



A critique of humanitarianism on the brink of genocide

Hanna Berg
November, 2023



That humanitarian language, materials, and practice offer a space for politics to hide (Feldman, 2018, p. 131) can probably not be more clearly illustrated than through the fact that the UN Security Council, as genocide unfolds in Gaza, calls – not for a ceasefire – but for a ‘humanitarian *pause*’ (United Nations, 2023). It is in this humanitarian space that various actors, not least Palestinians themselves, have done and still do, politics. But that not even a so-called ‘humanitarian *pause*’ can be realised in this very moment raises questions not only of the limits of politics interweaved in humanitarian language, materials, and practice, but also of the research that we as anthropologists of humanitarianism conduct within that



same space. It is Israel's brutal war on Palestinians, alongside its unconditional support by the West, that urges us to talk about these limits.

Doing research on humanitarianism, its interventions and everyday practice, I work closely with Syrian refugees and local humanitarians in Jordan. In my PhD, I explore how bureaucratic procedures help to (re)shape and sustain a humanitarian aftermath - the transformation of humanitarian organisations' emergency interventions into other forms of engagements, stretching far beyond their initial aims (McKay, 2012). Since the Nakba in 1948, following the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in 1967, Palestinians have fled to Jordan in many moments of occupational violence, shaping a demographic, social, and political reality that is ever-felt in Jordan (Massad, 2001). Many of my interlocutors, humanitarians working with Syrian refugees, were Palestinians. While their own experiences of dispossession and displacement often shaped their reflections on the provision of humanitarian assistance to Syrian refugees, these experiences also often informed Syrian refugees' reflections on displacement, past events, present conditions, and future possibilities. All these experiences unfolded within the humanitarian space that Ilana Feldman discusses; a space that - at best - allows for addressing problems of the here and now, but seldom offers fundamental changes for later and elsewhere. If it is ever a space for politics, it is for a politics of a specific, non-threatening sort. And it is precisely what Feldman points to when she analyses 'refugee politics.' Humanitarianism offers a space that allows Palestinians to make claims *as refugees* - never as Palestinians. As the failed UN resolution on a 'humanitarian pause' suggests, it is also a space where humanitarian actors can make subtle political claims.

But what the current siege and bombardment of the occupied Gaza strip make visible - for anthropologists like myself, who work in the region and who have fostered close and lasting relationships with people who are directly or indirectly affected by the ongoing events - is the fact that, like refugees and humanitarians, anthropologists cannot obscure their politics. Doing ethnography involves deep social engagements for months in the same place, with the same people. Many of our encounters and acquaintances then transform into other forms of lasting



social relations and friendships. As we leave the physical spaces of our fields, we are mutually invested in sustaining many of these relationships as they have become significant in our personal lives, extending far beyond our research, which only enabled our initial encounters. With Israel's brutal violence on the people in Gaza, such engagements demand from us to expose our politics.

In the accelerating Islamophobic political context in Europe, which during these last weeks has proved to play such a fundamental role in the direct danger of occupation, it is imperative that *no one* remains silent. For those of us who are personally and emotionally engaged with people directly or indirectly living the brutal atrocities in Gaza, it is not only a political and moral position as concerned citizens or as researchers, but also a personal, emotionally-charged obligation. Checking up on friends and acquaintances, sharing devastating news with each other on different social media platforms, discussing the current political climate in the world - from protests in Jordan or elsewhere, to the problems of media portrayals in the West and beyond - are meaningful forms of solidarity. While there is no room for uncritical, equivalencing statements like "taking both sides" in these engagements, neither is there in our professional responsibilities as researchers. For, there is a particular anthropological demand that lurks in this growing routinisation of the idea of some people dying - what Ghassan Hage (2020; UNAM-Históricas, 2016) calls 'cultures of exterminability'.

[T]his demand urges us to take a political stance for which there is evidently no room in the humanitarian space.

In this moment, most western states and institutions not only close their eyes, but unreservedly *support* the atrocities carried out by the Israeli state in the name of "self-defence" and, simultaneously, wholeheartedly neglect Palestine's own right to the same. As such, this demand urges us to take a political stance for which there is evidently no room in the humanitarian space. This demand is what conditions the very ethical right (not the noun but rather the adjective 'right' as opposed to 'wrong') of anthropologists like myself to academically engage with



Arab, Muslim, and in this very case, Palestinian communities. I do not mean that we have to agree with the political orientations of our interlocutors, but rather that we need to unconditionally oppose oppression, occupation, and extermination. Making this claim is to say that, in the increasingly polarised political discourse, where Western states' repeatedly and more intensely engage in a dangerous public de-sensitisation to the death of Palestinians (which also extends to Arabs regardless of nationality and religion), we cannot hide our politics packed in a language of 'humanitarian critique'. It is not *enough*. And it is not enough precisely because such subtle political engagement contributes to the temporal break of 'past destruction' and 'present displacement' and does therefore not really address, but only acknowledges, what has caused present conditions.

Beyond exposing our own politics, it is our responsibility as anthropologists of humanitarianism to ring the alarm when humanitarian language ceases to even accommodate the word "ceasefire."

But to say that *that* is not enough implies revisiting the role of anthropologists working on humanitarianism. In my view, our role is not only about asking what the humanitarian space (dis)allows actors to do, but about critically challenging the limits of the space itself. More importantly now that we stand on the brink of genocide, we have a duty to expose the *danger* when this already limited space disappears. Beyond exposing our own politics, it is our responsibility as anthropologists of humanitarianism to ring the alarm when humanitarian language ceases to even accommodate the word "ceasefire." We need to ask the question: How has calling for a ceasefire become *so* political that whoever uses the word is accused of antisemitism? *What is next?* Claiming that Palestinians are humans? Some would certainly say that we are already there. That Muslims are humans? Or Arabs in general? I am pointing here at the danger of creating a culture that makes a people exterminable (Hage, 2020; UNAM-Históricas, 2016). What if we reach a place when even calling for a 'humanitarian *pause*' becomes too political? Posing this question is a way to refuse this shrinking humanitarian



space in which the word “ceasefire” must be interwoven in subtle politics. It is not only our role to highlight, but also to *refuse* such development. The people in Gaza do not need a humanitarian *pause* - they need a ceasefire. They need the genocide to end. An end to the occupation. And if it has become too political even for the UN Security Council to utter those words, then at least we, as anthropologists working in the same humanitarian space, should.

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Not even Israel can block the sun

EHESS Environmental Humanities Students and Alumni in Solidarity
November, 2023



The title of this statement is a direct quote from [Gazan-based journalist Muhammad Smiry](#), who took footage of how people in Palestine recharge their phones and cameras on solar power so that they can continue to document the ethnic cleansing happening before their eyes at this very moment.

We are a group of students from EHESS, the School for Advanced Studies in Social Sciences in Paris. Our institution has issued [one statement after the Hamas attack](#) in occupied territories that happened on the 7th of October 2023, and then [another one after the killing of professor Dominique Bernad in Arras](#). Since then, it has not only remained silent about the constant and murderous bombing on the Gaza strip, but has also silenced the emerging voices, mostly from students and



precarious workers such as PhDs and members of the Solidaires Union at EHESS, that were calling out the double standards of the institution.

As students in the field of the Environmental Humanities, we want not only to speak out about the ongoing occupation of Palestine, but also underline how crucial it is to denounce this genocide, to discuss it in our classes, to collaborate with Palestinian academics so as to amplify their voices and truly decolonize our institutions.

Naomi Klein was right in 2016 when she asked environmentalists [to read more, and with more attention, Edward Said's writings](#), who once described environmentalism as “the indulgence of spoiled tree huggers who lack a proper cause.” That is not the kind of environmentalists that we aspire to be, and that is why we are stepping up. As students in the Environmental Humanities, we need to acknowledge that Zionist politics perpetuates environmental racism and green colonialism in Palestine. Occupation, displacement, and the ethnic cleansing of indigenous communities proceeds at the same time as the extractivism of natural resources and the destruction of the ecosystem. With her text, Klein reminds us that the history of colonialism is tightly intertwined with the current multiscale ecological crises driven by fossil fuels companies, particularly in the SWANA region.

On the other hand, anthropologist [Ruba Salih](#) argues that Frantz Fanon’s analysis of colonial violence should also be applied [to the ongoing genocide](#) in Palestine, as it would help us seize the measure of Palestinian generational physical and psychological trauma, and most importantly to recognize that the only hope to end the cycle of violence in the region is to end the apartheid and the occupation.

On October 9th, Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant in a public speech declared : “We [the Israeli] are fighting human-animals, and we are acting accordingly”. This sentence also reminds us of the words of Fanon, who in *The wretched of the Earth* wrote that the colonizer “ (...) dehumanizes the native, or to speak plainly, it turns him into an animal. In fact, the terms the settler uses when he mentions



the native are zoological terms. He speaks of the yellow man's reptilian motions, of the stink of the native quarter, of breeding swarms, of foulness, of spawn, of gesticulations. When the settler seeks to describe the native fully in exact terms he constantly refers to the bestiary". This language allows the colonizer to "adventure, conscience in peace, in the unlimited discovery of new means of terror" (Fanon; 2011).

As Israeli historian Ilan Pappé has extensively demonstrated in his works (2017), Israeli policies are a guidebook for how to commit crimes without facing any consequence. We have witnessed this capacity over the past 75 years, culminating in the dramatic escalation of these past weeks, when Gaza has been constantly bombarded, and [the West bank has also been under attack](#) (settlers, directly [armed by the Israeli government](#), have been given a license to kill).

More specifically, we want to highlight:

- How the Israeli government is gatekeeping vital resources such as water, food and fuel making it impossible for Palestinian civilians to perform rescue operations, by disrupting the functioning of hospitals, ambulances and excavators.
- How the state of Israel is built on the unequal distribution of natural resources (Hannah Boast; 2020), spatial segregation (Eyal Weizman and Rafi Segal; 2003) and apartheid, as stated by the UN (2007, 2022), Amnesty International (2022) and Human Rights Watch (2021).
- How the Israeli President and other public figures dehumanize Palestinian people, [calling them "human-animals"](#) and using the dangerous [language of "light against darkness"](#), opposing a good side to an evil and barbaric one, [referring to the biblical figure of Amalek](#). These terms are not only clearly arabophobic and Islamophobic: historically they also represent the linguistic premises to committing genocide as defined by the UN 1948 Convention.
- How Israel acted in environmental politics to make a "forest out of the desert" by implanting invasive species such as pines on Palestinian lands



and cultivating the widespread imaginary of 'terra nullius' (Boast, 2012; Diana K. Davis, 2016; Henni, 2022).

- How the Israeli state reinforced his presence by erasing historical and sacred sites such as the Mamilla Cemetery in Jerusalem (upon which, the "Museum of Tolerance" was sadistically erected) and [attacking worshippers at Al Aqsa Mosque in April 2023](#). The erasure of the Palestinian cultural heritage is fundamental to understanding the ethnic cleansing of these people.
- How the Israeli army [imprisons and tortures Palestinian people](#), often without a fair trial (the so called "[administrative detention](#)") and condones the kidnapping and lynching of Palestinian bodies by Israeli settlers ([such as in the case of 16 years old Mohammed Abu Khdeir](#)).
- How Israel relentlessly cut native olive trees, in an effort to impoverish and uproot Palestinians families and farmers (Braverman; 2009).
- How it bombarded and destroyed civil infrastructures, polluting the land and the sea, making the air unbreathable by [using white phosphorus bombs](#), as demonstrated by Amnesty International.
- How it pursues a policy of censorship (as in the case, among many others, of filmmaker Mohammad Bakri and of Al-Jazeera journalist [Wael Al-Dahdouh, whose family was intentionally killed](#)) and propaganda, as we have seen on our national television channels in the past weeks. As an example, the ex-Israeli ambassador in Italy Dror Eydar said on Italian television that the ultimate goal for Israel is to "destroy Gaza" and "[kill everyone who is a threat to Jews all over the world](#)".
- How Israel pursues the de-infantilization of Palestinian children: [the age of imprisonment was lowered to 12 years old in 2016](#) and more than [three thousand children have been killed over a three weeks period](#), while the Israeli far-right television [channel 14 described them as "terrorists killed"](#) (מחבלים שחיסלנו). We can observe similar policies of de-infantalization of marginalized communities in Europe, as denounced by activists such as Fatima Ouassak (2020) in France, where children from working class districts are racially profiled by the police because they are perceived as



dangerous and threatening troublemakers. We can't help but remember that the recent killing of the teenager Nahel Merzouk by a policeman in Nanterre last June is the tragic result of these kinds of policies.

Former Vice President of the UN Correspondents Association Mark Seddon asked Samah Jabr, a Palestinian psychiatrist and author of the 2018 book and documentary [Derrières les fronts](#)), “How do you bring together people now, I would not know”, to which [she responded](#): “The answer to this big question is simple: imposing human rights, justice, dignity for everybody. Then there will be no need for anger, hatred and violence”. As [Gilles Deleuze explained in the Abécédaire](#) interview series, Palestinians are in fact inevitably caught up in a revolutionary-becoming: “People in situations of tyranny and oppression are to enter in a revolutionary-becoming because there is nothing left to do”, he said.

Concerning the feminist movements of the '70, Ursula Le Guin once wrote that “There is a time for anger and that was such a time”. This is a time for anger, and a time for grief, but hope in a fairer future never dies, and that is the reason why Palestinians need our solidarity and our actions to resist oppression and fight for a better future, following the value of *sumud* (steadfast perseverance). This is the reason why we call out the President and faculty of the EHESS to take a clear position on this ethnic cleansing and express the same solidarity toward Palestinians as the one that was expressed toward [Ukrainian academics and refugees](#). We are devastated by the many innocents who were murdered, and we fear for those who are still alive. We are not taking sides as if it were a football match, as some people advocating for “peace on both sides” are implying: the very meaning of the word “partisan”, as Gramsci wrote (1917-1918), is to take sides. In continuity with the anti-fascist tradition, we stand in solidarity with Palestine and call for a ceasefire.

A group of students and alumni in Environmental Humanities from EHESS in solidarity with Palestine



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We Are All the South

Birzeit University Union of Professors and Employees
November, 2023



A Call from Birzeit University Union of Professors and Employees to academic and cultural communities worldwide

On the twenty-seventh day of the genocidal war being waged by the settler colonial state of Israel against the Palestinian people in Gaza and throughout historic Palestine, coinciding with the date of the infamous Balfour Declaration on November 2, 1917, which marked imperial endorsement of the Zionist colonial project in our land, we declare to the world that we are still alive and engaged in our national struggle for freedom and self-determination. We declare that our



people, with a population of more than 15 million worldwide, remain steadfast in Palestine and throughout the diaspora. We renew our call to our partners in the world, advocates of justice and freedom, and those in solidarity with our just national struggle, to stand with us against the most brutal waves of genocide and ethnic cleansing we have faced for more than seven decades.

We initially issued a statement at the beginning of this war entitled “[We Are All Palestinians](#)” to emphasize the century-long war against Palestinians and the historical injustices it has carried. We also solidified our people’s uncompromising will to engage in all forms of revolutionary acts as we face unprecedented levels of colonial violence. Today, we address you with a statement entitled “We Are All the South.” The imperialist forces and its hegemonic power, which has long nurtured the Zionist project in our land, have once again aligned themselves with the old-fashioned narrative known as the “clash of civilizations against barbarism,” aiming to break the will to life and freedom among the Palestinian people. We want to frame the situation as we see it and as we live it, not only because of this most recent iteration of violence, but because we have long endured and thrived through the violence of settler colonialism.

We remind you that solidarity begins with recognizing the sovereign voice of the oppressed and that they have the right to determine the form, means, and ends of their struggle.

During this war, the settler army targeted our people in Gaza, located in the southern part of our Palestinian coastline, unleashing unprecedented violence through the most destructive weapons accumulated in its arsenal, supplied and re-supplied by its Western allies. While the war waged from the skies in Gaza, this campaign also included killing, destruction, and brutal arrests against our people in the West Bank, Jerusalem, and the 1948 occupied territories. The settler state employs all kinds of colonial violence from its well-rehearsed arsenal, both physical and legal, including targeting our academics and university students inside Israeli universities, merely for expressing sympathy with the victims of the



aggression in Gaza and its open wounds. This is in addition to the McCarthyist campaigns targeting Palestinian academics, students, intellectuals, and artists around the world in unyielding attempts to silence their voices.

From our national, ethical, and humanitarian standpoint, we must inform you of the current situation across Palestine and the diaspora in the academic and cultural fields:

- Since the start of this savage war on Gaza, in addition to the homes, hospitals, orphanages, mosques, churches, and shelters under the care of the United Nations, Israel deliberately and systematically also targeted schools, universities, academic institutions, and cultural centers with direct shelling and ceaseless bombing. Their military actions have physically destroyed institutional infrastructures in Gaza and paralyzed the educational process in all academic institutions across Palestine, targeting 53 universities and other institutes of higher education affecting around 250,000 students and 3,000 secondary and primary schools affecting nearly 1,500,000 students. They have intensified their campaign against intellectuals threatening them with physical harm, arrests, and threats of their livelihoods. This current campaign has also featured targeted expulsions of professors, students, and workers in both the academic and cultural fields.

We call on all our comrades in the world, in unions, academic institutions, research centers, and collectives, to activate their engagement in the BDS movement, which aims to end international support for Israel's oppression of Palestinians

- In addition to its direct involvement in the crimes of the Zionist apartheid system, Israeli academia is now actively participating in the genocidal war by utilizing its human, intellectual, and promotional resources. This campaign has received official support from some Western academic institutions further exposing our people and those who are in solidarity



with us to violent measures working towards a suffocating silence and erasure of Palestine and Palestinian voices everywhere we exist. As we observe the aggressiveness of these institutions, we call on all our comrades in the world, in unions, academic institutions, research centers, and collectives, to activate their engagement in the BDS movement, which aims to end international support for Israel's oppression of Palestinians and pressure Israel to comply with international law through a campaign of boycott, sanctions and divestment of Israeli institutions. The genocidal war being waged by Israel today leaves no room for doubt about the principles, objectives and need for the BDS movement and its call initiated in 2005.

- The timid and apologetic attempts made by a few academics and intellectuals in the early days of the war to “condemn violence on both sides” do not deserve a response. However, we once again need to emphasize that there are not “two sides” in the current genocidal war, but rather a criminal army exercising brutality against a besieged people defending their lives and their right to defend life. This is a new round of the long war waged by the Zionist colonial settler state against the Palestinian people and their resistance. It is a war that clearly demonstrates the excess of Palestinian righteousness in the face of the excess of Israeli force, where there is no moral equivalence between the colonizer and the colonized, and there never will be. There is no equivalence between their swords and our blood, and there is no equivalence between the iron of their bombs and the flesh of our victims.

Therefore, the clarity of the horrific genocide in Gaza today leaves no room for debate about the form, mechanism, or purpose of solidarity with Palestine and Palestinians. It compels us to remind you of the common human, intellectual, and ethical grammar in our collective struggle against all colonial conditions in the world. We remind you that solidarity begins with recognizing the sovereign voice of the oppressed and that they have the right to determine the form, means, and ends of their struggle. You are our partners in our humanity, and you are our



partners in the battle to defend it: we are all the South, we are all Palestinians, we are all resistance, we are all Gaza.

2 November 2023

Birzeit University Union of Professors and Employees, Occupied Palestine

Palestinian Resistance is a Way of Being

Birzeit University Union of Professors and Employees
November, 2023





2023 will be recorded historically as the year that Palestinians stood boldly in the face of colonial fascism and screamed in defense of their homes, humanity, and lives. Palestinians as a people have endured over a century of settler colonial violence. We have thrived as a people and shall continue to do so. We do not need to speak of our right to resist, for it is not a right but a way of being and survival for Palestinians.

Zionism, the settler state, and the entire colonial system that is a product of this fascist ideology can no longer falsely hide beneath the cloak of humanism. In Palestine, in 2023, we do not demand our right to narrate. Our ability to narrate was never out of our hands, and resistance in all of its manifestations and forms does not need the pre-approval of static international law codes. The oppressed do not need to claim authority over their own oppression; the ongoing events of history - our history - are what allow us this authority. We consider it our duty not to expose the bloody barbarism of Zionism; their actions as a fascist state and a ruthless army are more than sufficient to undertake this task. It is our duty to record this moment not as its victims but as the people who will remember, record, survive, and resist it.

Our history will tell the story of these acts not only as a record of colonial brutality but also as a record of our boldfaced determination to live and resist it. We remain attached to our land and to our humanity as Palestinian Arabs - no need to prove our humanity to those who have lost theirs.

It might, nevertheless, be useful to remind ourselves and others of the crimes that have been and are being committed in Palestine - crimes that began with the violent and forceful introduction of Zionism onto the land and people of Palestine. This list is long and cannot be summarized in any simple form, but for those who have chosen to stand with the oppressed in solidarity with our struggle, we ask that you keep these points in mind when speaking about the idea of freedom and liberation - heads and souls raised high, as always, by the duty we have towards the blood of our martyrs and the righteousness of our cause. In compiling this list, we realize that phrases like "war crimes," "genocide," "apartheid," "criminality,"



and “inhumanity” seem unfit and atrociously insufficient to describe what the state of Israel has and continues to do:

- An occupying colonial power cannot claim the right to self-defense against the people under its brutal occupation. There is no moral equivalence between the colonizer and the colonized - however much the media attempts to claim otherwise;
- As is their modus operandi, the Israeli military, in their war against Gaza, has directly targeted our people through the belligerent bombing of homes, hospitals, orphanages, playgrounds, schools, universities, mosques, churches, and public spaces, deliberately killing any and all Palestinians they can, even targeting the dead in cemeteries. Cutting off and targeting water lines, electricity engines, emergency services, and other crucial services and civilian facilities are the actions of a genocidal power made even more audacious under the irony of Zionist claims of their “purity of arms”: this purity clearly only refers to the notion that their weapons are ready for use against all Palestinians all the time;
- The utter criminality of Zionist media coverage (adopted globally) persists in blaming the oppressed for the crimes of the oppressor. The great irony in the Zionist claim of victimhood is revealed in the genocide being committed by its military, fulfilling their aims of emptying Palestine of Palestinians. While always tragic, these crimes are part and parcel of Zionism and not new, for even now, massacres and displacement of Palestinian refugees continue as the world stands by only to bear witness;
- The blatant and boldfaced genocidal racism of Israeli political discourse: the pornographic call to death of Arabs by settler Zionist politicians across the political lines is fascism and cannot be described as anything but support for further genocidal violence and settler colonial fascism that has defined the history of this ideology;
- The violent construction of the prison of Gaza is the criminal imposition of what is now a sixteen-year sentence of solitary confinement for an entire population in the form of the blockade and siege of Gaza;



- The criminalization of resistance, including the self-criminalization of the right to resist, where all blood that is shed is blamed on the oppressed and all crimes of settler colonial invasion and dispossession are ignored entirely;
- The unfathomable crime of silence and complicity perpetuated by the entire world - including Arab and Muslim regimes under the oppressive power of American impositions — are openly supportive of genocide or mute witness to the crimes of settlers;
- The most blatant American complicity in the genocidal massacre of an entire people. Zionist and American colonials, with Arab regimes' complicity, have perpetuated crimes against the Palestinian people that define fascism in the 21st century;
- The ongoing historic crime of the complete denial of the Palestinian nation's political right to exist, resist, return, and self-determination.

We Palestinians have a right to our freedom. It is not a right enshrined in the precarious words of law codes but our human dignity to fight for freedom. Palestinian resistance has been criminalized since the beginning of the settler colonial invasion of Palestine. Now that our resistance has used guerrilla war tactics, we have now become the oppressors?! What is the Israeli army fighting to achieve? Unable to counter the resistance fighters, the aircraft bombed besieged Gaza, targeting nothing and everything at once! Are they trying in vain to continue the genocidal war that began upon the arrival of Zionists to our land? Trying to complete the erasure of 1948?

We Palestinians have a right to our freedom. It is not a right enshrined in the precarious words of law codes but our human dignity to fight for freedom.

Given all we know and all we have seen, we must act and choose justice and humanity and fight the oppression of colonial degradation. We are all Palestinians now, and we must all act immediately against the real criminals and scream in the face of this monster and his barbaric acts. Zionism is a genocidal settler project in



Palestine that is built on false mythology and sustains itself on perpetual and endless violence against the native people in Palestine - it should be seen and dealt with as such. Talk of freedom - political, academic, or social - falls on deaf ears unless or until the true criminals are called such and dealt with as such.

We in occupied Palestine — and all Palestinians — have no illusions in the poetic dreams of the triumph of the pen over the sword because the sword has cut too deeply into our flesh at the hands of an enemy who has been granted by the hypocritical international community and the destiny of imperial history to claim a monopoly on both the sword (that which acts to kill) and the pen (that which narrates the acts of killing). As intellectuals and academics working in occupied Palestine, we have to use our words, however futile they may feel in such critical times. We also have faith in the bold souls of our people, our resistance and the triumph of freedom, and in our inalienable rights. We recognize and proclaim that at this critical and urgent historical juncture, we shall overcome - justice shall overcome. We are not your passive victims; we have been murdered, maimed, and displaced by a settler state driven by an ideology of insane hatred and bloody violence, but we will not be silenced. Our resistance shows us the path forward, and we remain steadfast, and we shall triumph.

October 11, 2023

Birzeit University Union of Professors and Employees, Occupied Palestine

Gaza in light of German Holocaust memory culture

Lara Fricke

November, 2023



German Foreign Minister and Green party member Annalena Baerbock [announced](#) on the 23rd of October that Germany will not support a ceasefire as demanded by the EU - even though a humanitarian catastrophe is imminent in Gaza. [Meanwhile](#), many German cities prohibit demonstrations in solidarity with Palestinians. Schools in Berlin forbade students from carrying Palestinian flags as well as the traditional Palestinian scarf keffiyeh. People are getting arrested and beaten up by the police when demonstrating for Gaza. All of this happens in the name of Holocaust memory culture and Germany's commitment to 'Never again'. As we collectively witness the televised genocide of Palestinian people, legitimate and urgent questions arise: Have Germans learned nothing from their history? How can Germans - out of everyone - allow, support, and celebrate another genocide after the Holocaust?

Looking at the way Holocaust memory culture is constructed in Germany, and to a lesser extent in other Western societies, I argue that German support for the genocide of Palestinians does not happen *despite* the Holocaust memory culture,



but *because* of it. The belief that the Holocaust is a unique phenomenon is particularly well entrenched in Germany.

In 1988, philosopher [Alan Rosenberg wrote](#) about the difference between 'knowing' and 'understanding' the Holocaust in the following terms:

“Knowing [...] refers to factual information or the process by which it is gathered. Understanding, on the other hand, refers to systematically grasping the significance of an event in such a way that it becomes integrated into one’s moral and intellectual life. Understanding the Holocaust in this sense would radically change how one experiences and acts in the world.”

According to Rosenberg, the belief in the Holocaust’s uniqueness does not allow for comparison - which is a necessary method to gain understanding about a phenomenon. According to [Dirk Moses](#), the uniqueness thesis has become a dogmatic belief in German Holocaust memory culture. A recent illustration of this was a silencing campaign launched in 2020 against Achille Mbembe. The Cameroonian academic [Mbembe](#) was accused of relativising the Holocaust and, consequently, of antisemitism due to his efforts to identify the commonalities between colonialism, the Holocaust, and present-day violence and imperialism.

While German memory culture upholds its performative commitment to ‘never again’, it prohibits and punishes genuine attempts to uncover and understand the patterns and mechanisms underlying the Holocaust and other forms of violence, genocide, and oppression.

Rosenberg’s argument, according to which dogmas like the uniqueness thesis ‘block further inquiry’ to understanding how the Holocaust was possible, and, in turn, how to prevent more genocides, proves to be an accurate prediction. While German memory culture upholds its performative commitment to ‘never again’, it prohibits and punishes genuine attempts to uncover and understand the patterns and mechanisms underlying the Holocaust and other forms of violence, genocide, and oppression.



The impact of the uniqueness thesis reaches even further. With the attempt to frame the Holocaust as unique, the Holocaust was reduced to a solely Jewish experience, excluding not only the other victims of Nazi Germany but also its application to future genocides against non-Jewish people. This thinking creates a hierarchy of suffering and victimhood in which Jewish suffering, embodied in the state of Israel, eternally [trumps the suffering of others](#). Consequently, unconditional support for Israel promises Germans to absolve themselves from their inherited guilt and crimes. It is for this reason that Germany cannot accept Palestinians as victims of Israeli colonisation and thus, denies the reality of power asymmetries on the ground. Rather, Palestinians are branded as the real antisemites, and therefore deserving deportation “on a large scale” to use the words of chancellor Olaf Scholz as reported in the [Spiegel](#). This conveniently ignores that [90%](#) of antisemitic attacks in Germany are committed by right-wing groups and individuals.

It is through the very position as the colonised Other that Palestinians become a particular threat to the German narrative. This is because the lived experiences of Palestinians shine a light on the fragility of Germany’s absolution narrative. They make clear that Germany has not overcome its racist past - but is deeply involved with the colonisation, oppression, and elimination of another people. When [Scholz met with Israeli president Netanyahu](#) to emphasise the ongoing and unconditional German support for Israeli attacks on Gaza, the latter stated: “this is our shared struggle - the struggle of civilisation against barbarism.” This colonial language, quite typical for Zionism, reveals the continuous present of colonial patterns of thought in German society. Once again, the uniqueness narrative is at play: by insisting on the singularity, out-of-time-and-space-ness of the Holocaust, Germany refuses to acknowledge its own colonial crimes and their connection to the Holocaust. Hence, the slogan ‘never again’ reveals and sustains colonial and racist structures as, for colonised subjects, the violence and genocide have [never actually stopped](#).

Not only does German memory culture preclude a full comprehension of the Holocaust that would enable the drawing of necessary lessons to prevent



further genocides, but it also reveals that the underlying racist and colonial structures that made the Holocaust possible are still present in German society today.

Germany's complicity in the genocide against Palestinians shows that German society has not [“radically change\[d\] how \[it\] experiences and acts in the world.”](#) Not only does German memory culture preclude a full comprehension of the Holocaust that would enable the drawing of necessary lessons to prevent further genocides, but it also reveals that the underlying racist and colonial structures that made the Holocaust possible are still in place in German society today. Holocaust memory, therefore, serves as a performative act that creates the illusion of German rectification but is far from being [“integrated into \[Germany’s\] moral and intellectual life”](#).

Verantwortungsbewusstsein - On German Responsibility

Victoria Louisa Klinkert
November, 2023



For many years now we have met Germans who declare that they are ashamed of being German. I have often felt tempted to answer that I am ashamed of being human. - Hannah Arendt

Because I am German I take my country's genocidal history seriously, and because of this I stand for the freedom of the Palestinian people. In fact, I believe we have a responsibility to do so. The path from *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* to *Verantwortungsbewusstsein* - from knowledge of our past to a sense of responsibility for it - is what this piece is about.

Since my early childhood, I carry the weight of what it means to be German in the face of the unfathomable horrors of the Holocaust. Growing up, I have been guided through the process of reckoning with my country's past. And through this *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* I have come to know that in order to be German, to be human, I have to commit to the motto "Never Again".



Yet, in Germany, we [struggle](#) to apply this very same principle to our own colonial past. An observation that has too often been relegated to a footnote, but which is of utmost importance to understanding the current state of racially grounded historical amnesia regarding the conflict in Gaza. Is it really *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, when we turn a blind eye to the creation of the state of Israel, one that is inextricably linked to colonialism?

We know so little of the history of the region and of Europe's imperial part in it. Palestine was a British mandate (as part of the British Empire), and despite having been [promised](#) freedom, the land was also promised to Zionists looking to establish a Jewish homeland in the face of centuries of persecution. In 1947, after the horrors of the Holocaust, the land was partitioned, in a political move that was in keeping with the imperial habit of partitioning and occupying lands where other people already lived (see the creation of the USA, South Africa, and German South West Africa, to name a few). In 1948, British forces left, war broke out, and Israel claimed independence. In what is known as the '[Nakba](#)', over 700,000 Palestinians (half of the population) were forced out of their homelands and over 500 Palestinian villages were 'de-populated' and destroyed, in what can only be called an ethnically motivated expulsion. Ever since, Israel has been expanding its territory, occupying Palestinian land, refusing Palestinians' right of return, and, according to the [UN Special Rapporteur](#), "wilfully pursuing the 'de-Palestinianisation' of the occupied territory." This makes it a settler-colonial state. We must face this truth.

This [settler colonial state](#) has since engaged in the dehumanisation of the Palestinian people in order to justify its own existence. The use of racial typology is an import of imperial Europe, and has for centuries been used to justify colonial dispossession and oppression. Douglas Duff, a British imperial officer stationed in Palestine in the early 1930s, [referred to](#) the Palestinians of Haifa as such: "Most of us were so infected by the sense of our own superiority over these 'lesser breeds' that *we scarcely regarded these people as human.*"

This colonial legacy is lingering. In the wake of the recent horrific attack of



Hamas, on October 9th Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant justified the siege of Gaza in the following de-humanising terms: “We are fighting human animals and we act accordingly.”

Human animals.

He subsequently [vowed](#) that “Gaza won’t return to what it was before. We will eliminate everything.” Since, Israel has engaged in a bombing campaign of Gaza that is so forceful that it can only be [called out for what it is](#): genocide. *Again.*

“Never again” means never again shall we take part in or stand by when people are denied their status as humans and subjected to genocidal violence and ethnic cleansing.

For us Germans and, in fact, for Europe, facing up to the Holocaust means facing up to a crime against humanity. “Never again” means never again shall we take part in, or stand by when people are denied their status as humans and subjected to genocidal violence and ethnic cleansing. It is that simple. And if the state of Israel is the perpetrator, then we have an obligation to stand against it.

Federal Chancellor Olaf Scholz, however, pledged unconditional support to the state of Israel. [Declaring](#) that “Our own history, the responsibility we bear as a result of the Holocaust, make it our permanent task to stand up for the existence and security of the state of Israel. This responsibility is our guide.” Further, Friedrich Merz, the leader of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), has [called for](#) anyone wishing to acquire German citizenship to pledge allegiance to the state of Israel. What twisted logic, for our nationalist past to be tied to a nationalist present!

Guilt will always drive an inward-looking and self-serving politics. We need to be braver.

Despite Scholz calling his politics “responsibility,” Germany is driven by its



historical guilt. In what it believes to be an act of atonement for the Holocaust, it has pledged unconditional support to the state of Israel. Guilt will always drive inward-looking and self-serving politics. We need to be braver. How is it *Verantwortungsbewusstsein* when we pledge support to a state that has set out to eliminate an entire population? Are we afraid to call out Israel because it is framed as anti-Semitism? It is as if our support of Israel were a cocoon we can nest in to nurse our sense of guilt.

Germany - followed by much of Europe - silenced by its guilt-driven allegiance to Israel, has not only been silent on the ongoing genocidal violence. It has also engaged in a kind of [censorship](#) forcing the German people, once again, to be complicit in a genocide. We should be enraged at our history being used to fund, abet, and justify another genocide. The justification of one genocide based on our history of another. It is a perverted logic. A logic that is composed not of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, but of colonial amnesia and not *Verantwortungsbewusstsein*, but of guilt. Never Again.

It is our responsibility not to simply call for peace, but to also call for freedom. Palestinians cannot be forced to return to an [open air prison](#) and continue to be classified as sub-humans in an [Apartheid system](#). As Germans, as Europeans, in fact as humans, let's take responsibility and say, "we got this wrong." Let's take our *Verantwortungsbewusstsein* seriously, and fully engage our *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, our history, and our complicity, and invest in finding a solution - one where everyone can be free from persecution.

They say we will be judged by history, but I hope we can use our history to ensure that this will *never again* happen in the present. Before it is too late.



The Courage of Historical Truths

Antonio De Lauri
November, 2023



With the destruction of Gaza by Israel under way and the humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territories worsening day by day, a recurrent question is raised in mainstream media, TV shows and many academic circles: Is Israel's response to the Hamas attacks on October 7 proportionate or not? Some say it is. Others say only partially. Others say it isn't. But the point is that the question itself is a trap. Any serious debate about the current escalation of violence cannot start from October 2023. To overlook the historical context is a violation of the truth: it pushes to one side the state of oppression that Israel has imposed on Palestine at a growing pace in the past decades, and it washes away the responsibilities of Europe in the root causes of the conflict and occupation.



Western governments and institutions have overwhelmingly shown support for Israel in its explicit attempt at annihilating Palestinians. “This is civilization against barbarity. This is good against bad”, claimed Israel’s Ambassador to Berlin, Ron Prosor. “We are fighting against human animals”, said Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant. As the mainstream narrative goes, what is taking place is a broader battle of civilizations between “the only democracy in the Middle East” (as Israel has often been labelled by politicians and journalists) and authoritarianism (Hamas and, by extension, all Palestinians). Good vs evil. The civilized vs the uncivilized.

To overlook the historical context is a violation of the truth

“You are either with us, or you are with the terrorist”, said George Bush in 2001, when the US was launching the War on Terror, which led to two catastrophic decades of human loss (hundreds of thousands of dead), devastation and destabilization. Us and them. The civilized vs the uncivilized. Yet if we really want to indulge in the depressing mantra of a battle of civilizations, we should recognize that the terms of reference are different from how they first appear to the Western intelligentsia. With current events in Palestine and Israel in mind, if we compare the speeches of [Joe Biden](#) or [von der Leyen](#), with that of the [king of Jordan](#) at the Cairo Peace Summit, the conclusion would be that the American and the German don’t make a good impression (to use an euphemism). Indeed, I’d challenge anyone in saying on what “side” reason, justice and humanity lie in that comparison.

The decline of values, ability and courage in Western political leadership, coupled with their arrogance and double standards, is a perfect symbol of our empty times, in which social media threads determine the relevance of social issues, and a significant portion of academia is complicit with power or anesthetized and irrelevant. As I write this blog post, a turmoil was generated among some research institutes in Norway for the decision of a group of researchers to publish a Statement on the Situation in Palestine, now available on [Public Anthropologist](#)



[blog](#) and taken down from the website where it was originally published.

Over the past decades, we have seen wars conducted in the name of democracy, countries bombed in the name of human rights and regimes intermittently supported or fought depending on economic interests. In the US as well as in Europe freedom of expression has been dismantled, inequalities have increased and societal cohesion has eroded.

Polarizing discourses are used to generate clicks in ways that misrepresent reality. You raise questions about the opportunity to keep sending weapons to Ukraine? Then you are pro-Putin. You maintain that it is necessary to establish a dialogue with the Taliban? Then you support violations of human rights. Journalism is compromised or controlled. Dissidence is often mocked or even cancelled. Social problems tend to be oversimplified. Nuances are often unwelcomed in political debates. And so, horrors like the devastation imposed on Palestinians go on as Europe complicitly watches. Pro-Palestinians protests are banned. Voices outside the mainstream are silenced. European governments are far from being innocent in the protraction of this humanitarian tragedy. Once again, as with the invasion of Iraq in 2003 or the bombing of Libya in 2011 (to mention only two relatively recent examples), the current events will remain in the history books as a terrifying injustice.

It may be appropriate to recall how in 1993 the historian Howard Zinn introduced the essay "[Terrorism over Tripoli](#)":

"In April of 1986, a bomb exploded in a discotheque in West Berlin, killing two people, one an American soldier. It was unquestionably an act of terrorism. Libya's tyrannical leader, Muammar Khadafi, had a record of involvement in terrorism, although in this case there seemed to be no clear evidence of who was responsible. Nevertheless, President Reagan ordered that bombers be sent over Libya's capital of Tripoli, killing perhaps a hundred people, almost all civilians. I wrote this piece, which could not find publication in the press, to argue against the principle of retaliation. I am always furious at the killing of innocent people



for some political cause, but I wanted to broaden the definition of terrorism to include governments, which are guilty of terrorism far more often, and on an infinitely larger scale, than bands of revolutionaries or nationalists.”

The essay ends with these words:

“Let us hope that, even if this generation, its politicians, its reporters, its flag-wavers and fanatics, cannot change its ways, the children of the next generation will know better, having observed our stupidity. Perhaps they will understand that the violence running wild in the world cannot be stopped by more violence, that someone must say: we refuse to retaliate, the cycle of terrorism stops here.”

Unfortunately, we cannot say that lessons have been learned. Quite the opposite, as the situation in Gaza blatantly reveals.

Along with Palestinians, truth dies.

Noam Chomsky once praised Zinn’s work (endorsement for *Howard Zinn on History*) in the following terms: “Howard’s life and work are a persistent reminder that our own subjective judgments of the likelihood of success in engaging human problems are of little interest, to ourselves or others. What matters is to take part, as best we can, in the small actions of unknown people that can stave off disaster and bring about a better world, to honor them for their achievement, to do what we can to ensure that these achievements are understood and carried forward.”

As Palestine burns, many scholars are still reluctant to speak out, established academic institutions avoid making a public stand, unverified information is used as communication tactics, investigative journalism is invisible. Along with Palestinians, truth dies. There are times when we need to create the space for the courage of historical truths to emerge. This is one of those times.



We stand with Palestine, whether right or wrong

Yazid Ben Hounet
November, 2023



“We stand with Palestine, whether right or wrong!” (*nahnu m’a falastîn zâlimâ aw mazlûma*) is a phrase uttered in 1974 by former Algerian president Houari Boumediene. It has since become a credo in Algeria. That same year, Yasser Arafat, leader of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), then described as a terrorist, came to the UN for the first time to take part in debates concerning Palestine. This historic decision was taken on the initiative of the President of the 29th session of the UN General Assembly - Abdelaziz Bouteflika, Algeria’s



Minister of Foreign Affairs and Houari Boumediene's right-hand man - despite opposition from Israel and the United States.

[Yasser Arafat's speech](#) still resonates strongly with today's sad reality:

"I am a rebel, my cause is freedom. Many of you in this room have experienced the same situation as I have: the position of resistance in which I find myself and in which I must fight. You too have had to fight to make your dreams a reality. Today, you must share my hope. Mr. President... [turning to Abdelaziz Bouteflika, then to the audience] I have come with an olive branch in one hand, a fighter's rifle in the other. Do not let the olive branch fall from my hand! Do not let the olive branch fall from my hand! Do not let the olive branch fall from my hand!"

Since then, Palestine has become an observer member of the UN, but the colonial process has continued, the olive branch has fallen, its bearer has died in troubled circumstances and [the olive groves have continued to be monopolized](#) and destroyed to terrorize Palestinians.

We have been told to accept Israel's right to defend itself, even though this can only mean one thing: the Palestinians have the right to die in silence.

The formula - "We stand with Palestine, whether right or wrong!" - is far from being the counterpart of "unconditional support for Israel". It was uttered by a person who knew full well what it meant to fight against colonialism, and against the processes of moral disqualification of national liberation struggles. Houari Boumediene was also a former officer of the Armée de Libération Nationale (ALN), the armed wing of the Algerian Front de Libération Nationale (FLN), according to the Algerian point of view... or of a terrorist movement according to the point of view, at the time, of the occupying power (France). This fact is not unique to Algeria. Many national liberation movements - such as Nelson Mandela's ANC - have been described as terrorist groups.

To say that "We stand with Palestine, whether right or wrong!" is to say how



aware we are, as anthropologists, researchers and citizens, of the mechanisms used to delegitimize the Palestinian cause, as has been the case for other causes of national liberation.

We have been called upon to condemn the acts of terror of Hamas by the very people who have been complicit, or silent, during the decades (75 years) of terror inflicted by Israel on the Palestinians, and in particular the Gazans.

We were told to believe that Hamas in no way represented the Palestinians, without once hearing the point of view of the main people concerned: the Palestinians.

We were told not to publicly express our solidarity and affection for Gaza and Palestine.

We have been told to accept Israel's right to defend itself, even though this can only mean one thing: the Palestinians have the right to die in silence.

As Gilles Deleuze wrote in 1983: "It's a genocide, but one in which physical extermination remains subordinate to geographical evacuation: as Arabs in general, the surviving Palestinians must blend in with the other Arabs" (Deleuze 1983).

To say "We stand with Palestine" is to begin adopting a somewhat emic perspective, an approach dear to the anthropologist. It's worth noting that the day after October 7, no official spokesperson for Palestine (members of Fatah, the rival branch of Hamas) - whether [the current Palestinian ambassador to France](#), the former Palestinian representative in France, [Leila Shahid](#), or Riyadh Mansour, [the Palestinian ambassador to the United Nations](#) - condemned the attack on Israel. Not that they did not have any compassion for the Israeli victims. But they know better than anyone that any unilateral condemnation - any condemnation of the death of Israeli civilians, without taking into account the thousands of Palestinians murdered by the colonial state and the effects of an occupation lasting almost 75 years - is a discharge to Israel in its call for "unwavering



support to defend itself”, in the words of the [Israeli ambassador to the UN Security Council](#).

Palestinians know very well, from experience, what this means in practice. What’s more, although the UN Security Council was not unanimous in its condemnation of Hamas, this in no way prevented Israel (with the backing of the USA and Europe) from imposing a total blockade (water, food, electricity, gas) on the entire population of Gaza, and from continuously bombing buildings in Gaza, claiming thousands of victims, mainly civilians – many of them children. What would have happened if the UN Security Council had aligned itself with the Israeli – and therefore American and European – position?

“We are not subhumans” was Riyad Mansour’s strong statement to the UN Security Council (October 8, 2023), one day before the Israeli Defense Minister dared to bluster publicly about the siege of Gaza: “We’re fighting animals, so we’re going to treat them like animals”. A phrase whose genocidal intent is obvious.

To say “We stand with Palestine” is to begin adopting a somewhat emic perspective, an approach dear to the anthropologist.

As for the reactions of the political and media authorities in North America and Europe, they have only confirmed the abysmal hypocrisy between the values they promote and practice. They have only contributed to opening a little wider “the gates of hell on Gaza”, to propagating even further an “atmosphere of the end of the world” for an entire “orphaned childhood”, to quote Frantz Fanon. In his book *Sociologie d’une révolution* (1959), about the Algerian War of National Liberation (1954-1962), Frantz Fanon explained the types of war crimes perpetrated in the name of “democracy”, the feelings and desire for revenge that they necessarily nourished among the first victims: the children.

“Swedish journalist Christiana Lilliestierna spoke to some of the thousands of Algerian refugees in a camp. Here’s an excerpt from her report: “Next on the



chain is a seven-year-old boy with deep wounds made by a steel wire with which he was bound while French soldiers abused and killed his parents and sisters. A lieutenant forcibly held his eyes open, so that he could see and remember for a long time... “This child was carried by his grandfather for five days and nights before reaching the camp. “The child said: “I only want one thing: to be able to cut a French soldier into small pieces, very small pieces.” How easy do you think it is to make this seven-year-old forget both the murder of his parents and his enormous revenge? Is this orphaned childhood, growing up in an atmosphere of the end of the world, the message that French democracy will leave behind?” (Fanon, 1959 : 11).

On the contrary, in the Global South, but also here and there in Europe and North America, these reactions from political and media authorities have helped even more to demystify “definitively the most alienated of the colonized” (Fanon, 1961). Here again, and in conclusion, a comparison with the Algerian War of National Liberation is useful, and in particular this passage by Frantz Fanon (*Les damnés de la terre* 1961), concerning the gap between discourse and practice when it comes to the equality between humans:

“As soon as the colonized chooses counter-violence, police reprisals mechanically call for reprisals by national forces. There is no equivalence of results, however, as strafing by aircraft or cannonading by the fleet surpass in horror and importance the colonized’s responses. This to-and-fro of terror definitively demystifies the most alienated of the colonized. On the ground, they see that all the talk of human equality piled one on top of the other does not mask the banality of the fact that the seven Frenchmen killed or wounded on the Sakamody pass arouse the indignation of civilized consciences, while the sacking of the Guergour douars and the Djerah dechra, and the massacre of the very people who had motivated the ambush, “count for nothing” (Fanon, 1961 : 86).



No peace without decolonization

North African Decolonial Network
November, 2023



In the central Gaza Strip, the colonial state of Israel bombed the Al Ahli Baptist Hospital and a UN-run school on Tuesday, October 17, killing over 500 civilians. A letter by the North African decolonial network, which collected more than 500 signatures in two days from professors, researchers, artists, and other actors in the region and from friends throughout the world, expresses concern regarding the genocidal escalation in Gaza against the Palestinians, and urges a peaceful course of action in its letter entitled “No peace without decolonization.”

We, members and friends of the North African decolonial network, are responding to the call issued by our colleagues at Bir Zeit University, whom we salute for their courage and tenacity. With the present text, we want to express our full solidarity with the Palestinian people and their right to liberation, and our



compassion for all the civilian victims. We would also like to denounce the outrageous effects of political demonization and media intoxication, which seek to minimize and divert attention from the criminal brutality underway. Colonial forces always want history to begin with the moment their allies are attacked, thus erasing the accumulated effects of oppression, humiliation and perpetual aggression produced by apartheid policies.

No lasting peace in the region will be achieved if the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people continue to be ignored

We would like to stress that the history of this murderous madness did not begin on October 7, 2023. Just as it did not begin on October 6, 1973. It is the story of a permanent and gradual expansion of Israeli settlements in occupied territories, accompanied, with each wave of annexation, by ever more sophisticated ways of alienating and persecuting the Palestinians. It is the result of the creation of a discriminatory state where dehumanization is normalized, which today allows the Israeli Minister of Defense to publicly call the inhabitants of Gaza “human animals” — with impunity.

At the time of writing, Israel has ordered 1.1 million inhabitants to evacuate the northern Gaza Strip within 24 hours, and to take refuge in the south. Any resident who stays in place will be presumed to be a member of Hamas and threatened with elimination by the Israeli armed forces. On Friday October 13, 2023, for the first time in recent history, humanity witnessed the live announcement of a planned genocide. By supporting this massacre, be it tacitly or overtly, Western powers lost all legitimacy to take part in a lasting peace process. By exposing its double standards to the world, the West has once again shown its contempt for the “universal values” it loves to trumpet.

The cruelty of Israel’s colonization is intensifying. On Friday October 13, as Gazans fled the North, the Israeli army bombed civilians and ambulances. That same evening, it made incursions throughout the West Bank: Jenin, Hebron, Nablus, Ramallah, Bethlehem... For several days now, the State of Israel has been officially arming settlers and encouraging them to murder any and all Palestinians.

In Palestine, the current situation is but the outcome of enduring and



permanent colonial violence.

These state crimes are being committed with impunity. Western media propaganda justifies them — the most appalling example being the allegation that Hamas slit the throats of forty Israeli babies. Thanks to fact-checking by Al Jazeera journalists, CNN was forced to officially apologize, acknowledging that those were unconfirmed claims. But the damage was done: this lie, taken up by the US President himself, enabled Washington, in addition to its financial and military aid to Israel, to prime public opinion for the impending massacre. A somber reminder of what preceded the invasion of Iraq.

The international community's deafening silence on the war crimes committed in Palestine today is further proof that racial inequality has always been at the heart of the West's colonial and imperial projects. In fact, racial inequality has always been used to justify all the major massacres and genocides perpetrated against racialized populations.

In Palestine, the current situation is but the outcome of enduring and permanent colonial violence. This year, violence against Palestinians has markedly intensified. According to UN estimates, 173 Palestinians had already been killed by October. We all remember images of the Jenin refugee camp devastated by the Israeli army. Israel's indiscriminate policy of intensifying settlements, its constant violation of international law, and its failure to abide by peace agreements all undeniably amount to ethnic cleansing in a settler colonial context.

Other indigenous peoples have been massacred throughout history. Of this, the routine persecution of and discrimination against Native Americans is a constant reminder.

In the face of the international community's silence, the United States and the European Union's unconditional support of Israel, and the obvious biases of Western media, we, members and friends of the North African decolonial network, affirm our full support for the Palestinian people in their struggle for



liberation, and denounce the ongoing massacre of Palestinian civilians.

In this context, we also want to highlight the ethical and political necessity of ending the normalization agreements, which only reinforce Israel's sense of impunity.

No lasting peace in the region will be achieved if the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people continue to be ignored, if the demands for justice, true equality, and freedom of movement for all continue to be flouted. At the end of the day, the equation is simple, if constantly obstructed and denied: there can be no peace without decolonization!

Sign the statement [here](#).

Now is Our Moment to Act

Lori Allen

November, 2023



As anthropologists, scholars, and teachers, now is our moment to act. It has always been our responsibility, as academics and citizens, to defend and promote the spaces for critical thinking, dissent, and open debate, for free expression and academic freedom. But what rides on our collective efforts now, in this moment, is even more urgent, more essential, more existential.

We, alongside Palestinians, alongside Israelis and others in the SWANA region, alongside everyone else: we are on the edge of an abyss. We can all see into its dark heart, where fascism percolates and [ethnic cleansing](#) against Palestinians is under way. Israel's decision to respond to Hamas with vengeful brutality against Gaza's Palestinians has sparked a wave of lockstep, blue and white flag-waving support from western governments and large parts of their societies. This warmongering has made our responsibilities as intellectuals more acute. All of us are dangling over the edge of this abyss. Together, although as is painfully clear, not equally so.



When universities ban rallies in solidarity with Palestinians and [forbid critical speech](#) about Israel, they facilitate fascism in our own countries. The fight against repression was already getting harder globally, as extreme Right-wing governments and societies smothered pluralism and reduced the possibility of even claiming democratic rights, let alone enjoying them. The space that we ceded to these fascistic forces is now filled with people motivated [to harass, intimidate, silence](#), exterminate, and expel Palestinians—those Palestinians in historic Palestine and those living as the descendants of refugees globally. While Palestinians face the greatest threat —both within and beyond the SWANA region—those calling for their protection and liberation are also harassed, intimidated, silenced, and arrested. The [repression of Palestinian rights activism](#) and anti-Palestinian racism are spreading with the institutionalized support of governments and higher education institutions in the [US](#), [France](#), the [UK](#), [Germany](#), and [Austria](#). Those targeted include people who are part of our professional organizations and universities, Palestinian students and scholars, and [those who work on Israel and Palestine](#). In this climate of rising fascism, we cannot be silent.

We must speak out to defend the space to come together with others who oppose Israel's war and western governments' support of it.

The reciprocity and duties that come with professional community is not the main reason to speak out. Neither is the fragility of our own positions and freedoms. We must speak out to defend the space to come together with others who oppose Israel's war and western governments' support of it. Defense of the space to speak out is, in and of itself, a reason to do so.

Now is our time to come together to insist on the right to dissent and to contribute, loudly, to critical public discourse. Now, when it is even more difficult, when we risk professional troubles, and our children risk social pressures, and as we wonder [what federal agent](#) is spying on our demonstration and what [counter terrorism police](#) might come knocking.



This is urgent. Israel is carrying out war crimes by bombing civilians and hospitals, and collectively punishing the Gaza Strip by cutting off electricity, water, and food, and blocking aid from entering. Israel is preparing the military ground for [a genocidal assault](#), while the language of Israeli and US leaders is preparing the psychological ground, by dehumanizing Palestinians and defining all of the Gaza Strip as a legitimate target. International legal scholars are calling it [a textbook case of genocide](#) and [ethnic cleansing](#). This is urgent.

[As of 23 October](#), more than 5,000 Palestinians have been killed in this assault on the Gaza Strip so far, including at least 2,000 children, and more than a million people ordered to leave their homes and walk under the 6,000-plus bombs to Southern Gaza, which has no resources to house them. In the West Bank, settlers and soldiers take a free hand to commit their own atrocities, with tens of Palestinians killed—including [children](#)—and [more than 1,100 injured](#). The atmosphere of censorship and repression stifles any and all criticism. We must speak out despite it, and to spite those who would benefit from our muteness and passivity. As governments, politicians, university administrators, school directors, sororities, social media gatekeepers, and the mainstream media [silence critical voices and prohibit demonstrations](#) against Israel's actions, we must refuse to be cowed. This is our time to stand up, together with others, and find ways to clear the smog of propaganda and intimidation. [Historians of fascism](#) have much to teach us about the disastrous complicity of the silent majority.

This is the time to write to university and school leaders and media outlets to demand that they cease being purveyors of Israeli propaganda and recognize the truth of ethnic cleansing and settler-colonial violence. Now is our time to stand up for and with those whose voices are being silenced because of their national background, religion, or political stance. To join the growing public protests that are demanding a halt to the vengeful violence that Israel is perpetrating against Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, [in the West Bank and Jerusalem](#), in the gaols where [political prisoners are being deprived of water and electricity](#), and in the Israeli universities where [Palestinian students are being purged](#).



The history of our present starts much earlier, shaped by the West's rejection of [Palestinian demands for a democratic state of Palestine](#) that would equally protect its Jewish, Christian, and Muslim citizens.

As scholars and teachers, we have no excuse. We have the skills and resources to dismantle racist tropes of good and evil and convey the complexity of a regional history that did not begin on 7 October 2023, but led to Hamas's breach of the siege on Gaza and killing of unarmed Israelis and others. Nor did this history start with Israel's repeated pummeling of the Gaza Strip that has killed thousands of Palestinian civilians, including [women and children](#)—the always most obvious but incomplete red line of unacceptable violence. Nor did this history start with [Israel's 2007 blockade](#) of the Gaza Strip. The history of our present starts much earlier, shaped by the West's rejection of [Palestinian demands for a democratic state of Palestine](#) that would equally protect its Jewish, Christian, and Muslim citizens. It was shaped by Europe's decision to absolve itself of responsibility for the Holocaust by supporting the Zionist settler-colonial takeover of the Arab-majority land of Palestine. Now is our time to assert the facts of this history for wide audiences.

There are those who would say that this is not the moment to assert the academic freedom to speak truth to power. That any call for academic freedom and the demand to exercise it now would be poorly timed, because the priority is to avert the immediate threats to people beyond the sheltering halls of academe. There are those who would insist that the protection of civil rights in the West is an incorrect focus when historic Palestine is the land of struggle. That the voices of those facing ethnic cleansing must be centered. And indeed, our priority should be to foreground the diverse viewpoints and goals of Palestinians on [every platform](#). But what is going on now is, in outrageously uneven ways, happening to us all. As the Birzeit University Union of Professors and Employees proclaimed in a breathtakingly eloquent [call from Occupied Palestine](#): "We are all Palestinians now." Recognizing that from an expansive place is the meaning of solidarity. As scholars and teachers, we know well that our words and our pens are not equal to



the violence of armies. But they are what we have just now, and we must use them.

For a few things you can do:

Educate yourself: <https://merip.org/palestine-israel-primer/>

Read the citations linked in this essay.

Donate to the organizations that are working to protect the right to stand for justice, read their reports about the repression of students, faculty, and others:

<https://palestinelegal.org/donate>

<https://elsc.support/donate>

Donate to people working to save lives in Palestine:

<https://www.map.org.uk/donate/donation-details/484>

<https://www.unrwausa.org/donate>

<https://www.1for3.org/donate>

In the UK, email your MP:

<https://www.map.org.uk/campaigns/protect-palestinians-against-atrocities-in-gaza>

In the US, contact your representatives:

<https://www.jewishvoiceforpeace.org/take-action/>

Use exemplary faculty letters to university administrations:

Northwestern

University:

<https://dailynorthwestern.com/2023/10/16/lateststories/lte-open-letter-on-nu-leaders-responses-to-war-in-palestine-and-israel/?fbclid=IwAR1mOrcaj1oLg15kY5SPdwpEN0GuYsFAAy2e9UBtBeowPBZXJAul4rQ36OsC>

CUNY:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/e/2PACX-1vT1FLJtSCq9kn8uTAwNLlr4V9kko>



[GWxGsS6PPTwuaDNesQHbprxwiAQhWsv4MBsOpe5vyZBaJsAeyx7/pub](https://www.gutenberg.org/files/67/67-h/67-h.htm)

Read wise people:

<https://mondoweiss.net/2023/10/birzeit-university-union-we-are-all-palestinians-in-the-face-of-colonial-fascism/>

<https://jewishcurrents.org/we-cannot-cross-until-we-carry-each-other>

Join your [union](#).

Join the Boycott, Sanctions, and Divestment (BDS) movement

<https://bdsmovement.net/pachi>

Undertake actions suggested by Jewish Voice for Peace:

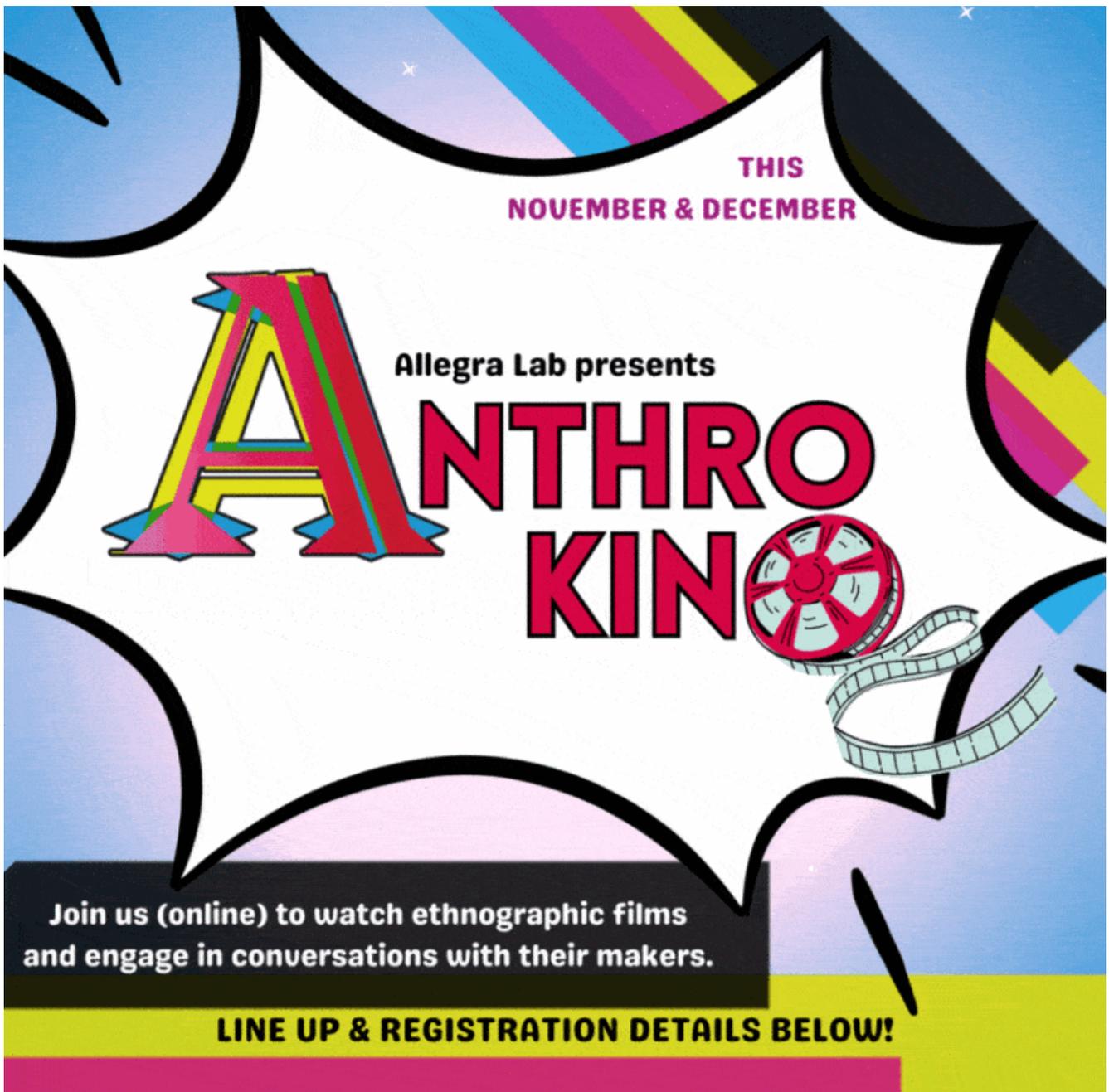
<https://www.jewishvoiceforpeace.org/resource-type/action-alerts/>

Support independent journalism, support those in Students for Justice in Palestine groups on your campus; write to your mainstream media sources when they frame the situation in so narrow a way as to be propaganda; demand they interview Palestinians, too; reach out to your colleagues working on the Middle East and ask how you can help.

AnthroKino - The Program

Allegra

November, 2023



In November and December, Allies meet (online) to watch ethnographic films and discuss with their makers. We have a wonderful line up of movies that explore humanitarianism (*The Bridge*), urban violence (*Shadowlands*), climate change (*Mammung*) and revolution (*The Secret Capital*). Register to receive the Zoom link!

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



The Bridge (30 mins)



Nov 8th - 2 PM CET

Laura Kunreuther, Mulki Mohamed Ali, Adam Mohamed Bashar, Kamoso Jean Bertrand

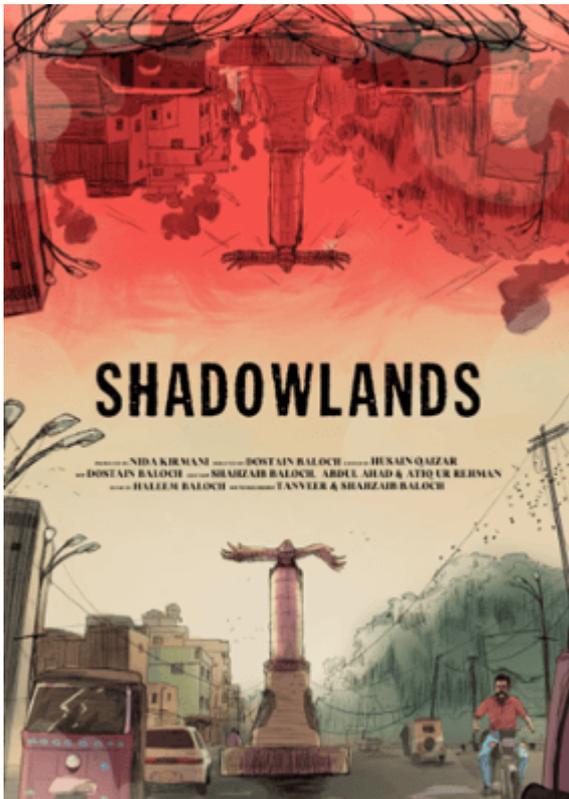
The Bridge explores the labor conditions of being an interpreter while also being a refugee under the governance of humanitarian aid. The fictional frame of the film enables a representation of ‘the real’ without threat to refugee security. Centering on the everyday episodes in the lives of two refugee characters, who work as interpreters in a camp for a fictional humanitarian agency, *The Bridge* depicts the multilingual nature of the camp and focuses on issues specific to interpreters in the field (lack of trainings, rejection by other refugee clients due to their ethnicity, the experience of nightmares and other consequences of the trauma associated with interpreting difficult cases etc.). It also addresses topics that affect refugee workers more generally: the dual-status of being both “refugee” and “worker”, the problems with the structure of work under which refugees are employed, and obstacles to organizing to produce change. Most poignantly, the film depicts a lack of respect for interpreting work and its hidden centrality to the operations of international organizations in refugee camps. Producing *The Bridge* led three of the filmmakers to create their own ‘Community



Based Organization' (CBO) that aims to produce more films based on research for social change.

Register [here!](#)

Shadowlands (30 mins)



Nov 16 - 1.30 PM CET

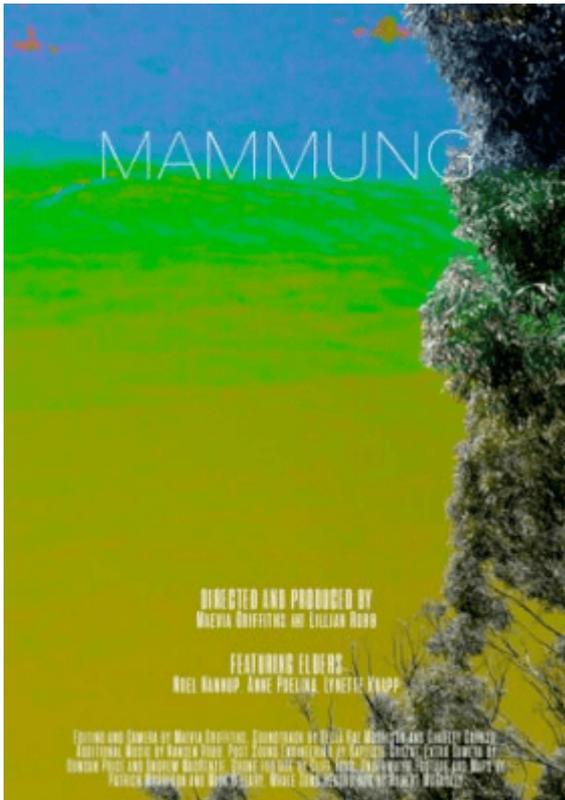
Nida Kirmani

Shadowlands: Life After conflict in Lyari, Karachi follows the stories of two residents of the area of Lyari in Karachi, Nawaz Laasi and Amna Baloch. Both have lost family members to gang violence in the area. Nawaz has lost four sons, two to gang violence and two at the hands of the police, and Amna's husband was killed by the police. Through telling their stories, this documentary sheds light on the on-going ramifications of violence and questions whether peace has truly been achieved for the people of Lyari.

Register [here!](#)



Mammung (43 mins)



Dec 7 - 1.30 PM CET

Maevia Griffiths et Lillian Robb

Mammung is the Noongar name for the whale: A creature that carries songs and stories through the world's oceans, transmitting them from the Perth Canyon to all the continents of the globe. In this film, *Mammung* tells the story of a period of climatic change that rivals the one we are seeing today. 10,000 years ago, Western Australia experienced rapid sea-level rise. The film explores Noongar memory of this event, following Dr Noel Nannup in recalling the significance of places that are now below the sea and the dramatic process of change that indigenous people endured. It challenges us to ask: can we learn to understand and value this rich body of knowledge as we too adapt to a changing climate? And



what awaits us if we don't?

Register [here!](#)

The Secret Capital (28 mins)



December 14 - 1.30 PM CET

Samuli Schielke and Mukhtar Shehata

“If the revolution ever reaches our village, then there really is a revolution in Egypt.”

Was there a revolution? *The Secret Capital* follows the struggles, hopes and frustrations of people who tried to bring the revolution to their village in northern Egypt. The film consists of footage shot by the village revolutionaries during their activities, and of interviews recorded by the filmmakers.

Register [here!](#)



Never Again Means Never Again For Anyone

Maura Finkelstein
November, 2023



I am not a scholar of Palestine. While I've spent time in the region and written about the occupation, this is not part of my scholarly ethnographic work. However, I am an anti-Zionist Jew who has spent almost three decades speaking out against the occupation. This is what I bring to this space.

Right now, we all have to figure out what our humanity is worth. For American Jews, this is particularly complicated. Can we stay silent in the midst of a



genocide, carried out in our name, with our tax dollars? I hope not. But the silencing of our words and actions, carried out by the Israeli-controlled Zionist propaganda machine, is well organized and devastatingly powerful. Speaking out against Israeli occupation has always been framed as anti-Semitism. Now, that tactic is being used to carry out a large-scale genocidal attack on Gazan civilians. Somehow, saying no to this monster of war has been twisted into support of the Hamas attacks on Israeli and American civilians on October 7th. If we try to contextualize the past few weeks within decades of occupation, apartheid, ethnic cleansing, and war, we are threatened, harassed, attacked, called anti-Semitic. The fear of such accusations is powerful. It is a weapon. It silences and silence can be deadly. But right now, our silence will cause thousands, if not millions, of people to die. On the one hand, we are powerless in this geopolitical nightmare, as US interests override basic humanity. On the other hand, our voice is more important than ever. We must use it.

Like many American Jews, I grew up in a world of contradictions. Like many American Jews, my religious education involved the repetition of violent words, images, and film footage, a demand that I carry the trauma of my grandparent's generation. For the most part, my family (like most American Jews) was untouched by the Holocaust. And yet, from kindergarten on, I was forced to bear witness, over and over and over again, to the devastation of that time, those events. I was told I was a victim. It was the only real identity I was allowed to have.

I do not remember when the Israeli flags were first hung from the walls of the Synagogue I grew up attending, but suddenly, in the mid-90s, they were everywhere.

By centering the Holocaust in my Jewish education, I was also told that I had to center Israel. I do not remember when the Israeli flags were first hung from the walls of the Synagogue I grew up attending, but suddenly, in the mid-90s, they were everywhere. For Bar and Bat Mitzvah gifts, friends and relatives planted



trees in Israel through a campaign carried out through the Jewish National Fund (JNF) - a project framed as “helping the desert grow” while masking a violent international act of erasure. Deciduous trees planted over razed Palestinian villages and olive groves.

Most American Jews grow up hearing that if we aren’t vigilant, the Holocaust will happen again. “Never forget,” we are told. We are forced to see, over and over, the emaciated bodies of concentration camp victims, we read and sit through hundreds of iterations of Anne Frank’s autobiography, we walk through the halls of Holocaust museums and are told, “This is who you are,” are told, “You are a victim,” are told, “You are vulnerable. Never forget.” What does that do to us as American Jews? We are currently watching this play out in Gaza.

For Jews in America, this repetition of “Never Forget” allows for our religious identities to be transformed into political affiliations: “We stand with Israel.” This identity is so powerfully rooted in genocide that most American Jews have been unable to see outside the walls of their own generational trauma and, therefore, unable to see [Israel as the anti-Semitic project it is](#). The United States and Europe will never have to truly confront their own anti-Semitism as long as Israel is held up and celebrated as the one place Jews can feel safe. This safety is a mirage and this trauma is blinding - it allows us to center our own pain while blindly participating in the ongoing genocide of Palestinian people. “Never forget” has become a chant of complicity. “Never forget” allows American Jews to ignore all other forms of suffering by reproducing the suffering of past generations.

“Never forget” should be a call to action.

If we are currently silent as a genocide in Gaza is carried out in our name, then we have failed to see the real message beneath this blanket of manipulation and propaganda. “Never forget” should be a call to action. “Never forget” should force all Jews to acknowledge how easy it is to dehumanize an entire population. “Never forget” should remind us that genocide is constantly occurring as the world watches. “Never forget” should turn all Jews into activists on behalf of the



Palestinian people. Instead, “Never forget” has turned us into the perpetrators. By rooting our identity in the Holocaust, we continue to reproduce generational trauma. And in reproducing this generational trauma, we give ourselves permission to participate in genocide as a way of pretending to protect ourselves from the past. We have never given ourselves permission to heal. We have never liberated ourselves from the cycle of abuse. And so we simply continue to roll beneath the waves.

Throughout the week of October 16th, [Jewish Voices for Peace](#) and [If Not Now](#), two anti-Zionist Jewish groups invested in peace and anti-occupation work around Palestine and Israel, staged a series of actions and rallies across the United States. On Wednesday, October 18th, I went to Washington DC for the rally on the Mall. We gathered at noon and sat in the sun, which illuminated the Palestinian Flags framing the capitol building. There were food trucks and signs reading “Never Again Means Never Again For Anyone.” There were Jews and Palestinians and everyone in between. There were people wearing kippah and keffiyeh and hijab. There were babies and dogs and young punks and grandmothers. We screamed “Never Again means Never Again for Anyone!” This is the legacy we should be bringing into the current moment. For people speaking out against the genocide in Gaza, there will surely be consequences. We may lose friends and family, our jobs, our safety. But we must ask ourselves, can we live with our silence? I hope the answer is no.