Reframing Hamas

Maura Finkelstein
December, 2023

On November 24th, 2023, a temporary ceasefire paused Israeli bombardment[1] and Hamas-led retaliation in Gaza. The pause was intended to bring humanitarian aid into Gaza, as thousands of civilians were without food, water, medical care, and shelter. Additionally, Israel and Hamas traded hostages – releasing approximately 100 Israeli and foreign captives to the Red Cross and 240 Palestinians from Israeli prisons. After renewing the truce twice, Israel resumed its bombardment on December 1st, within minutes of the ceasefire ending. The already-devastated population of Gaza is once again subjected to Israel's genocidal campaign. Since October 7th, more than half of all homes in Gaza have been completely destroyed and an estimated 250,000 housing units have been

partially destroyed. At least 50,000 families and their extended families are now homeless and close to 16,000 people in Gaza, including at least 6,150 children, have been killed. These numbers continue to climb, as Israel uses AI technology for their assault, targeting civilians with chilling precision. While framed as a "war on Hamas," there is no version of this reality that justifies the destruction of civilian life, land, and infrastructure. Instead, Hamas is Israel's excuse for genocidal violence, ongoing for 75 years.

Given this stark reality, are we finally ready to have real conversations about who Hamas is, what the organization wants, and how its members go about fulfilling their political goals? In his essential contextualization of the organization, *Hamas Contained: The Rise and Pacification of Palestinian Resistance,* Tareq Baconi argues that "…instead of…engaging with Hamas's political drivers, Israel has adopted a military approach that defines Hamas solely as a terrorist organization. This depoliticizes and decontextualizes the movement, giving credence to the persistent 'politicide' of Palestinian nationalism, Israel's process of erasing the political ideology animating the Palestinian struggle for self-determination" (2018: 227-228). It has been almost impossible to change the direction of this conversation. Because of this "terrorist" categorization,[2] Hamas and its members can easily be written off as monstrous savages, intent only on destroying Israel, all Jews,[3] and everyone caught in their wake. Because of this categorization, it's easy to avoid confronting the deep racist Islamophobia central to this framing. Because of this framing, thousands of innocent civilians have been brutally murdered in Gaza and then written off as collateral damage, the inevitable result of a necessary war on terror.

> *Hamas is Israel's excuse for genocidal violence, ongoing for 75 years.*

The problem with discussions around terrorism and terrorist organizations is that there is no clear and widely accepted definition of what a terrorist or a terrorist organization is. The International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism, signed on December 9th, 1999, defines terrorism in its

Article 2.1.b as "any . . . act intended to cause death or serious bodily injury to a civilian, or to any other person not taking an active part in the hostilities in a situation of armed conflict, when the purpose of such act, by its nature or context, is to intimidate a population,[4] or to compel a government or an international organization to do or to abstain from doing any act." While assumptions about the categorization of "terrorist organization" usually exclude states from this definition, political scientists studying authoritarianism include "state terrorism" under this categorization. However, in addressing "authoritarian regimes," such an analysis of state terrorism often excludes those claiming to be democratic (ie: Israel and the United States).[5] And yet, this shield of democracy doesn't erase the tactics of what would otherwise be categorized as state terrorism, such as the policing of communities of color in the United States, India's violence in Kashmir and the Northeast, and Israel's treatment of Palestinians to name just a few examples.

Utilizing the category of state terror, the original terrorist organization at play in Palestine is the State of Israel and the Israeli Occupation Force (IOF).[6] There is historical precedent for this claim. Beginning in 1917 and intensifying in 1948 during the Nakba (or the catastrophe), Israelis took control of 774 towns and villages, destroyed 531 Palestinian towns and villages, and committed atrocities resulting in more than 70 massacres against Palestinians. By 1949, around 15,000 Palestinians had been murdered and 711,000 Palestinian were dispossessed and turned into refugees, according to the United Nations.[7] By 1953, there were 870,000 registered refugees, over 34% of them living in refugee camps in Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, and Egypt.[8] These acts of terror were utilized by the State of Israel decades before Hamas was founded in 1987.

> *The original terrorist organization at play in Palestine is the State of Israel and the Israeli Occupation Force.*

Before the events of October 7th, an estimated 5,200 Palestinians were held in Israeli prisons. Many of these detainees were children at the time of their arrest

and many were never charged with any crime, aside from being Palestinian. In resolution 1566 (October 2004), the United Nations Security Council defines terrorist acts as "criminal acts, including against civilians, committed with the intent to cause death or serious bodily injury, or *taking of hostages*, with the purpose to provoke a state of terror in the general public or in a group of persons or particular persons, intimidate a population or compel a government or an international organization to do or to abstain from doing any act" (emphasis mine). There has been extensive coverage of Hamas's hostages but little framing of Palestinians detained and held without charge in Israeli prisons. Most detained Palestinians are political prisoners. Their detention is used as a form of intimidation against other Palestinians living in The Occupied Territories. With this in mind, and according to the UN's definition, Israel's practice of detaining Palestinian civilians and holding them (as well as torturing them) without cause is a clear act of terrorism. The UN General Assembly further articulated this definition almost two years later, in Resolution 60/43 (January 2006), defining terrorist acts as "criminal acts intended or calculated to provoke a state of terror in the general public, a group of persons or particular persons for political purposes." Israel does this to Palestinians on a daily basis.

Palestinians living under occupation experience the IOF as a terrorist organization – in the West Bank, this is the chronic terror of tanks tearing through their towns; homes searched, unprovoked, in the middle of the night; and civilians disappeared and imprisoned without reason. For Palestinians in both the West Bank and Gaza, this terror is the reality that civilians, particularly children, are murdered by settlers and the Israeli army on a regular basis, with no repercussions (chillingly echoed here in the US, as the police – often militarized with the aid of Israel, murder Black people without consequence, resulting not just in individual death, but also terrorized and traumatized communities). As context, two weeks prior to the October 7th attacks, Save the Children estimated that at least 38 Palestinian children had been killed by Israeli forces in the occupied West Bank since the beginning of 2023. At the time, that was more than one Palestinian child killed per week in 2023 and this is likely an under-

estimation. As the temporary ceasefire came to a close on the morning of December 1st, 2023, an estimated 6,000 children have been killed in Gaza and at least 63 children have been killed in the West Bank since October 7th. These numbers continue to grow.

> *There has been extensive coverage of Hamas's hostages but little framing of Palestinians detained and held without charge in Israeli prisons.*

When Palestinians resist occupation – both violently and peacefully – these are not unprovoked actions. Still, any form of resistance is evacuated of historical context and framed by Israel and the US as terrorist attacks that are fueled by an ahistorical and irrational hatred of Israel. Because Hamas is categorized as a terrorist organization (by the Israeli and US government and around the world), necessary contextualization and challenges to this narrative is almost impossible.[9]

It's worth noting that, in the wake of October 7th, Israel falsely claimed that Hamas beheaded babies, raped women, and used hospitals as military bases. In particular, on October 11th, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu claimed: "We saw boys and girls bound, who were shot in the head. Men and women burned alive. Young women who were raped and slaughtered. Soldiers who were beheaded." All of these claims have been debunked, even as Zionists continue to circulate such rumors. While Israel and the US continue to blame Hamas for an estimated 1200-1400 civilian deaths, eyewitness accounts from Israeli survivors show that, instead, Israel's indiscriminate attacks were likely responsible for a majority of these casualties. Yasmin Porat, a survivor from the Kibbutz Be'eri, has testified that Israeli security forces "undoubtedly" killed a large number of their own civilians following the Hamas assault. She went on to explain that Hamas treated her and the other Israeli civilians "humanely" – they intended to "kidnap us to Gaza. Not to murder us." Additionally, Israel's *Haaretz* newspaper published an interview with Tuval, a man who lived in Kibbutz Be'eri. Haaretz reports:

“According to him [Tuval], only on Monday night and only after the commanders in the field made difficult decisions – including shelling houses with all their occupants inside in order to eliminate the terrorists along with the hostages – did the IDF [Israeli army] complete the takeover of the kibbutz. The price was terrible: at least 112 Be’eri people were killed. Others were kidnapped. Yesterday, 11 days after the massacre, the bodies of a mother and her son were discovered in one of the destroyed houses. It is believed that more bodies are still lying in the rubble.” (translated and published by Mondoweiss).

Given these testimonies, it’s unclear how much of the violence on October 7th and in its aftermath was actually carried out by Hamas. However, we know that the Israeli army uses violence regardless of whether Palestinian resistance is peaceful or violent. For example, on March 30th, 2018, peaceful Gazan civilians began protesting every Friday at the border fence between Gaza and Israel. Their demand was basic: an end to the 12-year-long Israeli blockade of the territory (a form of collective punishment on civilians after Hamas took political control of the region), as well as the right to return to their ancestors’ homes, from which they were expelled during the Nakba in 1948. Israeli snipers regularly opened fire at protesters during the demonstrations. In 2019, the Israeli army killed 266 peaceful protesters and injured almost 30,000 others.

Israel and the US have crushed other forms of nonviolent resistance. In 2020, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) was “a cancer,” and promised the US would stop funding groups linked to it. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, in response, called the move “wonderful.” While BDS is a nonviolent form of economic resistance inspired by the South African anti-Apartheid struggle, both the US and Israel have reframed the movement as anti-Semitic, a move that – similar to calling Hamas a terrorist organization – forecloses any conversations about the legitimacy of resistance, whether peaceful or otherwise. The recent House Resolution equating anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism is another example of this silencing.

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resistance is peaceful or violent.

Despite the fact that Zionists have been terrorizing Palestinians for over a century, Hamas did not emerge until the 1970s.[10] Similar to the goals of the Black Panther Party, it was initially composed of activists who established charities, schools, and medical centers in the West Bank and Gaza Strip as a response to Israel occupying both territories in 1967.[11] The group was officially established as a liberation organization in 1987, alongside the First Intifada (uprising). Hamas, which favors armed resistance, didn't enter politics until 2005, in opposition to the Fatah party, which favored negotiations with Israel. In 2006, an armed conflict left Hamas in charge of Gaza and Fatah in charge of the West Bank. Unlike Fatah's approach to compromise, Hamas's goal has always been Palestinian liberation.[12]

While Hamas is not a sovereign government and Palestine (or Gaza) is not a sovereign nation, these uneven power dynamics between Palestine/Gaza/Hamas and the State of Israel are flattened in order to continue the Israel-US propaganda machine, which frames the occupation through the language of "rounds of fighting" or "cycle of violence." This erases the fact that Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank have been living under daily terror and apartheid for decades. Before Israel launched its genocidal campaign against Gaza in early October 2023, the territory was already known as the "largest open-air prison in the world" but it was more accurately the largest open-air *concentration camp* in the world (and now the largest open grave in the world). The Israeli blockade of the occupied Gaza Strip, prior to October, had been in place since June 2007, when Israel imposed a land, sea and air blockade on the area. Closed borders to Israel and Egypt produced a devastating economic and humanitarian crisis in Gaza even before October 2023. But Israel restricted the movement of Palestinians in and out of Gaza for much longer than the past 17 years.

Mobility has been an ongoing crisis in Gaza. Beginning in the late 1980s (with the first Intifada), Israel began to impose restrictions on movement by introducing a

permit system, similar to Apartheid pass laws in South African, requiring Palestinians in Gaza to get permits in order to work or travel through Israel or access the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem. These permits were almost impossible to obtain. In 1993, Israel began used "closure" tactics on the Palestinian territories on a regular basis, at times barring any and all Palestinians in certain areas from leaving, sometimes for months at a time, severing people from their livelihoods and families.[13] In 1995, Israel built an electronic fence and concrete wall around the Gaza Strip, entirely isolating Gaza from the West Bank. This infrastructural technology has since been used as a model for the US's wall along its Southern border.[14] In 2000, when the Second Intifada began, Israel canceled many of the existing travel and work permits previously issued in Gaza, and even further reduced the number of new permits issued. Israel's blockade has cut off Palestinians from Jerusalem, where Gazan's previously traveled for specialized medical care, foreign consulates, banks and other vital services. Importantly, this violates the terms of the 1993 Oslo Accords, which stated that Israel must treat the Palestinian territories as one political entity and that they cannot be divided.[15]This blockade also violates Article 33 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which prohibits collective punishment.

Given this history of enclosure, the last two months have resulted in an intensification of life-threatening shortages of food, water, medicine, and fuel (to name a few basic needs), which had already been part of Israel's ongoing assault on Gaza. Prior to this year's brutal assault on Gaza, Israel had already launched four separate military assaults in 2008, 2012, 2014 and 2021. Each of these attacks exacerbated Gaza's already dire situation. Thousands of Palestinians were killed, many of whom were children, and tens of thousands of homes, schools and office buildings were destroyed. We cannot understand Hamas's actions or the past two months of Israeli bombardment against Gaza without understanding this violent history of siege and military violence. Similarly, context helps us understand the devastating situation Gazan's having been living under for decades.

Israel will get exactly what they've wanted all along – a land without a people –

a pristine colonial fantasy space of extraction and capital.

Most Gazans (like most Palestinians, like most people) want peace, attained through a peaceful solution.[17] This was even true for Hamas. The party attempted peaceful negotiations with Israel, which could have once led to a two-state solution along 1967 borders. But Israel refused and continues to refuse a political solution to their settler colonial problem, framing the question of Palestine as an irrational project of terror, resolved only through a military solution. For those of us paying attention to Israel's ongoing destruction of Palestinian life, begun in 1948, it is not hard to imagine how this State-sanctioned violence would lead to a violent response. Israel has never had any intention of changing their forced reality in Gaza – they've never wanted peace and they've been very clear about why. Gaza is rich in natural gas, resources Israel is intent on exclusively claiming and extracting. The coast line is a stunning gold mine for tourist-driven capital. There is talk of building an amusement park on the mass graves of dead Gazans. Israel does not want peace with Gaza, Israel wants Gaza's land. As long as Hamas is written off as a terrorist organization, the State of Israel and Zionists across the globe will continue to justify the ongoing genocide in Gaza as self-defense against a zombie mob of blood thirsty terrorists. The collateral damage of murdered civilians will be justified in the name of Israeli security,[18] just as they were justified after the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2002. Israel will get exactly what they've wanted all along – a land without a people – a pristine colonial fantasy space of extraction and capital. Once they clear this land of the dead and decomposing bodies of the thousands of innocent civilians, mostly women and children, that they slaughtered along the way.

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Footnotes:

[1] Still, according to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Israeli forces fired into Gaza on November 29th, during the pause, killing two people.

[2] For more on this, please see Noura Erakat's discussion of Israeli categorization in *Justice for Some: Law and the Question of Palestine* (2019: 200-205)

[3] While their original charter did state: "Our struggle against the Jews is very great and very serious," this was revised in 2017 clarified that their struggle was

with Israel and the Zionist project, not the Jews. In fact, they make the critical distinction still so obfuscated in the US and Israel: “Hamas affirms that its conflict is with the Zionist project not with the Jews because of their religion. Hamas does not wage a struggle against the Jews because they are Jewish but wages a struggle against the Zionists who occupy Palestine. Yet, it is the Zionists who constantly identify Judaism and the Jews with their own colonial project and illegal entity.” (16)

[4] By this definition, the United States Police Force (often trained by the Israeli army) is a terrorist organization and police shootings of unarmed Black people are acts of terrorism. The US government, it should be noted, has categorized every Black and Native liberation/freedom movement/group as a terrorist organization, and has then proceeded to terrorize and often kill members of those organizations. We cannot trust these definitions, nor can we trust powerful entities who use such categories to silence and stifle liberation struggles.

[5] See: Stohl M and Lopez GA (eds) (1984);Poe SC and Tate CN (1994); Barros R (2016); Hill Jr. DW (2016); Sluka JA (2000); Cingranelli D, Mark S, Garvey JB, Hutt J and Lee Y (2022); José A. Alemán (2023)

[6] While they officially call themselves the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) I – like many others – reject that name, as they are not a defense force, but an occupying force.

[7] Morris, Benny, *Righteous Victims: A History of the Zionist-Arab Conflict, 1881-2001*, Vintage Books, New York: 2001 (1999), pp 297-298

[8] Morris, Benny, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge: (2004).

[9] As an example, I will be accused of being a terrorist sympathizer just for writing these words – such accusations have been thrown at me for years, but particularly in the wake of October 7th.

[10] For more on this history, please see Abu-Amr, Ziad. "Hamas: A Historical and Political Background." *Journal of Palestine Studies*, vol. 22, no. 4, 1993, pp. 5–19.

[11] It is important to note that Hamas has never desired a free Palestine "from the river to the sea," but instead they advocate for a return to 1967 borders, which once might have allowed for a two-state solution.

[12] For excellent scholarship on this history, please see: *Hamas Contained: The Rise and Pacification of Palestinian Resistance* by Tareq Baconi (2018, SUP), *The Making of a Human Bomb: An Ethnography of Palestinian Resistance* by Nasser Abufarha (2009), and *Governing Gaza: Bureaucracy, Authority, and the Work of Rule, 1917-1967* by Ilana Feldman (2008)

[13] All of these tactics echo South African Apartheid

[14] For for example US Border Control and an Israeli military contractor use similar technology to terrorize and surveille people on the Tohono O'odham reservation, which was sliced in two by the US-Mexico border. For more on the similarities between Israel's fences and walls and those on the Southern US border, see Will Parrish's 2019 reporting for *The Intercept*.

[15] For more on this, please see Rashid Khalidi's *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine: A History of Settler Colonialism and Resistance, 1917-2017* (Picador: 2020) and Gideon Levy's *The Punishment of Gaza* (2010: Verso Books)

[16] White slave owners made such an argument against emancipation, white South Africans made this argument against dismantling apartheid, etc.

[17] For more on this, please see *Popular Resistance in Palestine: A History of Hope and Empowerment* by Mazin B. Qumsiyeh (2011)

[18] 175 Gazans were murdered on December 1st alone, in the hours following the end of the ceasefire, according to Al Jazeera

Kein Tag Ohne Hitler

Marika Sosnowski
December, 2023

Rainer Maria Rilke: Words gently end at the edge of the Unsayable…

—

This morning the weight of generations of violence erupted with the coffee pot in the kitchen. Sometimes the mundane and the profound have a way of colliding – the hurt my ancestors have received and the hurt they have done illuminated by the explosion of the coffee pot in the kitchen.

How to explain that weight to others?
Perhaps we all feel that weight occasionally?
Are (you) buckled by it?
Now? Ever?

Amid the explosion, I ask myself how do we go about our days pretending like everything is normal when it is anything but? Why do we pretend that the weight of generations of violence, and how the law is used to justify and sustain that violence, is acceptable? Perhaps, if we are honest, there is really no day without Hitler.

Today, before I went to the kitchen to break down, I was looking at the legal documents issued to my grandfather and grandmother at the end of the War.

Terrible things are written there in a beautiful cursive script.

Him:

1939 Lager Ostrow
1940/1941 Ghetto Rutki-Kossaki
1942 Lager Zambrow
1943/1944 Auschwitz
1945 Buchenwald

Question: Welche deutsche Dienststelle hat Ihnen die Erlaubnis gegeben, nach Deutschland zu kommen? (*Which German department allowed you to come to Germany?*)

Answer: S.S.

Like he asked the S.S. for permission to come to Germany.

Her:

1939/1942 Łódź

1942/1943 Auschwitz
1943/1945 Zolern
1945 Theresienstadt

On one document she requests to have her birthday corrected from 8.12.1909 to 12.8.1909.

Action taken: considered a clerical error.

I imagine the bravery of my grandmother having to approach authority after all that has happened to her at the hands of authority to ask for this amendment to be made. An amendment that was just a “clerical error”. Nevertheless, she is thinking, *just in case*. Just in case it causes problems later on. Just in case it means our resettlement is delayed. Just in case I get punished or separated (or worse) from my husband and children and family, again. Just in case.

Another document, an Action Sheet, prepared in 1948 in the Landsberg Displaced Persons camp, states that my grandfather who “hat seine Familie in Polen verloren” (whether *verloren* means lost or dead in this context I do not know), “object[s] to any place of immigration except U.S.A. where relatives are living”.

He, and his wife, are sent to Australia.

Violence and the law have a way of inserting themselves into the fabric of life whether we know/like it, or not.

So many photographs of children screaming, the powder of rubble on their faces, blood and small bodies. Some stuck under concrete, others in their parents arms as they weep or look up to the sky to ask for, for what? For help? For humanity? For forgiveness? For rights?

“Israel has a right to defend itself.”

The struggle between the sons of light and the sons of darkness (despite being highly gendered) is bankrupt. I don’t know whose “son” I am anymore when the

State whose raison d'être was meant to make Jews safe makes me anything/everything but. Then again, who can deny the weight of the violence inflicted and the scars it causes, that are ripped open, now daily, hourly, every second? Violence, then and now. Recourse to legality, then and now.

I imagine friends approaching Rafah crossing. There are iron fences, concrete blocks, everything highly securitised. In my mind's eye I cannot decide if they have documents. I want them to have documents, the "right" sort of documents, but I know they are not nationals of another country and therefore, in all likelihood they will not be able to leave. The bombs will continue.

A Whatsapp message: "I am not in a safe place, but still alive. Remember me always. Please take care of my daughters if I die."

A few years ago, at the Erez checkpoint, a mother is carrying her child who has cancer, on her hip. She is being toyed with by a soldier (who is perhaps 19, maybe 20 years old?). The soldier needs to see a certain document in order to let her pass. She fumbles with her bags and her child. She has many and she does not want to put her child down. She produces the document. No, not that one. Another one is required. The child starts to cry.

In his book Time Maps, Eviatar Zerubavel suggests that while we are, genetically speaking, minuscule parts of our grandparents we are, nevertheless/in spite of/because of, the products of an 'inherently boundless community'. That inherently boundless community is made up primarily of 'things below the horizon of history' (or the "unknown, unknowns" as Donald Rumsfeld once called them). This boundless community is not genes but more social elements like culture, beliefs, skills and aspirations that have passed quietly from one generation to the next. It is also stories of displacement, dispossession, death, trauma, violence, and the law. It is documents that violate our rights, putting us in camps and allowing us to pass through checkpoints, or not. It is the violence done by the State in ways that are (perhaps) legal on paper (or perhaps not). Justified (or not). It is the fear that comes with asking authority to correct an erroneous document. It is being

sent to a country where you have no relatives, no connections, no history. It is being told to move south and then being bombed anyway. It is children in neonatal cribs when the power is turned off. It is mothers who sleep with their fingers on the pulse points of their children because they are worried they will die in their sleep from malnutrition.

If we believe, or even simply acknowledge that everyone is in some way or another affected by the inherently boundless community of experiences, and that these experiences – mundane and profound – the coffee pot, the documents, the bombs – craft the shape of all our lives – or at least tie each of us simultaneously to the past and the future – then it is necessary to, and impossible not to, feel mournful empathy for all sentient beings.

We are all wounded,
pulling large sacks of despicable acts,
tied with invisible threads,
behind us like a ball and chain.

Over time the ball and chain affects the way we walk, the way we think, the way we interact with the world. Bringing above the 'horizon of history' the ball and chain allows us not so much as to understand, fix and remedy the fact that we carry it, but to see its repercussions and to open our hearts to the woundedness of ourselves and others.

Aurora Levins Morales, a Puerto Rican Jewish poet writes:

We cannot cross until we carry each other,
All of us are refugees, all of us prophets.
No more taking turns on history's wheel,
trying to collect old debts no-one can pay.
The sea will not open that way.

Sharif S. Elmusa, a Palestinian poet who grew up in al-Nuway'mah refugee camp writes:

I hear. The good helpers are unable to comfort.
The shelter does not shelter.
I want my house to stand.
I want the walls back
To weep alone
To hang pictures.

Letter in support of EASA Executive Committee’s Statement on the situation in Gaza

Allegra
December, 2023

We, the undersigned, are deeply concerned by the current, ongoing attacks on academic freedom we are experiencing across Europe. We write this letter in full support of the EASA Executive Committee's Statement on the situation in Gaza.

EASA has issued several political statements and letters of support over the years. Most recently in 2022, for example, the Executive Committee issued a statement in support of Ukraine in the face of Russian aggression. Similarly, EASA's latest statement, on the situation in Gaza, expresses grief at the massacre of thousands of Palestinian civilians. We strongly support the Executive Committee's voicing of what we see as a necessary position in response to the indiscriminate destruction of Palestinian lives and civilian infrastructure in Gaza by the Israeli military and government. The statement also emphasises European complicity in the current violations of human rights, as well as the widespread political and media backlash against any form of academic and public solidarity with the Palestinian struggle.

In a historical moment when all informed humanitarian actors and the UN are

trying to bring attention to the flagrant violations of International Humanitarian Law, and are calling for the respect of human rights and dignity in Gaza, many European academics (including anthropologists) argue for the need to remain 'apolitical'. Yet this argument is largely used to shut down expressions of solidarity with the Palestinian people and dismiss any criticism of Israel's military offensive as anti-Semitic. The current conflict is instrumentalised to shut down nuanced opinions, including, crucially, Jewish and Palestinian voices for peace, and to intensify attacks on the social sciences for promoting critical thinking.

Anthropology is already a relatively marginal discipline that is often ignored or misunderstood in public opinion, but anthropology's problematic past entanglement with the colonial project makes it also uniquely placed to reflect on the links between regimes of truth and colonial oppression. Nothing in the Constitution or in the bylaws prevents EASA from issuing such a statement. Quite the contrary, Article 6 of the EASA constitution states: "The objectives of the Association are to promote education and research in social anthropology by improving understanding of world societies and encouraging professional communication and cooperation between anthropologists, especially in Europe". Being present in public conversations is part of this, as it demonstrates anthropology's contribution to understanding world societies.

Knowledge production is and has always been inherently political. Placing current events within their broader historical and geopolitical context is, in fact, essential. It is our duty to share our expertise in wider public debates, and we should be able to do so free from fear of censure, harassment, and reprisal. A statement such as EASA's becomes particularly important when there is a dominant, mainstream narrative that drowns out other voices. Moreover, the decision to stay silent in response to ongoing atrocities and efforts to silence fellow academics is also a statement in itself, and one that we do not support.

In light of the growing restrictions on academic freedom in Europe and the threats colleagues are facing as a result of their public stance against the human rights violations committed in Palestine, we request that EASA's Executive

Committee establishes a Working Group tasked to 1/ Look into and address the growing restrictions on academic freedom in Europe, 2/ Offer support to colleagues who face reprisals for publicly sharing their anthropological analysis of settler colonialism, 3/ Look into and suggest ways to address the situation of Palestinian academics and students in Europe and the Middle East. This working group should draft policy recommendations that will be presented and discussed during the upcoming EASA General Assembly in Barcelona in July 2024.

We understand that some of our colleagues who are currently being silenced will not be able to sign this letter. We therefore ask them to join the EASA General Assembly on December 21st (online from 2 to 4PM CET) and vote anonymously in favour of the establishment of the Working Group on Academic Freedom and Human Rights.

Sign the petition here

First signatories:
Agathe Mora, Lecturer, University of Sussex and Visiting Professor, University of Lausanne
Julie Billaud, Associate Professor, Geneva Graduate Institute
Umut Yıldırım, Assistant Professor, Geneva Graduate Institute
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The Unforgiven

Arpan Roy
December, 2023

"*How can we ever forgive them?*" I find myself asking over the past month and a half. I do not raise the possibility of forgiveness to suggest a moral high ground nor to dictate ethical conduct for the victims of genocide. Indeed, to talk about forgiveness in a time of televised genocide may just as well be talking about the impossibility of forgiveness. Yet, the topic has already been raised, if surreptitiously. Judith Butler, in a widely shared essay in the *London Review of Books* published on October 19[1] (and since translated into Arabic[2]) asks Palestinians and Israelis to imagine a future in which all parties "live together in freedom, non-violence, equality and justice," and for the world to accommodate this difficult task by producing a generation of "dreamers" and the like. It is true that Butler prefaces this rosy vision of the future by acknowledging decades of Palestinian suffering under Israeli occupation, albeit this acknowledgement is itself prefaced by her proclaiming any possible justification for Hamas's uprising on October 7 as "corrupt moral reasoning." It is also true that Judith Butler has engaged with Palestine for too long to slight her as a mere spectator-pundit; the kind of detached political commentator that has thrived on talk shows and tweets since October 7. No, Butler, apart from being a groundbreaking theorist of gender and politics, has genuine Palestine credentials. She has written a book on Jewish critiques of Zionism,[3] she has lended her name to countless letters in support of boycotts against Israel and legal appeals in support of troubled Palestinian scholars, she has given visiting lectures at Birzeit University near Ramallah, and in 2006 she made the brave (but, in the West, unacceptable) observation that Hamas belongs to the Global Left; a comment that she later retracted. There can be no doubt that Butler means well. But by asking Palestinians to somehow ignore a near-century of oppression in service of a still-hazy just future, and asking Israelis, in turn, to absolve the "corrupt moral reasoning" of Palestinians, she employs a kind of moral philosophy that asks the victims of violence to share the burden of responsibility with the perpetrators of the same violence, and vice versa. In very unphilosophical terms, she asks everyone to *put their differences aside and just move on.*

There is a genealogy to such thinking. In a stunning section of her magnum opus

The Human Condition,[4] Hannah Arendt outlines two ways of navigating predicaments one encounters in the world; those which she calls "faculties" of human action. One is by punishment and retribution, a kind of action best exemplified by the vengeful God of Last Judgment. The second is forgiveness, which, according to Arendt, was first "discovered" by Jesus of Nazareth in his dying moments on the cross. Jesus's discovery is radical, writes Arendt, because in the Judaeo-Hellenic context of 1st-century Palestine, it was understood that the power to forgive belongs only to God. By bringing this divine power to the realm of human affairs, Jesus made way for political possibility previously unavailable to mere mortals. Forgiveness, thus, is radical politics.

> *In very unphilosophical terms, Butler asks everyone to put their differences aside and just move on.*

But Arendt herself was a mere mortal, and, thus, inconsistent. She saw Jesus's discovery of forgiveness as the "miracle that saves the world," but she was herself unable to forgive. It is often ignored that despite her well-known verdict of Nazi evil being ultimately "banal," Arendt also concurred with the court's verdict that Adolf Eichmann should be put to death.[5] Butler, writing about Arendt's perplexing lines of thought on the matter, offers the following analysis: "No one dies as a consequence of Arendt's judgment and words, and yet perhaps they show us less the reason for the death penalty than its conflicted and theatrical vacillation between vengeance and some other version of justice."[6]

What might forgiveness as another version of justice look like? In a (relatively) recent book that has all the complexities and contradictions worthy of a classic, Mahmood Mamdani explores two models of possible aftermaths of political catastrophe.[7] The first is the denazification process taken by postwar Germany, and the second is the end of apartheid in South Africa. An even cursory look at this typology shows that it is almost analogous to Arendt's two faculties of human action (I say *almost* and not *exactly*, for reasons to be explained later):

retribution, on the one hand, and forgiveness on the other. Denazification entailed the ethnic cleansing of 12 million Germans from Central and Eastern Europe into the two postwar Germanies, show trials of SS officials in Nuremberg, and a peculiar self-flagellation at the level of national identity that continues to persist in the modern German state; particularly in its unqualified support for the welfare of the world's Jews for which Germany sees Israel as the indisputable guarantor. There is also the millions of Deutschmarks paid in reparations to families of victims of the Holocaust, the total subjugation of West German manufacturing and military interests to the United States in the immediate postwar period, and periodic celebrations marking the anniversary of its own surrender to the Allied forces, now understood to be Germany's liberation from itself. In denazification, there is a clear perpetrator—Germans—and a clear victim—Jews.

Although Mamdani does not use the term, it is forgiveness that characterizes his second model, that best exemplified by South Africa. For Mamdani, post-apartheid South Africa collapses identities of perpetrator and victim into a broader category of "survivors;" survivors meaning those who together "witnessed" a protracted moral and political South African nightmare, and together survived it. Features of this model include the establishment of institutions like the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in which both colonizer and colonized work together towards new political frontiers, no retribution against the perpetrators of violence (in fact, the category of perpetrator does not exist), and other such concessions. Mamdani makes clear that it is this model that is the only viable way forward for Palestine: a "non-national" state that is not exactly a binationalism of Jewish/Arab democracy but, rather, an anonymous political project that is a homeland for all, and without identitarian national markers. He writes: "The Palestinian moment will arrive when enough Israeli Jews are confident that they will be counted among Zionism's survivors." In this, Mamdani's vision is in agreement with Butler's call for "dreamers."

Watching now the carpet bombings of entire neighborhoods, the bravado military conquests of hospitals, the psychological humiliation of evacuees, the denial of basic amenities and nourishment to over two million people, the repeated

propaganda lies and fake news, the arrogant lauding of genocide by elected officials, the Abu Ghraib-style abuse of political prisoners, the extrajudicial killings in the West Bank, and more (the list is by no means exhaustive), one wonders how anyone can take Mamdani's survivor model seriously. Is the hindrance to a just future in Palestine really in the hands of Israeli Jews who are as yet unconvinced whether or not to take the leap of faith to "survive" Zionism? And can the political solution that was devised to end South African apartheid really be viable in a Palestine ravaged by psychotic Israeli hellfire? It should be mentioned here that the anonymous category of "survivor" was first coined by Wynand Malan, the Afrikaner member of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. It could not have been otherwise. Mamdani mentions this curiosity, but does not give it any importance.

> *Can the political solution that was devised to end South African apartheid really be viable in a Palestine ravaged by psychotic Israeli hellfire?*

The wider problem here is the discursive limits regarding what kinds of futures and political projects are welcomed by a community of scholars that would of course prefer a reprieve from endless cycles of violence. Mamdani is an established scholar, the kind who is able to get away with sweeping moral reasoning in parts of the world where he might not have a libidinal stake in the game. Even in less agitating times, I was struck by Mamdani's argument from an earlier book that Darfur was perhaps not a genuine genocide, whereas Rwanda was.[8] The point is not whether Mamdani is correct or incorrect, but that the matter of genocide, especially keeping in mind that the reader might also be the victim, requires a certain sensitivity, a certain humility and tact. Mamdani is astute in noting that political realities in Israel/Palestine are never static, and he observes shifts in Israeli political trends over the past century and a half that inform his prescribing the survivor model. But Mamdani seems ignorant of shifting Palestinian trends also. The binationalism once favored by many Palestinian activists, and critiqued by Mamdani, has over the past decade transformed not into a survivor paradigm but into an Algerian model of

revolutionary decolonization; one in which there is no future for the colonizer, less so as a survivor. This is an understandable development, regardless of moral judgment, and especially for younger generations of Palestinians who have never known, or are too young to remember, anything but the misery of the current status quo. One indication of this development is the shift in terminology. In the spirit of Confucius's famous dictum that "the beginning of wisdom is the ability to call things by their right names," the new activists refer to all Israelis as "settlers" and all Israeli localities, from those in the West Bank hilltops to Tel Aviv, as "settlements." The new activists are also highly literate in the pedagogy of the oppressed, well-read in Fanon and Kanafani, and they know that the currently televised genocide is not event but structure, with each and every one of its components already practiced for decades; only that it is has now escalated to a scale previously unseen, and that the world is now again looking.

> *The new activists are also highly literate in the pedagogy of the oppressed, well-read in Fanon and Kanafani, and they know that the currently televised genocide is not event but structure.*

I do not think that Palestine is Algeria, nor that the Jewish relationship to Palestine is exactly symmetrical to the French relationship to Algeria. In some ways, France was a more benevolent colonizer than Israel can ever be, eventually granting French citizenship to all Algerians and stealthily adopting Algerian decolonization into its own Hegelian self-image of *liberté-égalité-fraternité*.[9] This is not to say that the French colonization project in North Africa was anything but brutal. It was brutal, entailing massacre after massacre that have left permanent psycho-social scars. But these are the standards to which Israel has lowered itself. In other ways, Israelis do not have a metropole to which to flee like the French pieds-noirs did, should Zionism be violently overthrown. The point, however, is that if one feels the Palestinian tragedy authentically in one's bones, as any serious scholar writing about Palestine should, then it is imperative to be empathetic to these intricacies and nuances of political futures that reflect the reality of the Palestinian experience. Lecturing to Palestinians about corrupt

moral reasoning, in its various forms, is the antithesis to such empathy.

"*How can we ever forgive them?*" I still find myself asking. In my more sober moments, I know that forgiveness is inevitable. I do not mean here forgiveness as radical politics, as per Arendt, nor as political concession. Rather, forgiveness is an unavoidable reality of everyday life, of encountering the face of the Other, of not responding to genocide with counter-genocide. Forgiveness of this kind is difficult and constant work. Palestinian activists may very well discover in the end that forgiveness is the pragmatic political solution, even the moral one, but this is something that has to be discovered through experimentation—as Jesus did—and not prescribed by top-down moral reasoning. Jacques Derrida once wrote that only the unforgivable is truly forgivable, for otherwise it would not be a thing worthy of forgiveness.[10] He also frowned upon "transactional" impetuses towards forgiveness that rely on the logic of economic exchange, as Mamdani's survivor model does. It is because of this that I distinguish Butler from Mamdani, and Arendt from both. Arendt's call for forgiveness is not a call to move on. Rather, it is a call for a revolution of consciousness, and her own inability to forgive Eichmann shows a vulnerability and struggle-of-the-self that touches my heart.

> *Arendt's call for forgiveness is not a call to move on. Rather, it is a call for a revolution of consciousness.*

But here there are intrigues. I return now to the image of Jesus on the cross, that which Arendt locates as the site of the discovery of forgiveness as human action. Luke 23:46 is the biblical verse generally considered to be the climax of Jesus's mission. By this point in the Passion narrative, Jesus has already forgiven his executioners, and a solar eclipse is passing over Jerusalem, bringing darkness over the earth. Jesus, with his last gasps of breath, entrusts his spirit to the custodianship of God. He then dies on the cross: "*Jesus called out with a loud voice, 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.' When he had said this, he breathed his last.*"

In Arabic translations of the Gospels, probably some of their earliest translations ever made, at least orally, the action of his death (the Greek *exepneusen*) is translated as *aslam*—meaning "I submit" or "I surrender;" essentially the same form that six centuries later gives Islam its name. If forgiveness is radical politics, or if one must one way or another be compelled or obliged to forgive, take this language game as a warning against confusing this politics with surrender. Take care also to consider the awesomeness of what resurrects when a movement is violently extinguished.

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Authorship in the post-academic, post-human age

Kirsten Bell
December, 2023

In 1964, when describing the threshold for obscenity in *Jacobellis v. Ohio*, the US Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart said that while he couldn't define precisely what constituted hard-core pornography, "I know it when I see it". The problem, of course, is that the "I know it when I see it" test is highly subjective, because one man's pornography is another's erotic art. A similar issue plagues the subject of plagiarism. As Mario Biagioli (2012: 455) has argued, "Plagiarism is one of those notions that are stabilised by the emotions they express and elicit rather than by their conceptual clarity". The very fact that it's often difficult to reach agreement on whether plagiarism has or hasn't occurred suggests that the topic is good to think with.

As someone with a longstanding interest in publishing and conceptions of authorship, it strikes me that the question of how ideas travel and who, if anyone, owns them, usefully highlights areas of tension between academic, trade and

media publishing that require further unpacking in the post-human era of authorship in which we suddenly find ourselves. In what follows, I want to raise a larger set of issues about the somewhat uneasy relationship between academic writing and journalism, based on the different kinds of credit economies in which they operate, and what this means in the context of their increasingly symbiotic relationship and the rise of AI-powered language-processing models such as ChatGPT.

Parallels and interchanges between journalism and academia

Although journalism and academia operate in distinct social fields, there are numerous parallels between them that tend to disguise differences in their underlying models of authorship. First and foremost, they are highly desirable careers amongst people trained to think of the jobs as a calling – although in both professions employment is increasingly precarious, work conditions have deteriorated, and there are intense pressures to churn out "content", and its academic equivalent, "outputs", in a heavily metricised environment. Under such conditions, quality journalism and scholarship inevitably suffer, and sloppy practices and outright misconduct increase – as *Gaming the Metrics* (Biagioli and Lippman 2020) attests for the academic context.

In tandem with the decline of original and investigative reporting, repackaged content has arisen in its place. The practice has become so ubiquitous that it even has its own name: churnalism. Moreover, it's hard to even blame journalists themselves for the practice, because the contemporary media publishing landscape survives primarily on the backs of poorly paid freelancers churning out content for clicks in the accelerated pace of a 24-hour news cycle.

However, not all journalists are precariously employed; nor do all newspapers churn out click-bait. As with academia, journalism has increasingly become a complex ecosystem in which a growing proportion of labour in any given organisation is outsourced to freelancers ("sessionals" and "visiting lecturers" in academic parlance), although reputable outlets typically employ a cadre of staff journalists, along with a few "stars", to guarantee institutional credibility and accrue accolades. Like academia itself, the proportions of stars to freelancers varies dramatically from organisation to organisation, based largely on institutional capital and prestige. Indeed, much like Oxford and Cambridge (the same institutions that, not coincidentally, have produced many of their writers), stalwarts like the *Economist* and the *Financial Times* appear to have weathered the vagaries of the digital era better than initially promising upstarts like *BuzzFeed* and Vice Media.

There are also growing interchanges between the two sectors, with academics regularly contributing columns and articles to newspapers and magazines, or writing popular non-fiction, and journalists increasingly appointed into prominent roles at universities as chancellors and provosts. As Marilyn Strathern (2006) observes, key here has been the conceptual transformation of the university into a "knowledge producer". With "knowledge" reconceptualised as "information", this has led to growing demands for "expertise". In this framework, academics are a group of "experts" waiting to be deployed – primarily by government and industry – to meet the needs of "society" (now inserted as an interlocutor, albeit sometimes via the rubric of the "taxpayer"). Thus, intellectual thought, now transformed into "expert knowledge", must be publicly relevant, with academics incessantly exhorted to venture forth from the ivory tower under the banner of "public engagement", "knowledge translation" and "impact".

Conceptions of authorship in academia and journalism

But despite the parallels between academia and journalism, and their ever-

tightening relationship, there remain significant differences that crystallise most tangibly in their contrasting conception of authorship. As Biagioli (2012: 454) has argued, “Authorship in literature or other works protected by copyright law is quite different from scientific or academic authorship”. What copyright protects is the *form* or *expression* of an idea: the words it contains, its diagrams, illustrations, etc. However, what is important to academics is the *content*, not its *form*: “the claims, the ideas, the results, the techniques”.

Copyright

Copyright is a form of intellectual property protection that grants the owner or author of a piece of work the legal right to determine how it is used and s/he will control the regulation of the economic benefits derived from that piece.

Definition from www.the-definition.com

In essence, academics are not particularly interested in the property rights embedded in copyright itself, but credit rights, or attribution. This, of course, is precisely why we were so ready to relinquish our copyright to corporate publishers, with entirely predictable results (namely, they made a fortune selling our "property" back to our own institutions). It has also been a key impetus for the open access movement: we *want* our work to be circulated as widely as possible, without financial barriers to access.

It's also why we haven't traditionally claimed intellectual ownership over our course syllabi and teaching materials in the same way we do our publications. Although attitudes have changed in the wake of technologies that allow our teaching materials to be captured and reused (and even sold) by our institutions without our consent, they were historically conceived of as freely circulating gifts.

This feature of academic authorship makes it fundamentally different from authorship in other types of publishing – something recognised in the fact that academics retain copyright over their manuscripts rather than relinquishing it to their employer. Incidentally, this is why academic publishing agreements always ask whether you're a government employee; in this instance, it's the employer who owns copyright and assigns it to the publisher, not the employee. Academia presents a notable exception to the norm in this respect.

While attribution is obviously important in the context of trade publishing and journalism, what is ultimately at stake is royalties: the desired "credit" is as much financial as reputational. As Corynne McSherry (2003: 233) puts it, "Copyright law holds an infringer responsible whether or not there was any deliberate effort to deceive, because the copyright holder's economic interest has been damaged". For this reason, plagiarism is a fundamentally different type of offense in academia than in literary, trade and media publishing.

Defining plagiarism

Although plagiarism is considered a breach of ethics wherever it occurs, it is by far the worst of all academic sins. It's why we watch for it so vigilantly in students' work and take it so seriously when we spot it. The very fact that we have to spend so much time training students in what plagiarism is reveals that we are inculcating them into a very particular conception that is not remotely self-evident – as *Who Owns This Text?* (Haviland and Mullin 2009) illustrates at length. This is because in an academic context, it's not royalties at risk, but something far more significant: reputations. To quote Biagioli (2012: 458), "Prosecuting a scientific plagiarist for copyright infringement would be like going after Al Capone for tax evasion". According to Biagioli, this is why textual similarity alone is considered a more minor infringement than taking someone's ideas and arguments and passing them off as one's own.

In academic contexts, our ideas are fundamentally linked to textual sources: we warrant the former through the latter. These ideas are not primarily a result of the Muse, but of time and effort – labour, in so many words. We conduct empirical research, read widely in an area, come to grips with a range of sources, and then make a series of claims on the basis of what we have read and observed – much like pieces of a puzzle we have put together that could be arranged in multiple ways.

The success of the resultant "puzzle" is based on how well we've been able to convince our peers that the shape is pleasing and the pieces fit. Thus, our claims and our sources are inextricably entangled – arguably, over-entangled, given our intense fear of plagiarism and the excessive citation it tends to produce. (For example, so great is the fear of plagiarism that many academics, when suggesting that plagiarism is "good to think with", would have cited Levi-Strauss, because the expression comes from him.) To use a different metaphor: we stake claims on the basis of sources, so we expect other academics to acknowledge our prior title deed.

I first had cause to think about this topic a few months ago, when Gillian Tett published an article in the *Financial Times* titled Brits keep washing machines in the kitchen. Americans don't. Who's right? The article bears a strong resemblance to one I published in June in *Sapiens* titled Do washing machines belong in kitchens? Many Brits say 'yes', which is a condensed extract from my book *Silent but Deadly: The Underlying Cultural Patterns of Everyday Behaviour*. Although she quotes me at length in the middle section, Tett does not mention my *Sapiens* article or book, or the extent of the inspiration they arguably provided in terms of her sources and claims.

But Tett is not an academic. Nor, in point of fact, is my article, or the book it is excerpted from, aimed at an academic audience. Indeed, I found the experience of writing a non-academic book disconcerting precisely because you *don't* warrant claims in the same way – i.e., via constant citations. Popular non-fiction relies far more on the expertise and credibility of the author to warrant its content, and the author, in turn, doesn't have the rhetorical security blanket that citations provide. In this context, name checks, bibliographies and hyperlinks more than suffice, and these are attended to with radically varying degrees of attentiveness from writer to writer – from impressively detailed to extremely perfunctory.

In fact, what academics see as plagiarism – i.e., what Biagioli (2012): terms "a displacement and recirculation of the plagiarised work in new different communities" – can be conceptualised as a form of "remediation" (Bolter and Grusin 2000) instead. Of course, that remediation generally serves to bolster the authority of the remediator rather than the originator, but it also gets ideas out into the public domain that would otherwise sit "uselessly" inside the academy. In effect, the process of remediation transforms intellectual knowledge into commodified information, and this transmutation entails *a fundamentally different model of the author*.

AI and the death of the author?

While a transformation of authorship is implicit in the shift from academic to

public writing, there is still a designated author. Interestingly, this has remained the case even in the digital age, despite the theorising of media and literary scholars like Jay David Bolter (2001) and George Landow (1991) that hypertext would erase the figure of the author entirely by transforming an apparently stable, coherent text into a network of rhizomatic associations with no originary source. As Kathleen Fitzpatrick (2011) discusses, this is primarily because few humans have the time or the inclination to follow these associations, especially given the infinite potential of hyperlinks – of links within links within links connecting in an endless chain that leads the reader down an eternal rabbit hole.

Thus, to date, hyperlinks have not hastened the death of the author in the way that such theorists initially envisioned. It turns out that the very existence of such links, and the knowledge that we might follow them if we want to, means we mostly don't feel the need to. In fact, if anything, the opposite has largely occurred: the sheer abundance of information available in the digital age means that many of us seek authoritative and trustworthy voices (i.e., "experts") to mediate – or, at least, remediate it.

But that, of course, was before 2023. While humans don't have the capacity to search a potentially infinite multiplicity of hyperlinks, AI language processing software does. And AI treats all those links as grist for its processing mill. Simply put, for ChatGPT there are no authors, only content. (So perhaps Jay David Bolter and George Landow were right after all – at least, taking the long view.) ChatGPT will happily produce a "hypothetical exploration" that is framed as an original *analysis* rather than a *synthesis* of existing information and that contains no sources, even if it is only drawing on one or two.

For example, if you ask ChatGPT how cultural differences might manifest in kitchen design and appliance placement, you'll get a response that largely replicates the points of my piece and Tett's, without citing either. In fact, as Ryan Anderson discusses in *Anthro{dendum}*, ChatGPT disclaims any responsibility for citation, noting, "I am an AI language model and I do not have the ability to cite sources… Without access to external sources, my responses are generated based

on my pre-existing knowledge and training, which may not always be accurate or up-to-date".

Who is plagiarising whom?

According to *PC Guide*, what ChatGPT is doing by collating information off the internet is not plagiarism. In a recent discussion of plagiarism and ChatGPT featured in the magazine, the author notes, "the language model does not directly plagiarise chunks of text that could be found elsewhere. Instead, it generates its own original content". See the problem, academically speaking? The "original" content ChatGPT is generating is original in *form* only, not in actual *content*. However, as I've already discussed, this makes sense in terms of the main legal mechanism for determining plagiarism (at least in publishing): copyright, which is exclusively concerned with the economic interest of the author. But taken to its logical endpoint, as ChatGPT has done, means that anything and everything is original content, as long as it's synthesised and paraphrased rather than quoted directly. ChatGPT is basically the ultimate remediator!

This is an aspect of ChatGPT that has received surprisingly little discussion amidst the flurry of cautionary pieces about the technology, although there are exceptions – such as Lincoln Michel's recent article in *Counter Craft*: "The endgame for A.I. is clear: rip off everyone". While writers are worried about being replaced by ChatGPT, lecturers are worried about their students submitting essays generated by the technology, and academics are worried about unscrupulous scholars cutting corners by using the technology, the primary underlying concern is that people will be tempted to 'plagiarise' from ChatGPT. That ChatGPT is effectively plagiarising the whole of the internet is largely absent from view. Moreover, invoking plagiarism in this way is treating ChatGPT as the ultimate author of the texts it produces, even though it explicitly states that it does not meet the criteria for such.

In sum, much deeper conversations are currently needed about what we mean by the concept of the "author" and whether accompanying concepts like plagiarism

relate to intellectual influences, economic interests, or both. It seems to me that the traditional academic conception of the author, which has been increasingly discredited in an age of commodified knowledge and the concomitant rise of the public intellectual, offers us a way of understanding plagiarism that is particularly helpful in the age of AI. Because once we start prosecuting students for plagiarising ChatGPT, then we have essentially ceded the concept of authorship to the non-human synthesisers of the store of human intellectual thought, rather than the human originators of these ideas. And I'm pretty sure that for all those theorists predicting the demise of the author, this isn't *quite* what they had in mind.

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From Despair to Where? Anthropology, critique, political

practice and the case for radical optimism

Ian M. Cook
December, 2023

Allegra Lab · From Despair To Where? Anthropology, critique, political practice and the case for radical optimism

TRANSCRIPT OF THE AUDIO ESSAY (listen if you can, don’t read, this is for reference)

Ian M. Cook: Yesterday I took a break from my morning doom scrolling through anger, pain, fear, and aggression to check my H-Index.

I checked the number of times my publications had been cited by other authors. I didn’t do this to cheer myself up.

It’s almost as depressing as doom scrolling. I checked my H-index because I needed to create a metricised, accountable, legible version of myself for a grant application.

I had to demonstrate I have impact. It’s sometimes hard to say that we, as anthropologists, create impact. That we impact the world. If you told your mum that, ‘I became an anthropologist because I wanted to change the world’ she might legitimately ask, ‘and how do you do that?’ If you told your colleagues at a conference, ‘I became an anthropologist because I wanted to change the world’ they might snigger in your general direction.

Anthropology is great at critique, at deconstructing, but its ability reconstruct, to meaningfully contribute to political practice, is often less clear. It wasn’t always the case. Anthropologists used to quite happily join colonial projects: measuring their political worth by the amount of heads they measured.I think that this legacy has made us, rightly, a little more careful.

There’s also less need, than when compared to our cousins in sociology, to frame our research in terms of societal problems that need to be addressed. There’s plenty of anthropologists whose research agenda is driven by their curiosity (and there’s nothing inherently wrong with that by the way). Anthropology’s failure to regularly intervene in the world is also, I suspect, because contemporary academia has made many scholars deeply cynical about both the production of knowledge and the motivations of those doing the producing.

It’s not only the aforementioned metricised knowledge production that creates cynicism.It’s also because plenty of the radical scholarship we read is produced by horrible, self-serving individuals who float around academia with the singular mission of recruiting courtiers for the kingdom of their egos. But in spite of all of this, I’m deeply optimistic about anthropology and scholarship in general. And this is what this audio essay is all about I’ve called it ‘From Despair to Where?[i] Anthropology, critique, political practice and the case for radical optimism’

So I apologise for the despairing opening, but I think you probably needed it, because if I’d dived in feet first with the optimism you might have called me naive and stopped listening.

My optimism stems from speaking with a group of Europe-based anthropologists who have been working at international or state organisations, within social movements and on distinctly political projects. I spoke with them about the role of critique and anthropology’s possibility to move from critique to political practice.I’ll return to the question of radical optimism at the end. But it’s worth mentioning now that whilst optimism shares many similarities with hope, it is different from it.

If hope refers to wanting or expecting something good to happen in the future – or at least good for those who hope for it – then optimism is a broader disposition: an orientation imbued with hope, a quality of being that believes something good will happen. The optimism I detect is radical, I suggest, because it goes to the roots of anthropology, it suggests structural change in our practices, ones that orientate the discipline so that it pursues social change.What made me make this essay? Apart from a deep desire to escape despair, it was two anthropologists who made me do it, after I went to meet them on the top of a mountain not far from Geneva.

Chapter One: Critiquing Quote Unquote Good People

Agathe Mora: My name is Agathe Mora. I’m an anthropologist of international law and human rights. And I’m an editor at Allegra lab, also, the co-convener of the

network LAWNET at the European Association of Social Anthropologists, and a lecturer at the University of Sussex where I teach anthropology and international development.

Julie Billaud: So I'm Julie Billaud. I'm a political and legal anthropologist, part of the Allegra lab editorial collective. I'm also one of the conveners of LAWNET, at the European Association of Social Anthropologists, network for law, international governance, rights and politics and many stuff! And I'm also an associate professor of anthropology at the Geneva Graduate Institute.

Ian: Agathe and Julie were thinking a lot about anthropology and whether it can move from critique to political practice because of a workplace experience Julie: And we got sacked basically.

Ian: Yes, because they got sacked. But a bit more context. The weren't sacked from their day jobs as lecturers and professors, but rather by The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights where they were both hired.

Agathe: we were hired as anthropologists to look at diversity issues and the kind of culture, the organisational culture, as they call it, whatever that is. And, and it was, it was really great, because we got access, we got access to all kinds of interesting documents and to people. But we very quickly realised that there were so many hidden skeletons. And people really, really needed a space to kind of open up and talk to us in confidentiality. And so we started listening, and just take notes. And then we wrote a report based on these really kind of difficult interviews that we did. And I think it was, it was not what the management was hoping to find.

Julie: And there's a kind of paradox here. Because on the one hand, these organisations, they want to be seen, as, you know, transparent, they want to be seen as upholding by the principle of accountability that has become, you know, this kind of buzzword, in institutions everywhere. And yet, they want to be able to control the narrative.Ian: A desire to control the narrative is understandable to

some degree, given the rise of unresearched ‘hot takes’ that cherry pick lines from reports.

Jane Cowan: you know, paradoxically, this idea of accountability, which, you know, is a good thing. We all want accountability. But you know, how has that pursuit of accountability manifested in practice in lots of different areas? And you know, it has had these perverse effects.

Ian: That was Jane Cowan, Emeritus Professor of Anthropology at the University of Sussex. As she went on to point out over a cup of tea in her kitchen in Brighton, England, there has been increasing demands for accountability in lots of areas, including relating to human rights, justice and higher education. But, now we are witnessing a conjuncture between a rise in demand for accountability, audit cultures and datafication.

Jane: The forms in which, you know, things are measured and counted, become very standardised and, and precisely lose all that doubt, that ambiguity. And is being organised by, you know, by those who decide how to organise it beyond us.

Ian: And if we can’t imagine why that might be a problem for others, like for those who work in human rights organisations or for activists involved in social justice movements, then we can maybe imagine why it might be a problem for ourselves.When our work is made accountable as part of the standardised measures that have been a central pillar in the neoliberalisation of higher education it loses, I think, its value.

Jane: It’s not only the institutions that we study that are being attacked by let’s say neoliberalism, to say things very quickly. It’s also our own academic institutions, where critique is not necessarily what is the most value out put of research, where the dominant paradigm is the one of positivism once more… right? Where we need to be able to quantify our output.

Ian: It’s the cynic who knows the worth of research and not its value. I can understand critiquing social moments or organisations that some have claimed

are the ‘last utopias’ (Moyn 2012) in a world that feels like it’s going to hell in a reusable supermarket bag might seem counter productive or self-defeating. But ethnographic critique of the so called ‘good people’ has immense value. We need to critique humanitarian actions that frame human life in basic terms: that create a world in which a home is just a shelter, meals are only food, and living is simply surviving.

Julie: And so I think we have every right you know, as citizens of this world to discuss whether this is the forms of life that makes sense on this planet, especially nowadays with you know, increasing displacements of populations. Their encampment on Greek islands, I mean, do we want that? I mean, can’t we see something similar to? I mean, a mild version of a concentration camp? I mean, I think we have the right to ask these questions…

Agathe:… and the duty. Yeah, this is what we do. As anthropologists, this is, I think this is our political project. This project of, you know, the deconstructive, iterative critique of everyday life under certain regimes.

Julie: But at the same time, I also think that we, as much as we should critique and discuss and open this conversation and denaturalize, you know, things that are seen as good, inherently good, and show the other side of the coin, I think we need also to be able to reconstruct and make suggestions for improvement, we need to be creative about the way we intervene in the world.

Chapter Two: Finding Anthropologists who are Creative about the way they intervene in the world.

Noah Walker-Crawford: In the past eight years, I’ve been involved in a lawsuit brought by a Peruvian farmer against a German energy company. And this case is all about holding major polluters responsible for climate change.Ian: That was Noah Walker-Crawford, legal anthropologist, climate justice advocate, and researcher at University College London. I met him in a busy, noisy pub in

England, for an overpriced pint.

Noah: So the plaintiff in this case lives in the Peruvian Andes, where people are affected by glacial retreat, which in the long term causes water scarcity. But in the short term, the problem is that there's too much water and there's actually a risk of flooding caused by climate change. And in this case, the plaintiff is trying to get the company to contribute financially to measures to reduce the risk of flooding in Peru, and the company he is suing is called RWE, which is an energy company. Their main business is coal fired power. They've been around for over 100 years, and in that time, they've made a substantial contribution to climate change.

Ian: A Peruvian farmer can take a German energy company to court because, when we think about the climate, we're all neighbours.

Noah: This lawsuit uses neighbourhood law. The basic argument is to say that in times of climate change, we're all neighbours. And if we're neighbours, that means we have certain rights and responsibilities. And so the Peruvian farmer in this case is saying that the company, arguably should be a good neighbour, and they should take responsibility for the contribution they've made to climate change, and help him deal with the problems that it's causing in the Peruvian Andes.

Ian: A critique of Noah's research and the wider case in which he's involved might be that he has lost control: he's not setting the research agenda, it's being created by climate activists and Peruvian farmers.

A response to this might be 'good', why not have those who are directly affected by something set the agenda, especially those who suffer thanks to vast global inequalities structured by processes dating back to the onset of European colonialism. I think this is something Matthew C. Canfield, anthropologist of transnational agrarian movements and the right to food, might say. He took time off from being an Assistant Professor at Leiden Law School in the Netherlands to share a locally and democratically controlled waffle with me.

Matthew C. Canfield: I think the calls for decoloniality that we're seeing across the social sciences are really asking us to change the way that we think about our interlocutors. And one of the things that Rita Segato (2022) talks about is a move towards responsive anthropology where actually, we are accountable to the communities that have been the objects of anthropological study.

Ian: I think this is an amazing suggestion: to practice an anthropology that is responsible to, and answerable to, those who for centuries have served as anthropologists' objects of study – to respond to the historical projects of such groups.

Matt: We're going towards a more participatory method of ethnographic research where actually anthropologists have their questions framed by those communities. Oftentimes, we construct the questions based on our own theoretical ideas, and then go and do ethnography. But when we start actually from the needs of communities, and the kinds of questions that they have, that is being more accountable to them and providing them with the resources and answers to questions that they can use themselves for, for their struggles in liberation and bettering their lives.

Ian: One such example of this is Noah's work, another comes from Lieselotte Viaene, legal anthropologist, and Professor at the Department of Social Sciences of the University Carlos III de Madrid. I sat down next to a stream on a windy day with her and she told me all about her collaborations within her research project on rivers.

Lieselotte Viaene: We have been collaborating with Belkis Izquierdo, an indigenous Arhuaco lawyer judge in the special jurisdiction system of Colombia. And in 2019, as part of the whole peace process, and in that special jurisdiction, she recognised the concept of indigenous territory as a victim of an armed conflict, which sparked a huge debate not only in Colombia, but beyond. Because normally in human rights, it's the humans who are victims of human rights violations, not something which is called a territory, which from an indigenous

perspective it is. For example, she explains that she learned from the indigenous authorities that during the war many dead bodies were dropped in many rivers. And rivers received those dead bodies and also suffered because it is a living being. So how do you repair a river who also suffered from the violence created by humans? And that's extremely complex when it comes to a legal system which does not recognise that rivers, water sources, mountains, sacred spaces… that simply does not exist in our legal thinking and beyond our legal thinking, because a river is a river, a mountain is a mountain, it's a natural resource. It's something that has an economic value that gives us it is a resource so we humans can live. But that's it. There's nothing more. It does not have an intrinsic, more deeper value of dignity, of something that should be protected. And having those conversations with her… for example, we are organised in the framework of the International indigenous peoples day, which is the ninth of August a speech circle, bringing together her and then different indigenous lawyers from different parts of Latin America to start discussing about nature, territory as a victim, and also thinking about reparation.

Chapter Three: Where's the Line between Activism & Activist Anthropology?

Ian: I have a small confession. I've always been a bit wary of anthropologists who study activists. The first time I ever met real live anthropologists was when two anthropology students joined a group of us anarcho-leaning lefties who were traveling up from Liverpool to Scotland to protest against the G8 in 2005. They attended our meetings, made friends with us, interviewed us, but, I felt, they never really explained what they were doing. And then afterwards they disappeared to write their dissertations or whatever. I bumped into one of them in town once and they were a little embarrassed to see me.A little later, I was at another G8, this one in Germany in 2007. We'd formed into affinity groups to block a road and it turned out 2 of the 8 of us were doing their PhDs on 'activism'. And it sort of annoyed me. I think it annoyed me because I didn't believe they really believed in the cause. The stakes were also much lower for them if they got

arrested. The dual purpose diluted their purpose for the young overly zealous lefty I was.

I feel a little bit better about them now, because I've come to realise that there is no strict line between activists and anthropologists or academics, nor should there have to be. In fact, especially if you're a scholar who is writing about people who are trying to change the world for the better, you might benefit from being in the thick of something political.And, it turns out, if you're out there being political with the activists, you might meet people who have read scholarship who are not scholars.

I was reminded of this when I met Rafael Carrano Lelis, a PhD student in International law and Anthropology, outside the library at the university of Geneva Institute.

Rafael Carrano Lelis: I don't see this distinction. So watershed between academia and social movement. And it's actually the case that very often those authors that are informing my work, because it's a very specific type of work, right? It's informed by decolonial, feminist and queer theory. And these circulate a lot between the activists.

Ian: He researches how the queer transnational movement mobilises human rights to their benefit. And in his fieldwork he sees the activist/academic boundary collapsing to some degree. But, as he goes on to explain, just because scholarship is used by activists, it does not mean that the way we approach scholarship is the same.

Rafael: They don't want to debate ideas, because they want to use a certain theoretical framework, for instance, to align to their own purpose.

Noah Walker-Crawford also sees similar understandable instrumental logics at play within activist narratives about the topics they care about, but also highlights how anthropology can play a crucial role in furthering activism's critical edge.

Noah: Anthropology and activism can be seen as two different endeavours, separate endeavours in the sense that activism is all about simple answers of saying, 'this is bad. And that's why we need to do something about it', you know, activist narratives, you know, activist storytelling is about good and bad, you know, black and white. While anthropology is focusing on complexity, it tells us how everything is much more complicated than everyone thinks. But at the same time, I think there can be a productive interplay between anthropology and activism. So, you know, activism can involve simplistic answers to, you know, the problems of the world, and anthropology asks critical questions. It asks questions that might be uncomfortable for activist narratives that might question, you know, these simplistic arguments that activists are sometimes making, but the world is full of contradictions. And I think anthropology can help us deal with these contradictions. And my hope is that doing that asking critical questions will ultimately make activism stronger.

Ian: Grassroots community groups, radical activist circles and the like, might welcome the insights of anthropologists who research them. I say might because there's plenty of skepticism towards middle class academics researching within working class political movements. But what about the larger organisations that seek to make an impact in the world? Do these organisations see the benefits to having anthropologists in their midst?

Chapter Four: What anthropologists bring to the party

Samuel Shapiro: I'm Samuel Shapiro from Université Laval in Canada. I work in political anthropology, I research institutions, of the state, forms of governance and related matters.Samuel is conducting an ethnography of everyday life at the National Assembly of Quebec. I met him in an alcove on the 8th floor of the Quebec parliament building.Samuel: What I found what they said to me in a word was that I was asking questions that they weren't asking, I was thinking about things as an academic, but they couldn't as practitioners because they were doing their jobs and their jobs were to, you know, do the verbatim debates or to prepare the minutes or to, you know, speak on some issue as an elected official in a

debate. It was very complementary things, but I was thinking about issues they weren't thinking about, I was asking questions they weren't asking, and they were doing things that I wasn't doing. So I felt that it was less than an issue of agreeing or disagreeing. It was more a question of 'Oh, that's interesting. That's an interesting question. And and I never thought about that I never had the time to'

Ian: Samuel was generally welcomed and appreciated at the parliament, however, especially when anthropologists start publishing their research, their presence, and their insights, aren't always as welcome.

Pedro Silva Rocha Lima: My name is Pedro Silva Rocha Lima and I'm a lecturer in Disaster Management at the University of Manchester.

Ian: Pedro, who I met in an even noisier pub than Noah, started his research because he was puzzled as to why the International Committee of the Red Cross was working in Brazil, when there wasn't a war. He became interested in how humanitarian organisations translated the work they do in war zones into places facing chronic violence, like Rio de Janeiro. He went to the International Committee of the Red Cross knowing that his presence there as a researcher would be sensitive, and he was very careful.He knew the limits of what he was allowed to observe, and took fieldnotes in front of people so they were aware of what he was doing. When he was ready to submit a research article to a journal, he first sent it to his interlocutors. Things were initially fine. Indeed, his interlocutors read his work so carefully that one of them questioned Pedro's theoretical framing and suggested tweaks to the literature. But then headquarters got involved.

Pedro: then it went to headquarters and headquarters had their own say on what they thought about the paper. Things turned a little sour, to say the least. And there the organisation pushed back on many aspects of the work. In terms of what it could reveal what kind of information that it could include. And basically, I went through an entire very burdensome process and very, very tiring process of trying to negotiate what I could write down and what I could not. And, you know what

was guiding me through the entire process, I guess, was just what is essential for the ethnography? What is essential to make the theory that I want to make and to make the arguments that I want to make? And can I make those points, while also making the modifications that they're asked me to make?

Ian: After hearing such accounts, and remembering Julie and Agathe's tale of sacking that started us on this journey, we might despair at our chances to research the big and powerful organisations doing good in the world. But as a radical optimist, I can always detect hope.

Pedro: I think you're never going to be able to fully produce this fine grained detailed ethnographic accounts of the inner workings of powerful organisations when you need their authorisation to get access. But there might be ways we might find of recruiting allies within these organisations that are familiar with, or that are sympathetic to ethnographic accounts, to anthropological accounts. And I think finding these alliances and building these alliances can really help you find ways of chipping in and peering through a small, small gap: a small little hole in the black box of these big powerful institutions.

Ian: Sometimes, especially when talking about the actions or policies of large organisations, it can be hard to remember that they are peopled places and that these people contain multitudes, that such people exceed their role within any given institution. Here's Pedro again…

Pedro: So I think the main takeaway point from this moment, as I'm thinking about it, is the importance of the relationships that we develop during fieldwork and how those relationships that we develop with long term ethnographic fieldwork, can still matter when doing work in a big organisation, in a big powerful organisation.

Conclusion: Towards Radical Optimism

In 2021, the anthropology publishing platform Allegra Lab, where Julie, Agathe and I are all editors, published an editorial in which we proclaimed ourselves to be radically optimistic.

We said, and here I quote, “We know that to move forward, we have to be aware of the structures and inequalities that hold us back, all the stuff that frames our interactions and curtails our dreams. It’s not a naive optimism we’re embracing, but one in which we expect things will have to get messy. We dare to be optimistic to take a stance against individuated competition, and for academia as a collective endeavour, opening up spaces for creativity, intellectual curiosity, and the imagining of alternative futures.” (Allegra Collective 2021).

Optimism – as an orientation imbued with hope – can be both an individual disposition, or something collective. Collective optimism emerges under certain structural conditions, but only for some. Others feel profoundly unoptimistic One of the conditions holding back the development of optimism is a feeling of being stuck in a rut. Which is to say, optimism needs the possibility to imagine forward momentum in life or a projects you’re involved with (Hage 2009). I think the project of anthropology is something to be optimistic about, at least I think so having spoken to all of the anthropologists you heard above.

But aside from that analysis, I’m also making a case for a radically optimistic anthropology – a political move others have also made, arguing for an anthropology I’d like to see more of in the future.We need to be careful, of course, about overstating what anthropology and anthropologists can do. Especially when working with quote unquote real people who do quote unquote real stuff in the quote unquote real world and we’re mostly writing journal articles that are occasionally read and cited (and sometimes cited without being read).

If I’d found a group of anthropologists who researched less explicitly political themes and who, like most researchers, were by and large interested in thinking about their own practices in a more narrowly defined scholarly sense, then I

would, I imagine, have found different forms of optimism in regards to anthropology's place in the world (if I found any at all).

In this sense, the optimism I'm talking about resonates with a strand of anthropological literature identified by Kleist & Jansen (2016) that not only finds hopeful political alternatives amongst those with whom they research (in the case of this essay, anthropologists), but also want to push anthropology into becoming something more politically relevant. This involves, for many, going beyond critique, because critique is, or has become, part and parcel of the contours contemporary thought and thus fails to radically challenge it. Critique is its own niche within the wider intellectual world: one that can be compartmentalised and ignored.

Moreover, if the critique stops at critique: if it is only deconstruction and not reconstruction, it leads to despair, and despair is not a great basis for political change. In this essay we have met anthropologists who have gone beyond critique for critique's sake. Anthropologists who have creatively intervened in the world in ways that blur the scholar/activist categories and centre anthropology's tentative, non-absolutist mode of knowledge creation. I would suggest that the attempts at political practice by anthropologists, combined with the work of those who critique the international organisations and social movements that actively seek to intervene in the world, so that their their interventions might be more effective in achieving social justice, can help create and structure the conditions for critical radical optimism to emerge. And that gives me plenty of reasons not to despair.

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Featuring (in order of a-hear-ance)

Agathe Mora

Julie Billaud

Jane Cowan

Noah Walker-Crawford

Matthew C. Canfield

Lieselotte Viaene

Rafael Carrano Lelis

Samuel Shapiro

Pedro Silva Rocha Lima

Thanks

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‘From Critique to Political Practice’. Thanks to Julie and Agathe for the invitation and for everyone who gave their time to be interviewed.

(i) I stole the title from the Manic Street Preachers. Reading the lyrics it could almost be about being an academic: I write this alone on my bed / I’ve poisoned every room in my house / The place is quiet and so alone / Pretend there’s something worth waiting for / There’s nothing nice in my head / The adult world took it all away / I wake up with the same spit in my mouth / I cannot tell if it’s real or not / I try to walk in a straight line / An imitation of dignity / From despair to where

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The cats of Gaza or why Nakba is a multispecies catastrophe

Neha Vora
December, 2023

Like many of my friends and colleagues, I have been relying on the social media accounts of Gazan journalists, photographers, and others (some so young they could be my students) who are risking their lives every day to show the world what genocide looks like in real time. Over the past several weeks, I have seen a growing trend in the videos and photos from Gaza, and that is images of cats. Individuals and organizations are posting and re-posting photos and videos of cats in trauma after experiencing bombing and the loss of family members and cats starving in empty lots because they have managed to escape the horrors of urban destruction, images like the one below, which is from Israel's bombing of Gaza in May of this year.

The cat posts also focus on humans rescuing cats from the rubble of the bombings, and, most recently, Gazans fleeing the North with their children, pets, and meager belongings in what many are calling a second Nakba.

Amidst the horrific scenes of displacement, we also see videos of children playing with cats, and explaining how their cats are also affected by the bombings—these videos and their smiles provide fleeting moments of hope and happiness amidst a sea of death and destruction.

Despite a water and food shortage, Gazans are going out of their way to feed and rescue nonhuman kin—cats, dogs, donkeys, horses, and even birds.

Doctors are treating injured animals alongside injured humans even as their supplies are dwindling and they are being bombed, like the cat below who was provided a cast at a human hospital.

Gazans are also mourning animals and caring for their corpses even as they lose their homes and family members. One of the saddest videos I saw last week was of a young girl, devastated and crying inconsolably, holding the dead body of her beloved parakeet, who did not survive the bombing of their home. Motaz Azaiza, a 24-year-old photographer who has been chronicling life on the ground while fighting back tears for all he is witnessing, recently lost his cat due to the inability to find adequate veterinary care. His post about her death—reposted by thousands—was a video of him smiling and petting her in his Kevlar “press” vest as she sat on his shoulder, with the caption “I really am loosing [sic] a lot every day.”

As of the writing of this piece, over 15,000 human lives and countless nonhuman ones have been extinguished by the Israeli attack on Gaza. Many of the living are children left on their own after losing their parents and family members—their cats are their remaining kin, and a source of comfort within the unfathomable experience of loss. This image of a young boy covered in dust arriving by himself at a hospital with his rescued kitten has been shared many times across many social media accounts, as it both chronicles the devastating impacts of this genocide on children and showcases the enormous love that Palestinian children have for their pets. It also shows how humans and nonhumans rely on each other for comfort and care amidst the destruction of their world.


6:13
All Posts
hot_vet
hot_vet · Or...
Following
I talk to him and console him
and he understands me

It would not be surprising to anyone who knows me that I repost these hopeful and tragic accounts of the cats and other animals of Gaza. I am a self-proclaimed "crazy cat lady:" I carry cat treats around in my purse to feed the strays I encounter in Sharjah and Dubai (I have recently relocated to the United Arab Emirates), and I teach my introductory anthropology class through cats. At first the latter was a schtick to get students more engaged in a core class that many were taking to fulfill some requirement. My students in the United States usually found my cat memes and examples cute or eccentric at best, but for my students in the UAE—mostly Muslim Arabs and South Asians who grew up here—it makes perfect sense to discuss cats as central to stories of human world-making. Cats have a special position in Islam, and street cats are also ubiquitous in many Gulf neighborhoods, with residents regularly caring for and adopting them. As my research interests have moved toward animal studies and human-nonhuman kinship, I am realizing that my "anthro through cats" gimmick is in fact reflective of both my political commitments and my suspicion of anthropology's problematic embrace of humanism as a supposed corrective to the violences of slavery, settler colonialism, genocide, and environmental racism, as well as to colonial ways of knowing.

Everyday I encounter more photos and videos of Paletinians with cats and other animals being posted and reshared and on Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and other venues. I am clearly not the only one who finds these to be important moments to chronicle and share. While much of the text attached to these photos tries to elicit sympathy for animals as the innocents who are caught within a human war, others are intended to humanize Palestinians—who are constantly referred to as animals by Zionists—by showcasing their care for others, including

animals. What these images show me is that Palestine and being Palestinian is more than human—it includes the entire cosmology of place—the olive trees, the waterways, the donkeys, the companion animals, who have cultivated a way of life over centuries that the Zionist occupiers are purposefully trying to negate through walls that cut humans off from their land and cut nonhuman animals off from their migration routes and food sources; through pollution of water and contamination of land with sewage and chemical waste; through bulldozing olive groves; through the introduction of nonlocal species that strain existing ecosystems; and through the current deliberate displacement and murder of all life in Gaza in order to serve the interests of extractive capitalism—are we at all surprised that in the midst of this "war" Israel has been selling contracts to explore natural gas reserves estimated to be worth billions of dollars off the coast of Gaza to several corporations?

Many people invested in the end to this occupation and genocide have been saying that humanity is failing, and calling on global leaders to express better collective humanity through demanding ceasefire. However, we forget that the concept of humanity itself is one that was forged in the belly of the twinned beast of colonialism and capitalism, used to justify the enslavement and mass murder of those who were deemed less than human, and to position the world as a source of neverending surplus value. Settler colonialism and apartheid are not just about control and dehumanization, they are about the destruction of longstanding intimacies and kinship between land, flora, and fauna. Of course this is not a new argument—indigenous communities the world over have documented how terraforming, deforestation, and the severing of traditional relationships between humans and nonhumans are fundamental components of genocide, and in fact foundational to what many now call the Anthropocene (although not all of us have been included in the "anthro" of this term until rather recently). Humanity *has* failed, because humanity is what got us here in the first place, to a way of thinking about land as property, nature as controllable, and persons as limited to ever-shifting definitions of who counts as human enough.

What the cats of Gaza teach us is that Palestine's trauma is a multispecies trauma. They do not teach us that Palestinians are human, too, for that is an iteration that continues to define the human against something that it is not, something that will always be excluded and abject and therefore excisable. Palestinians and their cats I think are so compelling to many of us because they challenge liberal understandings of humanity and expose them to be colonial ways of defining the world, personhood, and imaginings of freedom. "Humanity" will never lead us to a universal justice and peace. The ongoing Nakba since 1948 is a structure of violence that attacks all life—and therefore Palestinian multispecies world-making is central to resisting this occupation. In our support for Palestinian life, then, perhaps we should stop appealing to humanity and to proving who is human enough to live—what would our forms of resistance and

fights against occupation look like if we abandoned the idea of shared humanity and centered radical multispecies kinship instead?

Please follow and share the accounts of Gazan reporters and Palestinian animal rescue organizations. Here are but a few:

@byplestia
@motaz_azaiza
@mariam_abu_dagga
@m_abu_samra
@mohammed.h.masri
@sulalaanimalrescue (Gaza-based)
@hot_vet (Nablus-based)
@yespets_rescue (Hebron-based)

Heresies and provocations. For a politics of urban justice

Marco Di Nunzio
December, 2023

In search of urban heresies

Wherever I glanced around Solomon's office, I saw, plastered on the walls and spread over the desk, maps, reports, designs of buildings that had been, or soon would be, completed. Solomon Kebedde is a well-known academic and respected architect, and a leading voice in the debate on the need to rethink urban planning and architecture practice as a way of harnessing the social, cultural and historical fabric of Ethiopian cities.

Over the fifteen years I have known him, Solomon would always brilliantly point out the tensions in the way Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia, was developing: the threat to the inner city to make room for high-rise construction, the fascination of business elites with glass-and-steel architecture, and the ways the rising costs of land, homes, and property are making the city less accessible to the many.

Worryingly, this is a common urban story.

In Ethiopia as elsewhere, city and national governments give out land in the hope of attracting investments and replenishing the city coffers. Developers and contractors bet on incremental growth to sustain their continuous quests for the next sale. Architects and urban planners embrace the belief that building will trickle down to produce social and economic inclusion. Experts sell urban densification, large-scale infrastructure, and the formalisation of the informal economy as panaceas for sustainable urban development.

Meanwhile, urban dwellers suffer. The very right of poor communities to live in strategic locations in the city is questioned through evictions. The building of new housing, including "affordable housing", fails to provide shelter to the urban poor or when traps them in a vicious cycle of indebtedness. Building brings employment, yet contractors' profit margins are often squeezed out of low wages and precarious labour conditions.

More than ever, we need a paradigm shift in the ways we imagine the future of cities. Established recipes for boosting urban change and development, from densification to economic specialisation to boosting large-scale infrastructure, have failed to make cities more sustainable or just. If we want to make cities just, we need to turn established orders of priority and urgency around.

> *More than ever, we need a paradigm shift in the ways we imagine the future of cities.*

As Solomon saw it, it is difficult to blame any one person or group for the deepening of injustice in cities, because we are all responsible, especially those in positions of privilege.

We are all in together. Blame lies in the pressure that the government exerts to seize a moment of economic growth and deliver change. It lies in the economic interests and architectural aspirations of businesspeople. It lies in the concern of domestic and international contractors with limiting cost and delivering on schedule. It relates to the kind of construction materials available. And blame lies

in the attempts of architects to get their time's worth when the fees they receive, especially from private clients, are not commensurate to the work needed to produce a feasible and detailed plan.

The collective responsibility for the *status quo* does not mean that we are individually absolved for not taking action to challenge injustice in cities. When responsibilities are shared, individual actions can make the difference.

Certainly, it is not easy to take action when the existing condition is perpetuated and enforced as desirable, necessary, and inevitable. As philosopher Jacques Derrida put it, taking action is a heresy, a willing act of rupture with is considered inevitable.

Perhaps what our cities need is a heretic politics.

Urban heretics

In Addis Ababa, the heretics are everywhere.

> *An architecture of the tabula rasa justifies evictions and dispossessions. It disrupts the urban fabric, creating a city devoid of the sociality that makes it thrive and on which the urban poor rely to get by.*

Solomon was himself a heretic. At heart, though, he was a pragmatist. As he saw it, development will occur; it is the how that makes the difference. The problem was that planners, architects and government officials saw Addis Ababa as a tabula rasa on which they could inscribe their visions of a city of the future. This approach is destructive and disruptive, he told me over and over through the years I knew him. An architecture of the tabula rasa justifies evictions and dispossessions. It disrupts the urban fabric, creating a city devoid of the sociality that makes it thrive and on which the urban poor rely to get by. Architects had to fight back, and with urgency, he believed. What they could do was to "slow down" development to allow room for negotiation and to advocate for a shift in government priorities.

He was not alone. Emebet and Samuel also searched for alternatives.

“Everybody blames us,” Emebet said, sipping a coffee in a café near her office. “When someone asks me ‘what do you do for living?’ I just keep quiet. [I say] ‘Yeah… I just work *minamen* [whatever]’, because the minute I say I am an architect, people start shouting at you.”

Emebet embodied architecture’s commitment to quality design, and she was known well beyond Ethiopia as a critical voice on this matter. Because of her status in the profession, Emebet’s clients listened to her and respected her advice, and developed projects she could identify with. Yet, she was aware that quality design was something for rich and powerful clients, and it was not enough by itself to make an impactful change in the lives of ordinary residents. Over the years I knew her, Emebet constantly sought to expand quality design beyond its elite focus. She worked *pro bono* on projects such as schools, hospitals, and the development of green areas. “We have three, four projects like that,” she told me in 2016, the first time I met her. Her firm needed to take in a lot more projects to sustain their *pro bono* engagements, but it was worth it: “you know I have a good life, I can do that. This is my way of giving back to society.”

> *Architecture has betrayed and ignored both nature and society. Architecture has lost meaning to me.*

Samuel went further. I first met him at a conference in 2016 where he spoke to an audience of students, architects, government officials and invited speakers from the United States and Europe. He told them, “architecture has betrayed and ignored both nature and society. Architecture has lost meaning to me.”

For him, responsibility was fundamentally about answering the question of what urban development is for and for whom. If we accept that the priority of development is roads, we limit the beneficiaries of design to those who can afford a car. If those who get to enjoy a well-designed building are those who live in it or can afford to shop in it, exclusion is not addressed.

It was not just architects who talked heresies. Construction workers also did.

Mr Girma was the chairman of the federation of construction workers' unions. His was not an easy job, he told me again and again. Unions could not do much to challenge working conditions on a wider political and policy level. For years they had tried to push for a national construction workers' agreement, but regulating work conditions did not seem to be on the government agenda. What unions could do, he often said, was to promote agreements within companies and hope management would follow through, or assist workers when they were fired for making demands. Mr Girma filed court cases when companies fired workers without following the rules. He stepped in to ensure that labour laws were respected.

When I met him in 2016, Mr Girma claimed a 75 percent success rate in court, but this concealed a fundamental predicament. Firstly, labour cases could take two or three years to be resolved, by which time workers might have already moved on to work in similar conditions elsewhere. For this reason, workers were often unwilling to start a lengthy litigation process. The only advantage was the hope of cashing in, if successful, on whatever compensation the company agreed to pay. Secondly, the union's emphasis on judicial and legal work reflected how workers' demands could do little to challenge workings conditions and question government and corporate practices.

In fact, while labour unions might win in court and companies might pay compensation, the latter's *modi operandi* continued unchallenged. After all, tens of thousands of birr in compensation to a handful of workers when laws were breached was nothing compared to the multi-billion-birr budgets of top-tier companies.

Yet, construction workers keep fighting, struggling, demanding.

Jemal, a 65-year-old carpenter, had worked in construction for at least four decades. When I first met him in 2017, he was leading a wildcat strike on a road construction site. He told me, "working is necessary, but also asking [for better

conditions] is necessary. If you work, you should ask!" "Our rights should be respected!" he concluded.

Permanent provocations

While I was doing research in Addis Ababa, a major political change happened: the collapse of a regime that had ruled the country uncontested for 28 years. Between 1991 and 2019, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), a coalition of ethnic and regional parties led by the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), governed the country, combining a commitment to development with a pervasive apparatus of political control and repression.

Under the impact of EPRDF's policies, Ethiopia's economy grew, becoming a paradigmatic African success story.

While the economy grew, discontent spread.

After Arat Kilo, part of the old city centre, was bulldozed in 2012, graffiti appeared on surviving buildings. One read: *since they were jealous of us, they tore down what was ours.*

Two years later, in 2014, and again, more dramatically, in 2015–2016, demonstrations erupted in the city's peripheries and the neighbouring region of Oromia. Protesters feared that the planned revision of Addis Ababa's Master Plan would expand the city's administrative boundaries and lead to the dispossession of Oromo farmers. Demonstrations snowballed, and eventually resulted in the resignation of the prime minister, Hailemariam Dessalegn, in February 2018.

The appointment of Abiy Ahmed as prime minister that April held the promise of positive change. The first Oromo in history to lead the Ethiopian state, dubbed a reformer and appreciated for his eloquence, Abiy was viewed as one who could address demands for political openness.

> *The political space had closed once again.*

Within three years of his appointment, the political situation had dramatically deteriorated. In November 2019, the EPRDF was formally dissolved and replaced with Abiy's new political creation, the Ethiopian Prosperity Party (EPP). The apparatus of political mobilisation and control at the urban grassroots that the EPRDF had built largely remained largely in place, and now served the EPP. Increasing ethnic violence and political friction – first, between Abiy Ahmed and Oromo nationalists; then, a two-year military confrontation with the TPLF which had refused to merge into the EPP; and, more recently, between the national government and Amhara political forces – created a climate of volatility and uncertainty. Meanwhile, the return of repression and surveillance has returned as the default government response to popular discontent, with members of opposition parties and critical media imprisoned and street protests violently suppressed. The political space had closed once again.

Nevertheless, construction workers continue to struggle for better working conditions in spite of political repression and dismissal from work. While some building professionals, particularly critical architects, persist in their search for urban alternatives.

These struggles have not (yet) resulted in a tangible counter-politics of justice. Yet witnessing them is important. The attempts of ordinary residents to reinstate their wider right to the city and critical building professionals to reimagine urban development must be seen not exclusively for what they achieve, but for being attempted at all.

While authoritarian regimes of power, domination and oppression are recrafted and remade, heresies continue and proliferate, often under surface. They stand as permanent provocations: they are reminders that our cities could indeed be otherwise, even when the realisation of alternatives seems impossible or unconceivable.

The names of individuals who appear in the text have been changed to protect their privacy.

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Featured image by Stefan Geens courtesy of Flickr.

Gaza and the coming age of the ‘warrior’

Ghassan Hage
December, 2023

‘Is it ethical to write something ‘interesting’ about a massacre as the massacre is

unfolding?' I keep asking myself. 'Is this not a form of exploiting the dead to produce literature out of the decaying bodies?'. I start thinking of Levi-Strauss' analysis of the trickster and the carrion-eater as mediators between life and death (in The Story of Asdiwal).

'In any case' I say to myself 'whether it is ethical or not, there is still an even more, practically speaking, fundamental question. 'Is it possible to write (full stop) as the massacre is unfolding?' I certainly am finding it hard to do so.

I was asked about the same time by Julie Billaud (for Allegra) and Fadi Bardawil (for Megaphone), if I could write something about Gaza. My overwhelming feeling was one of sadness about what is happening but also of futility and uselessness. I just couldn't bring myself to write. Some of the same ideas I struggled with when I wrote 'The haunting figure of the useless academic: critical thinking in coronavirus time' (European Journal of Cultural Studies, vol. 23, no. 4) were blocking my writing horizon. 'Massacre time' was even more prone than 'Coronavirus time' in instilling in an intellectual a sense of being the last one needed around the place. Who wants to listen to intellectual pontification while burying the dead?

There was also a sense of futility that comes from intellectual encounters with the déjà vu. I listen to some of the arguments floating around in relation to Hamas' massacre of Israeli civilians. Many have been argued before in relation to suicide bombers. What is the difference between terrorism and terrorists? (I think Hamas' attack was an act of terrorism, but I don't think that makes them a terrorist organisation. Terrorism is a type of political violence. Israel also engages in terrorism. It doesn't make it a terrorist organisation either). What is the difference between understanding political violence and condoning it? I once coined a word in relation to suicide bombers: exighophobia, the fear of socio-historical explanation. Plenty of it circulating now. If logical arguments defeated illogical politics we wouldn't be where we are now. and I am not only talking about Middle East politics. I am talking about the rise and rise again of extreme right politics, racism, sexism, homophobia, etc.

I am thinking many things but not many are worthy of writing. Every now and then something that does not make one repeat the same arguments *ad nauseum* emerges and triggers new reflections. I am having a zoom conversation with my friend Abbas El Zein (he's in Australia, I am in Germany) and I am talking about this. He makes an interesting remark which I found worth thinking about: Hamas' attack has more in it that is reminiscent of the early high jacking of planes by the PLO. In the sense of the attack being a way of asserting the existence of the Palestinian people and of the Palestinian cause in the face of a reality (pacification between Arab regimes and Israel) that was unfolding as if they and their rights and their suffering did not exist. But that's as far as the similarities go. The operational sophistication, the strategic intentions and the atrociously different degree and scale of the massacre of civilians take us somewhere else. Indeed, it has taken us somewhere else. And another interesting question here given the entanglement of Hamas and Iranian politics: is anti-colonial resistance possible in an age that seems more over-determined by geopolitical machination than ever?

> *Israel's revenge raid into Gaza had all the characteristics of the colonial punitive expedition.*

I hear some right-wing British journalist telling Piers Morgan that 'the people of Gaza are not exactly peacenicks'. It is always interesting how some westerners lament the fact that the colonised are just too vulgar, violent and unsophisticated for their refined taste. As if years and years of colonial brutality ought to produce a nice liberal cosmopolitan culture. There are many Palestinians in their twenties, thirties and forties, raised in Gaza, who have grown up being continuously bombed, imprisoned and humiliated by the Israelis, losing a relative here, and a friend there, a limb here and a bit of their soul there, on a yearly and sometimes monthly basis. Is it so hard to imagine why they did not have in them a capacity to mourn the victims of Hamas' murders on the 7th of October?

There are of course those of us who, despite our opposition to the Zionist ethno-

nationalist project, from the comfort of our social and geographic location, and because of our plural attachments, had it in us to mourn the victims of Hamas' murders. Still, we found ourselves unable to share our mourning with the way they were mourned by the Israelis and their Western allies. For, as the Israeli massacre of Palestinians began to quickly overshadow Hamas' massacre in its scale and in its racist de-valorisation of those being killed, it became clear that this was no ordinary mourning of the dead. This was a supremacist mourning: the world was invited to accept that, unlike Palestinians who are murdered all the time, the murdered Israelis were special. They were superior dead people who needed to be revenged in a way that reminds everyone, but particularly the killers, of how superior they were. Anything less was "anti-Semitism."

For anyone who knows their colonial history, it was very clear that Israel's revenge raid into Gaza had all the characteristics of the colonial punitive expedition. Indeed, it followed a well-established script, which structure has been replicated in every colonised space and by every colonial power without exception: The colonisers invade, take over a territory, kick the natives out of their lands and homes and destroy their livelihood and their modes of life. Then, they slowly drive away, or round up, the colonised and make them live in unbearable conditions. When the colonised get to the point where, as Fanon put it, 'they cannot breathe', they revolt, attack and kill some of the colonisers – sometimes in truly horrific fashion. Here the colonisers declare themselves outraged as if there was no reason at all behind such barbaric murderous behaviour. They assert their 'right to defend themselves' and launch a 'punitive expedition'. The punitive expedition is always extra-judiciary, it uses the legal language of rights but it seeks revenge and aims to kill as many natives as possible in a totally illegal fashion. The colonisers use the latest killing technologies against a far less militarily capable force and engage in a wholescale genocidal massacre aimed at teaching the natives a lesson 'they will never forget'. That is how colonisers have always mourned their very special dead ones. The US, the French and the British are experts in the field. They're all supposed to have atoned for their past colonialisms but happily joined the transnational coalition

encouraging the unfolding of this one. Australian colonial history is full of such genocidal punitive massacres. But somehow the Australian government couldn't see the similarity when they declared their full support for Israel's right to defend itself. Go figure. German colonial history in Africa provides us with notable examples of such genocidal punitive massacres. But the German government couldn't remember their history either. They use remembering one atrocity they have committed to block remembering another.

I am thinking all this but I hadn't written it in a linear narrative until now. I was doing it in fragments. A talk in Stockholm on ruination. Some social media posts. I am re-assembling them as I am writing at this very moment.

I was reflecting on this inability to write when Fadi Bardawil contacts me again to check if I have managed to write something for him. He clearly understands the difficulty. We don't talk about it much. I tell him I am trying. But I am telling myself that there was something more than 'the horrors of the massacre, not wanting to be a carrion eater, and all that' that was stopping me from writing. I note that in periods of intense fighting during the Lebanese civil war I sometimes had problems finishing sentences. During this war, however, I am having problems starting them. Every sentence we begin to write is full of hope. If nothing else, it takes time to finish a sentence, and when we utter the first word we are at the very least hopeful that we'll live long enough to finish it. To start sentences even when you don't finish them is a sign of hope, even if not finishing them means your hope has been thwarted midway through. But not to have it in you to start sentences is a sign of depression.

> *I note that in periods of intense fighting during the Lebanese civil war I sometimes had problems finishing sentences.*

After talking to Fadi, a past incident came to my mind in the middle of the night. For many years now I have come to accept that, while I rarely have a problem going to sleep, I am unable to sleep for longer than four or five hours at a time. This means that I usually wake up around 2.00 or 3.00 am and I am in this

situation where I can neither go back to sleep nor get up and do something. So, I often spend an hour or two where I am not sure if I am dreaming or remembering things. And that is when this incident came back to me. Whether a dream or a reminiscence, I felt it was important that it came to my mind when it did.

The incident had to do with something that happened in the Lebanese village of Mehj. It is one of the villages where some twenty years ago I began my fieldwork for my book *The Diasporic Condition*. Mehj is not its real name but that's how it figures in my ethnography– and now that I remember, Fadi, as a young student, accompanied me to this village at that time, so maybe that also helped triggering it. But well before that time, the village is a place dear to my memory. In the early 1970s, a school friend had an old-style house with particularly acoustic friendly rooms where he had set up the best of the best of sound equipment, and where we drank all kind of things and smoked all kind of things and listened to all kind of things (Frank Zappa, Mahavishnu, Teleman and Bartok were all time favourites).

After I migrated to Australia, whenever I went back to Lebanon, going to Mehj was like a ritual that involved a reunion with friends and a reunion with the space. In my case this was more significant than the usual diasporic return pilgrimage. It was so because at the time I was transitioning from adopting an uncritically inherited right-wing Christian Maronite politics to becoming a left-wing Australian. The space made up of my old friends (who were mainly Maronites) and the village house acquired a particular importance to me. It was the only place that I related to since my teenage years where I could be myself, and where I didn't have to hide my changing world views as I had to do around my relatives and parental entourage.

The incident in question happened in the 1981: I had just returned to Lebanon and was with my friends listening to some music and smoking some hash when some friends of our friend, whom I've not met before, joined us. At first it was much the same, endlessly talking about music, exchanging jokes and anecdotes, but soon the conversation moved to politics and one of the newly-arrived people

started making a classical Maronite argument: the Palestinians want to take over Lebanon and make it their own country as a substitute to Palestine and they want to kick ‘us’ out of Lebanon.

‘This is just nonsense’ I couldn’t help myself from saying.

He turned to me as if I had just denied the most fundamental truth that was at the basis of his existence and very quickly became quite aggressive: ‘Fuck off right, I don’t know who you are but fuck off. We don’t need to hear this bullshit here’ he said.

I wasn’t intimidated by his initial agressiveness. I continued ‘Well. I am interested. What evidence you have that the Palestinians want Lebanon as a substitute to Palestine. Look at their school books, why would they still be teaching their kids that the most important thing on earth is returning to Palestine if what you say is true?’ He looked at me as if I was really something vile. ‘Have you got any evidence other than the fact that you believe this to be true?’ I insisted.

As I finished, the guy got up and said in a seriously threatening tone.: ‘You want proof. I’ll go to my car and get my gun. Will that be proof enough?’

This time I was scared. But I gathered enough courage to say ‘forget it. I don’t do gun things. I prefer to just talk’. It was a rude awakening: living in Australia as a radicalised student and spending nights debating and arguing about Marxism, imperialism and world politics, had lulled me into thinking that politics was a long intellectual debate, involving shouting matches at the worst. That evening, I realised there and then that I was just a silly Australian student. I was not, but frankly, I was glad I was not, as I didn’t want to be, a warrior. For if I was going to be a warrior, it meant that comes a time I’d have to stop having ‘interesting debates’, and settle things by force. It was not something I aspired to ever do.

> *I find myself increasingly in situations where the culture of argumentation and debate that I dwell in is infiltrated by a warring culture of ‘shut up or else’.*

I think the reason why this story came semi-consciously to my mind in the middle of the night is because, since the Gaza war, I have become more acutely aware than ever that when it comes to Israel/Palestine I find myself increasingly in situations where the culture of argumentation and debate that I dwell in is infiltrated by a warring culture of 'shut up or else'. I cannot be certain, but I feel that this must have contributed to the difficulty I have writing about Gaza. It is not the fear of being bullied by and in that culture – I've got a much thicker skin than that. It is more the disgust at seeing it intruding and taking over my intellectual world. While nobody is threatening to put a gun to my head, being in Europe, particularly in Germany with its guilt-legitimised 'sympathetic Zionism,' and being subjected to all the taboos associated with speaking about Israel, one feels very strongly this state-sanctioned intrusion of a culture that normalises the usage of threat of force (fines, jail, withdrawal of research funds) to end complex intellectual arguments and put a limit on critical thinking: 'say this or that and I will call the police on you'-type culture. I know this happens elsewhere. It didn't happen in the Lebanon I grew up in, but I know it happens now. Call me a fool, but I still find it hard to believe that this is actually happening in the US and Western Europe. But it is. It still doesn't happen in Australia, but it is creeping in: for example, debates about the difference between anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism, a difference that has a long history and that has involved very knowledgeable people who have spent years researching and trying to understand is now simply defined for us, a priori, by governments and by university administrations.

I feel that the Gaza war is firmly propelling us along a historical path where the 'warrior' will rule over the 'intellectual', a world determined to de-valorise the work of 'thinking critically' and where I, as an academic, will belong to less and less. Here is perhaps what is really making it hard for me to write. But I have. I've managed to do some carrion eating after all.

Our History is Our Mandate

Hana Morgenstern
December, 2023

An edited talk delivered at the London School of Economics and Social Sciences on Nov 7th 2023

I spend a great deal of time researching and teaching about Palestinians and Israeli Jews who resist Israeli colonialism by refusing its separatism and racial hierarchies. It's always been my understanding that one of the founding structures of Israeli colonialism was the physical and epistemological separation of Arabs and Jews. This state of affairs was manufactured through forced population transfer when the state of Israel was established in 1948. Yet many still believe this separation stems from an immemorial tribal conflict or a civilizational one, in which Arabs are cast as representatives of the Orient and

Jews as citizens of the West. Never mind that nearly half of Israeli Jews hail from the Arab World and North Africa. From the time of their migration, they've been told to eliminate the vestiges of the Arab past from their language and practices so that they can assimilate into a secular Western democracy and differentiate themselves from the figure of the 'Arab enemy.' As children, we were told that the Arabs went to war with us because they hated Jews, but certainly not because they opposed Israel's treatment of Palestinians. And because we were surrounded by the Arab World, we would always be unsafe. In fact, we grew up with the idea that after the Holocaust, in which we had lost nearly all our family, no Jew is ever safe to live amongst non-Jews again. That is why Jews needed our own exclusive state and military to defend us. The collective trauma of the Holocaust needed careful working through and healing, but instead it has become a tool of political propaganda and statecraft.

> *Israel is the most dangerous place to be a Jew today*

Jewish unsafety is one of the main justifications for Palestinian inequality and for the broader regime of Apartheid and settler violence. Now the Jewish sense of unsafety is being weaponised on a global scale to justify the slaughter of thousands of Gazans, the bombing of hospitals, ambulances and refugee camps. We have the UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and UK Home secretary Suella Braverman knocking themselves over to protect Jewish people from Palestinians and the British public, by renouncing peaceful protests for Gaza as 'hate marches'. Even a renowned Antisemite like Marine Le Pen is promising to protect Jews in France from Islam. The Israeli state rhetoric which insists that Jews worldwide are made safer by its military violence stands in stark contrast to the reality that Islamophobia and antisemitism are rising hand in hand alongside the attacks of both Hamas and Israel. I don't think it can be said enough: the far right will never make Jews safer, nor will Apartheid, nor West Bank settlements. And slaughtering the adults and children of Gaza will certainly not make Jewish communities safer. There are about 7 million Jews in the United States and 7 million in Israel and the only difference between them is that in Israel Jews have

legal rights and privileges their neighbours do not. This doesn't make them safer. In fact, Israel is the most dangerous place to be a Jew today. Apartheid and colonialism are violent, with negative effects for all sides.

What I'm particularly concerned about today is the political discourse rampant in the UK & Western media that is equating the fate of Israel with the fate of Jews worldwide. In this equation Judaism, a millennia-old religion, has been made continuous with Zionism, a modern-day political ideology, and a critique of Zionism or Israel has become synonymous with antisemitism. Such rhetoric has for years been compounded by state-mandated definitions of antisemitism like the one posed by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA). A monolithic Jewish community is touted as a symbol of the West, and Palestine and its supporters, (including any progressive Jews) are framed as violent and antisemitic, even terrorists who want to destroy Israel and hurt Jews. This utter distortion, which pits communities against each other worldwide and endangers people's bodies, lives and employment, is shamelessly printed in right wing and mainstream newspapers alike.

What the media rarely reports is that there are many thousands of Jews worldwide, including myself, who reject this story. Contrary to popular belief, Zionism is not the only Jewish political tradition: we also have socialism, we have a progressive left and we have a pro-Palestinian movement. Although they are regularly under attack, thousands of Israeli Jews and Palestinians work together tirelessly for a democratic future. As we speak, hundreds of Jews are taking over the Statue of Liberty in New York's Ellis Island calling for ceasefire, last week they occupied NY's Penn Station and St Pancras Station here in London, and the week before the US congress. In London, every Palestine March has a Jewish Bloc, in addition to scores of protests organised specifically by Jewish organizations like *Na'amod* and *Jewish Voice for Peace*. In Cape Town South Africa, progressive Jews curate a *Shabbat against Genocide* in solidarity with Palestinians every Friday in the city's public promenade. In my own university, Cambridge, a coalition of Jewish, Palestinian, Turkish and other academics have spent the past half-decade working for Justice in Palestine/Israel.

We wept because like the children and grandchildren of Gaza, many of us have the memory of genocide and exile encoded in our bones.

Like others I know, watching the bombs streak down the skies of Gaza, watching people frantically pulling bodies out of the rubble and watching injured kids crying on the dusty floor of a hospital returns me to the mass graves of Jews and partisans in Lithuania, where my grandmother's entire town was liquidated. A few years after my grandmother fled to Palestine in the 1930's, her Jewish community was transported to Verdigris forest on the outskirts of their town. There they were told to take off their clothing, to lay next to each other in the ditches, and they were all shot. They say that the Holocaust began in Lithuania because the German military had so much help from civilians. Neighbours turned in and shot their own neighbours, an entire society was complicit. Later I realized that this is the world fascism created, the world of terror my grandmother fled, in which people came to be seen as human animals to be eradicated. To make a new world involves something far more radical than becoming one more nation state on stolen land. It means living differently; it means never looking at human beings that way again.

Last weekend, I hosted a *Shabbat Against Genocide* with about two dozen Jewish activists who have spent the last weeks protesting and organizing for a ceasefire in Gaza. Together, we recited the Kaddish, the Jewish mourner's prayer, and we wept, not only because of the horror of this violence, or because these bombings are being carried out in our names, or because we lost a friend or a relative in the slaughter, or because our family or friends were furious with us for supporting Gaza, or because we were being pushed out of our shuls or being targeted at work for criticizing Israel. We wept because like the children and grandchildren of Gaza, many of us have the memory of genocide and exile encoded in our bones. For some this means they think they will only be safe in a state of ethnic separation, but for others, like myself, our history decrees an ethical mandate to do anything we can to end pogroms, massacres and genocides, forever. Because we are only safe in this world when we find a way to live in it, share it and to

thrive in it together.

Statement on humanitarian action and the situation in Palestine

Geneva-Based humanitarians and scholars of humanitarianism
December, 2023

On the 31st of October 2023, professors and participants in the Master of Advanced Studies in Humanitarian Action at the Geneva Centre of Humanitarian Studies – humanitarian professionals most of whom have a strong field experience and knowledge of the Middle East – came together to discuss the current

situation in Palestine and Israel. The discussion was structured around four general questions:

1. How do you react to the recent events in Israel and Palestine?
2. What kind of questions do they pose to humanitarian values, to humanitarian organisations, to humanitarian workers?
3. What kind of responses could we conceive in such a difficult situation to promote the humanitarian values and inspire the action of the humanitarian organisations and humanitarian workers.
4. In light of those events, what is the significance of humanitarianism and humanitarian action in today's world?

Based upon opinions shared during this discussion, the following statement, initially meant to appear on the Centre's webpage, was produced. Since the Centre's Direction refused its publication and in line with the International Humanitarian Studies Association's call for Humanitarian Studies scholars to "speak truth to power and counter any silencing mechanism that jeopardizes academic freedom and the freedom of expression", we are grateful to Allegra Lab for accepting to have it reproduced here.

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As practitioners and scholars of humanitarianism, as citizens of the world, as human beings:

We are horrified by the action of Hamas on 7 October 2023 and the response by the government of Israel.

We are devastated by the escalation of violence in Gaza and the suffering of people in Israel and Palestine.

We extend our solidarity to those suffering and grieving the loss of loved ones in Israel and Palestine.

We are disturbed by the obstacles faced by the United Nations and

nongovernmental organizations to fulfill their mandate and protect the rights and dignity of people in Gaza who are victims of methodical violence.

We are distressed by the continuous pervasive violation of the fundamental principles of human rights and international humanitarian law in Palestine, in particular in Gaza where UN authorities have mentioned a real threat of “mass ethnic cleansing” and even “genocide.”

We are convinced that no peace in Israel and Palestine can be achieved as long as the political rights of the Palestinians are not recognized. Violence will not stop until the conditions that produced it are addressed.

We are deeply concerned by the limitation of freedom of expression and censorship in Western democracies, where peaceful expression of solidarity with Palestinians have been repressed, as well as by the growing number of both antisemitic and Islamophobic acts in Europe and North America.

We emphasize the importance of situating the recent events in the continuous loss of Palestinian lands as a result of Israel’s settlement policies and more broadly of considering the historical and political context of the actions of Western states before, during and after World War II, as well as the process of colonization and decolonization in the Middle East and elsewhere.

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As practitioners and scholars of humanitarianism, as citizens of the world, as human beings:

We observe how the recent events in Israel and Palestine reveal that the rules of international humanitarian law and the fundamental principles inspiring humanitarian action are disregarded or violated by some of the most influential members of the international community.

We refer to the difference between *jus ad bellum* (the conditions for initiating war) and *jus in bello* (the conduct of warring parties) and the fundamental

principle of proportionality in the use of force in an armed conflict as stated in the law of war, in Palestine, Israel and elsewhere.

We consider that the double standards applied by Western governments in Palestine, Israel and elsewhere are weakening their credibility in the defense of democracy, human rights and international humanitarian law.

We are acutely aware that humanitarianism, as a set of values, and humanitarian action, as a set of practices, cannot resolve systemic violence and have shown limited capacity to address global inequalities and injustices past and present, in Palestine, Israel and elsewhere.

We nevertheless express our profound attachment to the ethical and political principles founding humanitarianism and humanitarian action.

Beyond our feeling of powerlessness and our discouragement, our sadness and our grief, we express our renewed commitment to promote global equality and justice in today's world.

Julie Billaud, Alessandro Monsutti and the participants of the MAS in Humanitarian Action at the Geneva Center of Humanitarian Studies.

November 2023

The politics of condemnation

Alice von Bieberstein
December, 2023

As if he was, for the occasion of Halloween, joyfully embracing the figure of the grotesque, Hubert Aiwanger, former as well as designated minister of the economy in the Free State of Bavaria, went on record on public radio on October 31st, to denounce recent public demonstrations throughout Germany as antisemitic and critical or hostile towards Israel. Performing as a heroic member of a chorus of the brave to finally speak out loud what had too long been silenced (yet, in fact, spoken about *ad nauseum*), he repeated the well-rehearsed trope that anti-Semitism had been imported to Germany and that migration policies of the last years were to blame for these worrisome developments. Germany was handing 'our passports' to these people who then went to the streets to attack the police, attack Israel, and attack shops. In case his listeners had forgotten, his words thereby served as a reminder of what was to count and matter as sacred elements of Germany's *raison d'état*: security forces as embodiment of the state, capital, and Israel as fetishised embodiment of – as well as limits to – Germany's atonement for past genocidal crimes. Unsurprisingly for any right-populist

politician of moderate ambition, his demands were equally predictable: restriction of immigration and stricter policies of deportation.

The obscenity of this statement was not missed on social media. Aiwanger had been at the centre of a scandal, indeed a tectonic shift in German domestic politics, several weeks prior. Ahead of the regional elections, a national newspaper had revealed that Aiwanger had carried, and most likely authored, a most vile anti-Semitic pamphlet in his school days. While his brother came out in an attempt to rescue his innocence by taking the blame upon himself, the allegations continued and expanded to Aiwanger practicing speeches by Hitler-him-very-self in front of the mirror and other horrific details. In populist manner, he toured Bavaria's beer tents declaring himself the victim of a left-driven witch hunt ahead of the elections. Bavaria's prime minister Söder of the Christian Social Union (CSU) eventually backed him up. Aiwanger's party was able to expand its share of electoral votes by about 4% and will continue to govern in a coalition with the CSU.

> *Anti-Semitism, so we learn in 2023, is permissible when committed by a Bavarian white man.*

It should have been the end of Aiwanger's political career and, indeed, about ten years ago, the fact that it wasn't would have been utterly unimaginable. He would have had to step down. What we witnessed in late summer was a tectonic shift of the terms of domestic politics. Aiwanger excused himself, i.e. the act of carrying the pamphlets in his school bag, something he could not deny, by declaring it a sin of his youth. Anti-Semitism, so we learn in 2023, is permissible when committed by a Bavarian white man. We learn that it is nothing more than a coming-of-age confusion. In fact, it is not anti-Semitism at all, but an unfounded witch-hunt by a left-liberal media elite bent on destroying this politician's career.

But there is more to this tectonic shift: quieter, more marginal scenes. In late September, the local branch of the Christian Democratic Party (CDU) in eastern Westphalia joined electoral forces with the extreme right-wing AfD to scrap the

funding that had been demanded, promised, and allocated for the long-term financing of a National Socialist prisoner of war camp memorial site in Stukenbrock-Senne near Bielefeld. This has followed a number of other instances where the CDU, as one of Germany's major parties, has succeeded to push political decisions by more or less tacitly relying on the votes of the party most closely acting as a revenant of the Nazi-era NSDAP (National Socialist German Workers' Party). Their quiet co-operation now extends towards the sphere of memorial politics.

> *No, in the name of Germany's responsibility for the past, [our] energies must be routed, we are told, towards the condemnation not only of Hamas, but of people who are claiming and exercising their democratic right to protest against Israel's war crimes.*

But yet, in this day and age where politics is being reduced to the incessant call for and the repeated performances of condemnation, our energies of condemnation are not even channelled towards Aiwanger and all those who allow him to spurt his unbearable nonsense on public radio. No, in the name of Germany's responsibility for the past, these energies must be routed, we are told, towards the condemnation not only of Hamas, but of people who are claiming and exercising their democratic right to protest against Israel's war crimes. This happens as these war crimes are openly backed by the German federal government which could not even bring itself to vote in favour of a UN resolution demanding a humanitarian ceasefire because, as the German foreign minister explained, Hamas's terrorist crimes had not been condemned enough. All this in the name of the Holocaust.

This degree of historical perversion, or indeed irony, demands levels of political, mental, emotional, and ethical contortionism that are testing our limits of the possible. While the very real anti-Semitism of political leaders is reduced to the irrelevant status of childish games, the conservative party is joining forces with the harbinger of twenty-first century fascism in order to prevent the

institutionalisation of a Nazi memorial site. Meanwhile, ‘responsibility for the past’ has been evacuated to the ethically and politically hollow gesture of ‘unconditional’ solidarity with a state whose officials have left no doubt that they are determined to disregard international law and kill thousands of civilians in their eliminationist drive for revenge. I so very much agree with Michael Rothberg and Candice Breitz, who had planned a conference on (responses to) the entangled histories of violence under the title: We still need to talk. We need to defend and craft a political space of debate and analysis that is not entirely colonised by demands and gestures of condemnation (and accusation), but that allows us to not lose sight of the tectonic shifts that take place in the shadow of the glaring violence of killings, kidnappings, and bombs. Yet, irony reigns: the Federal Agency for Civic Education, a child of that post-war political order of ‘never again’ and whose very responsibility it is to support and facilitate public debate, has decided to cancel its funding and support for the conference. The lesson of Germany’s past in 2023? We shall no longer talk. Only condemn.