified. This gives one sanction to do anything one can or wants to if one perceives a particular threat, an existential threat.**<sup>7</sup>

7. Ibid., p. 55.

Finally, Bartov identifies another *never again*-type enjoinder, albeit one that doesn't use those words precisely:

**the communist one comes under the slogan of anti-fascism, that is that such systems of Nazism and fascism must always be prevented and that everything that we do to prevent it is justified ... It's a kind of 'Never Again' that gives one license to do whatever is needed to prevent that from happening.**<sup>8</sup>

8. Ibid.

Note that even while this latter seems the most inclusive and open, as opposed to the more exclusivist ethno-nationalist interpretations, like all of the *never agains* Bartov mentions it is characterized not only by the urge to prevent future wars and genocides, but also by the speculative justification of *violence in the very name of violence- and genocide-prevention*.

## Never again?

Declaratively, *never again* is past-oriented: a vow to remember the victims and prevent the forgetting of what happened. Thus understood, as Stef Carps and Michael Rothberg note, it may be seen as an impetus to remember and frame 'traumatic histories across communal boundaries' – as a tool, even, for the 'transmission across society of empathy for the historical experience of others', with 'the potential, at least, to help people understand past injustices, to generate social solidarity and to produce alliances between various marginal groups'.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, while the discursive and moral singularity attributed to the Holocaust (as identified by Michael Rothberg in his discussion of the criticisms of Holocaust-focused narratives) can sometimes obscure other atrocities or downplay traumatic events that may seem less violent, destructive or otherwise 'not traumatic enough', the collective memory of the Holocaust does offer a template to talk about and research other acts of violence in human history.<sup>10</sup>

At the same time, the main claim of *never again* is future-facing: to help chart out a different world beyond conquest, subjugation, mass killings, destruction. As such, post-World War II, it symbolized the potential to

9. Stef Carps and Michael Rothberg, 'Introduction: Transcultural Negotiations of Holocaust Memory', *Criticism*, vol. 53, no. 4, 2011, p. 518, [digitalcommons.wayne.edu](https://digitalcommons.wayne.edu).

10. See Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory, Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*, Stanford University Press, 2009; and Dirk Moses, 'Genocide and the Terror of History', *Parallax*, vol. 17, no. 4, 2011, pp. 90–109.

integrate the historical trauma of a generation and, as an articulation of hope for a peaceful future, radically inflected post-war politics and (popular) culture. It also influenced the practices and ideologies of decolonial struggles and the forging of political alliances among colonized nations,<sup>11</sup> for example at the 1955 Asian-African conference in Bandung, Indonesia, the birthplace of the idiom 'Bandung Spirit'. Darwis Khudori recalls:

**I personally found that 'Bandung Spirit' represents a common wish for: 1) a peaceful coexistence between nations; 2) the liberation of the world from the hegemony of any superpower, from colonialism, from imperialism and from any kind of domination of one country by another; 3) the equality of races and nations; 4) the solidarity with the poor, the colonised, the exploited, and the weak and those being weakened by the world order of the day; and 5) a people-centred development.**<sup>12</sup>

Similarly, the Non-Aligned Movement, kick-started in Belgrade in 1961, incorporated the idea of peaceful coexistence as one of its central tenets, effectively extending, or aiming to extend, the spirit and appeal of *never again* across peoples, nations and continents beyond the West.

Where, today, is *never again*? And where, in a world steeped in killing, destruction, exploitation and extraction, has it been for the past eighty years? Where is it as many of those in power actively contribute to the dismantling of any functioning approximation, however flawed, of an international order – of humanitarian law and other global institutions that were created to prevent the (re)barbarization of the world?

As the last survivors, witnesses and perpetrators of World War II pass away, as states and ideologies collapse, new ones arise and, consequently, geopolitical relations shift, the values, dreams and expectations that were derived from the ruins have increasingly become the stuff of pro-forma political statements. Take, for example, this Holocaust Remembrance Day statement by the German Ambassador to Egypt, made roughly eight months before 7 October 2023:

**It is our duty as a nation and as humans, to keep the memory alive and make sure that history does not repeat itself. Never forget, and never again. This became a supreme priority of our education, and of our Foreign Policy. Today this means fighting against any kind of discrimination, racism, antisemitism, anti-Islamism, and hate, which is again on the rise**

11. Jürgen Dinkel, *The Non-Aligned Movement: Genesis, Organization and Politics (1927–1992)* (trans. Alex Skinner), Boston: Brill, 2018.

12. Darwis Khudori, 'Bandung conference 1955 and Bandung commemorative conferences 2005 and 2015: excerpts from the declarations of heads of state and governments', *Bandung Legacy and Global Future: New Insights and Emerging Forces*, New Delhi: Aakar Books, 2018, pp. 291–98.



**in our societies. This begins at the grass-root level of our societies, in education in schools, and in local and religious communities.<sup>13</sup>**

To and for whom, then, does today's *never again* apply? Why has it become a discursive trope applied only in hindsight, after atrocities have been committed? What conditions have brought about its near-demise or degradation, or rather exposed it as a façade?

## Never again, for whom?

New instances of aggression and war can no longer be understood in the historical and mnemonic frame of the twentieth century. Nor, for better or worse, can past wars and destruction be understood in the frame of a market capitalism that, arising 'victorious' after the 'defeat' of socialism as an emancipatory project, has since evolved into a cynical legitimization of state-sponsored violence as a fight for 'democracy' and 'freedom'. However noble these values may be, their application in contemporary conflicts is marred by 'cancelling', censorship, hypocrisy, 'alternative truths' and outright lies, among other misuses of language (or images, for that matter). As noted by Ursula K. Le Guin: 'To misuse language is to use it the way politicians and advertisers do, for profit, without taking responsibility for what the words mean. Language used as a means to get power or to make money goes wrong: it lies.'<sup>14</sup>

Worse than anodyne, *never again* increasingly comes across as a grotesque political lie. Its performative emptiness, emancipatory devaluation and selective application typifies the for-profit use of high-flying terms such as 'freedom', 'democracy', or 'human rights', in ways that rest on binaries of absolute 'good or evil', 'right or wrong'. Such terms, so used, only contribute to the bloody, exclusionary, arbitrary, selective, religio-mythical 'realities' that serve to reinforce or even constitute divisions between those lives that are worth living and the rest.

Such is the case in the ongoing genocide in Gaza perpetrated by the State of Israel,<sup>15</sup> whose slaughter and racial optics demonstrate the selective and exclusionary character of the Israeli state's *never again*, almost from its outset: Three years after the end of World War II, following the establishment of the State of Israel in 1947,<sup>16</sup> the 1948 Nakba resulted in the destruction of Palestine and the mass displacement and dispossession of Palestinians. Per the UN's webpage 'About the Nakba':

**As early as December 1948, the UN General Assembly called for refugee return, property restitution and compensation (resolution 194 (II)). However, 75 years later, despite countless UN resolutions, the rights of the Palestinians continue to be denied. According**

13. U.S. Mission Egypt, 'Never Forget. Never Again. Germany and the United States Mark Holocaust Remembrance Day', U.S. Embassy in Egypt, 31 January 2023, [usembassy.gov](https://usembassy.gov).

14. Ursula K. Le Guin, 'A Few Words to a Young Writer', n.d., [ursulaklequin.com](https://ursulaklequin.com).

15. I'm leaving out discussion of Russia's war against Ukraine because the 'international community' (broadly understood as a combination of international institutions, the UN and geopolitically specialized associations such as NATO) did at least *something* to sanction the aggressor state (if only post-festum and always in line with western interests, having failed on all counts to at least try to prevent the war altogether). In the case of the Gaza genocide, this same 'community' did absolutely nothing meaningful – besides, that is, the further emptying-out of *never again* under the pressure of reproach that 'any critique of Israeli politics is anti-Semitism', which further revealed the crumbling of said community.

**to the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) more than 5 million Palestine refugees are scattered throughout the Middle East. Today, Palestinians continue to be dispossessed and displaced by Israeli settlements, evictions, land confiscation and home demolitions.<sup>17</sup>**

Yet the Nakba continues to receive little recognition or notice in western media or official political discourse.<sup>18</sup> As Michael Mann observes, one thing that 'makes this situation unique' is the fact of its 'involving the imposition of a settler-colonial state upon Indigenous people by another people, fleeing a genocide'. Mann goes on:

**Liberal assumptions might suggest that the terrifying experience of the Shoah would make Israeli Jews more sensitive to others' suffering. To the contrary, many seem to believe that to survive as a people, they must use to the full whatever coercive power they have. Since Israeli Jews have the military and political power to seize Arab lands, most believe they have the right to do so in the name of ethnic survival.<sup>19</sup>**

For *never again* to work post-World War II, it was deemed critical to redefine the system of transnational relations, international laws, and treaties and, once redefined, to include the newly decolonized nations within them. The United Nations, as the only approximately capable entity, was tasked with providing forms of global governance. This task was, and is, difficult to uphold. As a manifestation of the prolonged legacy of western imperial subordination, international law was, and is, innately biased: it has no actual leverage to coerce signatory parties to comply, particularly when a decision or action might be in conflict with the interests of those with political and military power. Nevertheless, in a technologically, economically and politically connected world, planetary institutions seem crucial to facilitate trans- and international contracts, cooperation and solidarity across territories yet within legal boundaries. Here, an exchange of letters between Hannah Arendt and Karl Jaspers is worth revisiting.<sup>20</sup> Referring to the trials against Nazi officials, Arendt wrote:

**The Nazi crimes, it seems to me, explode the limits of the law; and that is precisely what constitutes their monstrousness. For these crimes, no punishment is severe enough. It may well be essential to hang Göring, but it is totally inadequate.**

16. The establishment of Israel was an apology of sorts by European nations to the Jews they failed to protect during the Nazi reign and its genocidal upscaling of centuries of European anti-Judaism. At the same time, I would argue, the formation of Israel also contributed to the concealment of these European states' own share of historical responsibility, and that of large parts of their populations, for centuries of anti-Semitism.

17. 'About the Nakba', The Question of Palestine, UN, [un.org](https://un.org).

18. 'The Nakba, which means "catastrophe" in Arabic, refers to the mass displacement and dispossession of Palestinians during the 1948 Arab-Israeli war. Before the Nakba, Palestine was a multi-ethnic and multicultural society. However, the conflict between Arabs and Jews intensified in the 1930s with the increase of Jewish immigration, driven by persecution in Europe, and with the Zionist movement aiming to establish a Jewish state in Palestine'. Ibid.

19. Mann, 'Explaining the Irrationality of War', p. 12.

20. I first encountered this exchange in Hans Kellner, "'Never Again' is Now", *History and Theory*, vol. 33, no. 2, 1994, pp. 127–44.

**That is, the guilt, in contrast to criminal guilt, oversteps and shatters any and all legal systems ... . And just as inhuman as their guilt is the innocence of the victims. Human beings simply can't be as innocent as they all were in the face of the gas chambers (the most repulsive usurer was as innocent as the newborn child because no crime deserves such a punishment). We are simply not equipped to deal, on a human, political level, with a guilt that is beyond crime and an innocence that is beyond goodness or virtue. This is the abyss that opened up before us as early as 1933 (much earlier, actually, with the onset of imperialistic politics) and into which we have finally stumbled.<sup>21</sup>**

The arbitrary attribution of e.g. political, racialized, gendered otherness as a discursive (becoming, all too often, a biophysical) precursor of genocide is a mechanism of dehumanization to structure the ground for actions that, post-festum, are often called 'evil'. More specifically, Arendt used the term 'radical evil' for that which:

**has to do with the following phenomenon: making human beings as human beings superfluous (not using them as means to an end, which leaves their essence as humans untouched and impinges only on their human dignity; rather, making them superfluous as human beings). This happens as soon as all unpredictability – which, in human beings, is the equivalent of spontaneity – is eliminated.<sup>22</sup>**

Such framing amplifies the other's status as an enemy, readily transformable into a screen onto which fear and hatred are projected; this drives the formation of a mass psychosis in which things get physical. Punitive action, removal of degenerates, remigration (recently popularized by the extreme right) as 'deratization' – pest control, literally, getting rid of (human) rats – become acceptable methods of protection and security.

In his reply to Arendt regarding the question of guilt, Jaspers noted:

**I'm not altogether comfortable with your view, because a guilt that goes beyond all criminal guilt inevitably takes on a streak of 'greatness'—of**

**satanic greatness—which is, for me, as inappropriate for the Nazis as all the talk about the 'demonic' element in Hitler and so forth. It seems to me that we have to see these things in their total banality, in their prosaic triviality, because that's what truly characterizes them.<sup>23</sup>**

And since 'we' are ill-equipped to deal with actions that are 'beyond crime and innocence', 'beyond goodness or virtue' – actions that undermine lawfulness as a basis for preventing or sanctioning crimes against humanity – it should be clear to us all that it is necessary not only to devise a planetary system to deal, however precariously, with such acts of 'radical evil', but also to identify and prevent the escalation of conflict before it oversteps the boundaries of humanity and legality.

In the wider contemporary framing, as per Arendt, the othering logic of good vs. evil – whereby 'their' absolute guilt (vs. 'our' absolute goodness) is what drives 'us' to strive for 'our' ultimate victory and 'their' defeat – also helps to understand how and by whom the international system is presently being dismantled. Actions in breach of international treaties and organizations are often legitimated by a neo-nationalist, *my-country-first* affective logic, subject only to the power-based and otherwise arbitrary non/enforcement of 'the law'. And it is from this, too, that the persistence and impunity of certain actors derives. For example, the US's construction of a floating pier on the Gaza shore, now abandoned, effectively bypassed international humanitarian institutions whilst also assisting Israel in indefinitely preventing the arrival into Gaza of aid by land. Such unilateral actions, conducted via semi-transparent processes outside the scope of international institutions, undermine international efforts at conflict resolution, as well as the institutions themselves. They also routinely legitimize and normalize extraction and privatization in zones of conflict, securing terrain for (nationally favoured) corporations to operate with little social or political accountability.

In such circumstances, *never again* is not just an opportune political lie, a pervasive form or feature of political performativity, it is a failed ideal. Promoted as an all-human value despite its implicitly partial or exclusionary nature, it alludes to a better future even while it systematically fails to account for the mechanisms that drive atrocities, such as the techniques of detention and killing that culminated in, but did not end with, the Holocaust.

Now, in light of the ongoing genocide in Gaza, *never again* is also shown to be an utterly shattered promise of a better world.

21. Hannah Arendt, '43 Hannah Arendt to Karl Jaspers August 17, 1946', *Hannah Arendt, Karl Jaspers, Correspondence 1926–1969* (ed. Lotte Kohler and Hans Saner, trans. Robert and Rita Kimber), London: Harcourt Brace Company, 1992, p. 54.

22. Arendt, '109 Hannah Arendt to Karl Jaspers, March 4, 1951', in *Hannah Arendt, Karl Jaspers, Correspondence 1926–1969*, p. 166.

23. Karl Jaspers, '46 Karl Jaspers to Hannah Arendt, Heidelberg, October 19, 1946', in *Hannah Arendt, Karl Jaspers, Correspondence 1926–1969*, p. 62.

## Always already again

After the collapse of socialism, a 'victorious' liberal capitalism eradicated any politico-ideological alternatives, striving to deride into forgetfulness the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), which, post-war, had presented a political and economic alternative to the bipolarity of the socialist-east and capitalist-west systems. As such, it also offered major contributions and support to decolonial and anti-imperial movements across the globe, in the name of autonomy and self-determination.<sup>24</sup> As mentioned above, one of NAM's central tenets was the idea of peaceful coexistence among its members, based on the awareness that, while a world without conflict is impossible, it is possible to use methods of conflict resolution other than violence and war. Yet, 'after NAM' and 'after socialism', the world has effectively shaken off both the shackles of lawful conduct and, with them, the futurophilic obligations of never again in full spectrum – that is, the undertaking to work towards a peaceful and just future for all. Instead, a space has opened for the ruthless continuation and acceleration of necropolitical and colonial practices, now evident, yet again, in the decimation of Palestinian lives, lands and lifeworlds – just where an opportunity to fully enact a (re)commitment to never again has, once again, been lost.

To grasp, instead, the full consequences of its liberal renunciation, it is necessary to consider the longer, reality-structuring sociopolitical, historical, technical and economic processes and phenomena that preceded it: On the one hand, the wider effects and affects of the processes of capitalism and industrialization that, for humans, recast the relationship between time and place, decoupling us from a nature relegated to the status of a set of extraction-ready resources; on the other, those of a liberalism that historically and consistently traded political for economic power, leaving the former to conservative, proto-fascist and fascist actors.<sup>25</sup>

These processes, integral to modernity's scientific discoveries and technological advances, in particular the industrial revolution of the nineteenth century, were marked by what the German sociologist Hartmut Rosa calls 'social acceleration',<sup>26</sup> leaving a significant imprint on the future development of science and technology, on material and symbolic landscapes, and on the way politics has been hollowed out. Thus, as Rosa states, social acceleration has deeply affected the conditions of modern industrial human relations with others and with the world:

**The sociocultural formation of modernity thus turns out to be, in a way, doubly calibrated for the strategy of making the world controllable. We are structurally compelled (from without) and culturally driven (from within) to turn the world into a point of aggression. It appears to us as something to be known,**

24. See Dinkel, *The Non-Aligned Movement*; and Tvrтко Jakovina, *Treća strana hladnog rata*, Zagreb: Fraktura, 2010.

25. Tomaž Mastnak, 'Postsocialism', lecture at the School of Common Knowledge, Ljubljana, 28 May 2024. See also his *Črna internacionala: Vojna, veliki biznis in vpeljava neoliberalizma*, Ljubljana: Založba /\*cf., 2019, and *Bonapartizem, Prolegomena za študij fašizma*, Ljubljana: Založba /\*cf., 2021.

26. Hartmut Rosa, *Social Acceleration: A New Theory of Modernity*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2013.

**exploited, attained, appropriated, mastered, and controlled. And often this is not just about bringing things—segments of world—within reach, but about making them faster, easier, cheaper, more efficient, less resistant, more reliably controllable.**<sup>27</sup>

The obsessive quest to control the world has propelled modern industrial humans into an evermore aggressive relationship to nature, legitimizing and normalizing the desire for, and the operational mode of, conquest:

**Everything that appears to us must be known, mastered, conquered, made useful. Expressed abstractly, this sounds banal at first—but it isn't. Lurking behind this idea is a creeping reorganization of our relationship to the world that stretches far back historically, culturally, economically and institutionally but in the twenty-first century has become newly radicalized, not least as a result of the technological possibilities unleashed by digitalization and by the demands for optimization and growth produced by financial market capitalism and unbridled competition.**<sup>28</sup>

Effectively, what this means, in the context of the neoliberal takeover of mind and body, land and time – or, that is, their recasting as resources, Heideggerian *Bestand* – is that everything and everyone becomes a 'radical enemy'. Contra NAM, this ideological and material optics posits victory, domination (or financial gain, for that matter) and destruction as the highest goals or values – with application not only to treaties and laws, but also to 'the environment' (i.e., the planet, understood as a set of natural resources). Ultimately, all life, in its unpredictability and spontaneity, could be subject to elimination under this rule.

A world approached via the motto 'move fast and break things'<sup>29</sup> has no use for *never again*, nor for peaceful coexistence; no room for thought, no time to listen and hear and ponder; no need to reflect and debate, no use for empathy, solidarity or care. There is, however, plenty of room for war and destruction. War, according to Darko Suvin, 'is more than a metaphor for bourgeois human relationships, it is their allegoric essence';<sup>30</sup> or, as noted by Jean Jurès: '*le capitalisme porte la guerre comme la nuée porte l'orage*';<sup>31</sup> or, as Rosa Luxemburg concluded: 'force (*Gewalt*, violence) is the only solution for capital: accumulation of capital accepts violence as permanent weapon, not just at its beginning but also today'.<sup>32</sup> 'Continued warfare under capitalism *never* stopped', Suvin adds, before exemplifying his insistence that any discussion of modern warfare be

27. Hartmut Rosa, *The Uncontrollability of the World* (trans. James C. Wagner), Cambridge: Polity, 2020, p. 14.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

29. Jonathan Taplin, *Move Fast and Break Things: How Facebook, Google, and Amazon Cornered Culture and Undermined Democracy*, New York: Little, Brown, and Company, 2017.

30. Darko Suvin, *Gdje smo? Kuda idemo? Za političku epistemologiju spasa: eseji za orijentaciju i djelovanje u oskudnom vremenu*, Zagreb: Hrvatsko filozofsko društvo, 2006, p. 121.



cast in class terms: 'sabres, bullets, and bombardment was always the final answer of the upper class – first feudal landlords, then centralised state armies – to any bottom-up justice-seeking uprising'.<sup>33</sup> It is of little consolation that, according to Isaac Asimov, 'violence is the last refuge of the incompetent'.<sup>34</sup>

This dynamic inflects the present and future prospect of peaceful coexistence. It uncovers the conditions that drove the industrialization of killing and, just as importantly, alludes to the conditions of neoliberal totalitarianism. The latter – escalating a bellicose technopolitics that actively prevents and disempowers the peaceful resolution of disputes in favour of profitably arming one or more of the disputants – declaratively embraces *never again* at the same time as it cynically disempowers it by continually promoting (increasingly neo-nationalistic) violence and war as 'humanitarian' tools for conflict resolution, and discouraging or censoring critique.

If, however, one is to fight against the *Denkverbot* that seems to arise from this situation,<sup>35</sup> against the cynical imposition and naturalization of radically exclusive and mythologized relations between good and evil, 'us' and 'them', against subjugation and destruction, against the legitimization of war as an acceptable solution, one is – that is, 'we' are – required to attempt a substantial conceptual as well as actual reconfiguration of 'our' conditions and modes of human, nonhuman and environmental relationality, 'our' catastrophic overvaluation of financial 'sustainability' or 'gain'.

Today, any answer to the question of the future relevance of *never again* must avoid a binary 'yes or no', 'us or them', 'victory or defeat'. Not simply because the mantra has, so far, exclusively applied to the West, but because the very conditions and prospects of life amid the post-Enlightenment–technofeudalist–neoliberal–extractivist entanglement are premised on aggression and violence. Aggression, following Rosa, can be understood as a structural, political, economic and affective mode of operation: to be rendered controllable, we are increasingly compartmentalized, polarized, disoriented, neurasthenic subjects, apparently continuing to lose political and cultural agency in the face of seemingly insurmountable eco-political crises. Yet, in fact, we should be seeking to form radically different structures and practise radically different politics of solidarity, equity, care, kindness and gentleness as a substrate for decisive socio-ecological action.

In this, attention should be paid to the power of gentleness, which, as Anne Dufourmantelle describes it, 'is an active passivity that may become an extraordinary force of symbolic resistance and, as such, become central to both ethics and politics'.<sup>36</sup> Today, however, 'gentleness is troubling. We desire it, but it is inadmissible. When they are not despised, the gentle are persecuted or sanctified. We abandon them because gentleness as power shows us the reality of our own weakness'.<sup>37</sup> The same could be said of those striving for peace who have consistently been cast as cowards and traitors.<sup>38</sup>

31. Cited in Suvin, *Gdje smo?*, p. 121.

32. Cited in Suvin, *Gdje smo?*, p. 128.

33. Suvin, *Gdje smo?*, p. 123.

34. See John Michael Greer, 'The Last Refuge of the Incompetent', *resilience*, 20 August 2015, [resilience.org](http://resilience.org).

35. See Srećko Horvat, Paul Stubbs and Dubravka Sekulić, 'Against the "Denkverbot": If you cancel Palestine, cancel us', *Al Jazeera*, 1 November 2023, [aljazeera.com](http://aljazeera.com).

36. Anne Dufourmantelle, *The Power of Gentleness, Meditations on the Risk of Living*, New York: Fordham University Press, 2018, p. 5.

37. *Ibid.*

Finally, the question of whether the present extractivist neoliberal regime can accommodate any coherent, transformative and historically informed discussion of peaceful coexistence and *never again* reveals a twofold obstacle: First, that the apparent desire to understand the world as hostile (per Rosa, above) breeds generalized violence and aggression; and second, just as crucial, that as past traumas recede into the distance, future generations become immune to violent images and stories from the past.

For many people today, the *never again* war of nearly a century ago, its deportations, mass killings and destruction bear little emotional resonance. In the face of this, Darko Suvin asks: 'How can we outline a new *sensorium* humanity needs for continued existence?'<sup>39</sup> For, indeed – and despite the taint, in living memory, of the term and concept of revisionism by, for example, Holocaust denial<sup>40</sup> – Hans Kellner insists:

**It is the nature of an active historical culture to revise. Each new contribution to the discourse ... must acquire its own identity by foregrounding those features which deform and challenge the sense of the material. ... To be brought to life, or at least to the simulacrum of life that makes possible academic or even popular publication, the material will have to be reshaped, and this, in turn, means revision. The alternative is ritual, and even ritual is always open to the demands of the present.<sup>41</sup>**

The ways in which historical knowledge is produced, reproduced, disseminated and popularized, not just through education but also in popular culture and media, must be continually reinvented, recalibrated and updated in such a manner that 'the past' can 'speak anew' to new generations. Like this, it might affect them – as in, move them and make them move – in novel ways,<sup>42</sup> preventing mnemo-historical negationism and amnesia from feeding (off) political lies.<sup>43</sup>

38. In March 1915, French writer and pacifist Romain Rolland wrote: 'Whoever insists, in the midst of war, on defending peace among men knows that he risks his own peace, his reputation, his friends, for his belief. But of what value is a belief for which no risks are run?' Romain Rolland, *Above the Battle* (trans. C.K. Ogden), Chicago: The Open Court Publishing Company, 1916, [mirrorservice.org](http://mirrorservice.org).

39. Suvin, *Gdje smo?*, p. 116.

40. See Neil Levi and Michael Rothberg, 'Memory Studies in a Moment of Danger: Fascism, Postfascism, and the Contemporary Political Imaginary', *Memory Studies*, vol. 11, no. 3, 2018, [doi.org](http://doi.org).

41. Kellner, "'Never Again' is Now", p. 129.

42. Brian Massumi, *The Politics of Affect*, Cambridge: Polity, 2015.

43. *Negationism* refers to 'denying the existence of Nazi gas chambers and, more generally, the reality of the Holocaust'. See Henry Rousso, Lucy Golsan and Richard J. Golsan, 'The Political and Cultural Roots of Negationism in France', *South Central Review*, vol. 23, no. 1, 2006, p. 67.

# Broadcast: Towards Collective Study in Times of Emergency (for 24 hrs/ Palestine)

L'Internationale Online Editorial Board, Rana Issa,  
L'Internationale Confederation, Vijay Prashad

16 Oct 2024

Welcome to 'Towards Collective Study in Times of Emergency', a radio segment put together by L'Internationale Online for 24 hrs/Palestine.

L'Internationale takes its name from the nineteenth-century workers' anthem written by Eugène Pottier, which calls for an equitable and democratic society with reference to the historical labour movement. It is in this trajectory and spirit of internationalist solidarity that we were honoured to participate in 24 hrs/Palestine, an invitation extended to us when we met members of the collective during an assembly in Ramallah convened by mutual allies at the Qattan Foundation.

What you will hear over the hour-long broadcast is a selection of material taken from the ongoing publishing series 'Towards Collective Study in Times of Emergency'. It begins with a reading of 'We have been here before. Palestinian poets write back' by the researcher, translator and essayist Rana Issa, published in March 2024 and read here by Issa. In the piece she introduces and reads a selection of poems by poets living and working in Palestine, moving across the contexts of the 1940s and the time of the Nakba to the 1970s and those writing in Gaza today.

The following contribution is titled 'Everything will stay the same if we don't speak up' published under the name of L'Internationale in April this year. The text is a collective call to each other and to those in the cultural field to resist and speak out against 'censorship, self-censorship, pre-censorship, language policing, cancellation, disinvitation and defunding of politically dissenting voices' in the time of genocide. The text is structured through three voices: speaking from the voice of the confederation, an address to the many cultural workers silenced or cancelled, and a series of chronicles citing the ongoing archive of censorship.

In the final contribution historian and author Vijay Prashad reflects on the swell of social movements and the noise of younger generations as the dialectical opposite to the violence of silencing, endemic across cultural, academic and political spheres. Taken from a forthcoming episode of Radio Web MACBA recorded during his participation in the recent project 'Song for Many Movements', also at MACBA, Prashad offers hope as he stirringly states that 'the silence will be eclipsed by the noise'.

Interspersing these recordings are excerpts from a live recording of *Me, My Brother*. The song opens the listening session 'Until Liberation II', compiled by the Learning Palestine Group. The two listening sessions published in December 2023 and January 2024 each include over twelve hours of lectures, music and poetry from the 1970s until today, to understand 'the history, the present, the reality, of the ongoing struggle for liberation and justice for Palestine'.

### Broadcast: Towards Collective Study in Times of Emergency (for 24 hrs/Palestine)

[Listen online](#) →



#### Timecodes:

- 00:00:00** Introduction, written and read by Nick Aikens
- 00:05:10** 'We have been here before. Palestinian poets write back', written and read by Rana Issa
- 00:31:57** 'Everything will stay the same if we don't speak up', written by L'Internationale Confederation and read by María Berríos, Sabel Gavaldon and Roc Jiménez de Cisneros
- 00:48:53** Vijay Prashad, taken from a forthcoming podcast for Radio Web MACBA

#### Music is taken from 'Until Liberation II', compiled by the Learning Palestine Group.

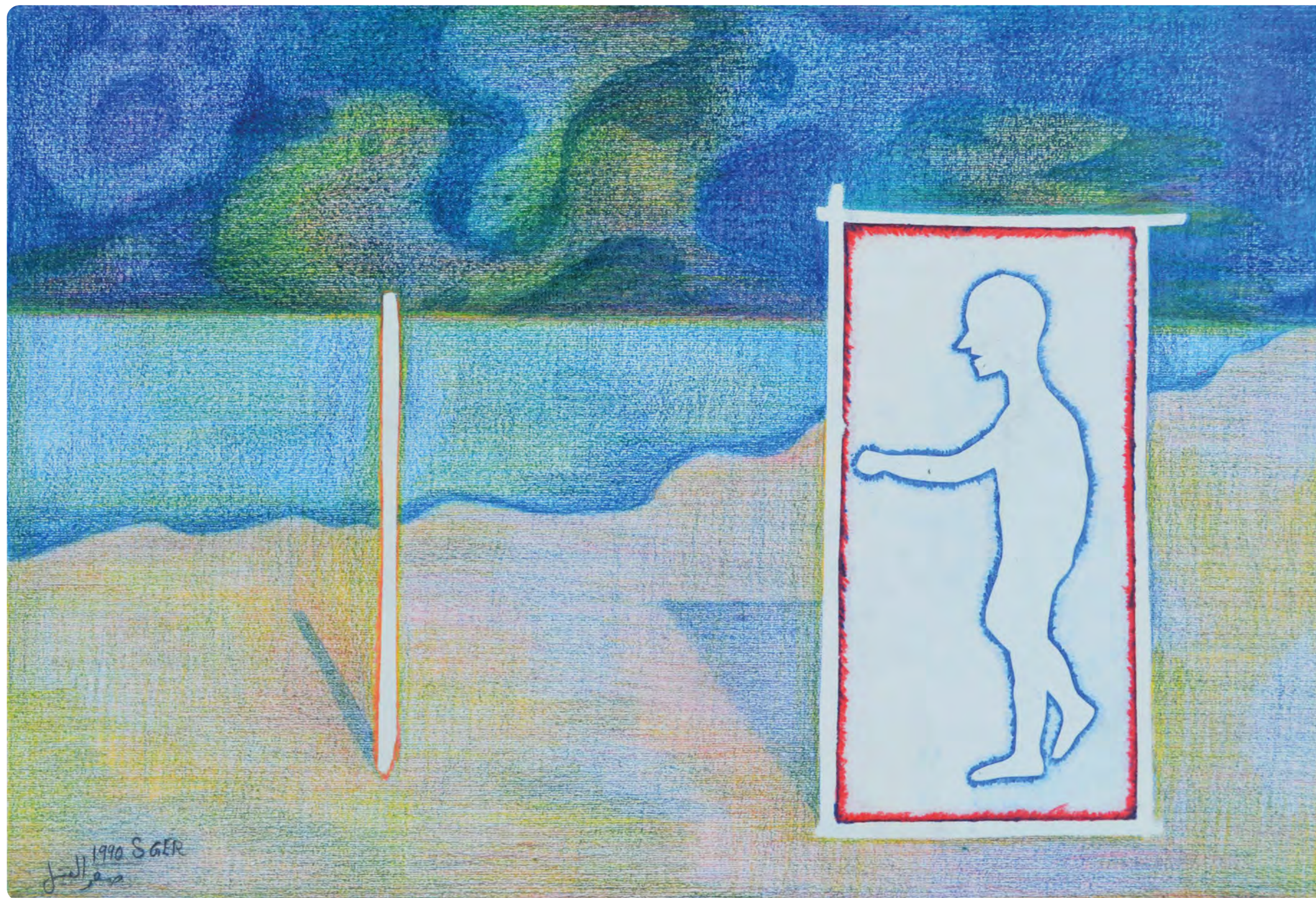
The selection was made by Nick Aikens and María Berríos on behalf of L'Internationale Online editorial board.  
The programme was produced with Radio Web MACBA.  
Special thanks to Anna Ramos and Roc Jiménez de Cisneros.  
Thank you to the authors and readers for their time and commitment.  
Thank you to the Qattan Foundation, Ramallah for introducing L'Internationale Online to 24 hrs/Palestine.

# Beyond Distorted Realities: Palestine, Magical Realism and Climate Fiction

Sanabel Abdel Rahman

14 Nov 2024





Sager Al Qatil, *Untitled*, 1990. Courtesy Zawyeh Gallery



In one of the most widely recognized images of Palestinian reality, sixty-year-old Mahfoza Oud embraces an olive tree with her eyes closed.<sup>1</sup> An Israeli soldier is ensconced behind her in his truck, looking down at her, his face hidden by sunglasses and a combat helmet. Mahfoza's trees were chopped down by Israeli settlers in 2005: the Israeli practice of obliterating Palestinian presence from the land is not a new phenomenon, but under the current fully fledged genocide, carried out by Israeli soldiers and settlers in Gaza and the West Bank, violence against Palestinian nature takes on an increasingly vengeful streak. Since the genocide in Gaza started in October 2023, Israeli soldiers and settlers have been uprooting and burning Palestinians' trees and killing their livestock with new intensity.<sup>2</sup> The hanging of a donkey head on the fence of a Muslim cemetery in Al-Quds in December 2023 by an Israeli man is emblematic of the intensification of collective acts of violence by the Israelis against animal, as well as human, life in Palestine.<sup>3</sup>

Palestinians' relationship to their land and to nonhuman life is diametrically opposed to such grotesque treatment. Investigating the magical-realist mode in Palestinian literature, especially in conversation with Indigenous climate fiction, offers piercing and comprehensive insights into this relationship. A study of this kind also helps us to understand Palestinians' conceptualizations and practices of love and dedication towards the land, and their concomitant tenacity in defending it against atrocities.

## Palestinian (Magical) Realism

First, let us consider the term 'Palestinian realism'. As documented in several books in the field of Palestinian studies, Palestinian literature and life are often viewed through the lenses of realism or more specifically trauma.<sup>4</sup> This literary tradition is often understood as an extension of post-1967 'Arabic realism', which prevailed following the Arab-Israeli War of 1967. Palestinian commitment to realist writing took form across documentary, social and poetic realisms.

Though accurate in depicting present realities, such lenses often fail to capture the nuances and paradoxes of Palestinian life, ranging, for instance, from exile and refugee experiences to everyday life under violent settler colonialism and the phenomenon of the 'present-absentee' Palestinian.<sup>5</sup> A (purely) realist view confines Palestinian agency and dreams of liberated futures within harsh realities and tropes of trauma. This, in turn, freezes Palestinians in the present and deems almost impossible their ability to comprehend the past and act with agency towards the future.

Magical realism can be mobilized to address this conundrum. As a kaleidoscopic literary mode, operating beyond reality – in a magical reality – it can play a significant role in reinstating Palestinian presence and agency. In my research, I have used magical realism as a tool to investigate settler- and post-colonial contexts. I view this tool as capable of creating a dynamic and potent space in which Palestinian collective agency, imagination and future liberation can be reified.

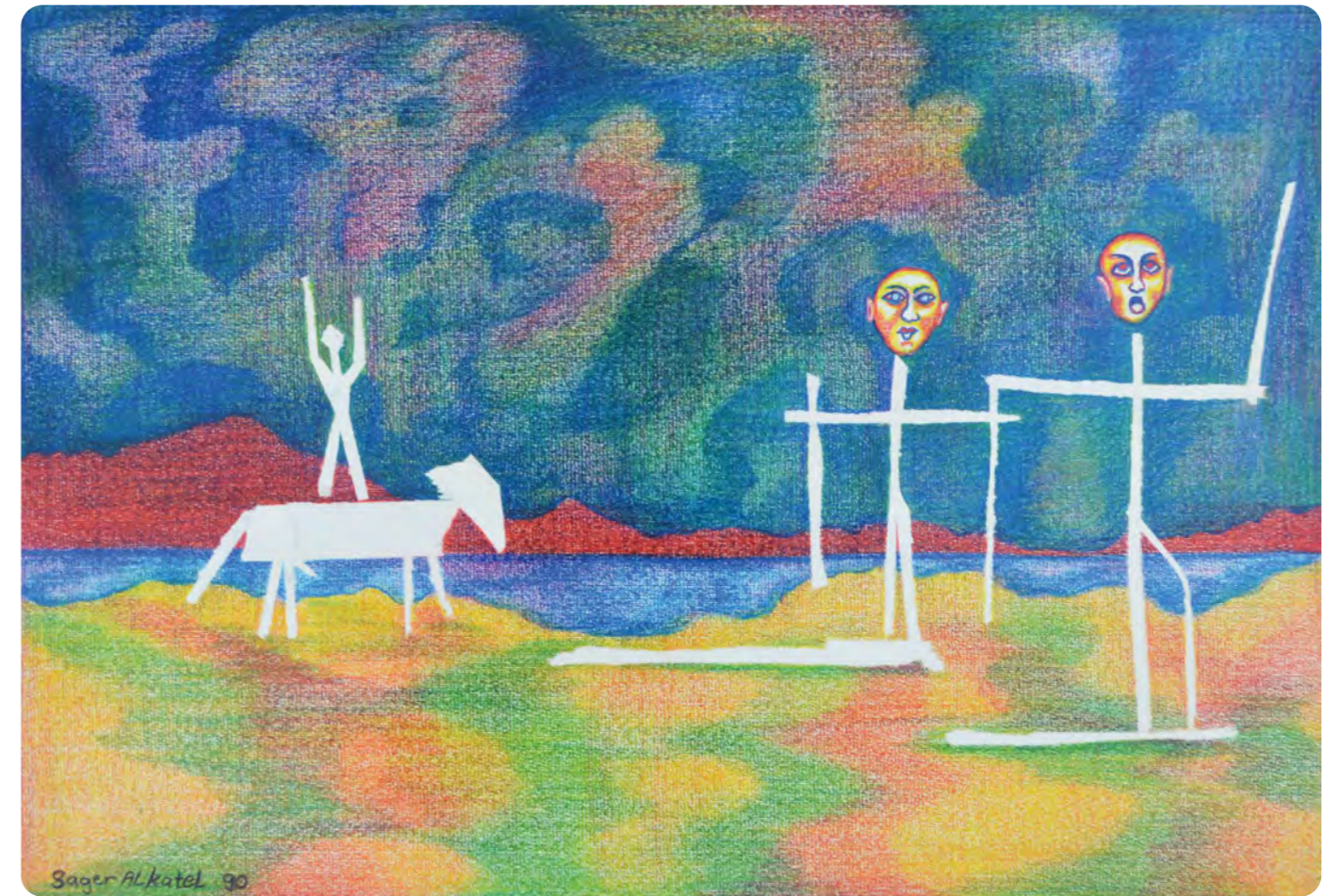
1. This essay is based on my doctoral thesis, currently being edited into a book with the provisional title *Magical Realism in Palestinian Literature and Folklore*, to be published by I.B. Tauris in 2025.

2. See, for example, Carolina S. Pedrazzi, 'In the West Bank, Israeli Settlers Are Burning Palestinians' Olive Trees', *Jacobin*, 11 October 2023, [jacobin.com](https://www.jacobin.com); and 'Israeli snipers target sheep in Gaza', *Al Jazeera*, 7 February 2024, [aljazeera.com](https://www.aljazeera.com).

3. 'Israeli settlers hang donkey head on Muslim cemetery in Jerusalem', *Al Jazeera*, 28 December 2023, [aljazeera.com](https://www.aljazeera.com).

4. See, for example, Bashir Abu-Manneh, *The Palestinian Novel: From 1948 to the Present*, Cambridge University Press, 2016.

5. 'Present absentees' are Palestinians who were forcefully expelled from their villages in 1948 and after and forced to live under the State of Israel. See Himmah Zu'bi, 'Present Absentees in Israel, Exiled in Their Own Homeland', *The Interactive Encyclopedia of the Palestine Question*, [palquest.org](https://www.palquest.org).



Sager Al Qatil, *Untitled*, 1990. Courtesy Zawyeh Gallery



The term 'magical realism' was initially coined within the visual arts in the early twentieth century and morphed to become a literary genre. It is often studied within the Latin American context, such as in the works of Gabriel García Márquez, Jorge Luis Borges and Isabel Allende. Arabic and Palestinian magical realism, however, are under-researched.

Magical realism remains an elusive term. In its broadest meaning, it is defined as 'fiction which mixes and disrupts the ordinary, everyday realism with strange, "impossible" and miraculous episodes and powers...'.<sup>6</sup> It is often referred to interchangeably with genres such as fantasy, speculative or science fiction, surrealism, absurdism and the Gothic. By approaching magical realism as a hybrid literary mode, elements from these different genres can be injected into the ever-transforming frameworks and modes of 'political realisms'.

This is especially pertinent in the Palestinian case as the Palestinian struggle for liberation is itself concerned with distorted material realities. The forms of distortion inflicted upon Palestinian realities extend beyond the physical occupation of the land, demolition of houses, uprooting of indigenous trees, firing of rockets and destruction of material structures; they are also wrought on corporeal space, as in martyrdom, maiming, massacres, imprisonment, torture, rape and the destruction of Palestinians' senses, such as sight and smell. They include the erasure of memory and recurrence of nightmares, as well as threats to mobility, as in refugeehood and exile. These distortions are synonymous with Israel's systematic land grabs, ethnic cleansing, destruction of Palestinian homes and gentrification of Palestinian neighbourhoods, and the imprisonment, maiming and killing of Palestinians bodies. The ongoing genocide against Palestinians in Gaza has brought forward horrific accounts of rape, the mutilation of corpses (running over living and dead Palestinians with tanks has become a common phenomenon), and the burning of refugees in their tents. These testimonies, recounted daily in the news, underscore Israel's desire not only to kill Palestinians, but to experiment with different forms of death, more horrific than could be imagined in even the most graphic work of fiction.

Given the seemingly paradoxical composition of magical realism, whereby the real and the magical coexist without contradiction, the mode's base in 'realism' holds political and revolutionary potential. At the same time, the magical aspect buttresses this potential and accentuates the aberrant realities, which usually emanate from settler- and post-colonial contexts. Such is the case with Palestine.

Certain figures, tropes, transitions and transformations recur through many magical-realist texts. In the Palestinian case, these elements play pivotal roles by keeping Palestinian memory alive while foregrounding hope and agency. The power of mythical creatures, for example, transcends mortal threat from Israeli violence. We see this in 'Saraya Bint al-Ghoul' (retold in Emile Habiby's 2006 novel of the same name, in English, *Saraya, the Ogre's Daughter*), where the figure of *farāsha* (butterfly) is able to

6. Martin Gray, *A Dictionary of Literary Terms*, London: Longman, 1993, p. 167.



Sager Al Qatil, *Untitled*, 1999. Courtesy Zawyeh Gallery



penetrate Israel's elastic borders without being seen, and where the young mythical boy Badran, who lives inside Palestinian rocks and waters, saves Palestinians from Israeli danger when summoned.<sup>7</sup>

## Ghosts and Eco-Surrealism

In relation to Palestinians' connection to nature within the genre of magical realism, I suggest the term 'eco-surrealism'. The term encapsulates surreal instances that reflect Palestinian connections to the land within magical-realist frameworks, and how this connection moves beyond gendered dichotomies of a man saving the female land into surrealist associations and potentialities. One such instance of eco-surrealism can be discerned in Shaykha Hlewā's story 'Mi'at Hikaya wa Ghaba' ('One Hundred Tales and a Forest') when a young woman literally glues herself to the land and grows a blossoming branch on her shoulder.<sup>8</sup> In the same story, a tree uproots itself and picks up the young girl to save her from a fire before returning to its roots. Hlewa's use of eco-surrealism therefore offers the possibility for Palestinian agency amid impending disaster.

Such eco-surrealist instances in contemporary writing reflect developments and transformations in parts of Palestinian literature. They take on a special function when describing the crucial relationship between Palestinians and their land. These relationships are surrealist in that they recur in dream and nightmare spaces. Dreams and, more commonly, nightmares also constitute the surrealist streaks of magical realism. They reflect the damage inflicted on the collective psyche since the Nakba. Yet they simultaneously draw on dreams of future liberation, giving power to Palestinian steadfastness.

From Gabriel García Márquez to Toni Morrison and Mahmoud Darwish, ghosts play pivotal roles in magical realism. Palestinian ghosts, usually emerging from martyrs' bodies, help reframe and rethink common traditional Palestinian tropes such as martyrdom and connections to the land. Ghosts usually linger in liminal or third spaces. When they emerge from the bodies of martyrs, visiting the living, they are accepted by living Palestinians as real, and sometimes even protected from the gaze of foreign voyeurs, who seek to turn Palestinian tragedies into plays, like the European characters represented in Elias Khoury's *Gate of the Sun*.<sup>9</sup> In addition to fuelling practices of perseverance and resistance, many Palestinian ghosts evoke guilt, such as when the ghost of the aforementioned Saraya emerges from the water to meet the narrator, who has just returned to Palestine after years of exile, and poignantly asks him: 'Have you forgotten us?'<sup>10</sup> Such a confrontation challenges the distortion of Palestinians' spaces, which suffer from physical erasure as well as erasure from memory.

Further, in the essay 'The Glossary of Haunting' Eve Tuck and C. Ree present a glossary of lingering ghostly presences in the wake of colonization.<sup>11</sup> Tuck and Ree begin by speculating that:

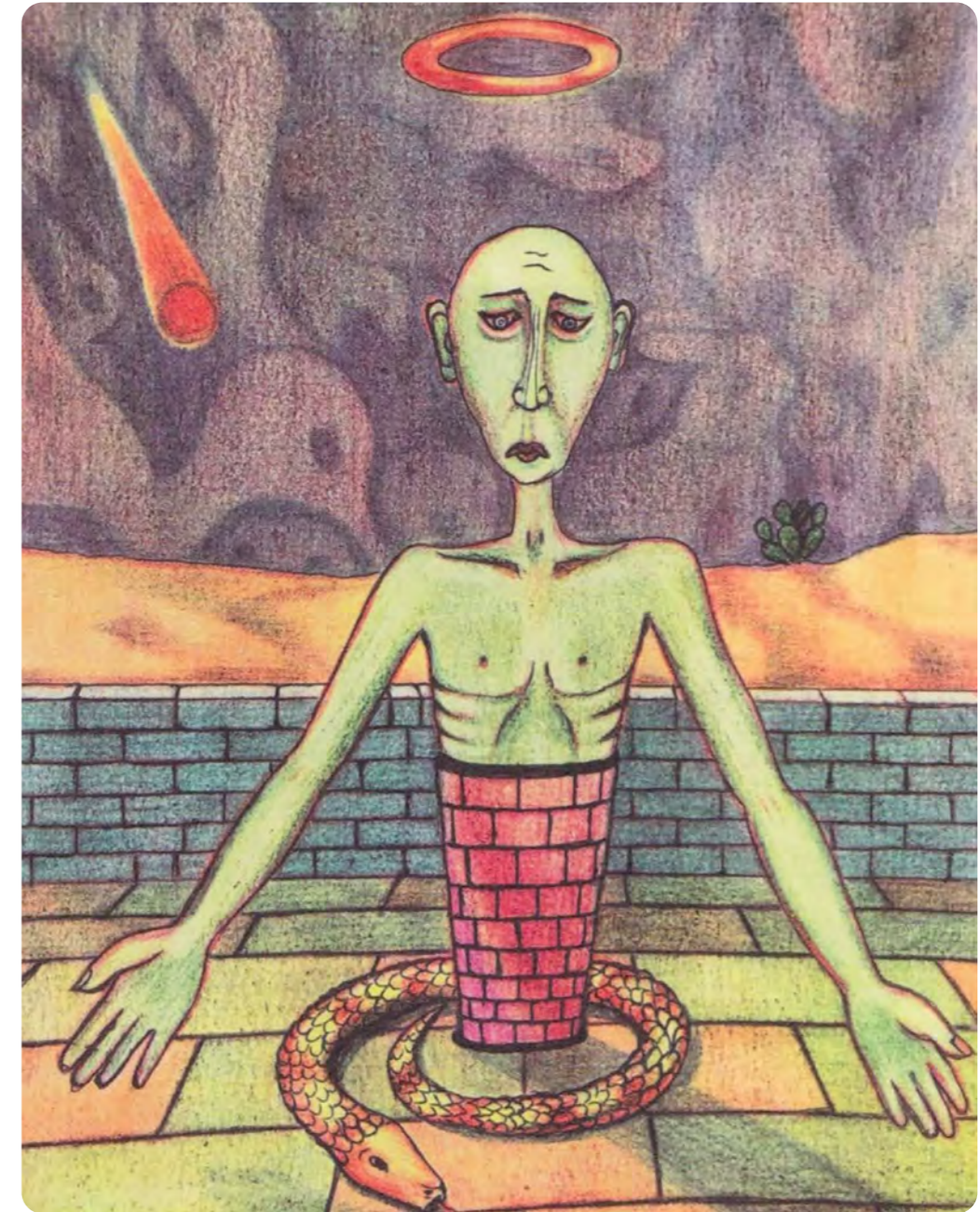
7. Emile Habiby, *Saraya, the Ogre's Daughter: A Palestinian Fairy Tale* (trans. Peter Theroux), Jerusalem: Ibis, 2006.

8. In Shaykha Hlewā, *Talabiyya C345, Palestine: Barā'āt al-Muṭawaṣit*, 2018, pp. 51–52.

9. Elias Khoury, *Gate of the Sun* (trans. Humphrey Davies), Brooklyn, NY: Archipelago Books, 2006.

10. Habiby, *Saraya, the Ogre's Daughter*, p. 35.

11. Eve Tuck and C. Ree, 'A Glossary of Haunting', in: *Handbook of Autoethnography* (ed. Tony E. Adams, Stacy Holman Jones, Carolyn Ellis), New York: Routledge, 2013, pp. 639–58.



Sager Al Qatil, *Untitled*, 1999. Courtesy Zawyeh Gallery



**the glossary appears without its host – perhaps because it has gone missing, or it has been buried alive, or because it is still being written. Maybe I ate it... The glossary is about justice... It is about righting (and sometimes wronging) wrongs; about hauntings, mercy, monsters, generational debt, horror films, and what they might mean for understanding settler colonialism, revenge, and decolonization.**<sup>12</sup>

Tuck and Ree offer definitions of terms such as 'Agent O', 'Beloved', 'Decolonization', 'cyclops', 'monsters' and 'revenge'. They describe the glossary as 'fractal; it includes the particular and the general, violating the terms of settler colonial knowledge'.<sup>13</sup> They open the 'A' section with 'American anxieties, settler colonial horrors', explaining that 'settler colonialism is the management of those who have been made killable, once and future ghosts – those that had been destroyed, but also those that are generated in every generation'; in short, 'settler horror'.<sup>14</sup> The authors explain how haunting challenges the 'relentless remembering and reminding that will not be appeased by the settler society's assurances of innocence and reconciliation'.<sup>15</sup> Their argumentation is summed up in the statement 'for ghosts, the haunting is the resolving, it is not what needs to be resolved'.<sup>16</sup>

In 'A Glossary of Haunting', we can observe links between the poetics and the agencies of Palestinian and Indigenous martyrdom within the magical-realist mode. Indigenous hauntology and Palestinian magical-realist martyrdom open up potent spaces for the colonized, who have been negated in both physical and metaphysical forms through settler-colonialist violence. The possibility to have agency even after their death weakens the dominance of settler colonialism and the power of the colonizers.

This phenomenon can be discerned in Ibtisam Azem's *The Book of Disappearance*.<sup>17</sup> At the end of the novel, it is implied that Palestinian ghosts return to haunt the Israeli settlers following a magical phenomenon where all Palestinians mysteriously disappear overnight. The sudden and forced disappearance of Palestinians is presented as a realization of the Israelis' deep-seated desire for Palestinians to cease existing, a desire shared across the society. This chimes with Tuck and Ree's assertion that 'decolonization must mean attending to ghosts, and arresting widespread denial of the violence done to them'.<sup>18</sup> This is echoed in Sinan Antoon's afterword to *The Book of Disappearance* in which he states: 'the ghosts of the dead will continue to haunt, demanding justice and recognition, and the living will write and remember'.<sup>19</sup>

12. Ibid., p. 640

13. Ibid.

14. Ibid., p. 642.

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid.

17. Ibtisam Azem, *The Book of Disappearance* (trans. Sinan Antoon), New York: Syracuse University Press, 2019 [2014].

18. Tuck and Ree, 'A Glossary of Haunting', p. 647.

19. Azem, *The Book of Disappearance*, p. 241.

## Indigenous Climate Fiction

Indigenous climate fiction opens up generous spaces to attend to such ghosts while giving agency to the occupied lands to free themselves from settler colonialism. By remaining true to collective struggle and liberated imaginaries, Indigenous climate fiction exposes what has been concealed about violence against nature under settler colonialism. Briggetta Pierrot and Nicole Seymour unpack the topic of climate fiction within Indigenous studies in their essay 'Contemporary Cli-Fi and Indigenous Futurisms'.<sup>20</sup> The authors first highlight the origins of 'climate fiction', the name journalist Dan Bloom gave to the category of speculative fiction concerned with climate change and catastrophe, before critiquing its scope. Pierrot and Seymour's criticisms centre on the claim that climate-fiction texts do not address how climate catastrophes are caused by settler colonialism.

Pierrot and Seymour present various approaches to the climate-fiction genre but insist that in most cases, Indigenous experiences are either absent or appropriated. When mentioned, Indigenous experiences and connections to the land are added with a heavy hand, merely to 'provide a disembodied source of wisdom and a veneer of multiculturalism'.<sup>21</sup> The authors note that, in advanced university courses that study climate fiction, the analyses around the works usually 'invoke indigenous peoples only to absent and sometimes even appropriate their experiences and traditions'.<sup>22</sup>

The empiricist approach usually employed when describing climate crisis – measuring CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, the greenhouse effect, acid rain, earthquakes, neurophysiological research, rising sea levels – although to some extent apposite, serves to negate thousands of years of lived knowledge and experience accumulated by and shared among Indigenous peoples. Rebecca Evans (cited by Pierrot and Seymour) underlines this tendency: 'popular climate-catastrophe narratives... focus on the future of destabilization of white Western privilege rather than the environmental and climate injustices that are ongoing yet ignored in the present'.<sup>23</sup> Pierrot and Seymour then go further to argue that 'intentionally or not, some mainstream cli-fi functions in large part to justify settler colonialism'.<sup>24</sup>

Studies of climate fiction often neglect to mention an alarming feature of the genre, inherited from science fiction: the persistence of a single, usually white male hero, who saves the world from an impending catastrophe. Tuck and Ree make a similar observation about horror films, writing that:

**mainstream narrative films in the United States, especially in horror, are preoccupied with the hero, who is perfectly innocent, but who is assaulted by monsterring or haunting just the same. ... The hero spends the length of the film righting the wrongs,**

20. Briggetta Pierrot and Nicole Seymour, 'Contemporary Cli-Fi and Indigenous Futurisms', *Departures in Critical Qualitative Research*, vol. 9, no. 4, December 2020: pp. 92–113.

21. Pierrot and Seymour, 'Contemporary Cli-Fi', p. 97.

22. Ibid., p. 95.

23. Rebecca Evans, 'Fantastic Futures? Cli-Fi, Climate Justice, and Queer Futurity', *Resilience: A Journal of the Environmental Humanities*, vol. 4, no. 2–3, 2017: p. 104, cited in Pierrot and Seymour, 'Contemporary Cli-Fi', p. 95.

24. Pierrot and Seymour, 'Contemporary Cli-Fi', p. 107.

## slaying the monster, burying the undead, performing the missing rite, all as a way of containment.<sup>25</sup>

Pierrot and Seymour meanwhile introduce an important related term, coined by April Anson, 'settler apocalypticism'. Here, 'the "state of emergency" story serves the settler state's white claims to the land.'<sup>26</sup> Anna E. Younes's eye-opening essay 'Palestinian Zombie: Settler-Colonial Erasure and Paradigms of the Living Dead' is insightful in this regard.<sup>27</sup> Younes places the figure of the zombie in the Palestinian context within the frameworks of land conquest and erasure under capitalism. 'From the 20th century onward,' Younes writes, 'a white (genocidal) gaze eventually turned the zombie myth into a flesh/meat-eating figure, roaming the land without direction and in need of cleansing from the earth.'<sup>28</sup> Younes explains how this zombie figure emerges from colonialist capitalism: 'Today, zombies represent capitalism's surplus populations: they are passive and excluded from political projects.'<sup>29</sup> In this reading, the ultimate zombie that must be annihilated so that the Western order can be restored is the Palestinian zombie.

In these settler-colonial narratives, it becomes one hero's 'mission', perhaps even his 'fate' to cleanse the conquered lands from their zombie residue. Such an individualist approach within non-Indigenous climate/science fiction negates the collective work of imagining that recurs in magical realism – and specifically, eco-surrealism – with the latter mode's emphasis on the popular, the communal, the collective and the traditional.

## Folktales and Science Fiction

This solipsistic view on how to deal with a man-made colonial disaster is constantly challenged in both Palestinian folktales and contemporary literature. For example, in the folktale 'The Louse', an entire Palestinian village self-annihilates in an act of mourning when a flea's husband (also a flea) falls into an oven and burns to a crisp.<sup>30</sup> The tale begins with the flea asking her husband to bake bread, but then he falls into the oven and dies. She applies soot to her face to mourn him and goes around the village telling the river, the goat, the tree, and others what happened. In an act of collective mourning, the tree breaks its own branches, the river dries itself up, the goat makes itself limp, and so on, until the entire village makes itself disappear. The manifestation of more-than-human solidarity within Palestinian culture explored in this folktale not only insists on the need to come together as a nation, but also allows the land to have agency over its very existence and to partake actively in building communities.<sup>31</sup> This strengthens Palestinians' connection to places from which they were forcefully expelled and portends transgressive relationships and futures in which the liberation of the land can be conceived of and materialized.

The absence of spaces of agency, unity and solidarity within mainstream climate fiction underscores the need to incorporate, critically and expansively, Indigenous and native experiences, histories and associations

25. Ibid., pp. 640–41.

26. April Anson, 'Recovering the Genre of Settler Colonialism, A Genealogy', Biennial Conference of the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment, Detroit, MI, 20–24 June 2017, cited in Pierrot and Seymour, 'Contemporary Cli-Fi', p. 107.

27. Anna E. Younes, 'Palestinian Zombie: Settler-Colonial Erasure and Paradigms of the Living Dead', *Janus Unbound: Journal of Critical Studies*, vol. 11, no. 1, 2022: pp. 27–46.

28. Ibid., p. 27.

29. Ibid., p. 31.

30. See Ibrahim Muhawi and Sharif Kanaana, 'The Louse', in *Speak, Bird, Speak Again: Palestinian Arab Folktales*, Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2021, pp. 288–90.

31. It is important to bear in mind that, arguably, the term 'nation' (and similarly 'nation state'), of which the West is wary given its fatalistic applications, does not hold the same connotations in the Palestinian context. Belonging to a community that exists between refugeehood, exile and occupation, and that has been forced out of the geographical boundaries of its land and place of origin, Palestinian nationalism is often centred around liberation and return rather than colonization and xenophobia.



Sager Al Qatil, *Tree of Life*, 1999. Courtesy Zawyeh Gallery



with the land, outside of settler-colonialist and capitalist systems. How can those who have been severed from their land be welcomed back rightly to the place they inhabited for hundreds, if not thousands, of years, before these places were 'discovered' for their natural riches? What is climate fiction without settler-colonial and imperialist critique? How can we place Indigenous forms of knowledge of the land and about the climate under serious academic investigation?

In a conversation between the editor of the anthology *Palestine +100*, Basma Ghalayini, and the cofounder of Comma Press, Ra Page, we hear similarly about the colonial origins of the science-fiction genre.<sup>32</sup> While focusing on *Palestine +100*, a collection of science-fiction stories about Palestine one hundred years after the Nakba of 1948, Ghalayini and Page highlight science fiction's original planetary-scale wish to occupy faraway lands beyond the Earth. From this critical conversation around science fiction as a genre, it follows that climate fiction could be susceptible to falling into similar traps when it is presented or created without any critique of the conditions of settler colonialism, imperialism and capitalism, which gave – and continue to give – rise to climate catastrophes.

Similar to these Palestinian attempts to redress science-fiction tropes, Indigenous Latin American climate fiction subverts the genre. Dominican writer Rita Indiana's novel *Tentacle* centres a magical sea anemone that possesses magical powers to manipulate time and make people transition across genders.<sup>33</sup> The anemone also has the power to force humans into many kaleidoscopic material realities at once. One of the novel's protagonists is Argenis, an artist who was pushed into a parallel reality after being stung by the creature's tentacle. Argenis is forced to relive the city's colonial history as a labourer for a buccaneer, while still living in the current time as a contemporary artist, thus living two lives simultaneously, in the same place but at different times.<sup>34</sup>

The sea anemone, a venomous creature, manifests the notion of nature fighting back. That, in *Tentacle*, the anemone has the magical powers to make human beings literally relive history, including the origins of colonization, invokes an eco-surrealist relationship between humans and nature, a relationship that has been sacrificed for settler-colonialist fantasies, which led to the very climate catastrophes of Argenis's life in the present.

It is in this same nature (or 'real'/material world) that the blood of Palestinian martyrs makes the anemone grow – not as in the sea creature, but the flower, a potent symbol in Palestinian culture. The way in which the anemone exists in both marine and floral forms in Indigenous Latin American and Palestinian literary works exceeds this wondrous homophonic coincidence to fatefully signify the shared histories of these cultures through connections to, love for, and loss of the land.

This essay has attempted to show how Palestinian magical realism and Indigenous (critiques of) climate fiction can enrich the ways we see and interact with the world through enshrined knowledge, experience and care

32. '*Palestine +100*, In Conversation with Basma Ghalayini and Ra Page', *Androids and Assets Podcast*, 15 May 2021, [spotify.com](https://spotify.com).

33. Rita Indiana, *Tentacle* (trans. Achy Obejas), London: *And Other Stories*, 2018 [2015].

34. **Buccaneers were English, French or Dutch sea adventurers who haunted the Caribbean and the Pacific seaboard of South America, preying on Spanish settlements and shipping during the second half of the 17th century.**



Sager Al Qatil, *Untitled*, 1985. Courtesy Zawyeh Gallery



for the land. Capitalism and other expansionist systems of living can never reach such goals. The generative overlap between Palestinian magical realism and Indigenous approaches to climate fiction evokes hopes of reversing the effects of climate catastrophe and gives agency and power to the Indigenous and colonized peoples who reimagine and die for the land and strive for the liberation of their peoples – from Turtle Island to Palestine.

### **Baqiya and Yu'ad**

Baqiya and Yu'ad are pseudonyms for two cultural workers based in Amsterdam. They have been involved in the cultural scene in Palestine in different forms for many years.

### **Bojana Piškur**

Bojana Piškur works as a curator at the Moderna galerija in Ljubljana. Her curatorial and research work focuses on the Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav context and the Non-Aligned Movement, especially in relation to art and culture. Much of this work formed part of the 'Southern Constellations' series of exhibitions (2019–22). She is also interested in how historical emancipatory ideas can be translated to and practiced in contemporary situations. Since 2023, Bojana has been a member of the editorial board of L'Internationale Online.

### **Charles Esche**

Charles Esche was the director of Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven (2004–24). He is an advisor at Jan van Eyck Academie, Maastricht, and Professor of Contemporary Art and Curating at Central Saint Martins, London. He was part of the Finding Committee for the artistic direction of documenta 15. He received the Princess Margriet Award in 2012 and the CCS Bard Award for Curatorial Excellence in 2014.

He has (co-)curated numerous exhibitions, including: 'To those who have no time to play' (2022–23), Framer Framed, Amsterdam; 'The Meeting that Never Was' (2022), MO Museum, Vilnius; 'Hurting and Healing' (2022), Tensta Konsthall, Stockholm; 'Power and Other Things' (2017), Europalia, BOZAR, Brussels; 'Art Turns, World Turns' (2017), Museum MACAN, Jakarta; 16th Jakarta Biennale (2015); 31st São Paulo Bienal (2014); U3 Triennial of Contemporary Art, Ljubljana (2011); RIWAQ Biennale (2007 and 2009), Palestine; Istanbul Biennial (2005); Gwangju Biennale (2002); and many Van Abbemuseum exhibitions. Since 2023, he has been a member of the editorial board of L'Internationale Online.

### **Ezgi Yurteri**

Ezgi Yurteri is an editor and writer operating across the cultural field. She has a background in economics and curatorial studies and is interested in exploring forms of cooperation, the organization of artistic labour, economies of exchange and the politics of knowledge production. Ezgi has worked with various cultural institutions and publishing houses in Turkey, and is currently an editor at Salt. She was part of the artist-initiated space sub in Çanakkale between 2019 and 2021, and has collaborated with AVTO, an independent organization for research and practice in Istanbul. Since 2023, she has been a member of the editorial board of L'Internationale Online.

### **Françoise Vergès**

Françoise Vergès is Chair of Global South(s) at the Collège d'études mondiales in Paris. Vergès grew up on Réunion Island and has lived in Algeria, Mexico and the US, where she was a feminist anti-racist journalist

and editor in the 1980s. She is an active teacher, scholar and curator. Her PhD thesis *Monsters and Revolutionaries: Colonial Family Romance and Métissage* was published by Duke University Press in 1999. Subsequent publications include *A Decolonial Feminism* (Pluto, 2021); *The Wombs of Women: Race, Capital, Feminism* (Duke University Press, 2020); 'Exposer l'esclavage: méthodologies et pratiques' (ed., *Africultures* no. 91, 2013); and *L'Homme prédateur: Ce que nous enseigne l'esclavage sur notre temps* (Albin Michel, 2011). She has written documentary films on Maryse Condé (2013) and Aimé Césaire (2011), and was a project advisor for documenta11 (2002) and the Triennale de Paris (2011).

### **The Free Palestine Initiative Croatia**

The Free Palestine Initiative Croatia represents a wide people's coalition that actively condemns the acts of genocide occurring under Israel's lasting apartheid and occupation regime. The coalition gathers Croatian intellectuals, feminist groups, anti-war movements, civil society organizations, Arab and Palestinian communities, migrant and refugee communities and Muslim communities, among others. The Initiative agrees on the need for dedicated and educated communication with members of the Jewish community, and its inclusion in the activities of the Initiative, on a path to opening up safe spaces for mourning while at the same time discussing insecurities, confusion and other accompanying phenomena. The Initiative organizes peaceful protests, direct actions and teach-ins on Palestine. We insist on grappling with historic and current geopolitical complexities as well as on expressing humanitarian positions and solidarity while critically interrogating the politics of genocide denial of the Croatian government and within Croatian (civil) society. The Initiative condemns Islamophobia and anti-Semitism, and is invested in educational labour, including the careful crafting of visual and textual materials for the public.

### **Hannah Gregory and Rebecca Bligh**

Hannah Gregory (Berlin) and Rebecca Bligh (London) have worked together as the main copy editors for L'Internationale Online since 2021.

**Hannah Gregory** is an editor of essays, artists' writing and experimental literature, with over a decade of experience in the cultural sphere. Her writing on art, places and relations has been published in *Afterall*, *Art Monthly*, *The New Inquiry*, *The White Review* and *The Wire*, among others.

**Rebecca Bligh** is an experienced freelance editor of essays, theory, small-press literature and art writing. Close reader; editing as care work.

### **Jokkoo with Miramizu, Rasheed Jalloul & Sabine Salamé**

**Jokkoo** is an art and music collective based in Barcelona. It was born out of the need to investigate and disseminate the most contemporary and futuristic electronic sounds of the African continent and its diasporas, engaging with ally communities worldwide. They create connections and spaces to give a platform to dissident aesthetics and narratives. The collective is formed of six different personas with shared goals: Baba Sy (aka pasaporteman), Maguette Dieng (Mbodj), Oscar Taylor (Opoku),

Nicolas Beliot (Mooki6), Ismaël N'diaye (B4mba) and Miriam Camara (TNTC).

Mira Karouta, aka **Miramizu**, is a Barcelona-based visual artist and DJ from Jordan with roots in Palestine and Lebanon. Drawing inspiration from her heritage and surroundings, she uses music and visual art to craft narratives that delve into the intricacies of our shared existence. She collaborates with Rasheed Jalloul to weave a sonic experience, a vocabulary of inclusive identity, in solidarity with the Palestinian people, who remarkably endure archaic aggressions backed by technologies of life eradication.

**Rasheed Jalloul** is an architect, artist and composer from Beirut, based in Barcelona. He works at the interfaces of architecture, language, poetry, music and space. His creative research focuses on devising interdisciplinary methods in an effort to re-indigenize knowledge production, using music as a vehicle.

**Sabine Salamé** is a Lebanese rapper and poet who uses the power of her vulnerability to tackle political and personal issues from an unconventional perspective with the hope of building real historical documentation for the future and to make everyone going through similar turmoil feel less alone.

Launched from Palestine at the beginning of the global lockdown in 2020, [Radio Alhara](#) is a communal media platform that encompasses the idea of public space and aims to blend the limits between producers and listeners.

### **Lama el Khatib**

Lama el Khatib is a writer and cultural worker. Since 2023, she is a member of the editorial board of L'Internationale Online.

### **Learning Palestine Group**

The [Learning Palestine Group](#) is a collective of artists, academics, intellectuals and community members working closely with Radio Alhara who aim to disseminate knowledge on the history of the ongoing struggle for justice, liberation and freedom for Palestine and the Palestinian people. The Learning Palestine Group wishes to practice new and old ways of spreading and sharing this knowledge, working within and around the constraints of social media and corporate-controlled networks.

### **Martin Pogačar**

Martin Pogačar is a cultural studies scholar working in the field of media memory studies, philosophy of technology, as well as Yugoslav popular culture and industrial heritage. His recent work includes: 'E/Affect Agropop: How Pop and Joke Made People Resonate in the 1980s', in Ana Hofman and Tanja Petrović (eds.), *Affect's Social Lives: Post-Yugoslav Reflections*, Ljubljana: Založba ZRC, 2023, a co-edited (with Iva Kosmos) volume *Social Impact in Arts and Culture: The Diverse Lives of a Concept*, Ljubljana: Založba ZRC, 2022, and an essay in *Memory Studies* journal, 'A Microphone in a Chandelier: How a Secret Recording Sparks Mnemonic Imagination and Affect'.



### Mick Wilson

Mick Wilson is an artist, educator and researcher based in Gothenburg and Dublin. He is currently Professor of Art and Director of Doctoral Studies at HDK-Valand Academy of Art & Design, University of Gothenburg. Current teaching and research interests address aspects of the political imaginary: constructions of 'publicness' and 'the social' in the contemporary art field; body counts – political community with the dead and the regime of calculation; the rhetorical dynamics of knowledge, conflict and violence; and the aesthetic politics of foodways.

Recent edited volumes include: with Gerrie van Noord & Paul O'Neill (ed.), *Kathrin Böhm: Art on the Scale of Life*, London: Sternberg Press / MIT Press (2023); with Henk Slager (ed.), *Expo-Facto: Into the Algorithm of Exhibition*, Utrecht: Metropolis M Books, 2022; with Cătălin Gheorghe (ed.), *Exhibitionary Acts of Political Imagination*, Iasi: Editura Artes / ArtMonitor, 2021; with Nick Aikens et al. (ed.), 'On the Question of Exhibition 1, 2, and 3', *PARSE*, Gothenburg: Faculty of Fine, Applied and Performing Arts, 2021; and with Paul O'Neill et al. (ed.) *Curating After the Global: Roadmaps for the Present*, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2019.

### Nick Aikens

Nick Aikens is a curator, researcher, editor and educator. He is the Managing Editor and Responsible for Research for L'Internationale Online. He assumed his role in August 2023 as part of the four-year EU-funded 'Museum of the Commons' project. Nick has a PhD from HDK-Valand, part of Gothenburg University and an academic partner of L'Internationale. He was previously curator at the Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven (2012–23), where he worked on numerous exhibitions and publications, and led the research programme 'Deviant Practice' (2016–19). He was a tutor and course leader at the Dutch Art Institute, Arnhem (2012–19), and guest professor in the Department of Exhibitions and Scenography at Karlsruhe University, Germany (2023–24). Since 2013, he has been a member of the editorial board of L'Internationale Online.

### Ovidiu Țichindeleanu

Ovidiu Țichindeleanu is a Romanian philosopher, translator and cultural theorist, writing on critical social theory, decolonial thought, alternative epistemologies, histories of the senses and the cultural history of socialism and post-socialism. In 2021 he co-founded *The Experimental Station for Research on Art and Life*, a collective project on a plot of land in the village of Silistea Snagovului, 40 km north of Bucharest. He is a member of the editorial board of L'Internationale Online, co-editor of *IDEA: arts + society* magazine, and part of the The Resurrection Committee, which curates research exhibitions that offer historical apertures through which to form alternative narratives to the dominant ones of the moment.

### Precolumbian

Precolumbian is a Philadelphia-based DJ, producer and cultural creator born in Peru. She is cofounder of queer experimental club night Seltzer and recent Nowadays (NYC) resident. She has been pioneering queer nightlife

in Philadelphia for fifteen years. She has performed for the Latin Grammys, Boiler Room, SXSW festival (Austin, Texas) and the Baltimore Museum of Art, and soundtracked Kenzo's A/W 2020 runway at Paris Fashion Week. Precolumbian has toured North and South America and Europe, and has releases on labels including Apocalipsis (NYC), Majía (Houston), Volquete (Buenos Aires), and Behuá Icara (Lima).

### Rana Anani

Rana Anani is a Palestinian curator and writer in visual arts and culture. She is a founding member of the Palestinian Museum, Birzeit, and Qalandiya International Biennial (Palestine), leading the 2018 edition on the theme of solidarity. Anani served as an associate curator of Sharjah Biennial 13's off-site project in Ramallah, 'Shifting Grounds' (2017). She has curated several group exhibitions including 'No Boundaries' (Bethlehem, 2019), 'Salute to the Prisoners of Freedom' (Beirut, 2021), 'Mist' by Shada Safadi and Akram Al Halabi (Ramallah, 2022), 'The Spring Exhibition' (Ramallah, 2023), as well as Mahmoud Alhaj's solo show 'Control Anatomy' (Ramallah, 2024). She curated *The Land and I*, a book on artist Nabil Anani's work (Institute for Palestine Studies, 2024), edited his memoir *Emerging to the Light* (Institute for Palestine Studies, 2019), and was the co-author with Suad Amiry of *Throne Village Architecture* (Ramallah: Riwaq, 2003). Anani is a fellow at the *Institute for Palestine Studies* and a board member of Khalil Sakakini Cultural Center in Ramallah.

### Rana Issa

Rana Issa is a writer, translator and curator committed to thinking and communicating about the atrocities taking place in Palestine, Lebanon, Syria and the world. She believes that historical context is necessary for unpacking our present predicament and hopes that one day she can write about the ocean blue. Until then, Rana dreams of a less wretched world, from the river to the sea.

### Sanabel Abdel Rahman

Sanabel Abdel Rahman is a postdoctoral fellow at the Merian Center for Advanced Studies in the Maghreb in Tunis (2024–25). She was a postdoctoral fellow at 'Europe in the Middle East – The Middle East in Europe' (EUME, Berlin) in 2023–24. She acquired her doctoral degree from Philipps University of Marburg in Arabic literature with focus on Palestinian magical realism. Her doctoral thesis, 'Oh Whale, Do Not Swallow Our Moon!: How Manifestations of Magical Realism Reflect and Challenge Distorted Palestinian Spaces in Literature' is currently being edited to be published by I.B.Tauris.

### Sara Buraya Boned

Sara Buraya Boned is a cultural worker, transfeminist and network weaver. She works at the Museo Reina Sofia, where she first began as an assistant in the Collections Department (2009–11), and where she has since worked in various roles, sustaining cultural programmes, public activities and collaboration networks. She is currently the head of *Museo Tentacular*, part of the Museo Reina Sofia's Study Centre.

Sara was the project leader of L'internationale from 2020 to 2023. Since 2018, she has been a member of the editorial board of L'internationale Online, co-editing the publications *Towards Collective Study in Times of Emergency* (2024), *Stories and Threads. Perspectives on Art Archives* (2022), *Degrowth and Progress* (2020) and *Feminisms* (2018). As part of her political and cultural practice, she is a member of the Institute of Radical Imagination and the assembly of Museo Situado. She has also been part of autonomous projects and collectives such as somateca, Calipsofacto, Archivos Comunes and Chantal.

### **Vijay Prashad**

Vijay Prashad is an Indian historian and journalist. He is the author of forty books, including *Washington Bullets: A History of the CIA, Coups, and Assassinations* (Monthly Review Press, 2021), *Red Star Over the Third World* (Pluto Press, 2019), *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World* (The New Press, 2022), *The Poorer Nations: A Possible History of the Global South* (Verso Books, 2013), and *The Withdrawal: Iraq, Libya, Afghanistan, and the Fragility of U.S. Power*, co-authored with Noam Chomsky (The New Press, 2022). Vijay is the executive director of Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research, the chief correspondent for Globetrotter and the chief editor of LeftWord Books (New Delhi). He appeared in the films *Shadow World* (2016) and *Two Meetings* (2017).

**Collective Study in Times of Emergency**

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*Collective Study in Times of Emergency* brings together 19 contributions including essays, collective writing, poetry and listening sessions, published by L'Internationale Online from November 2023 to November 2024 under the research strand 'Towards Collective Study in Times of Emergency'. The impulse behind and necessity of this work was to try to understand the implications of the genocidal war unfolding in Gaza for the cultural spheres in which L'Internationale's partners operate.

Through the process of this publication, 'collective study' – what Fred Moten and Stefano Harney have described as a form of 'study without an end' – becomes a means to work beyond the limitations of the 'statement', the single utterance, and to come into relation with certain practitioners, communities and contexts affected by this genocide. The commissions have come out of long-term relationships, friendships and new encounters: from within the L'Internationale confederation, through the programmes of our partners, and most importantly, with peers and allies within the Palestinian cultural ecosystem. The times of emergency are ongoing and so too is this work.

**With contributions by:**

Baqiya and Yu'ad, Bojana Piškur, Charles Esche, Ezgi Yurteri, Françoise Vergès, The Free Palestine Initiative Croatia, Jokkoo with Miramizu, Rasheed Jalloul & Sabine Salamé, Learning Palestine Group, L'Internationale Confederation, L'Internationale Online Editorial Board, Martin Pogačar, Mick Wilson, Ovidiu Țichindeleanu, Precolumbian, Rana Anani, Rana Issa, Sanabel Abdel Rahman, Vijay Prashad

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