



# How solidarity with migrant people is stifled at the France-UK border

Sébastien Bachelet  
February, 2024



Over 150 organisations [called for citizens to mobilise](#) against the new, controversial French immigration law deemed [‘an ideological victory’](#) by far-right leader Le Pen. They condemned this latest [‘clampdown’](#) on migration, including the suppression of statutory state medical aid for ‘irregular’ migrants and the reinstatement of the ‘illegal stay’ infraction. They also stressed that this law



further undermines solidarity efforts providing support to migrant people [\[i\]](#) in precarious conditions (e.g. restricted access to emergency accommodation). Attacks on the principle of solidarity have been a longstanding feature of hostile migration politics. Calais-based organisation Human Rights Observers ([HRO](#)) issued a [press release](#) last November following the detention in a French police station of two British volunteers, arrested while documenting the eviction of an encampment. HRO denounced this abusive practice as part of sustained efforts from the State to pressurise activists and undermine displaced people's support networks.

## Targeting migrant people and their supporters

In tackling migration, state authorities have regularly absconded from international protection obligations, issued deceiving promises (e.g. [“stop the boats”](#)), ramped up dehumanising rhetoric, and multiplied militaristic measures making journeys more dangerous. On the 24th of November 2023, [vigils were held on British and French beaches](#) to commemorate the second anniversary of a mass migrant drowning in the English Channel, and call for safe routes. However, states have cracked down on initiatives that document, mitigate, and challenge deadly politics of migration.

In France and elsewhere, state authorities harass and intimidate human rights activists, NGO practitioners, humanitarian volunteers and other citizens who provide support to (racialised) people criminalised for seeking safety, dignity, and opportunities.

*This criminalisation has devastating effects on the individuals targeted, contributing to an overall climate of violence and fear, while also deepening the vulnerabilities of migrant people.*

Mirroring [vilifying discourses about migrant people](#), politicians and journalists



(e.g. [British tabloids](#)) often portray solidarity actors as deviant and dangerous: traffickers, profiteers, or even traitors, fuelling the crisis and endangering law-abiding citizens. Some legal processes have attracted media attention: the trials of members of NGO search and rescue operations in the Mediterranean ([Pia Klemp and Carola Rackete](#)), and of solidarity actors in places like Greece ([Sarah Mardini and Seán Binder](#)), at the Morocco-Spain ([Helena Maleno](#)) and Italy-France borders ([Cédric Herrou, the Briançon 7](#)). State authorities have targeted organisations and their employees or volunteers but also other citizens (e.g. [elderly women, priests, and firefighters](#)) encountering migrant people and offering simple support (charging a mobile phone) motivated by political convictions, religious beliefs, or chance meetings with migrant people.

This criminalisation has devastating effects on the individuals targeted, contributing to an overall climate of violence and fear, while also deepening the vulnerabilities of migrant people. The regulation of migration involves a myriad of actors beyond the state (e.g. doctors, teachers) in the production of categories (e.g. illegal) and the enforcement of distinctions (citizen/migrant). The targeting of solidarity practices raises questions about how bordering processes not only govern the mobility of migrant people but also target those who challenge such processes, thereby (to some extent) collapsing some of their experiences, notably as subjects of repression and surveillance. Beyond these high-profile court-cases, forms of criminalisation targeting solidarity actors range from the formal to the informal, the banal to the spectacular.



Solidarity worker facing online harassment. Drawing by Calais-based artist Loup Blaster (Crimes of Solidarity series).

## Fostering fear through insidious harrassment

Louise (pseudonym) explained that, soon after getting involved with an association supporting migrant people in Calais, she realised the extent to which the French authorities target solidarity actors. She felt the impact on her life and loved ones: “I told my children that if one day Mum is taken away by the police, they must remember that she hasn’t done anything wrong, she was just doing humanitarian work. How do you explain to your children that it’s the *police* who do illegal things? [...] My daughter had nightmares about it for a while.”

Her testimony is one of many we collected in a research project on “[crimes of](#)



[solidarity](#)". In a recent report ([‘We know who you are’: hostile migration politics and the criminalisation of solidarity actors in France and Morocco](#)), we focus on the everyday, insidious harassment of individuals and organisations. Moving away from direct legal attempts to criminalise solidarity, insidious harassment ranges from targeting solidarity actors indirectly, through extraneous or opportunistic legal and administrative processes, to invasive and informal practices that repeatedly unsettle solidarity actors in their private sphere, fostering atmospheres of fear and surveillance.

*The repression of solidarity actors takes place amidst wider (and worrying) restrictions on the ability of all to voice concerns and challenge harmful policies.*

At the French-British border and beyond, state agents deploy opaque and punitive measures to stifle dissent and undermine practices of solidarity which challenge the [transnational enforcement](#) of violent migration policies resulting in [degrading treatment](#) of migrant people. These brutal measures partake in wider efforts, especially since [the destruction of the Calais Jungle in 2016](#), to make life unliveable for displaced people (e.g. preventing encampments in border zones). Solidarity actors experience gendered and racialized harassment and repression, are routinely issued abusive fines, followed, brutalised, threatened and more.

The repression of solidarity actors takes place amidst wider (and worrying) restrictions on the ability of all to voice concerns and challenge harmful policies. The wider national context is marked by social and political tensions, protests over police violence, crackdowns on dissent (e.g. in response to anti-[pension reform](#) movements), and the country’s post-colonial history of repressing [ethnic minorities](#).

Like the treatment of migrant people, the criminalisation of solidarity actors should worry all citizens as to the capacity and willingness of state authorities to stifle dissent and infringe fundamental rights (e.g. to protest). The targeting of solidarity illustrates how state authorities deploy formal and informal methods to



further enforce bordering processes and crack down on those who dare to challenge them. It raises questions about how climates of fear are generated as part of hostile politics of migration, with devastating consequences for migrant people and their supporters, bringing to the fore efforts to enforce and contest normative distinctions between citizens and (unwanted) strangers.

[\[i\]](#) Naming and categorising people depending on their migration status and in relation to their mobility (or lack of) entail ethical issues. Dominant discourses often employ de-humanising and reductive terminologies. We have elected to use the term ‘migrant people’ here to avoid reducing people to a certain status or condition

---

## Why ‘Framing Gaza’?

Allegra  
February, 2024



There has never been a better documented war than the one unfolding in Palestine at the moment. As Elshaik, Martinez and Shaer write in their [contribution](#) to Allegra's *Framing Gaza* thread:

“Daily, images, videos and voice notes proliferate faster than they can be witnessed or heard or known. We have numbers, data visualizations, graphs and charts of death tolls and aid trucks and calorie counts. [...] And of course, [we have] human rights violation reports, health analyses, compendiums of laws. We have transcripts of government officials calling for Gaza to be flattened, leveled, made uninhabitable.”

The facts of war can no longer be disputed. Instead, what is at stake is how violence and harm are framed: how certain kinds of violence are made visible, and others [invisibilised](#), and how certain forms of suffering become illegitimate. We must resist this selectivity, or ‘willed blindness’, as [Lila Abu Lughod](#) put it.



*When our own colleagues start censoring themselves for fear of being sanctioned, we may want to ask: what is scholarship good for?*

In the dominant framing, most Western governments have unquestioningly endorsed Israel's right to self-defence as an absolute, however tenuous that might look from an international law perspective. When even a mention of economic sanctions becomes a legally punishable offence (such as it is the case in Germany), when any call for, in a first step, simply a halt to the indiscriminate killing of civilians by state armed forces is equated with Antisemitism, governments and societies in Europe lose any claim to being the supposed guardians of an international rights-based order.

Rather than trying to actively help find solutions to the current conflict that is claiming thousands of civilian lives, the debates in many parts of Europe have been chiefly about who said what, and what kinds of questions and political opinions are deemed *verboden*. As a consequence, the [space for debate and for expressing solidarity with Palestinians has considerably shrunk](#), alarmingly also at universities where we would expect vigorous and nuanced discussion to be possible and welcomed. Instead, many universities have lent themselves to staging [McCarthyesque spectacles of denunciations](#), ritual self-flagellations and [dismissals](#). **When our own colleagues start censoring themselves for fear of being sanctioned, we may want to ask: what is scholarship good for?**

Allegra was created to be more than just another anthropology publication. We want to foster a sense of community, mutual support and engaged scholarship that the neoliberal university has gradually destroyed. Our editorial collective is less concerned with demands for conceptual and theoretical 'newness' and anthropological 'turns' than with making the world safe for human difference. We are defending a vision of anthropology that is 'in the world', i.e a 'worldly' anthropology, that produces [theories that can be used as stones](#). In that spirit, we seek to amplify voices that often remain marginalised, particularly voices that talk to experiences of violence and the legacies of colonialism, and to recentre a



postcolonial framing that despite calls to decolonise our universities still remains marginal or [wilfully misinterpreted](#).

*We felt that an open thread would provide space for immediacy and for these voices to be read.*

We know, from people who have told us informally, from comments when discussing other matters, and from authors who have withdrawn pieces from Allegra in the middle of the review process, that we've not made everyone happy. And, of course, we understand. We understand that given the heaviness of history in certain parts of Europe, and the structures that seek to repress those certain views, not everyone feels comfortable or safe publishing on a site that includes pieces that frame Palestine-Israeli relations in terms of settler colonialism, apartheid and genocide. Yet we fully assume our [killjoy status](#), to use feminist scholar [Sara Ahmed](#)'s expression, because we believe that the purpose of critical scholarship is primarily to challenge the status quo.

We felt that an open thread would provide space for immediacy and for these voices to be read. The authors we published in our *Framing Gaza* thread are scholars of the Middle East, or decolonial scholars who mobilise their knowledge of postcolonialism to offer analyses of the current conflict that unpack and disrupt the dominant frame.

Unpacking and disrupting the dominant frame also means that we should ask questions about how [the institutions to which we belong](#) are complicit in perpetuating the occupation of Palestinian territories. As many [Israeli and Palestinian anthropologists](#) themselves have highlighted, the inclusion of Israeli academic institutions in European funding mechanisms [contributes directly](#) to the ongoing repression of Palestinians. There is ample evidence that in Israel, academic disciplines from [technology](#) to the [social sciences](#) are implicated in the occupation. Now that there is no single functioning university left in Gaza, it is surely the moment for such reflection and collective action.



Just like trade union work within our institutions is important to address issues relating to labour, we can think about what our departments, institutions and wider networks can do [in response](#) to the latest surge of violence in Palestine. In this regard, we can build on past examples of solidarity within academia. Conflicts and repression in Myanmar, Ukraine and Turkey led universities to open up scholarships and places to scholars and students alike whose work or study was interrupted or academic freedom curtailed. As South Africans know from their own experience, liberation and higher levels of equality come rarely from internal resistance alone and are dependent on complex interplays with [external forms of pressure](#).

---

## **AnthroKino: Spring Program**

Allegra  
February, 2024



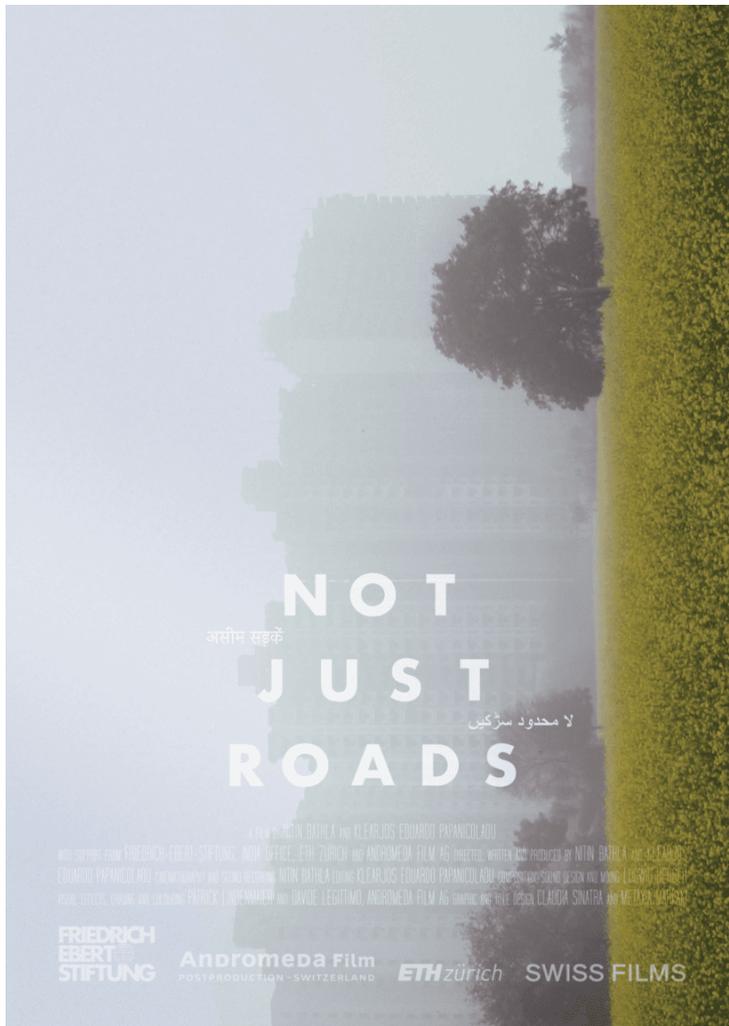
This spring, Allies meet (online) to watch ethnographic films and discuss with their makers. We have a line up of movies that explore the effects of urban infrastructures (Not just Roads), a series of short films on Black visual and sonic representations, social justice (Two tales of Modikahna), and on the politics of extractivist archives (Scenes of Extraction). Register to receive the Zoom link!

Our AnthroKino series is part of Allegra's efforts to strengthen our community through [gatherings](#).



## Not Just Roads (70')

March 7th 13:00 CET



### ***Nitin Bathla and Klearjos Papanicolaou***

Not Just Roads is a feature-length documentary film, which explores the recent history of planetary entanglements between the built environment, monetary speculation, and everyday life. It focuses on the sensorium of an urban expressway located on the peripheries of Delhi, the Dwarka Expressway. This expressway is being constructed as a part of the Indian government's Bharatmala ('Garland of Limitless Roads') program, which aims to add a total of 65,400 kilometres of new highways to the existing network of highways in India. Thus opening the Indian countryside to a massive urbanisation geared towards speculative investments for the emerging Indian middle classes and global



investors. Currently, these territories are inhabited by agricultural and working-class communities and nomadic herders and criss-crossed by native trails and vital ecological commons. The film captures the friction between the social and material lives of these competing life worlds, shifting between the sensorium of the worlds outside and inside of the gated utopias along the expressway. It journeys working class neighbourhoods undergoing demolition, construction landscapes, protests sites, and the persuasive pitches by the real estate salesmen attempting to sell dreamscapes.

Register [here!](#)

## Black visual and sonic intonation (short films)



M  
a  
r  
c  
h  
2  
1  
s  
t  
,  
1  
3  
:  
0  
0

### CET

In this AnthroKino session, we take up Arthur Jafa's question 'what could a Black visual language be outside of western paradigms of filmic representation?'. Taking 'Black Visual Intonation' as a visual language that could capture the



sonority of Black life, we adopt a Black feminist perspective to explore how image, movement and sound are vocabularies that assist us in rethinking and re-narrating the conditions of Black life, and importantly how they can attend to the imaginaries and practices of Black femmes, and the Black diaspora more generally.

We are a trio of artists and researchers who have different backgrounds and influences. We enter in dialogue with each other on how and why the mediums of sound and image are essential to various Black ways of knowing and being. Whilst engaging with notions of time, space, joy, sociality, race, and gender, we celebrate sound and image as process and praxis, and as forms of refusal of the normative logics of ethnographic film making.

We present a selection of short films and sound pieces that represent our respective practices:

### ***Rambisayi Marufu***

#### **Archival Encounters: A work in Progress (approx. 5min)**

A poetic gesture towards encounters in the archive. A response to an installation I curated at the Horniman Museum and Gardens in London (Nov 2021-2022), this work attends to questions of care, repair and intimacy in the museum.

### ***Nasheeka Nedsreal***

#### **Steady Renderings (work in progress)**

An experimental self-portrait delving into the intricate realms of personal mythology. Challenging notions of singularity and coherence, this kaleidoscopic exploration embraces fragmentation and hybridization through collage. Discarded images and videos converge and gain newfound significance, weaving together a tapestry of visual and sonic ephemera.



## **Artefact Dream (work in progress)**

An exploration on fluidity and displacement, delving into the shifting landscapes of belonging and connection. With frenetic energy, the film embarks on a journey of memory and imagination mutation, fostering a dislodging of belonging. Shot predominantly in Senegal and Louisiana, it symbolizes a transatlantic journey, weaving together themes of transition and interconnectedness.

## ***Melody Howse***

### **Joy - 03:00 mins**

A sound and image piece that meditates on the anti-gravitational capacities of dance as 'Refusal.' It considers movement a language and practice that is metamorphic. It is made with footage from the Berlin BLM demo 2021 and a soundscape created from demo speeches and sounds from across the African diaspora.

### **Independence - (work in progress 2:28)**

A video collage that evokes and features the experience of my grandmothers whose story of emancipation echoes that of the country which gained independence from the British at the end of 1970's.

Register [here!](#)

## **Two tales of Modikahna(73')**



**April 10th 13:00  
CET**



### ***Gouri Patwardhan with Nidhin Donald as discussant***

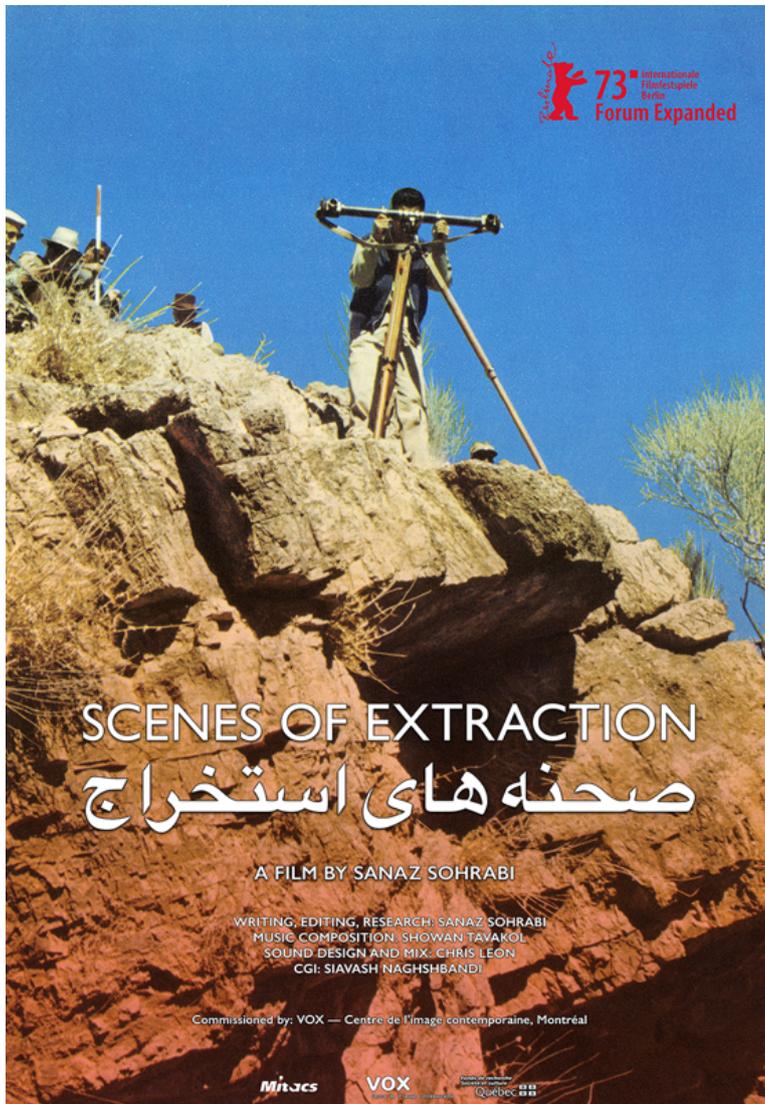
Sudhir Waghmare's canvases take us to Modikhana, a typical servants 'back alley' of the erstwhile British cantonment in Poona. His narrative reveals the rich and overlapping layers of the social and political history of Modikhana. In contrast, his daughter Kranti's quest for form brings her face to face with the daily violence of the environment in which she grew up. It makes her question available ways of confronting this violence. She continues to search for form, and tries to find creative ways to collaborate with her community. The contradictions and realities of Modikhana, an area that has seen much transition, are finely captured through the very different and highly individualistic voices of Sudhir and Kranti Waghmare.

Register [here!](#)

### **Scenes of Extraction (43min)**



April 25th 17:00 CET



The event is co-organized with [BEYONDREST Conversation Series](#) and the screening will be followed with a discussion with the research-based artist *Sanaz Sohrabi* and cultural historian *Alia Mossallam* on the possible ways to reconstitute contested archives into knowledge production.

Between 1901 and 1951, the British controlled oil operations in Iran expanded their geological expeditions and geophysical methods for locating commercially viable oil reserves across its entire oil concession. “Scenes of Extraction” takes the viewer on an archival stroll into the British Petroleum Archives to unearth the still and moving images that documented this expansive colonial network of



geological explorations that spanned across Iran, but also reached other British oil concessions in Papua and South East Asia. Reading the political economy of images in relation to extraction of crude oil, “Scenes of Extraction” evokes the history of imperial and colonial extractive industries in relation to the history of photography and archives, both as embodied technologies of extraction and dispossession in and of themselves.

Register [here!](#)

---

# Letter from Gaza with a response from New York

Zahra Ali  
February, 2024



The Institute of Women’s Studies (IWS) at Birzeit University in Palestine has launched “[Women’s Testimonies from Gaza](#)”, a project aiming to amplify the voices of women in Gaza living under the ongoing Israeli genocidal military operation. Beyond “archiving” or “documenting,” the project seeks to build community with them, while [publishing their words](#) in Arabic and translating them into English. I was invited to contribute to the project and I decided to write an answer to one of the authors of these testimonies. These are Duaa’s words, followed by mine.

“We are fine - thanks to the world that grants us choices, choices between swift and slow death, between dying of thirst or hunger. Dying in grief over memories destroyed with every street, the details of which you have memorized, or for a house that you lived in for years and was turned into ashes. Between the death of your loved ones, one by one, or being erased from existence along with all from your lineage. Perhaps, in the end, you survive with half a body, half a soul, half a heart. Thanks to the humanitarian efforts so that we experience displacement and



forced migration over and over again. Thanks to the world that draws inspiration from our death, producing texts, poetry, and slogans that resonate. Thanks to the world that, until the last breath, watches and observes the scenes of walls collapsing on our heads. Thanks to the world that sips its morning coffee as usual, smokes its cigarette, and writes about our steadfastness in the face of the massacre. The same world that still has energy to contemplate the remains of children, count their numbers, pray and implore God to grant us victory. By the way, how many did they count? I no longer count for this is the task of the world. Our task is to contemplate this amount of death and believe it, that the world we once knew is past, and we are in the midst of a new world, a world of our own.”

Duaa Badawi, October 31, 2023, Facebook post

*Duaa Badawi, 28 years old, is a content writer and marketing specialist from Gaza. She has a BA in Communication and Media Studies from Al-Azhar University and recently returned to Gaza in March 2023 after four years of living abroad in Istanbul, Turkey. Duaa, a mother of two, was displaced from her home in Gaza City to Rafah in the south. After Israeli airstrikes targeted her neighbourhood, some of her family members were injured and her house, in addition to many others in the neighbourhood, was destroyed.*

“Dear Duaa,

I read your words, over and over again. I read them as if you wrote them for me. I read them as if I am looking at you in the eyes while you are saying them. What are words after all? Just sounds that contain little fragments of our feelings. I felt these fragments deep in my heart, I hear you, I feel you. I hear the intense and unbearable pain in your anger. Yes, you are right, the world has let you down, we have let you down. You, your loved ones and your entire people are in a world of your own. Being from Iraq, I have caught glimpses of this world throughout my life, and I carry them with me wherever I go.



My dear Duaa, believe me, nothing is the same anymore, nothing tastes the same, nothing feels the same. I know exactly what you mean when you denounce our hypocrisy, I have felt the same many times about the way the world describes my people. Nobody chooses the apocalypse, and there is nothing to be gained from it. All the poetry, the texts, the slogans mean nothing, they are just the testimony of the deep and profound failure of humanity to account for our losses, for the destruction of our world.

Duaa, I want to tell you one thing, and I hope that amidst the unspeakable tragedy that you are in, it brings you a little something. Take it as if I am sitting with you in the tent and offering you a cup of Iraqi tea, very black, very bitter, but with a lot of cardamon and a little bit of sugar. I promise you, Duaa, that I will do everything in my power to stop this, that I will not give up on you, that I will continue to listen to you, to look you in the eyes.

Duaa, I live in New York City and teach at an US public university, in the heart of the empire that supports and arms the criminals that kill your people. I will let everybody know about you. I will say your name, the name of the members of your family killed by these cruel and heartless assassins, the name of your people in the streets of this city. I will teach my students about the history of your people, your poetry, your literature, I will make sure they know everything. I will fight the obscene impunity that Israel enjoys and the naked injustice that bring death to your world. I will make it known by everybody. I will fight so you can obtain your rights, for a better future for you, for your two children, and for your entire people

My dear Duaa, I cannot bring back the people and places that you have lost, and everything that was destroyed, the beautiful streets of your neighbourhood, your memories, but I can offer you this promise, and send you my most sincere prayers and the assurance that I will never look away.

Your sister Zahra”



# On an abyssal edge: a streak of blood, and absence

Nabil Salih  
February, 2024



The murdered is carried on the shoulders. In haste, a cadaver shrouded in white is slipped into an *indoor mass grave*. War's soundtrack echoes in the background, tearing through atmosphere and space. Unmarked, the nameless are laid in a bombed-out house embalmed in an eternal, silent scream.

No rest in the resting place.



There is “a secret agreement” between past generations and our own, the late revolutionary philosopher Walter Benjamin writes in his *Theses on the Philosophy of History*. We are endowed with a power to which the past has a claim. It cannot be settled “cheaply.”[\[1\]](#)

## Ghosts

The dead where I come from are buried close to their beloved. *Ghurba*, that melancholic up-rootedness, is unbearable in life, let alone in the narrow graves. In the mass graves of Gaza, Palestinians are condemned to a second estrangement: an exile on the threshold of the afterlife.

The mass graves, freshly dug and fed, are bulldozed. Those beneath earth’s surface are murdered anew, assailed and awakened early from a permanent sleep, where Israel’s generals also await – their guns loaded.

The late Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish saw what we cannot see. In one poem he writes:

Our lives are a burden to the general: “How does blood  
flow from a ghost?”[\[2\]](#)

From its inception and rise over the ruins of Palestine, Israel’s enterprise of destruction, writes Ariella Azoulay, had as its end both the “*destruction of the mixed society that had developed here [in Palestine], and the removal of anything that might enable its resurrection.*”[\[3\]](#)

Looking at the obliteration and urban evisceration in Gaza and the West Bank, I remember Fady Joudah’s words: this destruction entails the erasure of “even Palestinian ghosts from existence.”[\[4\]](#)

Ghosts, after all, are dangerous. As Darwish puts it:

“We, who have no presence in “The Promised Land,” became the ghost of the



murdered who haunted the killer in both wakefulness and sleep, and the realm-in-between, leaving him troubled and despondent.”[5]

Yet the tact, the living and the dead are violated not by Israel’s machineries of war alone. Pampered Western journalists have their own, no less pernicious part in this gleeful mutilation.

As Lucy Hockings silences her interlocutor to [safeguard Israel’s holy narrative](#), supremacist [Julia Hartley-Brewer](#), shorn of her SS uniform, gaslights Dr. Mustafa Barghouti on air, slandering him as an evil, Arab misogynist, who requires a spectacular discipline on the evening news.

## Superfluous Nonbeings

Today, as Edward Said noted decades ago in his essay *Permission to Narrate*, Palestinians are booted in a transition from a comfortable place in limbo to the category of “two-legged beasts” and “human animals.”[6]

Yet in this silencing and erasure, I, as do Palestinians and comrades, read a different script. Palestinians, Azoulay writes in a recent essay, “are now exterminated in front of the worlds’ eyes without being recognized as victims of colonial genocidal violence.”[7]

The latter seem to have been dumped somewhere in oblivion, in a corner so distant beyond dehumanisation.[8] Hamas are not the only beasts here. As Joudah writes, Palestinians altogether are now *superfluous nonbeings*.

As Said (among others) argues in *Culture and Imperialism*, the white man has a history of relegating darker humans down the ladder of racial hierarchy or casting them out of “civilization” altogether.[9] In Palestine lives an example of dehumanisation seen in colonised geographies farther afield.

In *Caliban*, the Cuban critic Roberto Fernández Retamar tells us of the Carib-cum-cannibal who, in the writings of Columbus and in European eyes, was “an



anthropophagus, a bestial man situated on the margins of civilization, who must be opposed to the very death.”[10]

Hitherto in the nebula of the uncharted margins of Christian cartography, the mythical monsters of European imaginary were, with the emergence of the Atlantic commercial circuit, translated into cannibals and barbarians who now could be located in the *Las Indias Occidentales*. [11]

In Columbus’s writings, the Carib differs from another American “discovered” over there: the “*Arauaco* of the Greater Antilles—our *Taino* Indian primarily—whom he describes as peaceful, meek, and even timorous and cowardly.” [12]

The Caribs’ aforementioned *bestiality* necessitated their extermination. What this vision does not explain, Retamar tells us, is “why even before the Caribs, the peaceful and kindly Arauacos were also exterminated.” [13]

By the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Walter Mignolo writes, time was transformed into a colonial device. Barbarians were now primitives, closer to nature, and Europe was in the present moment, civilized and modern. [14]

This conception justified the ideology of progress, which, naturally, still leaves trails of blood behind. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was an alibi for development and underdevelopment. [15]

*In Palestine lives an example of dehumanisation seen in colonised geographies farther afield.*

Palestinian *children of darkness*, as Benjamin Netanyahu labels them, are still *there*, behind, sinking in a deep hole – a point I shall return to later.

With the blessings and material backing of the atavistic American empire, Israel eradicates all that moves or stands motionless in Gaza with no differentiation. Our esteemed colleagues in the mainstream press then finish the job.



As Western writers parrot Tel Aviv's line and carefully minimise the scandal, Palestinian civilians vanish from the face of the earth. When some of these hacks proclaim to offer an *exclusive* look inside the exotic wilderness of Gaza, local reporters, murdered en masse, disappear like ashes.

Golda Meir is not alone. For many, Palestinians *as a people* seem nonexistent. They are *nonbeings*.

## The Palestinian Laboratory

In the early weeks of the Israeli attack, journalist Sharif Abdel Kouddous wrote for the *Guardian* that “[e]ven colour has been obliterated” in Gaza.[\[16\]](#) In a recent essay on the uricide underway, Arie Amaya-Akkermans writes that “the entirety of northern Gaza (...) have been nearly turned entirely to rubble.”[\[17\]](#)

The plentiful, AI-assisted rapid killing turning Gaza into “an assassination factory,” the mathematisation, fragmentation, and shattering of urban space Operation Iron Sword involves, makes it a unique episode in this decades-long genocidal campaign.[\[18\]](#)

The cyclical purge of nonbeings' lives and abodes in Gaza is usually commodified - certifying the prowess of the technology at work before going on the market.

Palestine, writes Antony Loewenstein in his book *The Palestine Laboratory*, “is Israel's workshop, where an occupied nation on its doorstep provides millions of subjugated people as a laboratory for the most precise and successful methods of domination.”[\[19\]](#)

This subjugation includes what Byung-Chul Han calls the “digital panopticon.”[\[20\]](#) The penetrated lives of Palestinians entombed alive in ghettos and a slow-death camp are not only encircled by concrete and concertina wire, they are captured in their smartphones too.

Alas, the terror of the apartheid Israeli state-in-violation does not depart from but



*surpasses* the Orwellian surveillance state against which Han poses the “digital panopticon.” The latter is merely one layer of besiegement in whose internet and “social media” Palestinians are entrapped.

The digital panopticon, Han writes in his *Psychopolitics*, feeds on freedom of excess, on voluntary exposure.[\[21\]](#) Israel’s voyeurs await, listening to ensnare Palestinians in their private lives and then gaslight and manipulate whomever they decide (or so they hope).[\[22\]](#)

Veterans of the IDF’s Unit 8200, the equivalent of the National Security Agency (NSA), then graduate and take their expertise to private companies such as the NSO Group or the United Arab Emirates’ DarkMatter, where “they are paid far more than they could ever imagine.”[\[23\]](#)

Eduardo Galeano was right when he said wealthy nations teach oblivion. “No wealth is innocent of another’s poverty.”[\[24\]](#)

## **Spatialised Necropower**

Israel’s domination and control blurs the line between the Foucauldian definition of discipline and security.[\[25\]](#) Achille Mbembe writes that, “[a]s the Palestinian case illustrates, late modern colonial occupation is a concatenation of multiple powers: disciplinary, biopolitical, and necropolitic.”[\[26\]](#)

In invoking necropolitics, Mbembe tries to account for malformed existences of subjugation where humans are reduced to the status of *living dead* who are herded in *death worlds*.

Drawing on Eyal Weizman, Mbembe shows how the exercise of necropower involves “the dynamics of territorial fragmentation—the sealing off and expansion of settlement.”[\[27\]](#)

Illegal settlements perch on high grounds like fortified panopticons, as a regime of “vertical sovereignty” disposes planar territorial division for a three-



dimensional one: Israeli traffic cruises in exclusive bypass roads that, when intersecting with Palestinians', the two are kept apart through a makeshift separation.[\[28\]](#)

“Besieged villages and towns are sealed off and isolated from the world. Daily life is militarized. Local military commanders have the discretionary freedom to decide whom to shoot and when. Movement between the territorial cells requires formal permits.”[\[29\]](#)

The above skies are occupied, and those herded and bashed underneath include not only the living, but also the dead. For postmortem violence captures Palestinians in-between, from the moment of their killing to the denied burials postponed and left hanging along with the bereaved mothers.[\[30\]](#)

## Extraterritorial Limbo

If transforming Gaza's humans to *nonbeings* and maintaining their unclassifiable, alien status is a unique phenomenon in today's world, reducing their land to a testing ground had its parallels in other *theaters of operations* faraway.

For Washington has a blood-stained record of treating its southern neighbors as laboratories for both counterinsurgency warfare and neoliberal disfiguration.

In *Empire's Workshop*, Greg Grandin illustrates how, “[f]rom the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth century, the U.S. military sharpened its fighting skills and developed its modern-day organizational structure largely in constant conflict with Latin America.”[\[31\]](#)

From Havana to Santiago, the Beltway has invaded lands, subjugated peoples, aided dictators, nurtured death squads, and restructured economies to the detriment of generations on whose bodies an imperial insignia was stamped, pernicious techniques tested then traveled elsewhere as *certified*.

“It was a flexible system of extraterritorial administration,” writes Grandin, one



allowing the United States, free from the burden of formal colonialism, to structure internal politics and economic relations in the name of fighting communism and promoting development.[32]

Extraterritorial administration is best exemplified in Guantanamo. Fast forward to the terrorist “war on terror,” the first 300 Taliban fighters captured early in the war by the Northern Alliance in Mazar-e Sharif required a secure location accessible to intelligence officers.

Fearing potential targeting and depletion of resources, Karen Greenberg writes in *The Least Worst Place: Guantanamo’s First 100 Days*, General Tommy Franks, Commander of CENTCOM, wanted the captives to be taken away.[33]

*For Washington has a blood-stained record of treating its southern neighbors as laboratories for both counterinsurgency warfare and neoliberal disfiguration.*

In Washington DC, Poland, Guam, and even Manhattan were listed as potential destinations. Policymakers, however, needed a location where neither US laws nor any country’s protocols applied. In the executive branch, some even viewed international law as compromising of US interests.[34]

They needed “a legal limbo,” what Donald Rumsfeld wished to be “the legal equivalent to outer space.”[35] The answer was Guantanamo Bay, where the US had a military base on a land leased for 99-years - a perfect solution “exempted from any civilian or extra-governmental protocols.”[36]

## Ruination

It is in this light that Gaza, an exceptional space, should be conceptually spatialised: a hole where Israel could dump anything with justification. For unlike other “extraterritorial” spaces, this hole has at its bottom a population of *nonbeings* whose cries are unheard and extermination is normalised.



“In Gaza,” writes Amaya-Akkermans, “the rubble and ruin must remain in full view not only as evidence of war crimes, but as living testimonies of shattered lives.”[\[37\]](#)

But commenting on a “before-and-after” image of Gaza, where colour and architecture are wiped out in the latter, Azoulay warns readers of being misled by the “before” image. It is there, she insists, that genocidal violence is also inscribed.[\[38\]](#)

It is for such reason Ann Laura Stoler brings *ruination* to our minds – those “protracted imperial processes that saturate the subsoil of people’s lives and persist, sometimes subadjacently, over a longer *durée*.”[\[39\]](#)

It is what people are *left with*: the afterlives that linger after violence is first inflicted, and that perpetuate the violation of lives and minds of beleaguered populations that Stoler (as do the natives) calls our attention to.

In Palestine, the enterprise of destruction upon which the state-in-violation was erected, writes Azoulay, is *a regime feature*. The sovereign demolishes homes, creates a spectacle and issues no permits for Palestinians to build homes anew.[\[40\]](#)

Keeping Palestinians in the status of passive subjects, Azoulay continues, “necessitates subjugation mechanisms that operate everywhere, all the time.”[\[41\]](#) This entails daily humiliation, systematised whimsical oppression at checkpoints through which Palestinian bodies, dead or breathing, may trickle through or not.

In Gaza, writes Sara Roy, violence has also “been a matter of everyday, ordinary acts: the struggle to access water and electricity, feed one’s children, find a job, get to school safely, reach a hospital, even bury a loved one.”[\[42\]](#)

This Kafkaesque violence, Roy writes in her book *the Gaza Strip: The Political Economy of De-Development*, “is distinguished by its ordinariness, prosaism and invisibility.”[\[43\]](#)



Since 1967, she writes in her recent *New York Review of Books* essay, Israel has transformed both Gaza and the West Bank from “a functional economy to a dysfunctional one” with an impoverished society.

De-development in Gaza, the Zionist catalogue of destruction stipulates, includes “expropriation and dispossession; integration and externalization; and disindustrialization.”[\[44\]](#) Thusly, both natural resources and institutional capacities are appropriated and crippled to maintain the unviability of Palestinian life.

The tact between the living and the dead, then, is violated by the mere acceptance of a *normal* that unfortunately has been disrupted by regretful scenes of violence played on TV. Had it not been for Hamas’s attack on the seventh of October, all would have lived happily ever after.

As Israel commits the *mélange* of less-spectacular atrocities Baruch Kimmerling once described as *politicide*, it maintains Palestinians’ manufactured status as threatening “other” against whom all of the drastic measures above are justified.[\[45\]](#)

When photographs of this violated existence emerge, it is only normal. The Palestinian as a distortion to a Westerner’s field of vision is in her rightful place within the frame as a refugee, a terrorist or a *superfluous nonbeing*.

The Palestinian self is terminally *handicapped* and is never allowed to be whole.

*Handicapped* also means inferior, never thought of as equal. Their violence, as one commentator wrote in the *London Review of Books*, where posh pseudo-leftists scribble from their hammocks, is *pathological*.

Like the “sneaky” Iraqi soldiers newsmagazines’ neo-literates scribbled about before Iraq was bombed back to the pre-industrial age, Hamas’s “dominion of the underground,” in the words of our author Amaya-Akkermans, is *cowardly*.[\[46\]](#)

Verily, Palestinians always seem to suffer from some sort of an incurable ailment



that requires an uninvited diagnosis from “allies” and foes alike.

## Policing by Word

Said, writing in the aftermath of Israel’s 1982 invasion of Lebanon, says a “disciplinary communications apparatus [*sic*] exists in the West both for overlooking most of the basic things that might present Israel in a bad light, and for punishing those who try to tell the truth.”[\[47\]](#)

Indeed, a multiplicity of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) were and remain at play. When Said says “disciplinary,” it is because – as the late Louis Althusser tells us – like the Repressive State Apparatus, the ISAs function by ideology *and* violence as well.[\[48\]](#)

The ISAs, writes Althusser, include the scholastic and the news and information apparatuses, and are united by a dominant ideology. Through them state power is exercised for the shared end of the reproduction of the relations of production – that is, the capitalist relations of exploitation.[\[49\]](#)

Silencing Palestinian comrades on America’s elite campuses, disfiguring their story on the altar of “the news,” are two examples of *policing by word*.

Despite their diversity and geographic diffusion, these ISAs function under the ideology of a global capitalist ruling class with vested interests in the state of Israel.[\[50\]](#)

Ideology, as the myths it deploys at its service, is everywhere.[\[51\]](#) But it is naïve to presume, as someone argued in *The Nation*, that Israel’s propaganda, increasingly futile on the streets, dictates the politics of the “only audience that counts” – that is, US policymakers.[\[52\]](#)

Joe Biden needs no treacherous spell to leap from a sympathetic stance to the side of war criminals – a category to which many White House residents belong. This foggy view presumes the presence of innocence in the Beltway, some good



faith and naiveté at the decision-making level.[\[53\]](#)

As Azoulay rightfully argues, “[i]mperial governments do not represent humanity but the logic of their racializing regimes. This endows them with imperial rights to support each other when they use genocidal violence.”[\[54\]](#)

*The Palestinian as a distortion to a Westerner’s field of vision is in her rightful place within the frame as a refugee, a terrorist or a superfluous nonbeing.*

The ruination of Palestinian life, the rampant bombardment in Gaza, have been historically perpetrated with both the blessings of US veto power in the Security Council, and - in the latter’s absence - disregard for passed resolutions.[\[55\]](#)

This impunity is partially earned by the fact that, as Max Ajl writes, investing in Israel to boost “world-wide accumulation through wars on republicanism and revolution served the US ruling class well.”[\[56\]](#)

As a protector of “the political architecture of global capitalism,” sanctifying Israel’s comfort, then, has as its corollary an oscillation between policing and bombardment of generations of the Palestinian nuisance until its coveted demise.

## **A Hole**

For those, a hole needed to be dug in the ground.

Michel de Certeau, in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, defines space as “a practiced place.” Like a word when spoken, “the street geometrically defined by urban planning is transformed into a space by walkers.”[\[57\]](#)

Marc Augé builds on this argument to introduce his concept of hypermodernity’s “non-places.”

Unlike the social anthropological places, non-places create solitary contractuality.[\[58\]](#) These include supermarket aisles, motorways and airport



lounges - all “defined partly by the words and texts they offer us.”[\[59\]](#) The bewildered commuter looks for these signs for guidance.

Words, Michel de Certeau tells us, in the act of naming somewhere, can create “*a nowhere in places* [emphasis added].”[\[60\]](#)

By naming, he argues, “that is, by imposing an injunction proceeding from the other (a story) and by altering functionalist identity by detaching themselves from it, they create in the place itself that erosion or nowhere that the law of the other carves out within it.”[\[61\]](#)

Can a name produce this “erosion or nowhere?” Augé asks.[\[62\]](#)

Or, let me rephrase the question: how to define a forgotten, caged shred of shrinking land inhabited by *superfluous nonbeings* mostly kept alive on scarce aid, frequently battered on the head, and irreversibly tattooed as human animals by a racist lexicon?

Gaza, with its population of already-expelled refugees, is transitory for many. But to which destination? Again and again, the thousands born in its refugee camps transition to an early, violent deaths by Israel’s warplanes. Some are killed in the womb, even before acquiring a name.

But a home where generations resist and build life-worlds despite besiegement and isolation, in being depicted as a hostile terrain inhabited by *nonbeings* outside any criminal category, the Gaza Strip sinks in an abyssal void, transforms into a black dot on the map.

When photographed scandal seeps from underneath the wreckage into the comfort of a Western audience, these *statements of horror*, as Azoulay calls them, fail to turn into *emergency claims* because, in dominant discourses where they shall be inserted, they are not “an exception to the rule.”[\[63\]](#)

There exists a preconditioned life in news articles (as in official gibberish) where Palestinians dwell. There, they are mostly *handicapped*, at fault, ahistorical,



spoken about and over. At times, leading rags may allow a select few to plead in a muffled voice and a tamed alphabet (for *diversity*, of course).

Israel's hallucinations tell a different story, one articulated by the denuded denial of its allies, by headlines articulating anything but the screams of photographs, and by the eloquence of crimes written, photographed, recorded, and taking lives as we speak.

It cannot but be seen.

## References

[1] Walter Benjamin, Harry Zohn, and Hannah Arendt, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections* (Boston ; New York: Mariner Books, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2019), 197.

[2] Maḥmūd Darwīsh and Fady Joudah, *The Butterfly's Burden: Poems* (Port Townsend, Wash: Copper Canyon Press, 2007), 223.

[3] Ann Laura Stoler, ed., *Imperial Debris: On Ruins and Ruination* (Durham ; London: Duke University Press, 2013), 214.

[4] Fady Joudah, "A Palestinian Meditation in a Time of Annihilation," *Litrary Hub*, November 1, 2023, <https://lithub.com/a-palestinian-meditation-in-a-time-of-annihilation/>.

[5] Mahmoud Darwish and Sinan Antoon, *In the Presence of Absence* (New York: Steerforth Press, 2012), 68.

[6] Edward Said, "Permission to Narrate," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 13, no. 3 (April 1, 1984): 27-48, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2536688>.

[7] Ariella Azoulay, "Seeing Genocide," *Boston Review*, December 8, 2023,



<https://www.bostonreview.net/articles/seeing-genocide/>.

[8] Nabil Salih, “An Iraqi in the Capital of the US Empire,” *OpenDemocracy*, January 6, 2022, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/north-africa-west-asia/an-iraqi-in-the-capital-of-the-us-empire/>.

[9] Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 1st Vintage Books ed (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 16–17.

[10] Roberto Fernández Retamar, *Caliban and Other Essays* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 7.

[11] Saurabh Dube, ed., *Enchantments of Modernity: Empire, Nation, Globalization*, 1. publ, Critical Asian Studies (London: Routledge, 2009), 67–91.

[12] Fernández Retamar, *Caliban and Other Essays*, 6.

[13] Fernández Retamar, 7.

[14] Dube, *Enchantments of Modernity*, 67–73.

[15] Dube, 70.

[16] Sharif Abdel Kouddous, “Israel’s Endgame Is to Push Palestinians into Egypt - and the West Is Cheering It On,” *The Guardian*, October 20, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/oct/20/israel-palestinians-egypt-west-bombs-rafah-border-crossing>.

[17] Arie Amaya-Akkermans, “Meditations on Occupation, Architecture, Urbicide,” *The Markaz Review*, December 25, 2023, <https://themarkaz.org/meditations-on-occupation-architecture-urbicide/>.

[18] Yuval Abraham, “‘A Mass Assassination Factory’: Inside Israel’s Calculated Bombing of Gaza,” *+972 Magazine*, November 30, 2023, <https://www.972mag.com/mass-assassination-factory-israel-calculated-bombing-g>



aza/.

[19] Antony Loewenstein, *The Palestine Laboratory: How Israel Exports the Technology of Occupation around the World*, First edition hardback (London; New York: Verso Books, 2023), 17.

[20] Byung-Chul Han, *Psychopolitics: Neoliberalism and New Technologies of Power*, trans. Erik Butler, Verso Futures (London New York: Verso, 2017), 37-40.

[21] Han, 37-40.

[22] Loewenstein, *The Palestine Laboratory*, 88-89.

[23] Loewenstein, 85-86.

[24] Eduardo Galeano and Eduardo Galeano, *We Say No: Chronicles (1963/1991)*, 1. American ed (New York: Norton, 1992), 262.

[25] Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France 1977-78*, ed. Michel Senellart, *Lectures at the Collège de France* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 20-21.

[26] Achille Mbembe and Steve Corcoran, *Necropolitics*, *Theory in Forms* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 82.

[27] Mbembe and Corcoran, 80.

[28] Mbembe and Corcoran, 80-83.

[29] Mbembe and Corcoran, 82-83.

[30] Jaclynn Ashly, "The Grim Reality of Israel's Corpse Politics," *Jacobin*, November 28, 2023, <https://jacobin.com/2023/11/israel-palestine-gaza-corpse-politics-human-rights-mourning>.



[31] Greg Grandin, *Empire's Workshop: Latin America, the United States, and the Rise of the New Imperialism*, 1st Owl Books ed, The American Empire Project (New York: Owl Books, 2007), 3.

[32] Grandin, 39-40.

[33] Karen J. Greenberg, *The Least Worst Place: Guantanamo's First 100 Days* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 1-3.

[34] Greenberg, 6.

[35] Greenberg, 7.

[36] Greenberg, 6-7.

[37] Amaya-Akkermans, "Meditations on Occupation, Architecture, Urbicide."

[38] Azoulay, "Seeing Genocide."

[39] Ann Laura Stoler, *Duress: Imperial Durabilities in Our Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 343.

[40] Stoler, *Imperial Debris*, 194-226.

[41] Stoler, 217.

[42] Sara Roy, "The Long War on Gaza," *The New York Review of Books*, December 19, 2023, <https://www.nybooks.com/online/2023/12/19/the-long-war-on-gaza/>.

[43] Sara M. Roy, *The Gaza Strip: The Political Economy of de-Development*, Third edition (Washington, DC: Institute for Palestine Studies USA, Inc, 2016), 127.

[44] Roy, 130.

[45] Baruch Kimmerling, *Politicide: Ariel Sharon's War against the Palestinians*



(London ; New York: Verso, 2006), 7-8.

[46] Lee Artz and Yahya R. Kamalipour, eds., *Bring 'em on: Media and Politics in the Iraq War*, Communication, Media, and Politics (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005), 218.

[47] Said, "Permission to Narrate," 30.

[48] Louis Althusser, *On the Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* (London ; New York: Verso, 2014), 244.

[49] Althusser, 140-47.

[50] Althusser, 245.

[51] Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Richard Howard and Annette Lavers, First American paperback edition (New York: Hill and Wang, a division of Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013), 217-74.

[52] Jeet Heer, "Israel's Ludicrous Propaganda Wins Over the Only Audience That Counts," *The Nation*, November 17, 2023, <https://www.thenation.com/article/world/israel-gaza-propaganda-biden/>.

[53] Nabil Salih, "As America Weeps for Ukraine, the Loss and Grief of Iraqis Is Forgotten," *Middle East Eye*, April 1, 2022, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/iraq-ukraine-wounds-living-nightmare>.

[54] Azoulay, "Seeing Genocide."

[55] Bruno Huberman and Sabrina Fernandes, "Israel Doesn't Care about Your Resolutions," *Africa Is a Country*, October 27, 2023, <https://africasacountry.com/2023/10/israel-doesnt-care-about-your-resolutions>.

[56] Max Ajl, "Misreading Palestine," *Ebb*, November 28, 2023, <https://www.ebb-magazine.com/essays/misreading-palestine>.



[57] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, [Nachdr.] (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2000), 117.

[58] Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, Reprint (London: Verso, 2000), 94.

[59] Augé, 96.

[60] Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 104.

[61] Certeau, 105.

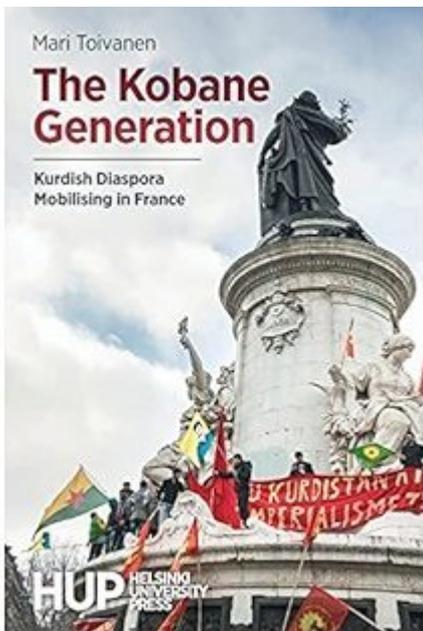
[62] Augé, *Non-Places*, 85.

[63] Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography*, 1st pbk. ed (New York : Cambridge, Mass: Zone Books ; Distributed by The MIT Press, 2008), 197-98.

---

# The Kobane Generation

Clare Maxwell  
February, 2024



In September 2014, the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) laid siege to the town of Kobane in the Autonomous Administration of North-East Syria. For the next several months, the world watched as the Kurdish-majority militias YPG (Yekîneyên Parastina Gel/People’s Protections Units) and YPJ (Yekîneyên Parastina Jin/ Women’s Protection Units) fought back, leading to a major turning point in the fight against the Islamic state. Most of the world was introduced for the first time to the YPG/J, and their unique place in struggle for Kurdish identity and autonomy. However, for the Kurdish diaspora, the siege of Kobane was a “critical moment”, an event

that pulled their community together and gave a common sense of purpose across continents, international borders, and generations. In [The Kobane Generation:](#)



[Kurdish Diaspora Mobilising in France](#), Mari Toivanen set out to explore the impact of Kobane on the Kurdish diaspora in France across generation, political affiliation, and nationality.

Kurds provide an interesting case study for the field of diaspora studies, as the Kurdish homeland is already fractured into territory belonging to four different nation-states: Iran, Iraq, Syria and Türkiye. This means that Kurdish identity is already transnational, existing through social and family networks, virtual spaces and political organizations that transcend national borders. The Kurdish diaspora in Europe is also multi-generational, as many immigrants in the mid-late 20th century arrived on work visas, and more recent arrivals coming as political asylees. The diaspora is also diverse in its loyalty to political parties, with some Kurds feeling closer to the philosophy of the YPG/J and their sister organization in Türkiye, the Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê (Kurdish Workers Party/PKK) which advocates for local autonomous political units arranged into a transnational confederation, while others support Kurdish Nationalist groups, such as the Partiya Demokrat a Kurdistane (Kurdish Democratic Party/KDP), which governs the autonomous Kurdish Regional Government in Iraq. Some Kurds in the diaspora prefer not to associate with other entities, or with no formal political institutions at all.

The variety of opinions and identities within the Kurdish diaspora lead Toivanen to one of her most emphasized points, that diaspora groups cannot be reduced into clearly delineated categories. Methodological nationalism, the idea that nationality can be a main lens of analysis in sociological research, simply does not apply, as Kurds do not share a common nationality. Nor can Kurds be boiled down to one exact ethnic, linguistic or political group. Toivanen thus does away with the question of what a diaspora is, and instead asks “how did it come to be,” emphasizing diaspora as a network of relationships and practices.

Of particular interest is the idea of generation. The book opens with the question of whether second generation diaporans, those who were born to immigrant parents in a “hostland” consider their own relationship with the Kurdish



“homeland.” Rather than simply consider the binary between the “first” and “second” generations of migration, Toivanen further considers the impact of political, social and technological trends on diasporans of different ages, and how actions within the diaspora radiate out and become touchpoints for both the Kurds back home, and the societies surrounding diasporans. In this way, she suggests that second generation Kurds in Europe are “raised in a transnational diaspora space but not limited to it.”

*As previously mentioned, Toivanen writes with the goal of pushing past a groupist or nationalist bias in ethnographic research. She emphasizes repeatedly that diasporas are not defined populations that can be quantified or reduced to a set of common denominators.*

To explain exactly what she means by this, Toivanen turns to the influences on second generation diasporans beyond their ethnic and familial identities. She notes that Kurds who were born in France often have a much better sense for their parents in how to navigate and communicate with local political and civil society structures. While the first generation often engaged in political activities that brought Kurdish immigrants together, such as party meetings, protests, and protests, second generation Kurds often engage in activities that are less politically formal, but more open to their hostland peers, such as petitions and boycotts, film festivals, and educational events. Of particular interest is the way that digital media and organizing spaces both ignited a feeling of pride in young and second generation Kurds and allowed them to add to a digital record of Kurdish identity. Seemingly overnight, Kurdish guerillas became a cultural touchstone through the interest of emerging digital media. Some of the portrayal was sensationalized - what journalist could fail to be enthralled by the beautiful women of the YPJ gunning down the barbaric ISIS against the backdrop of a burning Mesopotamia? Yet the narrowness and simpleness of the coverage of Kobane also meant that for the first time ever, young Kurds were seeing themselves not only in their native transnational diaspora life, but in their native, transnational digital lives. This led one interviewee to speculate that before



Kobane “we did not exist, but now we can say that being a Kurd is a pride.” By responding to news and expanding discussions on social media and online forums about Kurdish history and culture from the starting point of Kobane, second generation Kurds have also thrust Kurdishness into the digital world.

While the stated research focus of *The Kobane Generation* is on the interactions of diasporic practices and generational practices, Toivanen’s work also contains a larger message for her own sociologist and anthropologist colleagues, as well as those wishing to engage politically with the Kurdish diaspora. As previously mentioned, Toivanen writes with the goal of pushing past a groupist or nationalist bias in ethnographic research. She emphasizes repeatedly that diasporas are not defined populations that can be quantified or reduced to a set of common denominators. Rather, diasporas are a shifting set of practices and relationships. The inherent transnationalism of a diaspora is also just one influence on the behavior of individuals or smaller groups within the broader community.

Secondly, while Toivanen is explicitly not writing with the goal of critiquing European governments in their dealings with the Kurdish diaspora, the book conveys a certain frustration with the barriers to effective political action within a global system where political power still hews to the contours of nation-states. It’s a frustration that appears to be shared between the author and her interlocuters. While the siege of Kobane is a focal point of activism from the homeland, Toivanen repeatedly turns the resilience of activists and the difficulties in their mobilization due to the shifting sands of French relations with Kurdish institutions. While the west venerated the YPG/J as the frontline against ISIS, their sister organization in Turkey, the PKK, remained condemned as a terrorist organization. Despite the interest of prominent French politicians in Kurdish freedom and self-determination, including then-president Francois Hollande and former first lady Danielle Mitterand, the French and other European countries often failed to act when Kurdish-rights issues conflicted with their relationships with Middle Eastern governments. The thread of the book repeatedly turns back to the assassination of three Kurdish women activists, Sakine ‘Sara’ Cansiz, Fidan Dogan, and Leyla Soylemez, in the Kurdish Information Center in Paris’s 10th



Arrondissement. The assassin, who was suspected to be a Turkish intelligence agent, died in custody and the trail was dropped, an act interpreted by Kurds as a betrayal and a capitulation to Turkish interests. While Kobane becomes the focus of how Kurdish identity and possibility are focused in a Kurdish geography, the assassinations in Paris show how forces in the homeland can mobilize or silence Kurds in the context of Europe.

The effect in *The Kobane Generation* is not to recommend a specific policy response from the French government, but to elaborate on the possibilities, the limitations, and the sense of urgency present in diaspora organizing. As all good researchers do, Toivanen concludes with a call for further questions about the interactions of diaspora and generation as ethnographic lenses, and the reader is also left to question their own notions about the mechanisms of diaspora mobilization, and how diasporas interact with other cross-cutting social and political forces.

---

# **How South Africa rescued humanity (and International Law) at the International Court of Justice**

Julie Billaud  
February, 2024



Since the creation of the United Nations, and in line with the civilizing mission's rhetoric used to justify colonialism, racist arguments about the African continent as halting, obstructing, defying and subverting accountability for mass atrocities have been rehearsed in major political and academic circles in the West. In international diplomatic arenas as well as in institutional cultural environments, Western countries tend to perceive themselves as the protectors and promoters of human rights, responsible for showing other - mostly non-Western - countries the path toward ethical and democratic behavior. This self-celebratory narrative, always contradicted by wars and plunder perpetrated by European countries and the United States around the globe, is now again proven wrong by history. By bringing Israel before the International Court of Justice, the world's highest court, with the objective of putting an end to the ongoing massacres in Gaza - while the West continues to side with and provide military supplies to the oppressor - South Africa (with the support of its partners, all of which are exclusively from the Global South) is challenging the West's moral high ground and exposing its



double standards.

It is symbolically significant that of all the 193 United Nations member states, it is South Africa, a country that has made the painful experience of apartheid, and therefore understands too well that 'our freedom is incomplete without the freedom of the Palestinians' (Nelson Mandela), that is initiating this procedure. After more than one hundred days of uninterrupted bombings, and in spite of killings being livestreamed as they occur, the Western allies of Israel remain unshaken. Biden and Trudeau, Sunak and Macron, Borrell and von der Leyen continue to marshall pretenses to excuse the violence of 'the only democracy in the Middle East' and 'the most moral army in the world' and the atrocities it is committing with their help.

'In extending our hands across the miles to the people of Palestine, we do so with the full knowledge that we are part of a humanity that is at one.' It is with this quote from Nelson Mandela that Justice Minister Ronald Lamola opened South Africa's statement before the ICJ, perfectly encapsulating the essence of their intervention. Because what stood out in South Africa's intervention was precisely their humanity. Each member of the South African legal team went beyond presenting a legal case and, instead, offered a genuine expression of sympathy for the suffering of the Palestinians and solidarity with their struggle.

*Already in 1961, Franz Fanon concluded his essay *The Wretched of the Earth*, by saying: 'If we want to meet the expectations of our peoples, we have to look beyond Europe'.*

Whereas most human rights mechanisms tend to focus on contingent facts and limit the room for broader contextualisation and discussion about root causes, South Africa took the opportunity of this hearing to emphasize the importance of placing the current events in a longer history marked by ongoing denial of self-determination and right to return, Nakba, and occupation, all of which have led to the slow but consistent suffocation of Palestinians and prepared the ground for genocidal acts to take place. It stated that decades of impunity have emboldened



Israel to intensify its crime.

As Germany committed to take a stand and support Israel in front of the Court, Namibia, which at the beginning of the 20th century suffered the Herero and Namaqua genocide inflicted by the German empire, cautioned Germany to reconsider its decision. 'No peace-loving human being can ignore the carnage waged against Palestinians in Gaza,' the Namibian presidency declared.

Already in 1961, Franz Fanon concluded his essay *The Wretched of the Earth*, by saying: 'If we want to meet the expectations of our peoples, we have to look beyond Europe'. This statement can be read as a prediction of the role South Africa is taking today. His call to 'look elsewhere' in the quest for a true humanism, where concern for humanity is no longer eclipsed by the interests of dominating nations or the identities of conquering peoples, is reflected in South Africa's outstretched hand to Palestinians at the very moment when Western hypocrisy is exposed.

South Africa is presenting the West with a lesson that goes far beyond legal aspects in relation to the United Nations Genocide Convention. The different degrees of humanity that so-called humanitarian wars and attempt to export democracy have produced, whereas the massacre or the suffering of the 'civilized' is considered as more tragic than the massacre or the suffering of 'others', can no longer be accepted. The former colonized are now emergent or in several cases largely consolidated global powers that question the Western rhetoric of a moral superiority proclaimed while supporting the massacre of the Palestinians. Global hierarchies are being reconfigured and much is uncertain about the prospects for peace in several regions. But the challenges we all have before us require a change of mindset, not only ad hoc actions and reparations.

Demonstrations of solidarity with the people of Gaza are taking place around Europe but most political leaders remain untouched by the cry of thousands of innocent civilians. It is a key historical moment for European conscience to wake up and, inspired by South Africa, protect the idea of humanity, before it is too



late.

This paper was published simultaneously on both Allegra Lab and [Public Anthropologist](#).

---

# Can the Palestinian speak?

Ruba Salih  
February, 2024





It is sadly nothing new to argue that oppressed and colonised people have been and are subject to epistemic violence - othering, silencing, and selective visibility - in which they are muted or made to appear or speak only within certain perceptual views or registers - terrorists, protestors, murderers, humanitarian subjects - but absented from their most human qualities. Fabricated disappearance and dehumanisation of Palestinians have supported and continue to sustain their physical elimination and their erasure as a people.

But the weeks after October 7<sup>th</sup> have set a new bar in terms of the inverted and perverse ways that Palestinians and Israel can be represented, discussed, and interpreted. I am referring here to a new epistemology of time that is tight to a moral standpoint that the world is asked to uphold. In that, the acts of contextualising and providing historical depth are framed as morally reprehensible or straight out antisemitic. The idea that the 7<sup>th</sup> of October marks the beginning of unprecedented violence universalises the experience of one side, the Israeli, while obliterating the past decades of Palestinians' predicament. More than ever, Palestinians are visible, legible, and audible only through the frames of Israeli subjectivity and sensibility. They exist either to protect Israel or to destroy Israel. Outside these two assigned agencies, they are not, and cannot speak. They are an excess of agency like Spivak's subaltern,[\[1\]](#) or a 'superfluous' people as Mahmoud Darwish[\[2\]](#) put it in the aftermath of the Sabra and Chatila massacre. What is more is the persistent denying by Israel and its Western allies, despite the abundant historical evidence, that Palestinian indigenous presence in Palestine has always been at best absented from their gaze - 'a problem' to manage and contain - at worse the object of systemic and persistent ethnic cleansing and erasure aiming at fulfilling the narcissistic image of "a land without a people for a people without a land." Yet, the erasure of Palestinians, also today in Gaza, is effected and claimed while simultaneously being denied.

*More than ever, Palestinians are visible, legible, and audible only through the frames of Israeli subjectivity and sensibility.*



A quick check of the word “Palestine” on google scholar returns one million and three hundred thousand studies, nearly half of them written from the mid 1990s onwards. Even granting that much of this scholarship would be situated in and reproducing orientalist and colonial knowledges, one can hardly claim scarcity of scholarly production on the dynamics of subalternity and oppression in Palestine. Anthropology, literary theory, and history have detected and detailed the epistemological and ontological facets of colonial and post-colonial erasure. One might thus ask: how does the persistent denial of erasure in the case of Palestinians work? We might resort to psychoanalysis or to a particular form of narcissistic behaviour known as DAVRO - Deny, Attack, and Reverse Victim and Offender[3] - to understand the current pervading and cunning epistemic violence that Israel and its allies enact. *Denying* the radical obstructing and effacing of Palestinian life (while effecting it through settler-colonialism, settler and state violence, siege, apartheid, and genocidal violence in Gaza) is the first stage in Israel’s and western allies’ discursive manipulation. *Attacking* historicisation and contextualisation as invalid, antisemitic, propaganda, hate speech, immoral, outrageous, and even contrary to liberal values is the second stage. Lastly is the *Reversing* Victim and Offender by presenting the war on Gaza as one where Israel is a historical victim reacting to the offender, in response to demands that Israel, as the colonial and occupying power, takes responsibility for the current cycle of violence.

This partly explains why the violent attack that Hamas conducted in the south of Israel last October, in which 1200 people were killed, is consistently presented as the start date of an ‘unprecedented’ violence, with more than 5000 Palestinians killed in carpet bombings of Gaza until 2022 doubly erased, physically and epistemically. With this, October 7<sup>th</sup> becomes the departure point of an Israeli epistemology of time assumed as universal, but it also marks an escalation in efforts to criminalise contextualisation and banish historicisation.

Since October 7<sup>th</sup>, a plurality of voices - ranging from Israeli political figures and intellectuals, to mainstream and [left-leaning](#) journalists - has condemned efforts



to inscribe Gaza into a long term history of colonialism as scurrilous justification for the killing of Israeli civilians. Attempts to analyse or understand facts through a historical and political frame, by most notably drawing attention to Gazans' lived experience over the past 16 years (as a consequence of its long term siege and occupation) or merely to argue that there is a context in which events are taking place, such as General UN director Guterres did when he stated that October 7<sup>th</sup> "did not happen in a vacuum," are represented as [inciting terrorism](#) or morally repugnant hate speech. In the few media reports accounting for the dire and deprived conditions of Palestinians' existence in Gaza, the reasons causing the former are hardly mentioned. For instance, we hear in reports that Palestinians in Gaza are mostly refugees, that they are unemployed, and that 80% of them are relying on aid, with trucks of humanitarian aid deemed insufficient in the last few weeks in comparison to the numbers let in before the 7<sup>th</sup> of October. Astoundingly, the 56 years old Israeli occupation and 17 years old siege of Gaza, as root causes of the destruction of the economy, unemployment, and reliance on aid are not mentioned so that the public is left to imagine that these calamities are the result of Palestinians' own doing.

In other domains, we see a similar endeavour in preventing Palestine from being inscribed in its colonial context. Take for instance the many critical theorists who have tried to foreclose Franz Fanon's analysis of colonial violence to Palestinians. Naming the context of colonial violence and Palestinians' intergenerational and ongoing traumas is interpreted as morally corrupt, tantamount to not caring for Israeli trauma and a justification for the loss of Israeli lives. The variation of the argument that does refer to historical context either pushes Fanon's arguments to the margins or argues that the existence of a Palestinian authority invalidates Fanon's applicability to Palestine, denying therefore the effects of the violence that Palestinians as colonised subjects have endured and continue to endure because of Israeli occupation, apartheid, and siege.

But perhaps one of the most disconcerting forms of gaslighting is the demand that Palestinians should - and could - suspend their condition of subordination, their



psychic and physical injury, to centre the perpetrators' feelings and grief as their own. In fact, the issue of grief has come to global attention almost exclusively as an ethical and moral question in reaction to the loss of Israeli lives. Palestinians who accept to go on TV are constantly asked whether they condemn the October 7<sup>th</sup> attack, before they can even dare talk about their own long history of loss and dispossession, and literally while their families are being annihilated by devastating shelling and bombing and still lying under the rubbles. One such case is that of PLO ambassador to the UK Hussam Zomlot, who lost members of his own family in the current attack, but was asked by Kirsty Wark to "condemn Hamas" on screen. To put it another way: would it even be conceivable to imagine a journalist asking Israeli hostages in captivity if they condemn the Israeli bombardments and the war on Gaza as a precondition to speak and be heard?

"Condemning" becomes the condition of Palestinian intelligibility and audibility as humans, a proof that they share the universal idea that all human life is sacred, at the very moment when the sacrality of human life is violently precluded to them and when they are experiencing with brutal clarity that their existence as a people matters to no one who has the power to stop the carnage. This imperative mistakes in bad faith the principle that lives should have equal worth with a reality that for Palestinians is plainly experienced as the opposite of this postulate. Israel, on the other hand, is given "the extenuating circumstances" for looking after Israelis' own trauma by conducting one of the most indiscriminate and ferocious attacks on civilians in decades, superior in its intensity and death rate to the devastation we saw in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria, according to the [New York Times](#). Nearly 20.000 killed - mostly children, women, and elderly - razed, shelled, bulldozed while in their homes or shelters, in an onslaught that does not spare doctors, patients, journalists, academics, and even Israeli hostages, and that aims at making Gaza an unlivable habitat for the survivors.

*The only history and context deemed evocable and valid is the Israeli one, against the history and context of Palestinians' lives.*



Let us go back to the frequently invoked question of “morality.” In commentaries and op-eds over the last few weeks we are told that any mention of context for the attacks of October 7<sup>th</sup> is imperiling the very ability to be compassionate or be moral. Ranging from the Israeli government that argues that a killing machine in Gaza is justified on moral grounds – and that contextualisation and historicisation are a distraction or deviation from this moral imperative – to those who suggest Israel should moderate its violence against Palestinians – such as New York times columnist [Nicholas Kristof](#) who wrote that “ Hamas dehumanized Israelis, and we must not dehumanize innocent people in Gaza” – all assign a pre-political or a-political higher moral ground to Israel. Moreover, October 7<sup>th</sup> is said to – and is felt as – having awakened the long historical suffering of the Jews and the trauma of the Holocaust. But what is the invocation of the Holocaust – and the historical experience of European antisemitism – if not a clear effort at historical and moral contextualisation? In fact, the only history and context deemed evocable and valid is the Israeli one, against the history and context of Palestinians’ lives. In this operation, Israeli subjectivity and sensibility is located above history and is assigned a monopoly of morality with October 7<sup>th</sup> becoming an a-historical and a meta-historical fact at one and the same time. In this canvas Palestinians are afforded permission to exist subject to inhabiting one of the two agencies assigned to them: guardian of Israeli life or colonised subject. This is what Israeli president Herzog means when he declares that there are [no innocents in Gaza](#): “It’s an entire nation out there that is responsible. This rhetoric about civilians not aware, not involved, it’s absolutely not true. They could’ve risen up, they could have fought against that evil regime”. The nearly twenty thousand Palestinian deaths are thus not Israel’s responsibility. Palestinians are liable for their own disappearance for not “fighting Hamas” to protect Israelis. The Israeli victims, including hundreds of soldiers, are, on the other hand, all inherently civilians, and afforded innocent qualities. This is the context in which Heritage Minister Amichai Eliyahu, of Itamar Ben Gvir’s far-right party in power, can [suggest](#) nuking Gaza or wiping out all residents: “They can go to Ireland or deserts, the monsters in Gaza should find a solution by themselves”. Let us not



here be mistaken by conceding this might just be a fantasy, a desire of elimination: the [Guardian](#) and the +972/Local call magazines have provided chilling evidence that Palestinian civilians in Gaza are not “collateral” damage but what is at work is [a mass assassination factory](#), thanks to a sophisticated AI system generating hundreds of unverified targets aiming at eliminating as many civilians as possible.

Whether Palestinians are worthy of merely living or dying depends thus on their active acceptance or refusal to remain colonised. Any attempts to exit this predicament - whether through violent attacks like on October 7<sup>th</sup> or by staging peaceful civil tactics such as disobedience, boycott and divesting from Israel, recurrence to international law, peaceful marches, hunger strikes, popular or cultural resistance - are all the same, and in a gaslighting mode disallowed as evidence of Palestinians’ inherent violent nature which proves they need taming or elimination.

One might be compelled to believe that dehumanisation and the logic of elimination of Palestinians are a reaction to the pain, sorrow, and shock generated by the traumatic and emotional aftermath of October 7<sup>th</sup>. But history does not agree with this, as the assigning of Palestinians to a non-human or even non-life sphere is deeply rooted in Israeli public discourse. The standpoint of a people seeking freedom from occupation and siege has consistently been reversed and catalogued as one of “terror and threat” to Israeli state and society when it is a threat to their colonial expansive or confinement plans, whether the latter are conceived as divinely mandated or backed by a secular settler-colonial imaginary. In so far as “terrorists” are birthed by snakes and wild beasts as Israeli lawmaker Ayelet Shaker [states](#), they must be exterminated. Her words bear citation as they anticipate Gaza’s current devastation with lucid clarity: “Behind every terrorist stand dozens of men and women, without whom he could not engage in terrorism. They are all enemy combatants, and their blood shall be on all their heads”. Urging the killing of all Palestinians women, men, and children and the destruction of their homes, she continued: “They should go, as should the physical



homes in which they raised the snakes. Otherwise, more little snakes will be raised there. They have to die and their houses should be demolished so that they cannot bear any more terrorists.” This is not an isolated voice. Back in 2016 Prime Minister Netanyahu argued that fences and walls should be built all around Israel to defend it from “[wild beasts](#)” and against this background retired Israeli general and former head of Intelligence Giora Eiland, in an opinion article in Yedioth Aharonoth on November 19, argues that all Palestinians in Gaza die of fast spreading disease and all infrastructure be destroyed, while still positing Israel’s higher moral ground: “We say that Sinwar ( Hamas leader in Gaza, ndr) is so evil that he does not care if all the residents of Gaza die. Such a presentation is not accurate, since who are the “poor” women of Gaza? They are all the mothers, sisters, or wives of Hamas murderers,” adding, “And no, this is not about cruelty for cruelty’s sake, since we don’t support the suffering of the other side as an end but as a means.”

But let us not be mistaken, such ascription of Palestinians to a place outside of history, and of humanity, goes way back and has been intrinsic to the establishment of Israel. From the outset of the settler colonial project in 1948, Palestinians as the indigenous people of the land have been dehumanised to enable the project of erasing them, in a manner akin to other settler colonial projects which aimed at turning the settlers into the new indigenous. The elimination of Palestinians has rested on more than just physical displacement, destruction, and a deep and wide ecological alteration of the landscape of Palestine to suit the newly fashioned Israeli identity. Key Israeli figures drew a direct equivalence between Palestinian life on the one hand and non-life on the other. For instance, Joseph Weitz, a Polish Jew who settled in Palestine in 1908 and sat in the first and second Transfer Committees (1937-1948) which were created to deal with “the Arab problem” (as the indigenous Palestinians were defined) speaks in his diaries of Palestinians as a primitive unity of human and non-human life.<sup>[4]</sup> Palestinians and their habitat were, in his words, “bustling with man and beast,” until their destruction and razing to the ground in 1948 made them “fossilized life,” to use Weitz’ own words. Once fossilised, the



landscape could thus be visualised as an empty and barren landscape (the infamous desert), enlivened and redeemed by the arrival of the Jewish settlers.

*The tricks of DARVO (Denying Attacking and Reversing Victim and Offender) have been unveiled. We are now desperately in need of re-orienting the world's moral compass by exposing the intertwined processes of humanisation and dehumanisation of Jewish Israelis and Palestinians.*

Locating events within the context and long *durée* of the incommensurable injustices inflicted upon the Palestinians since 1948 - which have acquired a new unimaginable magnitude with the current war on Gaza - is not just ethically imperative but also politically pressing. The tricks of DARVO (Denying Attacking and Reversing Victim and Offender) have been unveiled. We are now desperately in need of re-orienting the world's moral compass by exposing the intertwined processes of humanisation and dehumanisation of Jewish Israelis and Palestinians. There is no other way to begin exiting not only the very conditions that usher violence, mass killings, and genocide, but also towards effecting the as yet entirely fictional principle that human lives have equal value.

[1] Spivak, G. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988). In Lawrence Grossberg and Cary Nelson, eds., *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, pp. 271-313. Urbana: University of Illinois Press; Basingstoke: Macmillan.

[2] Mahmoud Darwish, "The Madness of Being a Palestinian," *Journal Of Palestine Studies* 15, no. 1 (1985): 138-41.

[3] Heartfelt thanks to Professor Rema Hamami for alerting me to the notion of DAVRO and for her extended and invaluable comments on this essay.

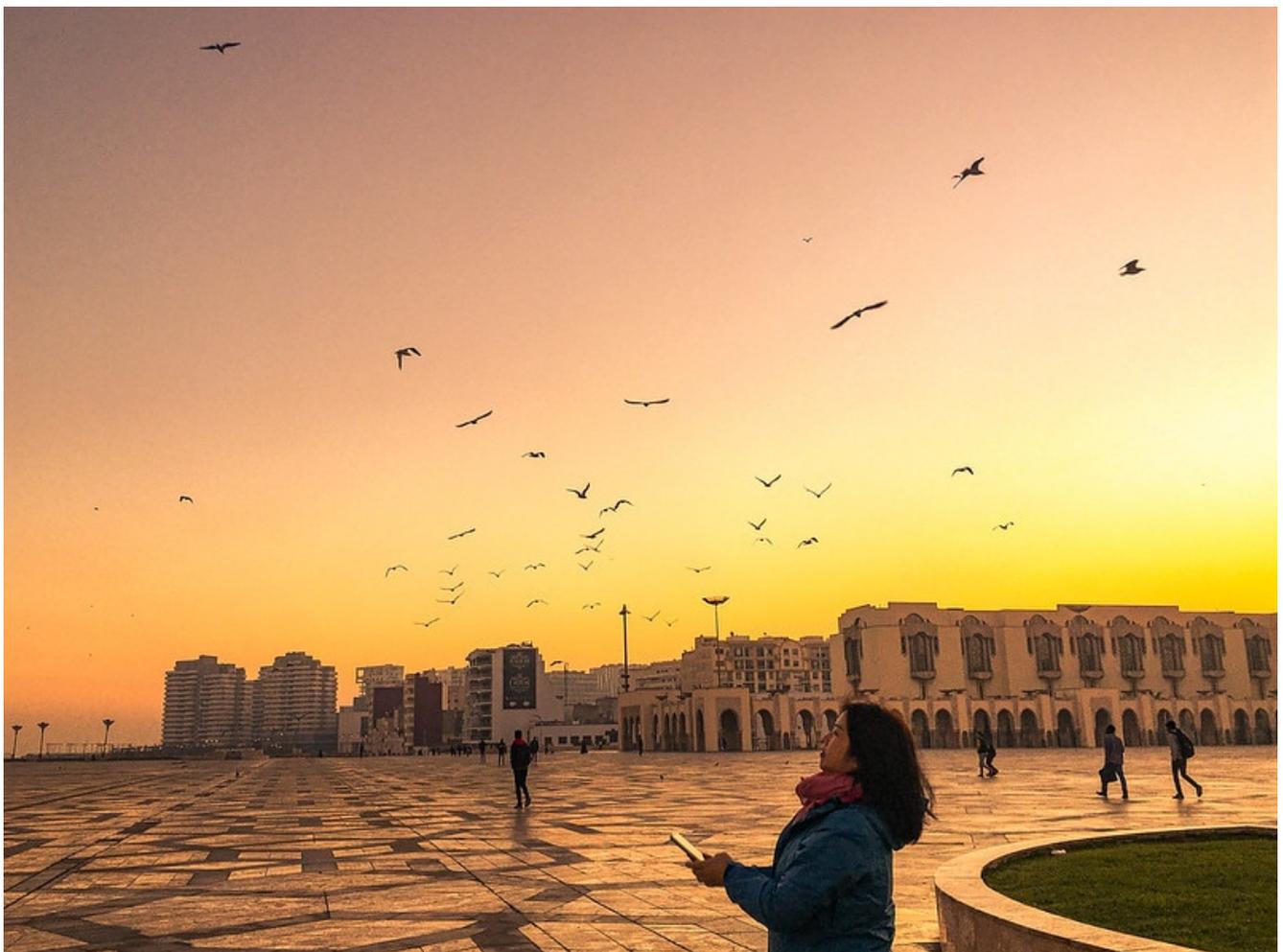
[4] Cited in Benvenisti M (2000) *Sacred Landscape: The Buried History of the Holy Land since 1948*. Berkeley: University of California Press. pp.155-156.



---

# The Outside: Migration as Life in Morocco

Ana-Maria Cîrstea  
February, 2024



Alice Elliot's monograph *The Outside: Migration as Life in Morocco* skilfully uses ethnography to unsettle mainstream conceptualisations of migration by tracing its hold on everyday life in what would be routinely called a 'sending' community. Set in the Tadla, a rural area of Central Morocco with one of the country's longest (and apparently most stigmatised) histories of emigration, the monograph centres



on the concept-cum-social force of ‘the outside’ (*l-brra*). Straddling both an ethnographic term and a theoretical concept, *l-brra* emerges as a complex yet slippery notion unfolding in the lives of those who leave, and, most strikingly, also in the lives of those who stay. By focusing on the relentless presence of ‘the outside’ in the Tadla, Elliot offers insight into the effects of migration on those frequently (and pejoratively) considered ‘left behind’. Instead, *l-brra* takes shape and, in turn, shapes the imaginations, daily concerns, relationships, and very personhoods of Elliot’s so-called ‘non-migrant’ interlocutors.

At the outset, Elliot outlines three conceptual functions of *l-brra*: as part of a wider cosmology and imagination governing life in the Tadla, as a practical force with significant impacts in everyday life (from the tyranny of bureaucracy to intimate gestures between spouses), and, finally, as wholly contingent on the context from which it emerges. Throughout the monograph, Elliot combines these conceptual aims with a varied range of scholarship, not only of migration, but also of gender, kinship, temporality, and theology, to list but a few. This broad theoretical brushstroke is one of the volume’s strengths, perhaps unsurprising given its sincere commitment to ethnography. The breadth of literature echoes the volume’s overarching argument that *l-brra* weaves itself into the textures and relationships of everyday life in the Tadla.

*Her central focus on the narratives of ‘non-migrant’ women is another theoretical and ethnographic triumph of the volume, as it centres these oft missed voices from studies of migration as a ‘male affair’ (pp. 21).*

When describing her fieldwork, Elliot labels it as inherently mobile—in her words, ‘multihousehold’ (pp. 18) rather than merely multisited—and shaped by a ‘disarming hospitality’ (pp. 15) as she takes the reader across the doorsteps of multi-generational family households, into student dorms, and on trips to Western Union branches. Her main interlocutors are mostly women from modest rural families whose close relatives live abroad, although she includes many other voices, such as her student dormmates, migrant men during their return trips,



and non-migrant men or elders in awe and contempt of the latter. Her central focus on the narratives of 'non-migrant' women is another theoretical and ethnographic triumph of the volume, as it centres these oft missed voices from studies of migration as a 'male affair' (pp. 21). Elliott does not let herself be discouraged by this, but turns it on its head by writing a unique monograph about migration largely 'in the absence' (pp. 21) of the mobile, male protagonists.

The book is structured into six chapters reunited by the empirical and conceptual presence of *l-brra*. **Chapter 1** considers the temporality of *l-brra*, as critical encounters with 'the outside' shape the structuring and pace of life in the Tadla. Attending to the changing rhythms of these encounters shows the multiple, competing temporalities involved in migration and the disordering nature of time. 'Dead' time becomes slow and leaves people in the Tadla stuck and waiting, before speeding up and burning in anticipation of a potential departure or a long-awaited return. These temporal effects of *l-brra* irreversibly intersect with movement across different spaces and scales, as agitating households in the Tadla reverberate with the movements of migrants' relatives to and from the city, and with migrants' crossings across the sea. In particular, we see how the materialisation of *l-brra* significantly affects the 'tempo of kinship' (pp. 32) as engagements and weddings are structured according to the bureaucratic timelines and political contexts of migrants' lives in Italy. Outside of these extraordinary events, the temporal qualities of 'the outside' impact the intimate relationships of love and care unfolding in the everyday, as dutiful wives prepare for their migrant husbands' return with visits to the souk or the hammam. Following the theme of migrants' return, **Chapter 2** focuses on how migrant men embody and become transformed by *l-brra*, which in turn impacts how they are perceived during their holidays in the Tadla. Multivocal, at times contradictory, storytelling turns a brush with 'the outside' into 'a mixed blessing' (pp. 50), as migrants' morality is subject to scrutiny by those who stay. A moral exceptionalism envelops migration in these narratives, serving as an unreliable pivot between pride and cleverness or between courage and madness. Migrants' offensive displays of wealth and status prove unsettling during their return to the



Tadla, often seen as 'animal like' in the eyes of elders or unmarried educated men (pp. 58). Despite these contested moral norms, *l-brra* has the power to qualify people above their rural origins, which Elliot shows most evocatively at play in marriage arrangements. In marriage offers from migrant men, their status of having been in 'the outside' trumps their social origins, their family background, and their illiteracy or lack of education. Besides their ability to offer more generous bridewealth payments, migrants are transformed by *l-brra* itself, as it impacts the very substance of their personhood.

*L-brra once again serves to undo preconceived ideas about the women's desires as simply being for all things Western or a mere rejection of traditional forms of life. Instead, 'the outside' helps situate their desire within the context of their lives, one which is irreversibly marked by the presence and possibility of migration.*

**Chapter 3** shifts focus to explore the shadows cast by *l-brra* in the lives of migrants' wives as they proclaim to be married to 'the outside' itself, rather than to their husbands, a relationship which Elliot terms one of 'intimate distance' (pp. 73). Similar to the previous chapter, 'the outside' serves to modify not only gender relations and norms, but it also creates a specific, precarious gendered personhood. Forged in the 'productive absence' (pp. 76) of their husbands, this personhood emerges out of women's roles as wives *without* husbands. The most striking setting is co-habitation with affines where women must juggle what Elliot calls a 'triangle of forces' (pp. 84): the expectations of their affines, the pull of their own blood ties, and the social force of *l-brra*. Most importantly, this chapter counters the view in migration and development studies which neatly equates migration with empowerment, showing how 'the outside' places new burdens on women's shoulders, such as interactions with the masculine spaces of local bureaucracy. At times, *l-brra* also marks a life that is lacking and painfully different, for instance by the delayed bearing of children or by the year-long waiting to join husbands in 'the outside'. Retaining a focus on women, **Chapter 4** explores another manifestation of *l-brra* in women's lives as it sits at the centre of



the strategised, yet predestined, conjugal futures for young women studying at university. For the young students with whom Elliot shares a dorm room, 'the outside' emerges as a pre-destined future orientation. Rather than imagining a future simply in the geographical space of 'the outside', the women desired conjugal bonds marked by privacy and openness, notions they associated with *l-brra*. Most strikingly, destiny is shown to beckon, rather than hinder, action in the young women's lives. The tension between notions of Islamic destiny and work on the self is beautifully explored as women prepare themselves to meet their pre-destined husbands by continuing their education, piously safeguarding and regulating their sexuality, and engaging in beauty rituals. During walks around the medina, young women grow accustomed to judging possible suitors by their stance, clothes, and manners in order to find their pre-ordained husband. *L-brra* once again serves to undo preconceived ideas about the women's desires as simply being for all things Western or a mere rejection of traditional forms of life. Instead, 'the outside' helps situate their desire within the context of their lives, one which is irreversibly marked by the presence and possibility of migration.

Returning to the figure of migrant men, **Chapter 5** focuses on the crossing, the mobility between *l-brra* and the Tadla, and how repeatedly engaging in it serves to perform and re-enact masculinity. Rather than a one-off rite of passage, migration emerges as an exercise of maintaining and performing a gendered identity under a changing set of circumstances. To avoid being accused of 'sitting like a woman' (pp. 123), migrant men must engage in designated activities, such as building houses or investing in a new business, upon their temporary return to the Tadla. Continuing to trace the effects of 'the outside' on gender, these masculine activities are expected to be made grander, more ingenious, and eccentric by the encounter with *l-brra*. **Chapter 6** concludes the monograph by revisiting how *l-brra* holds 'sui generis ontological characteristics in the Tadla' (pp. 148) as it has been shown to impact the everyday lives, bodies, relationships, and imaginaries of Elliot's interlocutors. Grappling with the cosmological and ontological aspects of *l-brra*, Elliot emphasises that the social power of the concept does not fit neatly into theological parallels. Similarly, the concept does



not simply amount to an imaginary notion, as it has significant impacts in people's lives - whether in the bodies and masculinities of migrant men, the lives and bodies of their migrant wives, or the animated anticipation of young students waiting to meet their predestined migrant husbands. Elliot concludes that *l-brra* therefore occupies a 'middle ground' between cosmology and geography (pp. 156). And ultimately, it is best understood 'in action' (pp. 156).

*Outside of migration studies, the monograph is a stunning example of the craft of ethnographic writing, marked by a sensibility honed through continuous engagement and caring relationships in the Tadla over the years.*

Doing justice to this commitment to understanding *l-brra* in action, 'The Outside' opens up the concept of migration and uses ethnography to unsettle preconceived ideas and epistemologies about how to best understand and document experiences of mobility. It emerges as a formidable asset for those teaching migration, with a potential to show students the manifold impacts of migration in a setting formally considered 'left behind' or 'non-migrant'. *Outside of migration studies, the monograph is a stunning example of the craft of ethnographic writing, marked by a sensibility honed through continuous engagement and caring relationships in the Tadla over the years.* It is the process of building this sensibility that is partly missing from the volume, which would benefit from more insight into the positionality of the author. Although it is briefly referenced in the introduction, more reflection on how the ethnographer's positionality impacts the material and the relationships at the heart of the monograph would help the reader better situate these encounters. Another potential shortfall is the limited sustained engagement with key interlocutors which could perhaps show how the influence of *l-brra* changes over the years. That being said, Elliot's monograph goes above and beyond most studies of migration by using the power of ethnography to shine a light onto the seemingly mundane yet remarkable hold of 'the outside' for both those who go and those who never set off across the sea.



# We Can Know No Innocent Futures

E.M. Elshaikh  
February, 2024



Is it for a lack of knowledge? The genocide in Gaza is being livestreamed. Daily, images, videos and voice notes proliferate faster than they can be witnessed or heard or known. We have numbers, data visualizations, graphs and charts of death tolls and aid trucks and calorie counts. And we have histories, recent and canonical. And of course, human rights violation reports, health analyses, compendiums of laws. We have transcripts of government officials calling for Gaza to be flattened, leveled, made uninhabitable. We have seen these calls realized every day.



And we also know that the institutions to which we belong, through which we make our living, our art, and our work, are actively investing in making Gaza unlivable. They are invested in apartheid, in war, and in the dispossession of Palestinians. We know that “decolonizing” is not an abstract idea that we use in the titles of our syllabi but is in fact a verb. To add to it all, we are witnessing our students, the undergraduates that we teach and mentor, being targeted by universities for their activism, arrested and harassed by the very institutions that purport to be bastions of learning and freedom of speech.

It is worth asking then, what are the ethical demands that knowing makes on us? This is the problem that we grapple with as we write this text, and it is the problem for which we will certainly not present an answer, but perhaps some initial lines of thought.

To answer this question, we must dispense with the notion of knowledge as a pursuit unto itself and the *raison d'être* of the university. We must see the university as it is, not as it imagines itself to be. We cannot see ourselves as innocent citizens of a university system which actively participates in violence. The university is not an epiphenomenal structure; we are part and parcel of it. And we must acknowledge our role in the material structures and systems that make up the university.

*And we know that the institutions to which we belong, through which we make our living, our art, and our work, are actively investing in making Gaza unlivable.*

Therefore, we must first confront a clear condition of contemporary academic life: the American university system invests heavily in futures, and these futures (both in the financial and temporal senses) rely on past and ongoing injustices to propel projected growth. As we argue later, university financial regimes prefigure injustices such as the Israeli occupation of Palestine as grounds for speculation and options trading. Such practices are not new; universities in the United States and across the pond, in [United Kingdom](#), held considerable investments in



companies involved in the Atlantic [slave trade](#) and in companies that supported the [apartheid](#) government of South Africa. In the United States, many universities have a history of investment in [private prisons](#). While these practices are not new, universities' involvement in futures speculation has dramatically intensified.

Futures, in a financial sense, are contracts wherein the value of an asset is based on a predetermined price on a future date, such that additional value is generated by exploiting the speculative difference between present and future prices (Miyazaki 2013, Meister 2021). In this sense, futures revolve around the “creation of difference” (Miyazaki 2013). Financial futures work as virtual realities which are then actualized. But these financial technologies are also creative, narrative technologies, populating the past and future with “counterfactual economic imaginaries,” thus establishing capitalist growth as a necessary precondition for present day experience (Beckert 2016). Modern financial imaginaries of the future rely on past valuations, knowledge which sets expectations for the future.

Our universities invest in these futures, but they also generate the knowledge which is used to imagine—and actualize—these futures, futures which do not include a free Palestine. Today's university students, faculty, and administration, although they occupy different roles within the university, are increasingly implicated in institutions that do not prioritize education but rather function as hedge funds, siphoning tuition dollars and donations into areas such as military weapons manufacturing and energy extraction. From within this context, arresting student protesters can be seen as part of an institutional strategy that consists in protecting Universities' investments (Members, forthcoming). Recognizing this, it is imperative, then, that we reconceptualize the very imbrication of knowledge, in/justice, and futures in university spaces from this starting point.

Scholars like Robert Meister and Clifford Ando have researched university financial practices since the early 2000s and have come to [interesting questions](#) about their operations. Their [reports](#) on the University of California and University of Chicago systems respectively indicate how university budgets have



seen large-scale cuts to student education (vacant professorships, the elimination of seminar courses etc.) and a dramatic increase in tuition charges. Newly generated funds are then injected into private investments. Although these [investments](#) are [not openly discussed](#), housing development, [defense contractors](#) and [energy companies](#) frequently appear within university portfolios.

In addition to these financial investments, universities like the University of Chicago directly partner with Israeli institutions on future-facing development projects ranging from security technology to [water purification](#) infrastructure. UChicago's engineering schools, in partnership with Israeli universities and American national labs and federal institutions, fabricate materials to remove water contaminants and develop technologies to desalinate water. This is particularly nefarious considering Israel's current blockade on clean water to Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. Israel has historically [weaponized](#) its water infrastructure to control aquifers underneath Palestinian territory and prevent Palestinians from collecting rainwater. It also actively destroys existing water infrastructure, most recently as it escalated its siege on Gaza and planned to flood tunnels with sea water, potentially contaminating groundwater for generations to come. Knowledge production in this partnership fails to address how its innovative solutions are used to create dire conditions of scarcity in Gaza and the West Bank (Doostdar, talk 2023).

As the genocide continues, universities continue to hold massive investments in this global financial scenario. Not only are universities tied to such present violence, but they also actively trade in financial futures that necessitate Israeli occupation, military operations, land development, and energy extraction *for their profit*.

In his recent book *Justice is an Option*, Robert Meister connects today's financial futures trading with a temporal relationship to injustice through the concept of "optionality." Options trading, the hedging of speculation on future financial outcomes, occurs through the management of investment portfolios and the purchase of movement between those financial futures (Meister 2021, 8). Today's



trade in options is made possible through a relegation of historical injustices into abeyance. Past and ongoing injustices, such as the settler-colonial displacement of Palestinians, and Israel's formation as an apartheid state, are made into necessary preconditions for present-day financial possibilities for investment in gas drilling or water infrastructure. In essence, university investments hold "counterfactual power" over the past and a dependency of the future on a present "in which we remain free to choose based on our prediction of what the future will be without therefore believing that we can change it" (Meister 2021, 80). Universities rush to push things like Israel's occupation of Gaza to the near past to justify their financial predictions.

*As the genocide in Gaza continues unabated, the knowledge materialized in our university spaces feels both prolific and inert to stop it.*

And so, what does this mean for the veneer of knowledge production that universities continue to define themselves by? In a world where universities act as hedge funds, students and faculty are made into clients of such futures. Knowledge production at universities orients itself in relation to institutions' investments in these same futures, whether it is in the direct form of engineering projects like UChicago's partnership with Israel's water purification program, or in less apparent pathways like through the humanities. Indeed, the formation of area studies programs, in particular after World War II, have blurred the line between university and state interests. Today, many humanities programs that discuss the "Israeli-Palestinian Conflict," or "Modern Middle East History," function to legitimize American foreign policy (Chow 2006, Khosrowjahi 2011). Within such programs, Israel's ongoing campaign of extermination becomes shaded with a sense of humanitarian inevitability, a post-hoc justification for what is pushed behind as "near east history."

But when the dire problem of Israeli occupation emerges again and again, and scholars of a wide variety of disciplines must face it, scholarship suddenly feels "stuck." What kind of knowledge is a knowledge that feels stuck in the present



(Scott 2014) between the violence of a past that is supposedly past and a future that requires investment on behalf of this past? Academics of every variety confront the real pressure that the fulfillment of university investments means a fulfillment of their own investment in the university - for jobs, stability, and above all, "optionality." And they are faced with the perniciously tempting desire to "see it play out," and then, in the case of some, theorize about such violence in the past tense. If university finances secure themselves by locking-in a present condition (Meister 2021, 2) and anticipating the future's valuable accumulation from ongoing atrocities - such as in Gaza, then university personnel often find themselves feeling similarly locked-in. In the case of researching and teaching about ongoing genocide in Palestine, these university affiliates are trained to lie-in waiting for that moment when violence has supposedly ceased, and researchers can safely discuss the retrospective innocence of victims and the culpability of perpetrators (Meister 2012). This is a politics that delays justice while benefiting from the proceeds accumulated in that delay.

As the genocide in Gaza continues unabated, the knowledge materialized in our university spaces feels both prolific and inert to stop it. Such knowledge is so truncated that it ceases to be experienced as a form of knowing but instead feels dispersed and impoverished. The knowledge produced at universities has degraded into mere information, characters and pixels lacking any conviction. Information here has no moral or political impetus. In the present, it has no force. This disfigured kind of knowledge can only produce a radical politics in retrospect, as part of an archive that can no longer incriminate us. We can know only as historians, nestled safely in the aftermath of established facts and accomplished history, unclouded by the complex and sensitive exigencies of an unfolding catastrophe.

So, we linger in abeyance, letting information wash over us, unprocessed, ineloquent. For once information takes a form, it makes demands upon us. Once bits of information are given names and attributions, once they coalesce into a structure, they become knowledge. As knowledge-makers, this is precisely what we are called upon to do, and yet we seem to have embraced an informational



approach to knowledge. One in which facts are commensurable, exchangeable, and neutral, stuck in epistemic purgatory, under-articulated and yet to be known. As Palestinian human rights attorney Rabea Eghbariah wrote in an [essay that the Harvard Law Review refused to run](#), “does one have to wait for a genocide to be successfully completed to name it? This logic contributes to the politics of denial” (Eghbariah 2023).

*For if knowledge stands apart from us, abstracted and reified, it too is emptied of its moral and political character.*

By conceding any power our work may have to disrupt ongoing violence, we precisely manifest this politics of denial. Now more than ever, we must resist the temptation to indulge in the aesthetics of erudition and learning, confident in the nobility of our epistemic labor—conceived of as separate from our political labor. We already have a surfeit of knowledge, and yet we are stuck. Perhaps we must admit that while there is knowledge, including knowledge that we ourselves produce, we have declined to *know*. For if knowledge stands apart from us, abstracted and reified, it too is emptied of its moral and political character, degraded into pseudo-knowledge, acting as a corpus of information-plus, which says nothing and does nothing.

As scholars and students, it is we who provide the universities-as-hedge funds with the legitimacy necessary to claim themselves as places of higher learning, and it is through our relationship with the university that we emerge legibly as faculty and students. The university structures and regulates our relationships to one another as well as to available resources. And so, we are implicated in the very activities of the university-as-hedge fund. This relationship is not one that we can inhabit passively. Confronting this reality requires our vigilance, but also our dissent and refusal and an acknowledgement that though we might be at odds with our universities, we are still a constitutive part of them. We must ask, “where are we? And who are we in the university where apparently we are? What do we represent? Whom do we represent? Are we responsible? For what and to whom?”



(Derrida 1980).

We are responsible to inhabit our institutions such that we are not clients and in which our knowledge production, teaching, and learning, are not predicated on investments in unjust futures. Or else we are responsible to refuse the university altogether.

From the starting point of understanding the university's role in contemporary financial accumulation upon past injustice, we argue for a redefined ethical disposition among university affiliates. This ethico-political form challenges today's vacillation among many academics between a presumed responsibility to maintain intellectual production, and the atomization (indeed alienation) of "colleagues" in the deconstruction of their responsibility to the university (Derrida 1980). Both of these approaches fail to address the weaponized form of investment which the university today embodies. Instead, we acknowledge that radical traditions of Black, Indigenous, and colonized people within universities have long operated, indeed labored, to cultivate "another side," a collective orientation to a different kind of knowledge and thus a different kind of future (Moten and Harney 2013: 26-27). Indeed, one in which "the generation of knowledge in the university—at the level of its form, content and practices—tends towards the knowing degeneration, disorganization and disequilibrium of the university" ([Moten and Harney 2020](#): 3). This is not some absolute responsibility to, or even through, the university, but a shared responsibility toward one another and 'others' *in spite of* the invested future the university participates in.

Our dissent and refusal of business as usual are tools in refashioning this inhabitation. Our critique and dissent must also set the terms against which we are constructing our critiques - as scholars, and artists embedded within universities across the country, it behooves us to collectively reimagine being in the university. What does it mean for us to participate in the institution of the university? How shall we be scholars and teachers in universities? What does it mean for us to produce art or knowledge or music from within these institutions? Or better yet, as Moten and Harney (2020) ask "How do we keep work from rising



to the status of ‘the work’ or, higher still, ‘my work?’”(1). “What does it mean to work against the institution you work for when your working against the institution is extracted by the institution as surplus?” (ibid, 5). How can we cultivate spaces within the university in which we share stakes with a world beyond our campuses? What does it mean for our labor to be predicated on investments whose harm spans geographies? What kinds of literal investments are we making and in what futures? The questions to be asked are endless.

*We must create spaces in which refusal of the university-as-hedge fund is not only possible, but necessary.*

To critique the university as a space and as a structure cannot only be an endeavor to expose its flaws and injustices as we see them, but it must also be an effort to reimagine the spaces that can be forged despite the university, and in which liberatory politics and solidarity with a world that lies outside is possible, and in which we can move beyond the institutions of the scholar, professor, and artist, in the interest of shared experience and shared projects (Moten and Harney, 2020). The ivory tower must be sullied because it was never pure to begin with. We must unsettle any notion that our intellectual and artistic pursuits are separate from and unresponsive to the very conditions of their possibility.

We must create spaces in which refusal of the university-as-hedge fund is not only possible, but necessary. Even while we might inhabit a relationship of antagonism toward the university, our sense of our own complicity is incomplete without a reckoning with the material basis that is the condition of possibility of our own work and the effect it has on people who lie far outside the borders of our campuses. We must refuse our isolation and atomization and that of undergraduates, as well as the depoliticization and instrumentalization of our intellectual and teaching practices. We must insist that we owe something to one another, and to the people whose lives, contexts and histories line the pages of our volumes and source the inspiration for our art. We are responsible to and must insist that we *respond* to people whose lives are affected by the activities of



the university, which are the same activities that enable our scholarship.

We must divest epistemically and materially from colonial violence and unlearn the fiction that these were ever separable in the first place; and we must demand that our universities divest from futures that shore up Israeli apartheid and enable genocide.

We must stand firm with a free Palestine.

## **Sources**

Doostdar, Alireza. 2023. "Critical Perspectives on the Crisis in Gaza." The University of Chicago, October 19.

Beckert, Jens. 2016. *Imagined Futures: Fictional Expectations and Capitalist Dynamics*. Harvard University Press.

Chow, Rey. 2006. *The Age of the World Target: Self-Referentiality in War, Theory, and Comparative Work*. Next Wave Provocations. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Derrida, Jacques. 2004 (1980). "Mochlos, or The Conflict of the Faculties." In *Eyes of the University: Right to Philosophy 2*, translated by Jan Plug, 1st edition, 83-112. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press.

Eghbariah, Rabea. 2023. "The 'Harvard Law Review' Refused to Run This Piece About Genocide in Gaza," November 22, 2023. <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/harvard-law-review-gaza-israel-genocide/>.

Khosrowjah, Hossein. 2011. "A Brief History of Area Studies and International Studies." *Arab Studies Quarterly* 33 (3/4): 131-42.

Harney, Stefano, and Fred Moten. 2013. *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning*



*and Black Study*. New York, NY: Minor Compositions.

———. 2020. [The University \(last words\)](#).

Meister, Robert. 2012. *After Evil: A Politics of Human Rights*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

———. 2021. *Justice Is an Option: A Democratic Theory of Finance for the Twenty-First Century*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

Members of UChicago United for Palestine. 2023 (December 20). "[UChicago Arrests Students to Protect Investments in Israel](#)." The Triibe.

Miyazaki, Hirokazu. 2013. *Arbitraging Japan: Dreams of Capitalism at the End of Finance*. Berkeley: University of California press.

Said, Edward W. 1996. *Representations of the Intellectual: The 1993 Reith Lectures*. Vintage.

Scott, David. 2014. *Omens of Adversity: Tragedy, Time, Memory, Justice*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

---

## **Border Porosities: Movement of People, Objects, and Ideas in the**



# Southern Balkans

Clare Maxwell  
February, 2024



Petroleum engineering may seem like an odd place to find metaphors for the field of border and borderlands studies. Yet, in her new book *Border Porosities: Movement of People, Objects, and Ideas in the Southern Balkans*, Rozita Dimova manages to make the analogy come alive in order to describe the relationship and borderland between the Republic of North (RN) Macedonia and Greece. In geological terms, porosity refers to the ability of a fluid or gas to move through rock due to the interconnected pores and passages formed through various processes. In anthropological terms, Dimova uses the idea to communicate the many ways that “people, objects and ideas” are not mobile in relation to national borders, but rather reproduce enduring spaces for movement and interconnectedness.



*Dimova likens the railways to a ‘web of cavities and cracks,’ allowing the intended flows of trade and military might, as well as letting dissent, activism, and new political ideologies seep in.*

To guide the reader into a clearer understanding of porosity, Dimova starts off with the most tangible, and perhaps most obvious, example of porosity: railroads. Against the backdrop of the ailing Ottoman Empire and the rise of ambitious, eastward-looking European railroad companies, the first chapter tells the story of the Thessaloniki (Greece) to Mitrovica (Kosovo) railroad line. Initially intended for economic development and the movement of resources out of the Balkan hinterlands and into Ottoman ports, the line also served to catalyze tensions between Balkan separatists and their rulers in Istanbul. During the first Balkan war, in which Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia and Montenegro fought for independence, the railways provided both a means of troop transportation to the Ottomans and a convenient target for Balkan separatists. Throughout the 20th century, the lines maintained a role as a strategic military tool, a focal point for trade and travel between the Balkans, and even a site of transnational labor organization between railroad workers. Dimova likens the railways to a “web of cavities and cracks,” allowing the intended flows of trade and military might, as well as letting dissent, activism, and new political ideologies seep in.

It would be over simplistic to consider border porosity as simply a material condition. In further chapters, Dimova lays out an imaginative, almost fantastical porosity, brought about in relation to the possibilities created by different economic circumstances on either side of the Greek/RN Macedonian border. On the one hand, Greeks can travel to their lower income neighbor to purchase otherwise unaffordable goods, beauty treatments and luxury entertainment. In exchange, Macedonians vacationing or owning property in Greece gain the opportunity to exhibit and reproduce the markers of middle-class prosperity. Furthermore, the entanglements between Macedonian citizens who interact with Greece through tourism and property ownership, ethnically Macedonian Greek citizens, and child refugees who left Greece for Communist Balkan countries



during the Greek Civil War are all classified as sorts of ‘human sediments,’ carrying pieces of one homeland and depositing them into another. Dimova also writes on the influence and support between environmental groups opposing open-pit mining on both sides of the border, and their ability to build connections through common but decentralized political projects. In these ways, cross-border movement and shared sentiments are facilitated, through both brief, relatively superficial ways and through lifelong and even intergenerational connections.

*Dimova lays out an imaginative, almost fantastical porosity, brought about in relation to the possibilities created by different economic circumstances on either side of the Greek/RN Macedonian border.*

While overall, the concept of border porosity maintains its value as a framework for border ethnography, the application in the book’s final chapter falls into the trap of being slightly overstretched. Until this point, Dimova has focused on her initial goal of describing cross border mobility, here she arrives at a conundrum. Rather than being two separate but interconnected entities, Greece and RN Macedonia share a history, a national hero in the form of Alexander the Great, and a claim to the historical territory of ancient Macedonia. The quest to claim this heritage fuels animosity between the two governments while also becoming a tool for producing national identity in RN Macedonia particularly, and eventually, even a smokescreen for political corruption. During the 2016 Colorful Revolution in Skopje, pro-democracy and multi-ethnic protestors attacked a monument that had been constructed in a show of ownership over Macedonian antiquity, both paving the way for rapprochement with Greece and emphasizing the multiple layers of their history, including their Ottoman and Yugoslavian past. While the concept of porosity and permeability remains relevant, Dimova also mixes it with Sarah Green’s “traces and tidesmarks” framework of border analysis as well as Mikhail Bahktin’s theories on communication. The result is that the porosity metaphor feels simultaneously all encompassing and slightly cumbersome or made to be one-size-fits-all.



Readers may be well advised to familiarize themselves with Balkan history before digging into *Border Porosities*. In just 149 pages, Dimova touches on points from over 2,400 years of regional history, starting from the reign of Phillip II of Macedon (382 BCE). She manages to reference the Hellenistic age, the Ottoman Conquest, the Balkan wars, the World Wars, the Greek Civil war, Yugoslavia, and the Mediterranean migrant “crisis” to end up in a description the 21st century in which she describes the ongoing relationships between the two countries and the supra-national power structures of NATO and the European Union. As such, the book can be a great motivation for further historical inquiry for those with a border studies background, an opportunity to flesh out finer points for those already familiar with the region, or a source of confusion for a reader with neither point of reference.

For all her details and rich analysis, Dimova rarely pinpoints where Greece ends and Macedonia begins. Overlaps in shared history and heritages, language, ethnicity, geography, political ambition and social values suggest less that they are two separate entities, and more that the permeability between the two countries is so prevalent that it can be difficult to distinguish the two. In illustrating this, *Border Porosities* meets its stated goal of demonstrating that “borders, infused with political, economic, and symbolic features, can simultaneously become the terrain for exclusionary and emancipatory practices for the actors who are involved in border crossing on an everyday level and also be affected by larger political and symbolic disputes.”



# White Enclosures: Racial Capitalism and Coloniality Along the Balkan Route

Céline Eschenbrenner  
February, 2024



Rexhepi's [White Enclosures](#) is an insightful book exploring the co-construction of race and borders along the Balkan route. It puts racial exclusion in the Balkans in conversation with broader logics of securitisation and anti-migrant violence in western Europe and North America. The racialisation of Roma, Muslim, and migrant communities in Bosnia, Serbia, Kosovo, Albania, and Bulgaria, it argues, aims to wall up whiteness in the peripheries of white supremacy, where silencing Muslim and immigrant realities allows state authorities to figure their nations as



European.

The book is divided into two parts and five chapters. The first part focusses on the people, movements, and memories that have defied the participation of Balkan countries in the construction of European white enclosures. It examines the work of activists, the rehabilitation of imperial pasts by the heritage industry, and the enforcement of a racial and religious order in Kosovo to show how dissident Muslim and Roma people in the Balkans have historically faced geopolitical erasure, exclusion, and secularisation. The second part looks at the way colonial histories and racialised relations of power in the Balkans have affected people's sense of self through the control of sexuality and intimate bodily conducts. It locates statecraft in the ordering and sanitising of Muslim bodies, drawing fruitful parallels between the straightening of queer bodies and the sealing of borders.

Chapter one focusses on the lives of Alija Izetbegović and Melika Salihbegović, two Muslim Bosnian activists and intellectuals who were arrested under the communist regime. Izetbegović was arrested first in 1946 for “religious extremism” and opposing Tito's regime, then in 1983 for “muslim nationalism” in what became known as the Sarajevo Process, alongside Salihbegović and eleven other Muslim intellectuals. Rexhepi draws on the political stories of these two figures of Muslim activism to argue that racism in Eastern Europe is not a postsocialist phenomenon, but that racialised religious hierarchies already informed politics in the Balkans during the socialist period.

*White enclosures, from this perspective, are built through the curation and recuperation of white artifacts, architectures, and histories.*

In chapter two, Rexhepi examines the recovery of Habsburg colonial sites and institutions in Bosnia under the European Union's fostering of heritage capitalism. The author draws on the political neutralisation and celebration of Habsburg imperial sites to show how the reclaiming of Habsburg pasts in Balkan countries has served to recreate European roots and silence radical Islam's past and present importance in the construction of Balkan identities. White enclosures,



from this perspective, are built through the curation and recuperation of white artifacts, architectures, and histories.

Chapter three attends to the construction of race in post-Ottoman Albania. Rexhepi looks at the racialisation of Albanian Muslims as “enemies within,” made suspicious not because of their racial otherness but because of their proximity to whiteness, to show that racism in Eastern Europe is deliberately vague. Drawing on Ghassan Hage’s insight that racism expands through vagueness rather than the specificity of its targets, the author argues that racist practices in the Balkans rely on empirical “all over the placeness,” on contradictions and ambivalence rather than clarity. White Balkan Muslims, from this perspective, are only passing as white while remaining the objects of European structures of exclusion and control.

The first chapter of the second part, chapter four leaves behind geopolitical considerations on the construction and exclusion of Muslim subjects in the Balkans throughout post-Ottoman and post-Cold War years and turns to the sexual straightening of queer Muslims into hetero or homo-normative European figures. Rexhepi draws on images and imaginaries of nonnormative Albanian bodies to think about heteronormalisation historically. Queer Muslims, insofar as they stand for the endurance of Ottoman pasts in Eastern Europe, the author argues, continue to haunt Albania’s orientation toward Europe, and as such face attempts at normalisation. At stake here is the regulation of sexuality and the construction of intimate compatibilities between Albania and western Europe in the process of European integration.

*Strategies of enclosure rely on the differentiation between good and bad Muslims, the author suggests, where the “good Bulgarian Muslim,” although still racialised, stands as a figure of assimilation, while Roma Muslims continue to embody the ultimate internal others.*

Bodies remain central in chapter five, where Rexhepi considers how the construction of Roma and Muslim enclosures in the Balkans is tied to



demographic panics over the imagined threat of creeping sexual, racial, and religious differences. Strategies of enclosure rely on the differentiation between good and bad Muslims, the author suggests, where the “good Bulgarian Muslim,” although still racialised, stands as a figure of assimilation, while Roma Muslims continue to embody the ultimate internal others. This process of differentiation is important in order to understand the way racialisation in Europe works through the moral ordering of legitimate and illegitimate religious minorities, and the progressive incorporation of the former within the bounds of white enclosures.

Rexhepi's is a conceptually dense book, tracing the recent history of racism and Muslim exclusions in the Balkans through the lenses of racial and sexual reconstructions under socialist and postsocialist regimes. It feels at times inaccessible to the average dabbler in East European geopolitics, but this is also one of the book's strengths: to complicate stories that have often been simplified through Euro-American analyses as a series of internal conflicts bringing down inclusive socialist regimes and making room for divisive nationalisms.

*[...] Rexhepi's book remains central to grasp the Balkans as a key site for the production and reproduction of whiteness in the margins of Europe.*

Although the author claims to have sketched “resistance in racialized and refugee populations along the Balkan route” (155), readers may be left wondering about the role contemporary migrations – Muslim and not – across the Balkans have played in the reproduction or transformation of racialised religious hierarchies in recent years. The book is oriented more toward the construction and enforcement of racial enclosures and dominant logics of differentiation than to their contestation by Muslim or migrant minorities. That is, there is little room in the book dedicated to the analysis of Muslim means of resistance against racial and religious b/orders, let alone pages where readers, through ethnographic descriptions, are led to understand what life is like for racialised migrants moving across the white enclosure that is the Balkan route. That said, Rexhepi's book remains central to grasp the Balkans as a key site for the production and



reproduction of whiteness in the margins of Europe. It is an important read to better understand border work, racialisation, and the persistence of imperialism against Europe's "internal others" today.