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Jewish Currents

Fall 2025



UCLA
in Crisis

The Anti-Woke
Go to College
in Israel

No Coal
for Genocide!

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Jewish Currents

Vol. 79, No. 2 (711) Fall 2025

A progressive, secular voice.

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Jewish Currents (ISSN #US-ISSN-0021-6399), Vol. 79, No. 2 (711) Fall 2025. Published quarterly by

Association for the Promotion of Jewish Secularism, PO Box 130049, Brooklyn, NY 11213. Phone: 646-598-6730.

Email: info@jewishcurrents.org. Website: jewishcurrents.org. Single copies \$18. Subscriptions \$60 per year in US; elsewhere, \$75.

Periodical postage paid at Brooklyn, NY, and additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *Jewish Currents*, PO Box 130049, Brooklyn, NY 11213.

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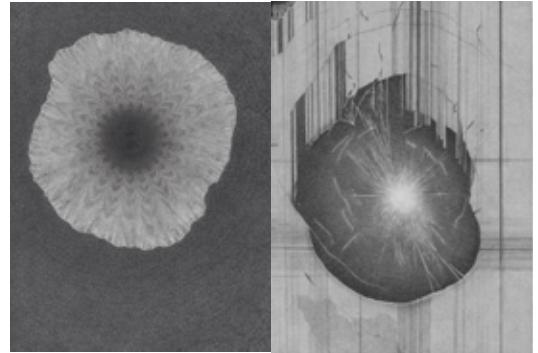
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Cover: Massoud Hayoun: *Stateless - Por no llevar papel*, 2024, acrylic on canvas, 48 x 36 in

This piece depicts the artist's Egyptian grandfather, who raised him and who was an undocumented migrant for many years. It is dedicated both to people of Palestinian origin and to the migrants in the US and Europe who have been rendered stateless by genocide and fascism.

Back Cover: The encampment at UCLA, spring 2024. Photo: Adali Schell

Letters from Our Readers

On “Against Zionist Realism”



For Jon Danforth-Appell, Jewish anti-Zionist organizing wrongly reinforces the bond between Judaism and Zionism, obscuring the more central role played by the United States in supporting Israel's actions. But in arguing against “Zionist realism,” the author reifies *nationalist* realism—the idea that the only *real* politics out there are nation-states. This obscures a long tradition of Jewish thinkers and movements who supported Jews collectively taking responsibility for their futures outside the context of an ethnostate—a tradition whose esteemed successors now include IfNotNow and Jewish Voice for Peace.

Danforth-Appell argues that we are not responsible for the actions of mainstream American Jewish organizations because they are undemocratic and don't accurately represent the community they purport to speak for. Yet the same is true, to varying degrees, of US state institutions, which seemingly serve elite and special interests above those of their constituencies. In this moment of ongoing catastrophe, what is called for is political action, undertaken both as Jews and as Americans—because if we act like only national identity matters, we will fail to build a world beyond nationalism.

Simon Jacobs
Berkeley, CA

There was a time in recent history when “Jewish” was an identity category utterly unaffiliated with state power, imperialism, and genocidal violence. The slogan “Not In Our Name” hearkens back to this time. There was, however, never a point in time when the identity category “American” was not affiliated with an empire that was, and remains, “the greatest purveyor of violence in the world,” in the words of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Thus Jon Danforth-Appell's implicit suggestion that the slogan “Not In Our Name” ought to refer to our Americanness over our Jewishness misses the crucial recognition that “American” is necessarily an identity category affiliated with genocide and empire. The hope of appending the phrase “Jews say” to our protest slogans is that Jewishness might yet be rescued from such an affiliation.

At its best, “Americans Say Not In Our Name” is an overly optimistic misdiagnosis of the possibilities of Americanness; at its worst, it gives fodder to “anti-Zionist” groups like If Americans Knew that posit Zionism as an aberration from true (white, Christian) “American values,” rather than continuous with genocidal histories of European and American imperialism. Danforth-Appell is right to note that American Jews are not uniquely complicit in Zionism's atrocities, but his suggestion to decenter Jewishness and uplift Americanness in our protest of Zionism misses the moral bankruptcies of American identity. It also obscures the hope, which we imagine Danforth-Appell shares, that we might (re)create a Jewishness that stands in unwavering opposition to empire, Zionism, and American nationalism.

We aspire to a Jewish life that does not center or hallow *any* state or national identity. As American Jewish life becomes more and more defined by Zionist or anti-Zionist identification, we ask ourselves what of Jewishness remains or can be instigated otherwise. We've debated whether to release the term “Jew” from inherited identity toward literary use as a political symbol, or to limit “Jew” to its religious underpinnings, or, in our more enraged moments, to repudiate Jewishness entirely due to its inescapable implications in historical and contemporary violence. But we agree that replacing a Jewish protest identity with an American one leaves us on unstable, corrupted ground for political advocacy, while forsaking the possibilities present in explicitly Jewish protest that aims to undermine national allegiances as such. We look to identity as generative creative ground that strengthens us to disengage our ties to nationalist state projects.

Leora Fridman
New York, NY

Moriel Rothman-Zecher
Philadelphia, PA

It's important for Jews working toward Palestinian liberation to ask ourselves whether our tactics and formations are more self-soothing than strategic, and to question the value of organizing *as Jews* at all. It's true, as Jon Danforth-Appell says, that "the American empire's support for Israel is rooted in geopolitics and the global capital of the arms trade, not a love for Jews." But love for Jews is how the US's foreign policy toward Israel is sold. Lawmakers invoke that love in appropriating endless billions of dollars for US-made weapons sent to slaughter Palestinians. As long as this is marketed as being on our behalf, we have to visibly oppose it *as Jews*—to attack the stated justification for, and thereby facilitation of, the genocide. Yelling "Not In Our Name" isn't a plea for absolution (or a way of ignoring the responsibility of Americans). Rather, it's an attempt to use the leverage we have. Let a politician announce that they're doing it for Boeing's shareholders or to bring about the Rapture—we can change our t-shirts without missing a step.

On a personal note, this mode of organizing feels unavoidable to me: Because I'm a Jew, everything I do is as a Jew; because of my love for my community and my understanding of history, I'm unable to cede the public expression of Jewishness to supporters of genocide. Whether I hold a banner saying so depends on the venue, but when I say, "I'm a Jew against this genocide," I consider it both strategic and the most honest thing I can do.

Joe Dobkin
New York, NY

*I appreciated Jon Danforth-Appell's pragmatic analysis of who is providing the most significant material support for genocide and occupation. However, I take issue with the claim (which was also repeated on the *On the Nose* episode discussing the article) that Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP) is one of the leading groups organizing direct action in solidarity with Palestine. As a current sophomore at Barnard College, I have witnessed the dynamics between many groups in the Palestine solidarity movement over the past year. While Jewish students are certainly part of campus movements, the vast majority of direct actions on campuses have been led by Students for Justice in Palestine and other Palestinian-led organizations; focusing only on JVP thus wrongly marginalizes the work of Palestinian-led groups.*

At Columbia University, we've seen the administration target and penalize our Black, brown, and Palestinian comrades the most harshly, often utilizing the flimsy justification of "combating antisemitism." Given this reality, white Jews on campus absolutely should use our privilege to participate in riskier actions. But this does not mean that we must turn to Jewish-centered organizing; those who have US citizenship or those who aren't reliant on financial aid are also in a position to take risks. Identity politics are often shallow; it's more

important to identify the broadest base of people who can exploit their positionality and act together to shift the balance of power.

Hannah C.
New York, NY

We at Halachic Left, a grassroots organization of Halachically observant Jews working against the occupation, don't disagree with Jon Danforth-Appell's claim that a main axis of our complicity in the ongoing genocide in Gaza is our Americanness, not our Judaism. But we believe that deep cultural shifts are crucial for creating long-term change and that this work is most impactful when done within a communal framework. We know that our schools send graduates to the Israeli military, that politicians are often afraid to alienate Jewish voting blocs over Israel, and that American Jewish organizing under the banner of opposing antisemitism has helped the current administration in its campaign of repression on university campuses. Our religious communities are also intricately connected to the Israeli Religious Zionist community, which is at the forefront of the settler movement and a crucial constituency in the right-wing, Jewish supremacist political coalition in Israel. As the Talmud teaches, "Kol Yisrael arevim zeh b'zeh" ("All Jews are responsible for one another"). We organize as religious Jews because we see ourselves as responsible for helping to facilitate political transformation in all Jewish communities, and hope that this ethos will maximize our impact.

Eliana Padwa
Jerusalem

The letter writer is a co-founder of Halachic Left.

In his recent piece, Jon Danforth-Appell writes that "the Jewish left as a whole has yet to articulate a project that is not just the negation of Zionism." But in searching for the positive content of anti-Zionist Judaism, might we consider . . . Judaism? Our traditions of dialectic argumentation and empathy for the vulnerable, to give just two examples, ought to be rich enough to furnish the positive content we seek.

Isaac Congedo
Silver Spring, MD

As *Jon Danforth-Appell* rightly notes, anti-Zionism, perhaps counterintuitively, still centers Israel. As if to dramatize the “realism” Danforth-Appell describes, in my view, even the article itself (and the podcast discussing it) reproduce terms and concepts common to both Zionism and anti-Zionism, which feel so embedded that it’s hard to imagine it any other way.

For example, Danforth-Appell writes: “The mobilization of American Jews around a conception of our unique responsibility to oppose the Israeli government entangles the anti-Zionist Jewish left in an overbroad definition of Jewish peoplehood that necessarily centers the state of Israel.” But I am not sure that there is any conception of Jewish peoplehood that exists absent Israel. As my colleague Noam Pianko argues in his book *Jewish Peoplehood: An American Innovation*, the term “Jewish peoplehood” only emerged in the 20th century and was coined by rabbis like Stephen Wise and Mordecai Kaplan who had strong Zionist commitments.

Indeed, historically, there was no consensus on the idea of a single Jewish people or nation—a concept deeply connected to the emergence of highly dubious “racial science” discourses. Arthur Ruppin, a founder of the city of Tel Aviv and of the sociology department at Hebrew University, argued that Sephardic and Middle Eastern Jews were closer to Arabs and Muslims than to Ashkenazi Jews, the latter of whom he saw as the real Jews. In response to experiences of discrimination that Jews from the Ottoman Empire endured at the hands of Eastern and Central European Jews in early 20th-century New York, Salonican-born intellectual Henry Besso argued in 1939 that Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews are as far apart from each other “ethnologically” as a “German Catholic and a Spanish Catholic.” The implication was that, although both groups ostensibly shared a religion, they constituted different peoples. He thus opened up the possibility that there could be multiple Jewish nations, just as there were multiple Catholic ones. Likewise, some Ladino newspapers in New York as far back as the early 20th century argued for the existence of “pueblos djudios” (“Jewish peoples,” in the plural).

Both Zionist and anti-Zionist Jews tend to use other terms uncritically as well, such as the oft-repeated category of “diaspora Jews.” The term implies that “diaspora” is always in relation to Israel; that, as I discussed with editor-in-chief Arielle Angel back in 2020, “Israel is the center and we are dispersed from the center—even as we attempt to assert that that former periphery is a new center.” I worry that our correctives to Zionism sometimes reinforce the same binary. Take, for example, the idea of “doikayt,” often translated as “hereness.” As I explained then, I worry about the dichotomy it sets up between “here” and “there.” I continue to advocate for the idea of “multi-rootedness” to help shift our frameworks away from Zionist realism. We need concepts that allow for pluralities—for multiple diasporas—and for multiple nodes of connection. I hope this concept can also help provide the “positive” content that Danforth-Appell provocatively suggests is needed to move beyond anti-Zionism.

If one wants to challenge Zionist realism, one has to challenge the underlying nationalist logic encoded in our everyday language, which shapes our structures of thought. Maybe rethinking peoplehood and diaspora is a place to start.

Devin Naar
Seattle, WA

The letter writer is an associate professor of history and Jewish studies and the Isaac Alhadeff Professor in Sephardic Studies at the University of Washington. He serves on the Jewish Currents advisory board.

On “We Need New Jewish Institutions”

As the founder of the *Bushwick/Ridgewood Shul*—a budding Jewish community currently based out of my apartment—I appreciated the suggestion in Arielle Angel’s recent response that we simply define ourselves as Jews, rather than constantly flagging our anti-Zionism. We are Jewish, too, and anyone who comes to our space is welcome to leave if they find our politics distasteful. In the short time our shul has existed, I have seen hundreds of people come through, including those who chafed at the term “anti-Zionist.” My hope is that we can provide a home for local Jews, even those who are only 75% with us—people who enjoy themselves enough socially and Jewishly to come back again, despite their disagreement, and who might move politically over time. Importantly, our shul has already been a source of connection beyond Shabbat services. Community members have gotten involved in Jews for Racial and Economic Justice and taken part in direct actions and canvassing together—evidence that a communal and spiritual home can help us build the World to Come.

Esti L.
Brooklyn, NY

Arielle Angel’s terrific article manages to be radical *and* practical at a time when we need both qualities, and need them simultaneously. I would like, however, to offer two points of contention: First, I’m not sure Angel is right that “our small minyanim and chavurot cannot provide . . . lifecycle support.” My own chavurah, Havurat Shalom in Somerville, Massachusetts, does provide a fair amount of such support, and I imagine we’re not unique. Granted we don’t always have a minyan on Saturday mornings, but we gather our strength for lifecycle events and have sufficient expertise

for naming ceremonies, b'nai mitzvahs, weddings, and shivas, all of which benefit from the intimacy and personal connections characteristic of a havurah. Second, I think a more robust conversation is warranted about the content that is offered in new institutions and, especially, the role of new liturgy in challenging the status quo. What does it mean, at this moment, to thank God for making one a Jew, as per the traditional morning blessings? To proclaim in Kiddush or Havdalah that God has chosen us from among all nations? Don't we need new prayers regarding chosenness, superiority, and our relationship to non-Jews? If we don't take seriously the language of our prayers, I fear our new institutions will reproduce the chauvinism of the current ones.

Lawrence Rosenwald
Maynard, MA

In her recent piece, Arielle Angel writes, "It is the Zionists who have been the primary actors over much of the last century of Jewish history, who have strangled our diasporic languages and disinvested from our cultural and spiritual life." This claim, however, bears an uneasy relationship to history. Zionists and their institutions have been the fomenters and supporters of a variety and depth of Jewish culture. Multiple Zionist Yiddish publications appeared in Palestine in the 1920s and '30s, and both Yiddish and Ladino creativity would be significantly poorer today without cultural efforts supported in and by Israel. Hebrew, as a language of Jewish existence and cultural production, would also be diminished without the State of Israel.

We do a disservice to Jewish culture when we fail to grapple with the fact that the Jewish diaspora faces its own challenges of cultural preservation, continuity, and innovation—with or without Zionism. Indeed, in the US context, for example, both Hebrew and Yiddish are little spoken, due to the upheaval of the Holocaust, immigration, and assimilation, which have had a bigger impact than state suppression. In other words, the power of Zionism is not greater than that of sociolinguistics, and, more broadly speaking, it's facile to blame Zionism for cultural processes that have little relation to political movements. We need to seriously consider difficult questions about the impact of assimilation and how to build a thriving Jewish community. We won't get there by reading our own political preferences into Jewish cultural history.

Zackary Sholem Berger
Baltimore, MD

I wholeheartedly agree with Arielle Angel's recent responsa on the need for new Jewish institutions. But Angel nearly lost me in the

opening sentences, when she writes, "Nearly every organization charged with stewarding" the enterprise of Judaism "is infected with a voracious rot. Over the past 20 months, there is no sacred Jewish ritual that has not been performed by soldiers in Gaza, in the ruins of someone's home or school, right before or after a slaughter." This is certainly the case. What I question is the implication we are seemingly meant to draw from this assertion. In the months after 9/11, when many expected Muslims to preface any public utterance with a statement distancing themselves from the attacks, didn't we on the left feel that indicting all Muslims for the actions of their co-religionists was itself a form of bigotry? I worry that Angel's pronouncement will provide aid and comfort precisely to those who argue that it is Judaism, not Zionism, that is the root of the problem. In light of the way such assumptions can be weaponized, we must be scrupulous in avoiding such conflation.

I know this is easier said than done; I agree with Angel that the cowardice and deeply compromised leadership of most Jewish institutions makes it more difficult to extricate Judaism from Zionism. And I agree that the work of extrication is *our* task as Jews on the left, since our community's mainstream leadership has either abdicated that duty or has no interest in it. Still, I found Angel's opening language incompatible with a call for Jewish renewal or organization, and worry that it might undermine her otherwise much-needed exploration of the subject.

D.D. Guttenplan
Brooklyn, NY

The letter writer was the editor of The Nation from 2019 to 2025 and was editor of The Jewish Quarterly before that.

Angel does an excellent job diagnosing the problem that modern, justice-minded Jews are feeling in this singularly troubling moment in history. However, I take some issue with Angel's prescription for "new spaces, new containers for the exploration of antifascist Jewish life." There are, in fact, organizations that have been fighting this good fight for generations, though we are often marginalized, ignored, derided, or simply forgotten. I speak of the Secular Jewish movement, which blossomed during the Haskole, or Jewish Enlightenment, and was once a vibrant stream in Jewish American life. Though our institutions were greatly diminished during the McCarthy-era purges, some of us still remain.

I am the Education Director and Principal of the Sholem Community and its Sunday School, which has served Los Angeles since the early 1950s. We were founded by blacklisted artists and professionals as a place where their kids could come together to play and learn. Our community is modeled after the Yiddish Folkshul movement, promulgated by the great Yiddish scholar and philosopher Khayim Zhitlovsky. We also

follow in the footsteps of the late Hershl Hartman, a longtime contributor to *JC*, who, between undertaking voluminous writing projects and Yiddish translations, found time to develop meaningful secular observances for Jewish holidays.

I see the work of carrying on secular Jewish tradition as a sacred task. We find our moral calling not from scripture but from our proud history of revolutionary thought and actions—our investment in anti-racism, labor activism, solidarity with marginalized groups, and the simple notion that what is good for humanity, for *mentshlikhkayt*, is good for the Jews. I believe that what we have to say and what we teach are more relevant now than they have ever been before. But in order for us to be a part of the revival that Angel yearns for, we need a seat at the table, a voice in the great debates of our era, and, most of all, to be seen. To quote a famed lyric by Hirsh Glik, a great young poet and partisan fighter who lived and died in far darker times than these, "*Meer zaynen do*"—We are here!

Ross Helford
Los Angeles, CA

I agree with Arielle Angel that we urgently need new Jewish institutions, a necessity that has only become more acute since October 7th. Angel correctly diagnoses the poisoned chalice of our current institutions being built on inherently anti-democratic foundations, and we should keep this assessment in mind as we build new institutions within this burgeoning ecosystem. Unfortunately, a private Jewish day school—such as the new project, Achvat Olam, mentioned in the article—does not fit this democratic vision.

Public education is one of the bedrocks of our democracy. It is where the vast majority (87%!) of American kids, and particularly children from lower- and middle-income families, learn and grow. Private Jewish day schools remove Jews from the broader community and segregate our financial, social, and cultural resources at the expense of other would-be ally communities. It is perplexing to me then to suggest repeating this mistake with the next generation, even if the purported political leanings of the private school in question are more palatable. Despite their warts, public schools have to be central to the future of education for the Jewish left.

In our current political context, bolstering private schools is particularly destructive. The Trump administration and its backers have made abundantly clear their interest in dismantling public education, which would gut communities of one of their most sustaining resources. The administration has already frozen federal funding for crucial programs and services, and endeavored to remove and refashion critical civil rights protections in the public school context. While Achvat Olam notes on its website that it "grieve[s] the chronic underfunding and racialized inequities that shape public education," this acknowledgement does nothing to negate the

detrimental impact private schooling has on public education. Meanwhile, despite its claim that Jews cannot attain the true depths of "identity-formation, literacy, and belonging" without full-time Jewish day school—a borderline offensive statement, given that Jewish life is not "extracurricular," in Achvat Olam's words, for the more than 75% of Jews who have never attended these schools—there are plenty of opportunities to build new educational and cultural Jewish institutions for kids through means that do not require weakening public education.

There are many necessary opportunities that must be pursued to build new Jewish institutions. This is one we should leave behind.

David Mantell
Brooklyn, NY

The letter writer is a former public school teacher and current employee of the New York City Department of Education.

I enthusiastically agree that we need an entirely new Jewish organizational infrastructure. But it is important to remember that the need for new institutions is not unique to the Jewish community: All of the core institutions of our society—from health care to education to the "justice system"—are facing utter collapse. We must build mutual aid and community self-defense networks not only because these kinds of groups help advance a more just world but because the institutions that we inherited have failed. They are hollowed out, abandoned, or utterly corrupt, helping to hoard wealth for those in the upper echelons of power and feeding a toxic sectarianism that has eroded class consciousness. Yes, we need new synagogues. And we also need new community councils, food distribution centers, community safety networks, transformative justice working groups, schools, labor unions, and affordable housing. We may build these new institutions out of bare necessity, but perhaps, from the hollowed-out shell of our dying society, we can yet build something better.

Shane Burley
Portland, OR

On "The Gavel and the Gun"

Darryl Li argues in favor of the "centrality of the armed struggle" to further the Palestinian cause. His main justification is that violent actions have been the "bloodstained lever moving the question of Palestine onto the international legal agenda." His approach to Palestinian violence is instrumentalist: He argues that it should be endorsed because it works. He fails,

however, to provide any plausible criteria for judging what he might consider success. Given his cynical attitude toward international law, and his sense of the futility of recent cases in particular, it's baffling that he would regard such legal developments as successes. Meanwhile, if one judges success by the ability to improve the lives of Palestinians, or even just to prevent catastrophic destruction, then the record of Palestinian violence is one of abject failure. Li does not, and cannot, point to any success of that kind. The post-October 7th charges of war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide prove the catastrophic consequences of the Hamas attacks, not their success.

But the most disturbing aspect of Li's argument is its morally horrifying stance. Li uses slogans familiar from anti-colonial parlance like "armed struggle," "armed resistance," and "organized force" to cover up the moral question of the *kind* of violence under discussion: above all, killing, maiming, raping, and abducting civilians. All morally and legally informed discussions of armed conflict distinguish between combatants and civilians—the only basis for justifying *any* use of violence in war. If military actions do not comply with this distinction, then they are simply crimes, as well as war crimes; mass killing of civilians is simply mass murder, as well as a war crime. Li antiseptically describes such crimes as instances when "anti-colonial violence transgresses international legal prohibitions against targeting civilians." But the problem is not merely the "transgression of legal prohibitions," but the moral indefensibility of the crimes of mass murder, rape, and abduction. Li also engages in "whataboutism," using the fact that the Israelis commit war crimes as a justification for Palestinians to do the same.

Indeed, Li's immoral stance undercuts the entire basis of the opposition to Israeli military actions under international law. If war crimes, including murder, are justified by a "good cause," then the only question in prosecutions for war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide would be whether the killing is done for the "right side." All the work of documenting Israeli war crimes becomes merely hypocritical within this frame, as the inviolability of civilians would be irrelevant; the only question would be whether Israel's motivations are just. In this schema, even the basis for opposing colonialism becomes unclear. After all, most colonialists have argued that their brutal actions were for the greater benefit of humanity. I do not have the space here to make the contrary arguments in favor of nonviolent alternatives, but the human and moral catastrophes wrought by the "armed struggle" demand the search for those alternatives.

Nathaniel Berman
New York, NY

The letter writer is a visiting professor of law and history at Columbia University.

Darryl Li argues that Palestinians have won gains in international courts as a result of Hamas's October 7th attacks. Though Li concedes that such "unprecedented moves in international law," like the International Court of Justice (ICJ) finding that the Israeli occupation of the West Bank constitutes apartheid or its investigation of Israel's clampdown on the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, may "simply reflect the unprecedented horror of Israel's genocidal war in the Gaza Strip," he counters that the long view of the history of Palestinian resistance bears out the centrality of armed struggle. Yet many of the legal findings Li touts as Hamas accomplishments respond directly to the most grotesque of Israeli actions. Israel could have avoided the ICJ investigation of Israel's termination of UNRWA activities, for instance, simply by leaving the agency's activities intact. If Israel were not committing a genocide in Gaza, does Li think that Hamas's attack, which included the kidnapping and murder of hundreds of civilians, would have elicited sympathy and support in the international community?

Li does not discuss the argument that Palestinian violence has repeatedly hardened Jewish Israeli attitudes, essentially destroying the electoral left in Israel, the sector of society that showed any interest in co-existing with Palestinians. But even on his preferred terms of analysis, should we call a strategy "successful" when it achieves its results only by banking on Israel to slaughter more than 100,000 Palestinians? Philosophers may debate whether the killing of innocents is justified by larger positive consequences, but in this case, the consequences were not positive, but apocalyptic. As the Lebanese Marxist intellectual Gilbert Achcar writes, the 10/7 operation increasingly looks like "the most catastrophic miscalculation in the history of anti-colonial struggle."

Moreover, Li downplays shifts in the international order that run contrary to his argument. Israel now attacks numerous neighboring countries with American support; recently, the United States even bombed Iran at Israel's instigation. Whereas in the middle of the 20th century, the Palestinians could look hopefully to anti-colonial movements throughout the Global South, today, by contrast, it is Netanyahu's regime that seems in the vanguard of a far-right trend sweeping not just Europe, but also Latin America and India.

To be clear: Israel bears the moral responsibility for its horrific crimes after October 7th. But if we are thinking strategically, rather than morally, we cannot ignore reality. Under present conditions, if the fate of Palestinians is decided on "the battlefield," Palestinians will lose calamitously. We on the left must refuse prescriptions that predicate victory upon that loss.

Raphael Magarik
Chicago, IL

Elaine Mokhtefi

“There was a current of confidence and warmth between all of us who were in Algiers working with liberation movements.”



Illustration: Nadyia Duff

Interviewed by Ari M. Brostoff

The organizer and writer Elaine Mokhtefi, who helped transform Algeria into an epicenter of anti-colonial liberation movements, was born Elaine Klein on Long Island in 1928. After a childhood spent crisscrossing the United States with her parents, struggling Jewish dry-goods merchants, she left home at 16 to attend college in Georgia; she was shocked by the virulent racism of the Jim Crow South and was soon kicked out of school. Mokhtefi returned to New York, where she threw herself into the bustling world of postwar peace-building, working as a student organizer for the United World Federalists (UWF), which sought to create a democratic world government. As anti-colonial struggles accelerated across the globe, the UWF, like this milieu more broadly, became increasingly fractured, and, in 1951, the group's centrist leadership expelled its more radical student division. Meanwhile, as an emerging internationalist youth leader who openly criticized American racism, Mokhtefi found herself under FBI surveillance.

Like many young Americans seeking respite from the McCarthy-era US, Mokhtefi moved to Paris—but soon discovered that France was structured by its own pernicious racism. As her illusion of French cosmopolitanism evaporated, Mokhtefi glimpsed an internationalist community in the country's shadows: a Third World liberation movement that connected the cafés of Paris's impoverished North African quarters to on-the-ground liberation struggles from Algeria to Vietnam. She returned to internationalist organizing, working as an interpreter and coordinator in a world conference circuit that brought her to gatherings across the globe. Mokhtefi became particularly committed to the Algerian struggle, which by 1954 had hardened into a brutal war with French occupation forces. She worked closely with the Algerian independence movement

in exile and eventually took a job back in New York at the movement's US headquarters.

*In 1962, Algerians defeated their colonizers, and a few months later, Mokhtefi set foot in Algiers for the first time. She immersed herself in the dizzying life of the newly independent nation through several government jobs: staffer at the tourist authority; assistant to the presidential press secretary; and, over the course of more than a decade, a series of positions for the Algerian Press Service. Her most fascinating and singular role was a kind of unofficial post: As US dissidents from Black Power activist Stokely Carmichael to psychedelics advocate Timothy Leary sought refuge on Algerian soil, Mokhtefi—the only American in the Algerian government—became their greeter, interpreter, tour guide, fixer, and handler. She developed an especially intense and often challenging relationship with Black Panther Party leader Eldridge Cleaver, who fled to Algiers in 1969 with his wife, Kathleen Cleaver, the party's communications secretary, as well as left-wing journalist Robert Scheer; several other high-ranking Panthers followed. In the 1970s, the country took a repressive turn, and, in 1974, she was forced out after refusing to spy on a rival of President Houari Boumédiène. Along with former National Liberation Front (FLN) revolutionary Mokhtar Mokhtefi, whom she later married, Elaine returned to Paris, and finally to New York. In her 2018 memoir *Algiers: Third World Capital*, Mokhtefi recounts a life and times shot through with high jinks and head-spinning parallaxes at the intersection of global struggles. Her story—which we discussed in an interview at her Upper West Side apartment—helped me understand the kind of careful ingenuity that might, in a different world, be called diplomacy. This interview has been edited for length and clarity.*

Ari M. Brostoff: You say in your book that you became “Algerianized” before you had ever been to Algeria. What do you mean by this?

Elaine Mokhtefi: A few months after I arrived in Paris, I went to the May Day Parade, an enormous event that takes place every year. I’d never seen anything like it; I was enthralled. Suddenly, as the parade was ending, thousands of men came running through the streets. They had no signs, no flags. Their arms were splayed. I sensed that something important was happening, but I had no idea what. Then I read an article in *France Observateur*, a leftist magazine at the time, which explained that these men had been excluded from the parade because they were Algerian. That was a bombshell. I saw Paris differently after that.

Other young people who had come to Paris—and who, like me, thought of Parisians as positive, friendly, amoureux—arrived at a similar realization. There was a street in the Latin Quarter where we often ate; the Tunisian and Algerian restaurants were the most prominent and cheapest, so we gathered there. We began to learn about the political situation in Algeria, and we also became aware of the large community of immigrants living on the outskirts of Paris. They lived in poverty, and their movement was restricted by the French authorities. So all of a sudden I was getting an education. It’s not as though I had been totally innocent before, but now there was specificity.

AMB: In October 1962, after more than a decade of commitment to the Algerian freedom struggle, you went to Algiers. French troops and militias had only just left the country, and independent institutions of governance were very new. Reading your account of this time, I was struck by how quickly you wound up at the center of things and how exciting—I want to say anarchic—even your more bureaucratic positions seemed to be. How did you become so embedded?

EM: I had contacts in Algiers before I arrived. I knew several members of the FLN who had come to New York during the war as part of a delegation dispatched by the Algerian government-in-exile; after independence, they became leaders in the new national government. They helped me find a lovely apartment and a terrific job as a journalist and translator at the Algeria Press Service (APS). I could bring a car from Paris; it was a very comfortable life—and it was very exciting. In the years immediately following

“We began to learn about the political situation in Algeria, and we also became aware of the large community of immigrants living on the outskirts of Paris. So all of a sudden I was getting an education.”

independence, the new government encouraged liberation movements—not only in Africa but also in Asia and Latin America—to set up headquarters in Algiers. The government provided them with the means to operate and even trained their freedom fighters in the Algerian army.

And I got to be a part of it. After more than 130 years of French administration, 90% of the Algerian population was illiterate. Even people who had received formal education had little or no administrative work experience: All of those positions had been occupied by French settlers. Algerians were making lots of decisions but often didn’t have the technical skills required to put them into practice. So a lot of improvisation was required. I had only a medium education, but it was sufficient to take on a lot of responsibility.

AMB: As an American in Algiers, you supported the Algerian government in challenging US imperialism around the world, particularly the US military assault in Vietnam. What did this look like from your position?

EM: The Viet Cong had special privileges in Algiers—they were given a house and travel documents—and I became very good friends with their representative, Trần Hoài Nam. He considered me sort of the typical American, and would ask me what I thought of this or that; it was funny. At one point, together with an expatriate American jazz pianist and five or six others, I organized a committee in solidarity with the Vietnamese. We issued a communiqué attacking the United States and I put it on the APS wire so it went out all over the world.

I had a close relationship with the North Koreans, too, and even the Chinese and the Russians invited me over from time to time. It’s strange to look back at that now, but there seemed to be a current of confidence and warmth between all of us who were there working with the liberation movements.

“The Black Panther team in Algiers worked like a military organization; they wrote down everything they did. They all had roles to play and knew what their roles were.”

AMB: I was fascinated by your account of these relationships—especially the one between the Panthers and the Algerian government, and how you wound up as a mediator between them. I thought your wildest story was the one about a group of American convicts on the lam who stole a million dollars, hijacked a plane, and landed it in Algiers; they hoped to deliver the stolen money to the Black Panther faction there, and thus establish themselves as political dissidents eligible to receive asylum in Algeria. The Panthers baffled President Houari Boumédiène with the incredible demand that they be allowed to keep the money. I have to say, they come off as acting pretty arrogantly toward their hosts.

EM: It was a very difficult situation. The Panthers had an unnecessarily antagonistic attitude toward the Algerians; they wrote a fiery letter to Boumédiène because he didn't want to let them keep the money from the hijacking. I was on vacation in Paris at the time with my future husband, but I tried to help: I suggested a compromise in which the money would be given to the Palestinian Liberation Organization. Eldridge wasn't thrilled, but he agreed. I went to a major newspaper in Paris and gave them a press release. But, of course, the Algerians couldn't accept those terms. Put yourself in Boumédiène's position: No company anywhere in the world would have let their pilots land on Algerian soil if the government had accepted and then distributed this stolen money. The Algerians were calm and cool throughout. Contrary to what many people have said, they did not kick the Panthers out of the country. [*Ed. note: Cleaver and his comrades left gradually over the course of the following years as internal disagreements and financial strain increased among their faction.*] And they authorized the air pirates to stay in the country as well.

I feel I should emphasize more, though, how great the capacity for work was within the Black Panther team in Algiers. They worked like a military organization; they wrote down everything they did. Kathleen gave a report at the end of each day. They all had roles to play and knew what their roles were. It was amazing.

AMB: It's almost like they were foreign service officers, highly disciplined in relation to their mission but also taking full advantage of a position of impunity. It makes me think of the story you tell about the Panthers' bid for official recognition—can you talk about that?

EM: The Palestinians and the Vietnamese had embassies in Algiers; the Panthers and all the other liberation organizations had offices. One day, Eldridge invited me to lunch. There was an American who followed us into the restaurant—he had been hanging around, trying to get in with the Panthers. He may or may not have been a federal agent. Eldridge took the man by the neck and threw him out of the restaurant. Then he sat down and told me that he wanted the Panthers to have official status, like an embassy. He said, “Do what you can.”

I contacted Mhamed Yazid, who had been the Minister of Information of the Algerian provisional government in Tunis, and he said he would like to meet the Panthers. Mhamed was from one of the few Algerian families whose members had been well educated under the French. He spoke good English and was proud of it. He invited us to lunch at his family's home in Blida. We sat in the garden—it was Eldridge and Kathleen and [Black Panther field marshal] Donald Cox and me. Mhamed's grandmother made couscous with fresh vegetables, and Mhamed told all his American jokes. We must have passed muster because after the Viet Cong got moved to Embassy Row, their house was given to the Panthers.

AMB: You wound up in increasingly high-stakes situations, like getting passports doctored in Germany for the purposes of another proposed hijacking scheme, this time involving Eldridge and the West German anti-imperialist Baader-Meinhof Group, who wanted to hijack a plane and demand the release of American, German, and Palestinian political prisoners—

EM: —and I was just a little girl from the United States!

AMB: It seems like you were able to keep your cool even when you were in over your head. Were you scared?

“Algerians feel closer to Palestinians than they do to anybody else. They feel that the Palestinian situation is their situation.”

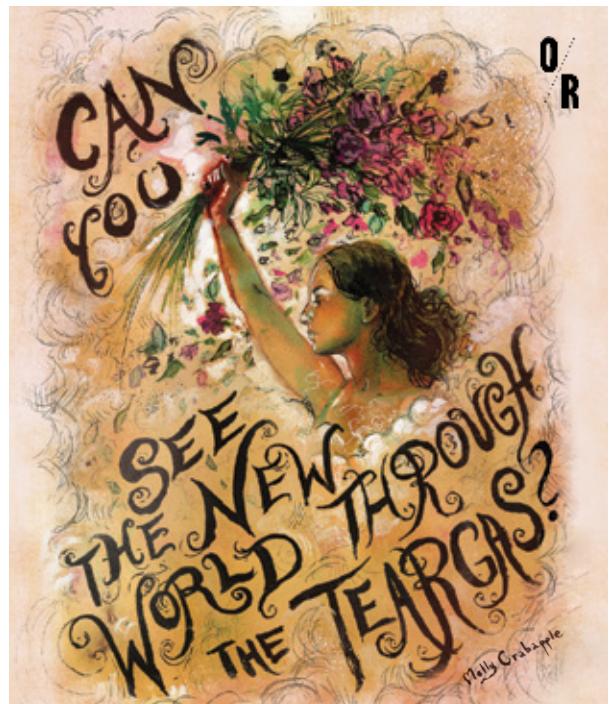
EM: I was a little scared on the trip to Germany—I knew certain organizations were tracking me—but I had to go through with it. I had met so many people in Algeria who had taken such risks, and I felt that I had taken no real risks. I had never picked up a gun or gone to war. All I had to do was pick up the passports and return the passports. [Ed. note: Cleaver pulled out of the hijacking plan while the passport operation was still in progress, and the Baader-Meinhof Group did not carry out the plan under discussion.]

AMB: Where did the Palestinian struggle fit into your world in Algiers? As you’ve said, there were national liberation groups from around the world with a base there, but Palestine in particular always seemed to be in the air.

EM: I think Algerians feel closer to Palestinians than they do to anybody else. They feel that the Palestinian situation is their situation. Palestinian news has always gotten preference in Algerian media. When I worked for the APS’s French-language radio station, I would prepare a 15-minute Sunday morning radio program every week on what the press around the world was saying about Palestine. Representatives from Palestinian organizations were constantly coming through Algeria. I remember in 1967 [during the Six-Day War] you’d walk along the streets of Algiers and people would be crying. I had a boyfriend at the time who came to my house and sat on the couch and just bawled. It was as though Algeria was at war. It’s still like this—you meet any Algerian, and their heart goes out to Palestine.

AMB: Your time in Algeria ended in exile from your adopted home, but your memoir is remarkably lacking in bitterness, and you continued to do political work as a writer and activist, particularly in the Palestinian solidarity movement. Do you have any thoughts on where the inheritance of Third Worldism lives on today?

EM: That’s the kind of question I really can’t deal with. I’m a lowly worker! Sometimes with an idea. **JC**



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HIGHER ED'S



To salvage academic freedom amid Trump's attacks,
universities must break from their Cold War compromise with US militarism.

Erik Baker

BAD BARGAIN

ON JUNE 16TH, 2025, the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities, the Association of American Universities, and the American Council on Education joined with 12 institutions of higher education to sue the United States Department of Defense (DOD). At issue was what the coalition characterized as yet “another attempt to slash funding for critical American research” by the Trump administration. In May, the DOD had announced that it would significantly reduce the rate at which it reimburses the recipients of its research grants for “indirect costs” (such as facilities and administrative expenses), which would represent a colossal hit to the budgets of affected universities. The overhead expenses the DOD was asking schools to shoulder, the coalition wrote, “are the real and necessary costs of conducting groundbreaking research that has made our nation the world’s leading military superpower.”

The day after the joint lawsuit was filed, a federal judge issued a temporary restraining order blocking the DOD policy change. For now, universities will continue to receive the accustomed overhead reimbursement rate for their military research, like those projects at MIT that have equipped “drones used by Israel” with “automated weapons systems and the ability to fly in swarm formation,” according to a recent report by Francesca Albanese, the United Nations Special Rapporteur for the Palestinian territories. Other proposed DOD funding cuts may be more difficult to block, to the chagrin of partner

universities. After Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth announced the termination of his department’s support for social science research, Columbia’s Sabin Center for Climate Change Law warned that the move could “harm national security by cutting DOD off from critical information and the ability to understand and respond to current and emerging threats.”

In pleading the case for continued DOD funding, university leaders who had spent the past year and a half denying the charge by campus activists that their institution was complicit in the genocide in Gaza have pivoted to celebrating the research that forms the clearest site of their complicity, even more so than the financial assets targeted by campus divestment campaigns. Where once they shook their heads at the naivete of the students whose chants asked them how many kids they’d killed today, now they are practically submitting their tallies to the DOD, one last desperate gambit to maintain the status quo. The fact that much of the federal research funding affected by the Trump administration’s offensive against higher education is not disbursed by the military and has no explicit connection to the defense industry makes it all the more striking that so many scientists have chosen to emphasize their contributions to American imperial glory. “NSF [National Science Foundation] investments have made America—and American science—great,” a University of Vermont environmental scientist wrote in June, criticizing the cuts with self-consciously Trumpian

The call by campus activists to end institutional complicity in human rights violations would, if taken seriously, open Pandora's box.

diction. An open letter published in March by nearly 2,000 scientific and medical professionals warned that Trump's "wholesale assault" on research means that other countries "will surpass us in business, defense, intelligence gathering, and monitoring our planet's health." In the face of Trump's cuts to climate funding, the Salata Institute for Climate and Sustainability at Harvard urged universities to "tell the story of . . . the economic and national security benefits of basic science research" more persuasively. "The federal government has been the world's largest investor in science research since the Second World War," the Institute's post noted, implicitly affirming that federal funding for research depends upon the extent to which it follows dutifully in the footsteps of the Manhattan Project.

It would be relieving to dismiss this rhetoric as a strategic concession to our reactionary moment: If a little jingoism is what it takes to shore up popular support for lifesaving research on cancer and climate change, perhaps that's a price worth paying, distasteful as it may be amid a US-funded genocide. The more disturbing possibility is that the entire academic research enterprise does, in fact, play a vital role in helping the United States to project its strength around the world, with the intolerable consequences of that strength on full display today in Gaza. At MIT, one of the 12 universities that joined the lawsuit to block the DOD's overhead reimbursement rate cut, some students and researchers have taken a less rosy view of the school's entanglement with US imperial might. In its 2024 report "MIT Science for Genocide," the MIT Coalition for Palestine demonstrates the university's prominent place within the US military-industrial complex, noting that MIT receives over 17% of its research revenue from the DOD alone. The school also partners with a wide range of private weapons manufacturers as well as the Israeli Ministry of Defense, whose research grants are, in turn, frequently underwritten by the US military. "These collaborations," the coalition writes, "legitimize abuse of political, human, and civil rights in Palestine. They also recruit MIT faculty and students into militaristic activity and bias scientific research agendas toward belligerent instead of life-affirming applications." Properly understood, the advocacy of the MIT Coalition for Palestine and its allies on campuses across the country entails much more than simply pruning some unethical practices or structures from the otherwise healthy trunk of American higher education. The call by Palestine solidarity activists to end institutional complicity

in human rights violations would, if taken seriously, require a reconfiguration far vaster than anything that could be captured in a protest chant, or even a letter of demands. The movement opens Pandora's box.

Now, as Trump's top-down attack on universities throws their operations into disarray, it is tempting to judge that we should keep the lid closed, at least temporarily. This past spring, after the university where I teach rebuffed Trump's most extortionate demands, signs reading "Thank You Harvard!" began to appear at rallies that had once excoriated the university for its repressive treatment of protesters and cooperation with US and Israeli militarism. The calculation is clear and, on its own terms, logical: We can make common cause with our institutions against the Trump administration, return to the status quo ante, and then, once our academic freedom is secure from outside interference, get to work unraveling our bloody entanglements.

The problem with this approach is that the academic freedom it defends is one that has already been compromised by the bargain universities struck with the federal government in the mid-20th century, during the construction of the modern military-industrial complex. According to this agreement, academics could govern their own affairs as long as they remembered who was paying them and what their benefactors hoped to gain. The exercise of academic freedom reaches its limit when it threatens what higher education does to bolster American power. Within this circumscribed freedom, criticizing the academy's service to militarism and imperialism is itself a destabilizing transgression; asking critics to hold their tongues until their institutions are more secure belies the fact that universities entwined with the military can only ever purchase security at the price of subservience.



Demonstrators protest military research used by the Israeli military at MIT in Cambridge, May 9th, 2024. Photo: Josh Reynolds/AP



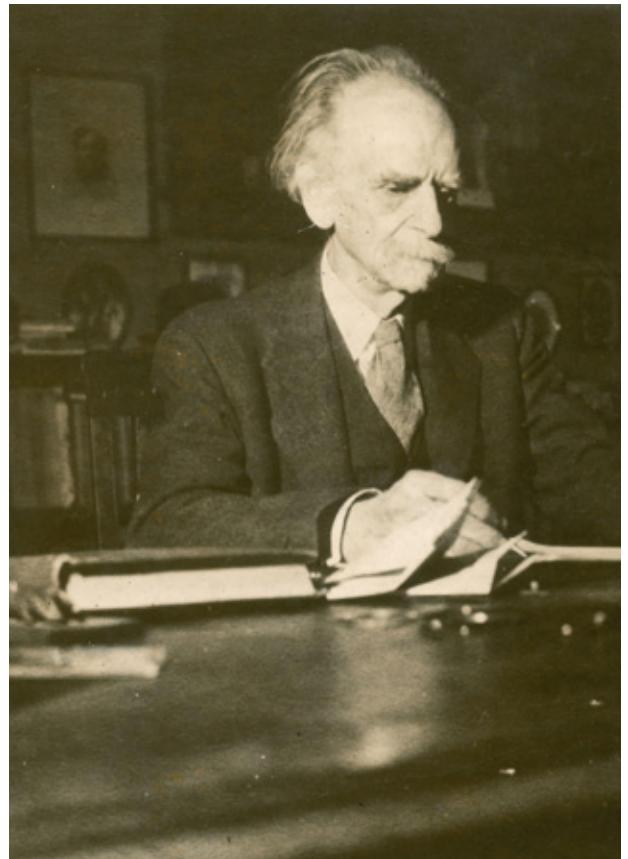
Community members rally at Harvard in Cambridge to protest Trump's withholding of funds from Harvard, April 17th, 2025. Photo: Rick Friedman/Alamy

WHEN FRANZ BOAS CALLED the first meeting of the American Committee for Democracy and Intellectual Freedom (ACDIF) to order on March 17th, 1939, the 80-year-old anthropologist was nearing the end of one of the most distinguished careers in the history of American science. Born in 1858 in Prussia to a Jewish family, Boas settled in the US in the late 1880s, bouncing from one scientific institution to another before finally securing a professorship at Columbia University. His revolutionary approach to anthropology, which turned to culture to explain much that his contemporaries reduced to biology, brought Boas into the political fray, where he emerged as one of the first and most vocal opponents of scientific racism in the white-dominated academy. As the name of the ACDIF reflects, Boas understood democracy and scientific freedom to be interdependent. Scientific truth bolstered democracy by undermining racist ideologies, but scientists needed autonomy to arrive at truth.

The mutilation of Italian and German science following the rise of fascism confirmed that science could not thrive when subordinated to military purposes.

Over the first decades of the 20th century, Boas had come to believe that militarism—and the willingness of his professional peers to lend their services to it—was one of the most pressing threats to intellectual freedom. In 1919, after learning that four American anthropologists had agreed to spy for the US while working in Mexico during World War I, Boas wrote an incendiary letter to *The Nation* in which he declared that anyone “who uses science as a cover for political spying . . . prostitutes science in an unpardonable way and forfeits the right to be classed as a scientist.” The mutilation of Italian and German science following the rise of fascism confirmed for Boas that science could not thrive when subordinated to military purposes. That meant that militaristic but not yet fascist countries, including the United States, needed systemic transformation if they were to truly safeguard scientific autonomy. “Fascism, we know, will mean the end of all intellectual freedom and our main task is to stop it,” Boas told the Communist newspaper *Daily Worker* in 1938. “The ultimate solution, to my personal way of thinking, is Socialism.”

By that point, Boas was far from alone in these judgments. In 1937, a group of radical scientists in Philadelphia, dissatisfied with what they perceived as the political timidity of existing professional organizations, formed the American Association of Scientific Workers (AASW), modeled on the recently founded British Association of Scientific Workers (BASW). The AASW and the BASW were explicitly antifascist, anti-militarist, and economically progressive, allied with the labor movement and the era’s Popular Front between social



Franz Boas
Photo: Alamy/Science History Images

democrats and communists. By the end of 1938, a Boston-Cambridge chapter had joined the Philadelphia group, and the organization debuted to the public with support from a roster of prominent scientists (most famously Robert Oppenheimer, who would go on to lead the Manhattan Project). One of the AASW’s first major initiatives was a boycott of scientific materials, including laboratory equipment, imported from Germany; a policy of financial noncooperation with fascism was, the Harvard biologist Kenneth Thimann felt, “the least action which the Association, if it stands for anything real, could take.”

Those scientists who shared Boas’s conviction that fascism was latent wherever militarism and nationalism could be found hoped that taking action against European fascism would help prepare their colleagues to work for radical transformation at home. Writing in 1939, BASW leader and Irish scientist J.D. Bernal observed “a much greater reluctance than heretofore among scientists voluntarily to assist in military research, and a strong feeling that in doing so they are violating the spirit of science.” Bernal, an outspoken activist in the Communist Party of Great Britain, maintained it was imperative that such acts of individual refusal be linked to the broader fight against capitalism and imperialism. “Everything which tends to strengthen national industry and improve the efficiency and economy of its processes increases its military strength,” Bernal argued. “To this extent all national

AFTER WORLD WAR II, THE GENIE
OF MILITARY PATRONAGE WOULD NOT
SO EASILY RETURN TO ITS BOTTLE.



industrial research is potentially war research.” The implication was that no one’s hands were clean until everyone’s were. Bernal, who continued to work as a scientist, wasn’t demanding that his colleagues put down their pipettes until war was abolished, but he maintained that even scientists doing “basic” research still had an obligation to join political efforts working toward that horizon. Given the contributions of even quite theoretical work in thermodynamics and electromagnetism to the development of modern industry, scientists could only ensure their work didn’t find military application by ending militarism itself.



Top:
General Leslie Groves (left) and Robert Oppenheimer at work on the Manhattan Project, August 1945. Photo: Science History Images/Alamy.



Bottom:
A billboard urging silence at the Hawley Plant in Milwaukee, a sister site of the Manhattan Project, 1943. Photo: RBM Vintage/Alamy

Left:
The mushroom cloud caused by the Trinity plutonium bomb in Alamogordo, New Mexico, July 16th, 1945. Photo: DOD/Alamy

By the late 1930s in the US and United Kingdom, even those scientists committed to the long-term struggle against war were also increasingly convinced of the necessity of military struggle against the Nazis in the short term. That conclusion wasn’t incompatible with Bernal’s arguments in principle; Bernal himself ended up cooperating enthusiastically with the British war effort, despite the low security clearance to which his Communist affiliations condemned him. Most radical scientists in the US, like Oppenheimer, eventually followed the same trajectory—but in the meantime the advent of war plunged their movement into bitter recriminations. Within the ACDIF, tensions mounted after the national executive committee found itself divided on a petition that would have committed the group to opposing American entry into the war, on the grounds that “the war threatens to destroy intellectual freedom and the rights of free men” and “will inevitably entail death, permanent physical or spiritual injury to millions of people, and serious interference in cultural and scientific progress.” Boas supported the petition, but many of his key collaborators did not. When Boas died, exactly two weeks after Pearl Harbor, the ACDIF had already folded. The AASW still persisted on paper, but a similar fissure about supporting US entry into the war marked its end as an influential organization in American science. Those who believed that the external threat of fascism needed to be repelled with force before scientists could redress their professional collaboration with military-industrial devastation won the debate.

The postponed reckoning finally arrived in 1945, after scientists helped the US build the most destructive weapon ever devised. A new mass movement of scientists erupted to advocate for international civilian control over atomic technology and to preempt the arms race looming on the horizon. Many of the movement’s leading figures, echoing their prewar predecessors, urged scientists to work for the radical political and economic change without which they could find themselves responsible for the total annihilation of civilization. In his essay in the 1946 book *One World or None*, published by a weapons control advocacy group founded by former Manhattan Project scientists, Albert Einstein argued that to avert nuclear catastrophe, it was necessary to create “a supranational organization” to which the world’s superpowers turned over their military resources, so it could then prevent individual states from making war.

This efflorescence of anti-militarist advocacy after the end of the war suggests that Boas’s opponents within the ACDIF were correct that taking up arms against fascism would not necessarily prevent scientists from organizing for peace once the fight was done. But the genie of military patronage, once released to grant scientists’ every funding wish, would not so easily return to its bottle. The Manhattan Project had integrated American science more fully into the war apparatus than ever before, and some scientists found that they quite

In a brutal piece of irony, many postwar scientists justified their embrace of military funding with a concept that to radical scientists was practically synonymous with anti-militarism: intellectual freedom.

enjoyed the nearly unlimited resources now at their disposal. In the late 1940s the US federal government allocated some 2% of its total outlays to scientific research, especially within the national lab system that emerged from the Manhattan Project. By the mid-1960s that figure had swollen to 12%—some of which was channeled through officially non-military institutions like the National Science Foundation (founded in 1950), but much of which continued to be routed through military bureaucracies like the Office for Naval Research (founded in 1946). And it was channeled not merely to laboratories under formal governmental or military operation, but increasingly to universities, whose enrollments were spiking, with federal encouragement, at the same time.

As this Cold War science regime crystallized, scientific anti-militarism largely withered to the posture that sociologist Kelly Moore calls “moral individualism”—lone courageous researchers, often motivated by Quakerism or other pacifist belief systems, refusing to cooperate with the military, even as they watched their profession as a whole embrace its status as an appendage of the American war machine. The movement of atomic scientists, bereft of the relationships that prewar Popular Front organizations like the AASW had developed with the labor movement and other forces struggling for broader social transformation, abandoned a confrontational posture toward the state, preferring instead to dispense expert advice about the mechanisms that would reduce the risk of nuclear apocalypse. That meant these activists needed to keep the peace with their more conservative colleagues so that “science” could appear to speak with a single voice, which drove their advocacy toward the lowest common denominator. While the scientists succeeded, with the McMahon Act of 1946, in securing formal civilian control over nuclear weapons and energy development, this control became a closely guarded prerogative of the executive branch, with vast swaths of information about the nation’s nuclear infrastructure shrouded in secrecy. The consolidation of the Cold War eventually confirmed the defeat of the movement, at least in its radically internationalist form, although its legacy lives on in the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* and its famous Doomsday Clock, ticking down to an apocalyptic “midnight.”

In a brutal piece of irony, many postwar scientists justified their embrace of military funding with the concept that to Franz Boas was practically synonymous with scientific anti-militarism: intellectual freedom. Influential scientists like MIT vice president Vannevar Bush and Harvard president James B. Conant, both

former Manhattan Project leaders, distinguished the American system from the Soviet project of “planning” science to achieve predetermined social goals, arguing that American institutions displayed a characteristic commitment to freedom as their central principle of operation. Funders identified “really first-class men,” in Conant’s phrase, and equipped them with the money they needed to pursue their creativity wherever it led them, secure in the faith that the results of such free inquiry would ultimately redound to the benefit of the United States and its military. True scientific freedom was not, as Boas believed, freedom *from* military oversight. It was the freedom *of* military support. “There’s no such thing as tainted money,” the Cold War-era quip went, “except ‘t ain’t enough.”

THE NATURAL SCIENCES were not the only fields to benefit from the Cold War bonanza in research funding. The era now romanticized as a golden age by many academics in the humanities and social sciences was made possible because policymakers and government strategists calculated that investments in those fields would pay off, believing that the “softer” disciplines could help the US outmaneuver its adversaries and demonstrate to the world America’s intellectual and cultural achievements. Money from the Office of Strategic Services and its successor, the Central Intelligence Agency, helped underwrite the groundbreaking postwar work of anthropologists such as Margaret Mead, Clifford Geertz, and Clyde Kluckhohn, as well as some of the early work of the anarchist political scientist James C. Scott; the literary achievements of the Iowa Writers’ Workshop in the 1950s and 1960s; and the transnational network of philosophical luminaries coordinated by the Congress for Cultural Freedom, to name just a few examples. The beneficiaries of such funds were not just hacks and propagandists, in other words; many were not even fully aware of where their funding was coming from. In the mid-century decades, Cold War largesse was the water in which everyone was swimming.

The radical agitation that erupted on college campuses in the early 1960s and intensified with the escalation of the Vietnam War disrupted this complacent status quo. The student movement, and its allies among faculty and research staff, forced the denizens of the Cold War university to clarify which side they were on. In 1969, more than 80 scientists convened in San Francisco by the organization Science for the People pledged that they would “not participate in war research or weapons production” and that they would “counsel

[their] students and urge [their] colleagues to do the same." This was a marked break from the era of individual refusal, as Science for the People saw its boycott as a pathway to collective action against the military conscription of American science.

Many of the university-based activists seeking to purge their institutions of military influence recognized that severing direct financial ties to the US military would redress only one axis of the academy's relationship to the violence of American empire. As researchers in the 1960s and '70s grappled with the place of knowledge production in a fundamentally destructive political-economic order, the more structural critique of J.D. Bernal—who used the phrase "science for the people" in his 1952 book *Marx and Science*—returned as an inspiration. In 1970, the Harvard Medical School professor Jon Beckwith made headlines for announcing he would donate the money he received from a prestigious award for his groundbreaking work on gene isolation to the Black Panther Party. He had previously explained that he was troubled that his research could someday be used against his intentions for bioweapons production, since "we see work in biology used by our government in Vietnam and in devising chemical and biological weapons." Mitigating this possibility, in Beckwith's view, required "changing society so that it serves the people," a task that revolutionary groups like the Panthers were undertaking. The 1973 Science for the People-aligned manifesto "Toward an Anti-Imperialist Science" similarly proclaimed, "As scientists and revolutionaries we unite with anti-imperialist scientists of the world and with popular movements of our countries." This declaration, drafted in collaboration with left-wing Mexican scientists, wasn't just a promise, but a description of how activists in Science for the People had been conducting themselves for years, traveling around the globe, often at great personal risk, to lend aid to revolutionary forces in the Global South, including North Vietnam. In May 1971, the Boston-based Red Crate Collective, an affiliate of Science for the People, published a pamphlet on "Science for Vietnam," a program for coordinating scientific aid and soliciting donations of textbooks, medicines, and physical equipment useful to the continued development of scientific and medical capabilities in North Vietnam.

The student movement against the Vietnam War, and its allies among faculty and research staff, forced the denizens of the Cold War university to clarify which side they were on.

Throughout the late '60s and early '70s, anti-war students and faculty picketed military-funded labs at dozens of schools; they also occupied, vandalized, and in one case, bombed the sites of war research. The suppression of such



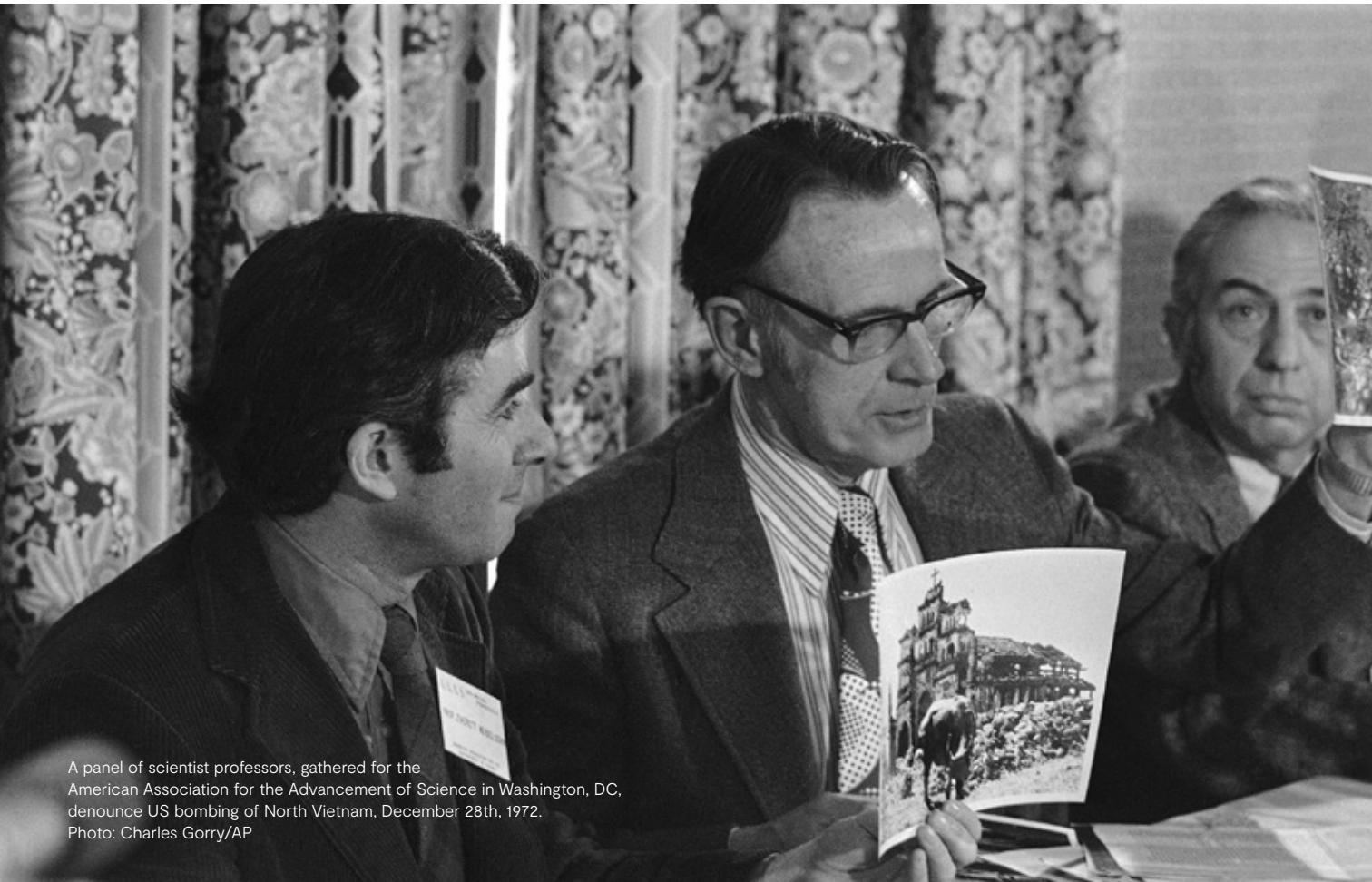
Science for the People cover, August 1970
Courtesy of Science for the People.

protest was often carried out under the cover of the denatured Cold War conception of academic freedom. In 1972, Stanford fired tenured English professor H. Bruce Franklin for suggesting at a rally the year before that the crowd should forcibly shut down the university's military-funded Computation Center, with university administrators and conservative faculty insisting that Franklin didn't deserve institutional protections like tenure, because of the threat he was mounting to free inquiry. "When students try to stop, interfere with, or even question too closely, some university function (class, lecture, research project) that has a connection to some political controversy," wrote a group of Science for the People affiliates in 1972, "they are accused of violating the academic freedom of those who scheduled the activity in question." The group juxtaposed this accusation with the response of the Caltech physicist Murray Gell-Mann when questioned by young scientists in France about his work advising the Pentagon: "I am not free to answer." The secrecy that military research nearly always required made the free exchange of ideas impossible by design. But it was in the name of freedom that universities clamped down on scholars who interrogated their colleagues' choice to submit to the yoke of secrecy.

The universities' repression of protest in the late '60s and early '70s was only a pale shadow of the state violence inflicted on off-campus revolutionaries, and by the end of



Students and supporters demanding a halt to military research at MIT in Cambridge, November 6th, 1969.
Photo: AP



A panel of scientist professors, gathered for the American Association for the Advancement of Science in Washington, DC, denounce US bombing of North Vietnam, December 28th, 1972.
Photo: Charles Gorry/AP

Throughout the late '60s and early '70s, anti-war students and faculty picketed military-funded labs at dozens of schools; they also occupied, vandalized, and in one case, bombed the sites of war research.

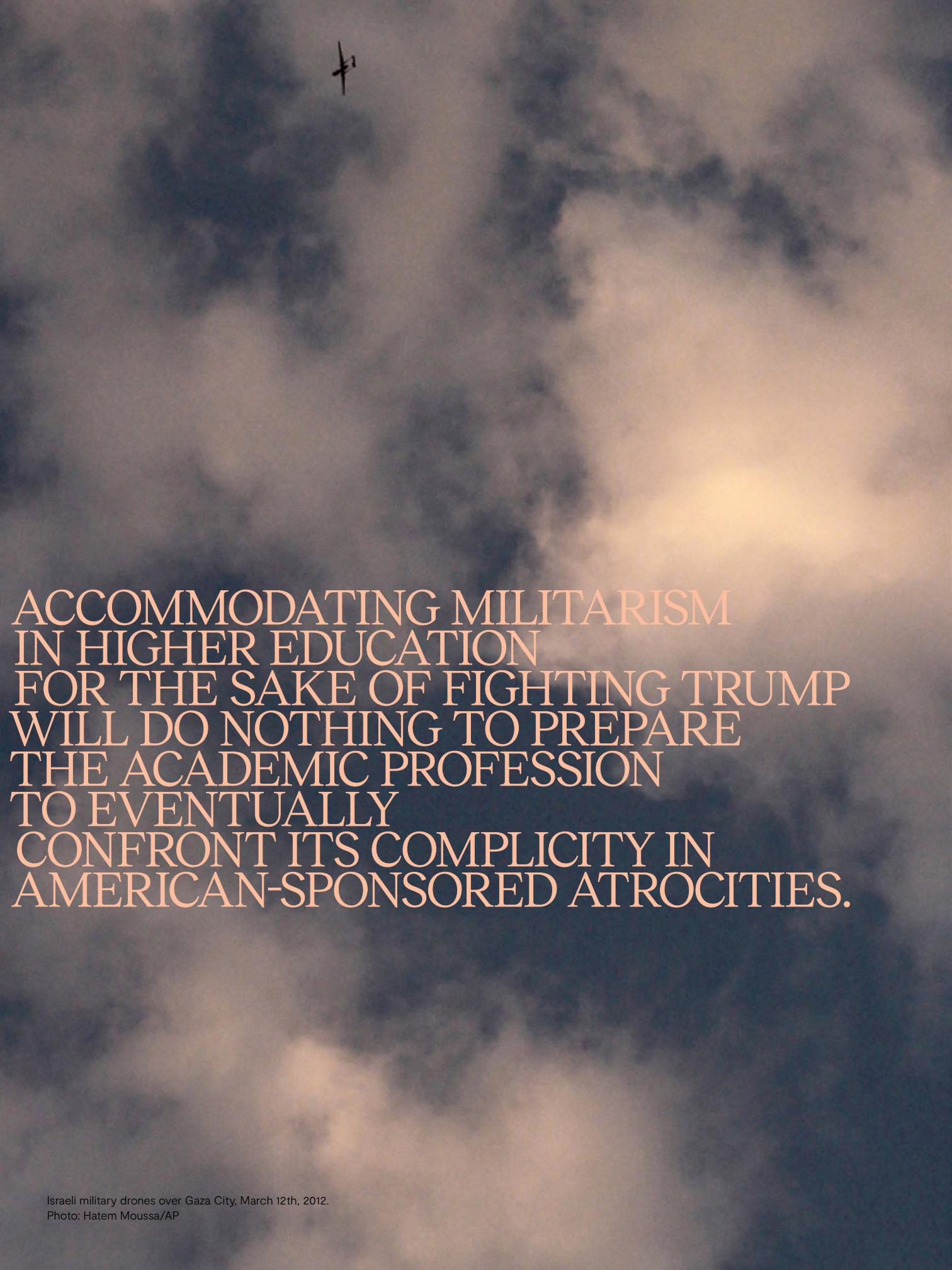
the 1970s radical academics were left to contend with the awareness that the broad societal transformation they understood as an indispensable condition for the full redemption of their institutions was off the table, at least in the short term. During the Reagan administration, DOD science funding exploded. When the Cold War ended, fears that the federal gravy train would end along with it sent universities scrambling to expand their partnerships with private industrial partners, including in the defense sector. (These fears ultimately proved unfounded: The train may have slowed in the 1990s, but it was back to running full speed following the 2001 declaration of the War on Terror.) Under the Clinton administration, the federal government began the practice of funneling grants toward universities with formal industry partnerships in place. Lockheed Martin has been particularly aggressive in establishing a host of American universities as “strategic partners,” a designation which entails research collaboration as well as recruitment initiatives. As Penn State’s Corporate Engagement Center puts it, the defense giant and its academic collaborators establish “a holistic relationship that grows, evolves, and spans a remarkable breadth,” including research, classroom education, and post-graduation student recruitment.

When today’s anti-war activists protest their universities’ ties to defense contractors and the military, administrators defending these collaborations still draw upon an idea that was forged in the Cold War and has only calcified since: A commitment to intellectual freedom requires academics to acquiesce to the military-industrial takeover of their institutions, while challenging military research in the university is tantamount to a violation of this freedom. “Calls to deprive fellow students of their choice of where to work and to prevent researchers from choosing whom to work with are deeply troubling,” a New York University spokesman told the student newspaper in 2024, after a protest targeting the engineering school’s research and recruiting partnerships with institutions like the US Navy and Lockheed Martin. “NYU rejects calls for academic boycotts,” the spokesman explained, “because they are at odds with the receipts [sic] of the free exchange of ideas and academic freedom.” Eighty years after academic researchers wagered that the necessity of defeating fascism justified the short-term sacrifice of their intellectual freedom, the logic of military collaboration has revealed itself as an Orwellian monstrosity. War is freedom; dissent is repression.

UNDER THE SECOND TRUMP ADMINISTRATION, anti-militarist activists in the academy face an organizing landscape that looks less like that of the Vietnam era and more like a twisted version of the dilemma radical scientists faced on the eve of World War II. When the fight looked something like the campaign against the Vietnam War, the beats could feel almost comfortingly scripted. We knew what the demands were and to whom and how best to pose them: take up physical space, disrupt business as usual, pull every possible lever to make the higher-ups uncomfortable. Now college and university leaders are more uncomfortable than we ever managed to make them, because their alliance with the federal government, including the Department of Defense, has broken down. The clear battle lines of last year, which pitted activists on and off campus against an unholy alliance of university administrators, weapons manufacturers, and military bureaucrats, have dissolved and been replaced by a three-way standoff between The Good (anti-imperialist activists), The Bad (our new fascist president), and The Ugly (American higher education).

As in the late 1930s, intellectual freedom seems threatened simultaneously by far-right authoritarianism and by the subtler constraints of mundane collaboration with military partners. Once again, there is an argument to be made that the former threat needs to be confronted first, in order to ensure that scholars have stable footing on which to grapple with the latter, more complex menace. We would do well to learn from past capitulations to this logic. Accommodating militarism in higher education for the sake of fighting Trump will not do anything to prepare the academic profession to eventually confront its complicity in American-sponsored atrocities. It is time, instead, to imagine a more robust academic freedom, one that draws on the vision of Boas, Bernal, and other radical antifascists of the interwar period and breaks from the perverted Cold War formulation—the freedom of academics to sell their services to the highest bidder, without bureaucratic interference or ethical challenges from their peers. How might we, as academic organizers and committed anti-militarists, begin to enact this more expansive notion of academic freedom?

A 2007 lecture by Science for the People veteran Richard Levins might help us grapple with the challenges confronting us today. Delivered to the Socialist Caucus of the American Public Health Association, and aptly titled “One Foot In, One Foot Out,” the lecture charts the options available to the



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politically committed researcher facing the dire circumstances of the 21st-century university. The first is to push the envelope—taking bold stands, challenging professional orthodoxies, and making principled decisions about which funding sources to pursue. This approach entails joining the struggle to defend and strengthen academic job security (“Here is where unions are important,” Levins notes). The second is to focus on advancing one’s research career in conventional terms while also building relationships with organizations outside the academy that could deploy one’s findings to advocate for legislative change or other reforms. The last option is “to leave the institutions that are so frustrating and increasingly demoralized,” devoting oneself full-time to activism and figuring out how to “make a living in some other way.” Levins acknowledges that there is no perfect approach, and that an individual might incorporate elements from each path.

Although nearly two decades have passed since his address, this schema remains useful for understanding the forms that political engagement in academia has taken in the 21st century. The academic labor movement, especially unions of graduate students and non-tenure track teachers and researchers, has grown considerably since 2007, winning contracts that have protected hundreds of thousands of academic workers from retaliation and harassment. At the same time, academics have gotten more comfortable writing for a general readership, helped in part by an expanding ecosystem of advocacy groups that help scholars share their most salient research findings with policymakers and the public at large. And the accelerating collapse of the academic job market has made defecting entirely for a life of full-time political work more tempting for countless unemployed and underemployed radical scholars.

The movement that emerged after October 7th to protest the complicity of American higher education in the Israeli genocide in Gaza exemplifies how the three strategies Levins gestures to could work together productively. The academic labor movement has played an indispensable role in supporting campus activism, whether by defending individual workers from punishment for their advocacy or by coordinating protest directly. Researchers have also lent their expertise to the solidarity movement, sharing their insights on Palestinian history, genocide, famine, and the American military-industrial-academic complex in essays, reports, and teach-ins, while also contesting the obfuscations that many of their co-workers have peddled. And the campus struggle has always relied on movements outside the American academy for support, leadership, and inspiration, be it organizations of socialists, anti-imperialists, pacifists, anti-Zionist Jews, or, most importantly, Palestinians themselves, both in the US and in occupied Palestine. At the peak of their power, during the encampment wave of spring 2024, student activists succeeded in prefiguring a radically different kind of university, one where

“civil discourse and critical inquiry are not abstract concepts” but rather “active principles,” as my Harvard colleague Walter Johnson put it. The encampments, at their best, showed how a movement grounded in the university could also point beyond it.

Though now dismantled, this liberated educational zone in the belly of the beast offers a site from which to affirm the vision of those scientists and academics who have insisted, against immense pressure, that true academic freedom lies beyond the militarized university. Franz Boas was right when he warned the ACDIF that scientific cooperation with the war effort would threaten its ideals in the long run. Since militarism and imperialism are themselves the seeds of fascism, an antifascist science must always orient itself toward a world without war and without empire. And while we may sympathize with the decision of scientists like J.D. Bernal to temporarily compromise their anti-war ideals for the sake of defeating Hitler, the pragmatic case for short-term collaboration is weaker when the fascist threat in question is not the official enemy of our military but rather its commander-in-chief. If we understand Donald Trump as akin to the dictators of interwar Europe, then we must aspire to more than just forcing his regime back into tolerantly financing our institutions.

As Israel perpetrates its extermination campaign in Gaza not only with technologies developed by American scientists but also with American power—the power that has prevented global actors from coming to the aid of the Palestinians and that has enabled, through the precipitous inequality in wealth and military capability that it sustains, the slaughter to proceed so rapidly—we might conclude, as Daniel Ellsberg did about the Vietnam War, that the US isn’t simply *on* the wrong side; it is the wrong side. That leaves even the good things we academic workers do in American universities—everything that makes America healthier, wealthier, safer, and smarter—stained in blood. This implication may have been one reason why so many academics and administrators, even those without a strong commitment to Zionism, found the Palestine solidarity movement that spread across American campuses last year so threatening. And it is why, as university leaders boast of American higher education’s role as an appendage of the national security machine, opponents of that machine in academia have no choice but to confront their schools and their government simultaneously.

There were academics whose careers flourished in Nazi Germany, scientists who made groundbreaking discoveries and scholars whose historical and philosophical insights still endure. Most of us regard them, justly, as criminals, disgraces to our profession. The more resolutely our nation commits itself to a genocidal project of its own, the more unsparingly we must look inward: If our scholarly contributions do in fact aid the cause of American greatness, are they worth making in the first place? **JC**

THE BETRAYAL OF LIGHT

On keeping time in Gaza

Abdullah Hany Daher

I USED TO WAKE UP to sunlight shining through the window. Now a missile striking two blocks away wakes me. There is no morning anymore—no work, no school, no mealtime. There is only the next instant, and the fear we won't survive it.

Even the sky in Gaza has changed. The sun rises, but brings no warmth. The night arrives, but offers no rest.

What we call sleep is no longer sleep. It is fatigue with one eye open. We pack our bags. We keep our children fully dressed. Every hum overhead stops our breath. When quiet persists for more than ten minutes, we relax a bit.

On the fourth night of October 2023, the sky lit up. A belt of fire lashed our street. I was lying on the floor beside my brother. We heard screeching. Then nothing. Then dust, and screaming. I saw my cousin's chest open. His body falling to the ground made a sound unlike any other. My brother and I crawled out from under shards of glass. Half of the building across the street had vanished. We had no time to bury my cousin properly. No cloth. No light. For the first time, I questioned the fairness of surviving. Something froze inside me, then shattered. I didn't cry. I stayed broken. After all, the war didn't stop. Rebuilding would only mean readying myself to shatter again.

In a shelter, a child cried for his father who had died the previous morning. His mother, silent and unblinking, held him with arms of stone. "Mama, why aren't you crying?" the child asked. The mother broke. I wish I hadn't seen it, her face collapsing like that.



**At the precipice of each instant,
two voices speak to me.
One says, “You survived.”
The other, “It will begin again.”**

I once studied under a lamp. I read books. I dreamed of life. Now the glow of my phone makes me flinch. A candle is a target. A match, a betrayal. The drones look for illumination. I remember the night a neighbor’s flashlight cost him his home. The plane circled. Then came the light. Then the ending.

We cover our windows. We speak in whispers. I learn the corners of our destroyed flat by heart. The number of steps between the hallway and the sink. The pattern of cracks on the floor. The smell of burning in the distance.

Children play games of silence. I grab my mother’s hand to make sure she exists. We don’t ask questions anymore. The answers are relentless: Nowhere is safe, no one is whole.

In December 2023, we were sheltering in an industrial area. Tanks circled. No exit. No future. My father said, “Now, run.” I saw the dust under the tanks’ tracks. I smelled their steel. I don’t know how we made it—but that’s all I was left with: the simple fact that we lived, and the feeling of guilt that others didn’t.

I am afraid of light. I am afraid of darkness. I am afraid of stillness. I fear noise. When the blasts stop, I grow more afraid. The silence is only a prelude. Every second feels like waiting. What are we waiting for? We do not know.

At the precipice of each instant, two voices speak to me. One says, “You survived.” The other, “It will begin again.”

A part of me wants to believe in morning. A part of me prepares for another night.

I used to know time as a schedule, a plan, a goal. Now, time is only something to endure.

Sometimes I close my eyes and picture a sunrise that implies coffee rather than fear. I dream of mindlessly opening a window to feel the breeze, of reading a book without the sound of drones overhead. I dream of nights in Gaza as they once were: lovers walking along moonlit streets, children playing. But I do not believe these dreams.

I wonder who I’ll be if this ends. If I will ever again sit near a lamp without flinching. If my children’s children will ever trust the light. There are no metaphors in Gaza. There is only what is gone and what remains—this life between shadows, and the memory of another light. **JC**

THE MAKING OF A COAL BOYCOTT

Inside the campaign to break the toxic relationship between
Colombian mining and Israeli militarism

Maxy Guedes Andreas Malm



Palestine solidarity demonstration in Bogotá, 2024.
Photo courtesy of Helena Müllenbach Martínez.

ON NOVEMBER 1ST, 2023, three weeks into Israel's war on Gaza, five days after the tanks began rolling into the Strip, the day after over 150 Palestinians were buried under one residential building in Nuseirat—roughly half of the victims being children, many of whom were playing football next to the house when the bombs fell—a distant actor announced its entry into the arena: Sintracarbón, the trade union for coal workers in Colombia. It issued a statement describing what was happening as a “genocide,” and called on the Colombian government to “suspend the shipping of coal to Israel.”

Closer to the bloodshed, Leyla, a Palestinian activist hailing from Gaza and living in Amman who requested a pseudonym, was electrified by the call. She was working for Disrupt Power, a Palestinian militant research collective looking for ways to throw spanners into the killing machine. Coal, she saw, would be the ideal target. “Coal imported to Israel goes straight into its unified electrical grid. It powers the settlements in the West Bank, the artificial intelligence used to bomb Gaza, the military factories, the bases—everything running on electricity,” she told us in a June interview. When Leyla and her colleagues began gathering data, they learned that more than 60% of this coal came from Colombia. They found the ships that transported the coal and the ports where those ships docked. Then they passed on their research to the Ramallah-based NGO Palestine Institute for Public Diplomacy (PIPD). In the spring of 2024, Amira, a PIPD activist who also requested a pseudonym, left the West Bank on a mission: to help convince the Colombian government to keep its coal away from Israel.

Since the British first occupied Palestine, coal-fueled electricity has been a critical hinge for colonial acceleration in the region. In the early 20th century, Jewish settlements gained privileged access to Palestine's newly established electrical grid, and by 1948, Jews—the majority of whom were recent settlers—made up one-third of the population but consumed 90% of the electricity. All the way into the new millennium, imported coal remained the basis of electrical power generated and dispatched across the lands conquered in 1948 as well as in 1967. In the early 21st century, gas was discovered in the waters of historic Palestine, and Israel quickly ratcheted up extraction as it sought to shift its power plants



Haifa Power Station, 1935
Photo: Israel Electric Company Archive

onto this source. But it was an incomplete success: On the eve of the genocide in Gaza, between a fifth and a quarter of the country's electricity still came from the combustion of coal—the bulk extracted from lands that have been violently depopulated in Colombia. In 2023, these companies shipped nearly \$447 million worth of Colombian coal to Israel, accounting for roughly 5% of the former's coal exports and almost half of latter's imports.

This is the reality Amira had in mind as she traveled to Bogotá in early 2024, hoping to get Colombia to end a collaboration that had destroyed many lives on both sides of the Atlantic. She would be addressing a Colombian government that, for the first time in history, was made up of forces of the left. In 2022, Gustavo Petro, a former member of the leftist guerrilla organization 19th of April Movement (M-19), was elected president of Colombia, backed by a panoply of social movements including Sintracarbón and the organized working class, Indigenous groups, and environmental organizations. Petro had campaigned on the idea of a politics of life and a program for remaking the Colombian economy, including, most audaciously, weaning it off fossil fuels. After his victory, the government quickly launched a transitional program, the

“Coal imported to Israel powers the settlements in the West Bank, the artificial intelligence used to bomb Gaza, the military factories, the bases—everything running on electricity.”

most radical so far in any fossil fuel-producing country: a complete ban on new fossil fuel infrastructure. Not a single contract would be issued for opening a coal mine, drilling oil, or exploring for gas, opening the possibility that Colombia's role in fueling the world's fossil economy might slowly fade away.

One of the program's architects was Susana Muhamad, Petro's first minister of the environment. Muhamad is the face of climate justice and biodiversity protection in Colombia; she is also Palestinian, the granddaughter of an immigrant who fled the threat of conscription into the British army in 1925. Muhamad renewed her ties to Palestine with a 2009 visit to the West Bank. “I had dozens of cousins spread out around Ramallah who were aware of my existence. They kept asking me, ‘Why didn't you come before?’ These family ties sort of transcended time and space,” she told us in April. It was thus to Muhamad that Amira paid a call. They sat down for a coffee, and the activist briefed the minister about her mission. Muhamad was horrified to learn about the critical role Colombian coal was playing in the ongoing genocide: “I said, ‘We have to let President Petro know about this’—and I opened the door for social movements from Palestine to transmit their message directly to the president.” Petro, who has long stood in solidarity with Palestinians, required little persuasion. In June 2024, the president announced that Colombia would halt coal sales to Israel. In August, he tweeted a terse explanation—“Colombian coal is used to make bombs to kill Palestinian children”—alongside a copy of Decree 1047, which put the export prohibition into law.

Petro's decision to materially divest from Israel's genocide made waves across the Atlantic. It was the greatest victory to date of the campaign for an energy embargo against Israel, if not the boycott movement as a whole. The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and Hamas hailed the move, issuing communiques in praise of the Colombian president. For leftists across the globe, Petro's actions offered a glimpse of true internationalist solidarity with Palestine; here, at last, was a model to follow. As the human rights advocate Rula Jamal wrote in *Jacobin*, “with Colombia being the largest coal exporter to Israel, this decision is not only a victory in symbolic terms but shows the enormous impact

that a wider energy embargo could have in ending Israel's genocide in Gaza.” In response to news of the ban, the Israeli Electric Corporation, the state's largest supplier of electrical power, said that it was negotiating with “alternative suppliers” of energy to “further increase our room for maneuver.” But the reality remained that a choked-off Colombian supply threatened to leave Israel gasping for energy.

As it turned out, however, the extraction feeding the destruction of life and land across Colombia and Palestine would not be so swiftly interrupted. Even after Petro's ban, Colombian mines were not closed to Israel, and ships continued to leave the ports of Colombia for those of the occupation as coal corporations found a way to evade the law. Decree 1047 would not be the last word on the export, only a preamble.

On the eve of the genocide in Gaza, between a fifth and a quarter of Israel's electricity came from the combustion of coal—the bulk extracted from lands that have been violently depopulated in Colombia.

TRAVELING THROUGH COLOMBIA'S “mining corridor” in the northern region of Cesar this April, we were confronted with huge walls blocking the mines—massive ramparts of stone and slag that the companies have built to keep the wasteland out of sight. But in one spot, a landslide has gouged out a viewpoint over the pit, allowing us to take in the scene: a bowl stretching hundreds of meters into the earth, black terraces coiling up along the sides for the trucks to drive on. Nothing can grow, nothing can live on this land; in the words of the Colombian scholar and activist Felipe Corral Montoya, who accompanied us on the trip, “it is a dead desert.”

Half a century ago, residents tell us, this region was swathed in blue and green. But all of that changed with the



“God knows how many peasants still lay buried around here . . . The coal that comes out of this ground is stained with blood.”

Coal mine in Cesar, April 2025
Photo: Maxy Guedes

arrival of multinational mining corporations. The largest company in the area is Drummond, headquartered in Birmingham, Alabama. It arrived in Cesar in 1993—and promptly began clearing land by force. The process involved “the deaths of innocent people, rapes, displacements. God knows how many peasants still lay buried around here,” according to a woman in the mining town of La Loma, who spoke on the condition of anonymity. Many were forced to sell their land—“they were made to practically give it away,” she explained—and would later be prevented from returning by the fait accompli of their fields having turned into coal rubble. “The coal that comes out of this ground is stained with blood,” she said. Further to the north, the residents of the region of La Guajira suffered the same fate. Here, the Wayuu—an Indigenous people who survived Spanish colonization through a combination of luck, adaptation, diplomacy, and guerrilla warfare—bore the brunt of the terror, facing waves

of paramilitary atrocities and mass evictions until the region could boast the largest open-pit mine in Latin America, this one owned by the Anglo-Swiss commodities trader Glencore.

The mining giants arrived just as Colombia’s decades-long armed conflict between right-wing paramilitaries and leftist guerillas was reaching new intensity. The guerrillas’ Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the National Liberation Army were born out of peasant revolts against land concentration in the hands of large landowners. Now, these groups took to targeting the coal industry’s infrastructure, blowing up coal trains and kidnapping managers and engineers. In response, Drummond set up a paramilitary force of its own under the umbrella of the existing far-right militia Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC). The Alabama company paid hundreds of armed men, provided them with training grounds, and coordinated with them to secure the perimeters of its coal mines. The coal railway, which carried

The far-right paramilitaries referred to their mission as “social cleansing,” a strategy of prompting the population to flee by means of spectacular murders and shrill threats.



Members of the AUC conduct a military drill in the mountains of the southern region of Cauca, 2002.
Photo: J. George/AP

material from mines to the port, was also enveloped in checkpoints; the private guards who manned them could shoot at anyone considered “suspicious.” The paramilitaries referred to their mission as “social cleansing,” a strategy of prompting the population to flee by means of spectacular murders and shrill threats. One gruesome instance of such violence unfolded in 1997, when armed men stormed the Santa Fe estate, shouting: “We are from the AUC and . . . we are going to stay here to carry out social cleansing.” The paramilitaries then

summarily killed a 13-year-old boy, after which the residents fled. Their property was declared abandoned and sold at auction; much of it eventually ended up in the hands of Glencore.

By such means was the coal enclave of Colombia constructed. After forcing the exodus of some 300,000 people, several thousand of whom were killed, Glencore and Drummond together took hold of the northern tip of the country. Colombia had already been a paradigmatic case of ecologically unequal exchange, with biophysical matter constantly being drained from the country to feed the world market. The two companies’ conquest consolidated this pattern. Up until the ban, between 90% and 97% of the coal mined in Colombia was exported to other countries, and was much in demand at power plants from the Netherlands to Israel. As one Wayuu woman told the researcher Aviva Chomsky, “neither we nor our animals eat coal, that’s not our life.” Instead, it has ever been “the White Man [who] eats coal.”

In the sacrifice zones that have resulted from this takeover, a litany of woes has unfolded: collapsed agriculture; water shortages arising from the mines’ diversion of dozens of rivers; air pollution that attacks lungs, eyes, and other organs; cracked houses due to underground explosions; animals and people killed by the coal trains. Once contamination reaches intolerable levels, already displaced communities must again be “resettled,” dispossessions that feed extreme poverty in the most unequal country on the continent. Then there is the changing climate. Both Glencore and Drummond have made it onto *The Guardian’s* list of the 100 companies that have poured the most fossil fuels on our planetary fire. “Nowadays the sun is much hotter than it used to be,” says Maria Dolores, the traditional matriarchal authority of a Wayuu community living along the coast of La Guajira. Her son Luis Carlos continues: “When the rains arrive, we are happy, because we can plant crops and the flowers sprout and our animals have water to drink. But nowadays the rains are weak and rare. The desert is closing in on us.”

Others may have bought more coal from Colombia than Israel did, but none had a similar fingerprint on the industry's bloody takeoff.



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (left) shakes hands with Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos in Bogotá, September 13th, 2017. Photo: Ivan Valencia/AP

ISRAEL HAS DEEP ROOTS in this story of destructive extraction. Throughout the Colombian armed conflict, Israeli actors helped pave the way for Drummond and Glencore, assisting and equipping the military forces of the right in an extensively documented—and, in Colombia, well-remembered—history of sordid entanglements. As Sintracarbón noted in its first call from November 2023, the coal sent into the furnaces of the genocidal machine today is “linked to the role of Israel in training military and paramilitary groups in the armed conflict our country has suffered.” Others may have bought more coal from Colombia than Israel did, but none had a similar fingerprint on the industry's bloody takeoff.

Memories of this period inevitably feature a certain Carlos Castaño, the founder of the AUC. In the early 1980s, this young Colombian anti-communist moved to Israel for two years. He took classes in military schools as well as at the Hebrew University. In his autobiography, he described the experience in glowing terms:

I did not only learn about military training in Israel. It was there that I became convinced that it was possible to defeat the guerrillas in Colombia. I began to see how a people could defend itself from the whole world . . . In fact, I copied from the Israelis the idea of autodefensa [self-defence, through the wide distribution of] weapons; every citizen of that country is a potential soldier.

Upon his return home, Castaño rose in the ranks of the paramilitaries and, in 1997, unified them under the command of the AUC, whose members would go on to commit the lion's share of massacres and mass displacement during the war.

Israel's input in the armed conflict extends beyond Castaño's early epiphanies. In the mid-1980s, FARC rebels, together with trade unionists and left-wing intellectuals, formed a political party called Unión Patriótica. The Colombian state responded by physically annihilating the party, killing more than 6,000 members—cadres, mayors, presidential candidates—over two decades. The operation under which the murders happened was designed in part

by Rafael Eitan, a Mossad agent and former national security adviser to prime minister Yitzhak Rabin. (Sintracarbón referenced this link between the Israeli military and Colombian paramilitaries in its first statement calling for a boycott of coal exports to Israel.) Additionally, the AUC itself received extensive training from Yair Klein, another Israeli veteran and mercenary who also lent his services to the death squads of the Medellín drug cartel. (In 2001, the Colombian government demanded his extradition from Israel, to no avail.) Israel also supplied nearly 40% of the weapons the Colombian army and paramilitaries used to battle the guerrillas: The Hermes drone, first tested on the battlefields of Gaza, was a particular favorite, as was the Galil, an Israeli-made automatic rifle.

There has been a mirror image of these entanglements on the left. In the 1970s, the M-19 guerrilla sent its fighters to train in Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) camps. “During our armed struggle . . . my comrades went to the Sahara and trained with the PLO,” Colombian President Gustavo Petro, a former M-19 member still unapologetic about that past, recalled to us in an April interview in the presidential palace—in an office furnished with Marxist books and adorned with a keffiyeh. “Our love for Palestine was born there.” In 1981, M-19 showed its solidarity with the PLO by attacking the Israeli embassy in Bogotá; following the Sabra and Shatila massacre in 1982, the group attacked the embassy a second time.

The pattern has continued into recent years, with Colombia's right and left refracting their internal struggles through Israel and Palestine. Petro's predecessors on the right have stayed firm in their commitment to the former. In 2013, then-president Juan Manuel Santos traveled to Jerusalem to shake hands with Israeli leader Benjamin Netanyahu and sign a free trade agreement between the two countries; he



Guerrillas from the M-19 movement
turn in their weapons in Santo Domingo,
Colombia, March 1990.
Photo: Carlos Gonzalez/AP

“During our armed struggle . . . my comrades went to the Sahara and trained with the PLO,” Colombian President Gustavo Petro recalled to us. “Our love for Palestine was born there.”



Gustavo Petro waves Colombian and
M-19 flags as he addresses people at
the International Workers' Day march in
Bogotá, May 1st, 2024.
Photo: Fernando Vergara/AP

Almost one year after Decree 1047 stopped coal exports, Drummond's ships ensured that Colombia remained the main coal supplier to the Israeli occupation.

was “very proud” when Colombia was called “the Israel of Latin America,” he told *Haaretz*. Citing the use of Israeli military equipment, Santos—who had been minister of defense at the height of the state’s war against the guerrillas—affirmed to Israeli leaders that “with your technology and our resources, we can create enormous synergy.” The torch was carried forward by Santos’s successor Ivan Duque. In November 2021, Duque paid the usual obsequious visit to Israel, where he inspected a navy drill, praised the free trade agreement, inaugurated the first Colombian “trade and innovation office” outside the country, and conferred with Israeli officials about supposed threats on the Venezuelan border from the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah.

Now, with the left-wing, pro-Palestinian side of the armed conflict holding the reins of power, the tables appear to have turned. “They bring death and destruction wherever they go,” an ex-FARC combatant tells us in a class at a popular university in Fonseca, La Guajira, where former guerrilla fighters now channel their Marxist consciousness into projects other than armed struggle—such as the transition away from fossil fuels. The ex-fighter’s “they” was a sweeping reference to the nexus of coal companies, the US, and Israel. In contrast, another course participant emphasized, “we are on the side of those who suffer from war. We are of the people. We support Petro’s decision to stop exporting coal.”

ENFORCING THAT BAN has proved more complicated. In August and September 2024, just after Decree 1047, coal exports to Israel plunged to zero. In October of that year, Glencore sent one last ship, then sold the coal mined from La Guajira to other customers. From its assets in South Africa, the commodities trader still transported the fuel to Israel—and one cannot rule out the rerouting of Colombian coal from other ports—but to all appearances, the company adhered to the ban, perhaps worn down by long-standing activist pressure.

Drummond, however, did not continue to oblige. As Petro’s ambitious programs faced resistance from bourgeois forces and the new government found itself spread thin, it was left to activists to serve as watchdogs of the coal companies’ compliance. On site in Bogotá, PIPD tasked Helena Müllenbach Martínez, a Colombian organizer and co-founder of the international Resist Glencore campaign, with monitoring the ban. Together with activists from BDS



The Drummond port outside Santa Marta, 2025
Photo: Maxy Guedes

“In a way, the decree contradicts itself. On the one hand, it gives precedence to human rights over private property. On the other, it treats commercial obligations as sacrosanct.”

Colombia, she identified 28 Drummond ships going straight to Hadera and other Israeli ports between October 2024 and April 2025. Where Glencore and Drummond used to share the coal export to Israel, the latter now monopolized it without much ado, seeking not to attract attention to this business any more than to its erstwhile dealings with paramilitaries. A total of one million tons of Colombian coal were thus fed into the grid, roughly two-thirds of the average pre-ban amount. Almost one year after Decree 1047, Drummond’s ships had ensured that Colombia remained the main coal supplier to the occupation.

Here, the company was taking advantage not only of the lack of government monitoring but of a loophole in the law itself. According to article three of Decree 1047, the export ban did not apply to contracts signed—as Drummond’s deals with Israel were—before the law came into effect in mid-2024. It was this article the Ministry of

Trade cited when PIPD and the Colombian wing of BDS demanded to know why Drummond could get away with flouting the ban. “In a way, the decree contradicts itself. On the one hand, it gives precedence to human rights over private property. On the other, it treats commercial obligations as sacrosanct. So technically, Drummond might not be violating the decree,” Müllenbach Martínez explained to us in a June interview, her frustration palpable.

The motley coalition of actors who had galvanized support for the initial boycott sprung into action again. PIPD passed on the data it had collected about the decree’s subversion to the relevant ministries. On May 28th, the Wayuu Indigenous Guard—an unarmed community protection network—joined various allied groups to block coal mines across Cesar and La Guajira for a day, raising Palestinian flags and calling for a real embargo. Wayuu groups and trade unions also held a series of meetings with government officials to communicate their objections to the ban’s evasion. Sintracarbón, too, released a vehement statement repeating its call to cut off coal to the genocide—this one also signed by the oil workers’ union and the national federation for Indigenous peoples. At its headquarters in La Loma, Drummond felt the heat. The company issued a plea of innocence: “Coal exports to Israel have been done in conformity with the authorization that the National Government gave,” it claimed, pointing to its shipments having been approved by the trade ministry in line with article three.

Before this wave of protest, Petro seemed only dimly aware of this subversion of his decree. “Drummond might be cheating us,” he said in passing during our interview. But now, faced with a public campaign highlighting how Drummond made a mockery of his order, the president re-entered the fray. In mid-July, he wrapped the edifice of the presidential palace in Palestinian flags. On the 23rd of the same month, he delivered another characteristically erudite and rambling speech on the climate catastrophe, homing in on the question of the coal boycott. By now he seemed to be burning with rage. “Am I a shell here, a puppet in a theater they call politics, while real power lies elsewhere? . . . The export of coal to Israel is prohibited—it’s an order from the president of the republic.” He railed against Drummond, for first murdering workers and then flouting a democratic decision, then decried his own former minister of trade, Carlos Reyes—a liberal who “deceived” him by inserting article three into the decree—as “an accomplice to the genocide in Gaza.” He vowed to henceforth allow “not a single ton of coal” to reach Israel, and called on the workers and the Wayuu to block mines and ports if the export continued.

The day after Petro’s address, Drummond sent another vessel, *Fortune*, from its Colombian port, this one loaded with nearly 100,000 tons bound for Israel. Now Petro lost it. As commander-in-chief of the armed forces of Colombia,

he ordered the navy to intercept any further shipments; should the company try to violate the law of the land by continuing to supply Colombian coal to Israel’s genocide, it would be met with warships. Such an announcement was unprecedented in the history of boycott initiatives, and perhaps in that of relations between states and foreign capital. Müllenbach Martínez welcomed the news. “As long as ships are within Colombian waters, he does have the legal right to send in the navy,” she said. “It’s an incredible thing for other countries to look into, that you can actually do something like this.” Since the order to the navy, PIPD has not registered a single outbound ship. The Drummond port has gone quiet, a decades-long supply to Israel coming to an abrupt halt. More cause for celebration came on August 20th, when the presidential office issued a second decree, number 0949, which canceled Decree 1047’s now-notorious article three and issued an absolute ban on coal exports to Israel. The contracts that Drummond had signed with Israel before 2024—which ran until 2036—all nullified with the stroke of a pen.



People burn the flags of Israel and the United States during a “Palestine Lives” vigil in Bogotá, October 17th, 2023. Photo: Ivan Valencia/AP

In July, Petro ordered his navy to intercept any future shipments to Israel—an announcement unprecedented in the history of boycott initiatives, and perhaps in that of relations between states and foreign capital.



Supporters of President Gustavo Petro display a Palestinian flag as he addresses a rally in Ibagué, Colombia, October 3rd, 2025. Photo: Fernando Vergara/AP

A Pyrrhic victory it might still be, but the model of the Colombian boycott initiative has been inspiring to many in the movements for Palestine and the climate.

“What are they doing in Gaza? Showing us how the power of carbon can wipe us all out if we rebel . . . We have to destroy Mister Carbon, or else he will destroy us all.”

But this law is likely to be just another act in a protracted struggle. After Decree 1047, Glencore and Drummond sued the Colombian government 17 times, for millions of dollars in each case, within the framework of free-trade agreements. Now, “there will be even more court cases, because Drummond was counting on another decade of sales and now the contracts have been canceled,” Müllenbach Martínez said. Even more critically, in 2026, Colombia will elect a new president. Polls have indicated that the right or far right is likely to reconquer the palace. A top contender is Vicky Dávila, a media personality aspiring to be the Colombian Jair Bolsonaro or Javier Milei who has attacked Muhamad for being a Palestinian foreigner and Petro for being a terrorist sympathizer. Barely had the ink dried on the presidential paper before conservative parliamentarians and presidential candidates demanded that the Colombian supreme court abrogate Decree 0949. In the assessment of Müllenbach Martínez, “this new decree can be eliminated in 24 hours if they win.”

A PYRRHIC VICTORY it might still be, but the model of the Colombian boycott initiative has been inspiring to many in the movements for Palestine and the climate. “A lot of countries in the Global South were meant to do much more for Palestine, to disrupt the genocidal machine economically. But so far, and we’re in September 2025, it’s only Colombia doing it,” says Mohammed Usrof, a Gazan living in Qatar who has become the face of Palestinian youth at the United Nations Climate Change Conference’s COP summits in recent years. Usrof, who has lost 70 family members to the massacres in Khan Younis, invests considerable hope in the lessons of the Colombian boycott, and he is not alone. Efforts to keep the experiment alive have spread. In the run-up to COP30 in Brazil, the campaign for an energy embargo is focusing on that country, which is nominally committed to both mitigating climate change and ending the genocide but is still a major exporter of oil to Israel. Oil workers’ unions have called on President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva to follow in the footsteps of Petro. South Africa, with its mixture of judicial vanguardism and uninterrupted coal exports, has become another front for similar protests. Leyla, the activist from Disrupt Power, says that the Colombian ban is ripe for export to such places. It lays out the process—“a trade union which set the ball in motion, and after that, solidarity movements could be mobilized and policymakers lobbied”—and shows that “an energy embargo from below can actually win.”

More abstractly, the episode can be seen as an object lesson in the clash between two dialectics. On the one hand: a dialectics of destruction. Coal from Colombia has energized occupation and genocide in Palestine; Israeli militarism has

contributed to displacement and destruction in Colombia; and both together are fueling the ultimate breakdown of the climate. Within this dialectic, as seen from the northern shores of Colombia, the current genocide in Gaza appears like a culmination: The physical annihilation of Palestine is the concentrated exhaust from a world system geared toward the destruction of the many for the benefit of the few. Petro emphasized as much in his July 23rd speech: “What are they doing in Gaza? Showing us how the power of carbon can wipe us all out if we rebel. Mister Carbon is the power of the world . . . We have to destroy Mister Carbon, or else he will destroy us all.”

On the other hand, then, a dialectics of resistance. The coal boycott has come about through a remarkable reciprocity between social movements in Colombia and Palestine and—uniquely—the executive power of the left. Once in the cabinet and the presidential office, Muhamad and Petro were proudly responsive to pressure from extra-parliamentary campaigns, and egged the activists on in turn. The exceptionality of this situation is hard to exaggerate, and the fight to keep it in place is ceaseless when a bourgeois state apparatus works to maintain business as usual and a revanchist right stands ready, preparing to regain full power. Movements have reached for the emergency brake on the coal train; whether they can bring it to a halt remains to be seen. **JC**

Rumah Kata, Ibaw, Mana Ceritamu?

Afrizal
Malna

Aku masuk ke rumahmu seperti memasuki sebuah cerita yang mengubah siapapun yang mendengarnya. Apa saja yang pernah kita ucapkan, membuat jalan pulangnya sendiri, merangkai kembali yang pernah dilupakan. Kalung di lehermu adalah kisah. Tetapi sejak kata diganti dengan sinar listrik, tombol-tombol yang bisa menanam tomat, tak ada orang bercerita, tak ada undangan untuk pulang. Halaman di belakang jadi gudang sepatu bekas.

— *Ibaw, apa kabar? Apakah kau masih menulis?*

Malam mulai menyusun lagi sebuah buku dari hati yang tak pernah tidur. Aku berjanji padamu untuk merangkai sebuah cerita, membongkar makam waktu dalam sebuah dongeng. Seperti kerinduan yang meminta air matanya sendiri, seperti genggamannya yang meminta tangannya sendiri.

“Ibaw berceritalah, seperti burung-burung pertama kali membuat hutan dari kepakannya.”

Suara becak berdering, sebuah rangkaian besi dan kayu di atas aspal jalan. Waktu menjadi nyata. Pori-pori di leher kita, seperti kota-kota kecil yang menyediakan sumur untuk membasuh muka. Waktu menjadi nyata. Kecepatan, yang pernah membunuh kita di sebuah jalan, menjadi sebuah peti yang sedang tenggelam ke dasar laut. Kita jalan bersama sambil membuat malam penuh cerita. Tapi kemana kita mau pulang? Pemilik kata—telah terusir. Rumah kata hanya ada dalam cinta. Sebuah pohon jambu air tumbuh. Teh panas. Lala suara ledakan. Api.

“Apakah kamu baik, Ibaw?”

Kota ini memiliki sejarah kucing yang lehernya tercekik, di balik panggung-panggung politik penuh pecahan kulit telur, tulang-tulang ayam, dan deretan toko berdagang es campur. Beras, gula dan minyak goreng mulai menjadi politik. Orang membuat partai-partai baru, seperti memencet tombol tv. Menciptakan seorang presiden yang memimpin api pada setiap kata. Ia yang membakar pusat-pusat akademika untuk api politik. Lalu mengirim bangkai sebuah kota, memecah alat-alat kekuasaan untuk menyelamatkan diri. Tak melihat anak-anak mulutnya tak lagi berbau susu.

Aku genggam seluruh jemari di leherku, seperti usaha terakhir untuk merebut kata lewat sihir cerita. Lalu jemari-jemari waktu memasang kembali sayap-sayap malaikat setiap kata. Membiarkan ketakutan pergi dari setiap hati. Lalu kata-kata mulai membuat rumah baru lagi di situ, lewat perjalanan panjang dari ribuan cerita yang pulang mencari para pendengarnya. Membiarkan cahaya matahari membuat tanaman di halaman. Bermain bola di ruang buku, ikut membuat lapangan tempat anak-anak bernyanyi. Seperti suara yang sedang sibuk memasuki dan membuka genggamannya.

House of Words, *Ibau*, Where's Your Story?

Translated from the Indonesian by
Daniel Owen

I enter your house as if entering a story that changes whoever hears it. Whatever we've said makes its own way home, threading back together the sequence of the forgotten. The necklace around your throat is a story. But ever since words have been replaced by rays of electric light, buttons that can plant tomatoes, there are no storytellers, no invitations home. The yard out back has become a warehouse for used shoes.

— *Ibau*, how's it going? Are you still writing?

Night begins to recompose a book using sleepless hearts. I promise you I'll assemble a story, exhume time from its tomb in an old tale. Like a longing that seeks its own tears, a fist that seeks its own hand.

"Ibau, tell the story, speak, like the birds first building the forest from their wing flaps."

The trill of a becak's ring, an assemblage of iron and wood atop an asphalt road. Time becomes tangible. The pores in our necks are like little cities that proffer wells for us to wash our faces. Time become tangible. Speed, which once killed us on the streets, becomes a chest sinking to the bottom of the sea. We walk together while making a night full of stories. But where can we go home? The keeper of words has been evicted. The house of words is found only in love. A water apple tree grows. Hot tea. Then the sound of an explosion. Fire.

"Are you alright, Ibau?"

This city has a history of strangled cats, behind political stages filled with eggshells, chicken bones, and rows of shops selling es campur. Rice, sugar, and cooking oil become politics. New parties are formed, like pressing the buttons on a tv. Create a president who leads a fire through every word. Who incinerates the centers of learning for the blaze of politics. Then ships off the city's corpse, shatters the instruments of power to save himself. Not noticing that the children's mouths no longer smell of milk.

I hold every finger to my throat in a final effort to seize words through the spell of story. Then the fingers of time restore each word's angel's wings. Let fear loose from each heart. Then words begin to build a new home there, through the long journey of thousands of stories coming home to find their listeners. Let the light of the sun make a plant grow in the yard. Play ball in the space of books, make a field for children to sing. Like a voice busy entering your fist and opening each finger.

PORTRAIT



UNIV



OF A

IVERSITY

IN CRISIS

UCLA capitulated to its own hardline pro-Israel activists long before President Trump came calling. As a result, its students have repeatedly become targets of vigilante and police violence.



Will Alden



A pro-Israel mob attacks the Palestine solidarity encampment at UCLA in the early morning hours of May 1st, 2024. Photo: Ethan Swope/AP

AROUND 8 PM on the last evening in April, some 200 people gathered in Bruin Plaza on the University of California, Los Angeles, campus for a screening of the documentary *The Encampments*. As the sky darkened and lampposts clicked on, members of the school's chapter of Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) stretched a white sheet of fabric between two metal poles, while their comrades in flannels, puffer jackets, and loose-fitting jeans, most faces obscured by medical masks or keffiyehs, settled on blankets near the Bruin bear statue. *The Encampments* chronicles the Palestine solidarity movement at Columbia University, but it includes a brief portrayal, nearly 30 minutes in, of the UCLA students' own encampment on Royce Quad, not far from this evening's screening—the site where, exactly one year earlier, an off-campus mob wielding wooden boards, metal rods, fireworks, and chemical spray had staged a ferocious overnight attack while police looked on. Victims of that mob attack were among the crowd marking the grim anniversary, yet they never got to see their protest represented on screen. About 25 minutes into the film, a column of 30 University of California Police Department (UCPD) officers in riot gear emerged from behind a concrete stage at the northeastern edge of the plaza, marching two abreast, visors down, batons and pepper-ball guns in hand.

This aggressive interruption of the students' movie night marked a new phase of the sprawling police operation that had dominated a section of campus for the previous week: UCPD officers from up and down the state—including the Riverside, San Diego, Santa Barbara, and San Francisco departments, in addition to UCLA's own—had spent the days leading up to the anniversary of the attack patrolling Royce Quad and sitting in police SUVs prominently parked near the grassy expanse. The SJP students had originally planned to screen the documentary on the quad, but on the afternoon of the event, university security personnel sealed off the area with steel barricades, and a long caravan of California Highway Patrol SUVs pulled into a campus parking lot nearby. This expensive show of force, while unusual in its size, exemplified post-encampment UCLA, described by a group of faculty members in a May essay in *The Nation* as “a fortress” that was “nearly unrecognizable as a university.” In the wake of the 2024 mob attack—and the subsequent mass arrest of the student protesters who had been attacked—the university went to work “ensuring that the Royce Quad encampment and related incidents could never happen again,” including by redrawing its emergency-response plan so that police officials “no longer need[ed]” to consult senior administrators before curbing campus protests, according to a sworn declaration that summer by Rick Braziel, then head of

This expensive show of force exemplified post-encampment UCLA, described by a group of faculty members in May as “a fortress” that was “nearly unrecognizable as a university.”



Police attempt to break up a screening of *The Encampments* on the UCLA campus, April 30th, 2025. Photo: Edward Ho/Daily Bruin

The police arrested the two people who had been holding the poles of the makeshift screen and barred them from campus for two weeks, citing a Vietnam War-era law that the university unearthed last year and now regularly deploys against pro-Palestine student activists.

the newly formed Office of Campus Safety. In the fall, under a preliminary federal injunction premised on the idea that the encampment had been a “Jew Exclusion Zone,” UCLA announced an interim update to its “time, place, and manner” rules, effectively limiting protests to certain “areas for public expression” and forbidding “tents, campsites or other temporary housing or other structures” anywhere on campus unless specifically approved by the Events Office.

The revision to these free-expression policies was widely viewed as unfairly targeting the Palestine solidarity movement, gathered under the banner of the UC Divest Coalition at UCLA. Campus authorities invoked the new rules in October, as they dismantled Jewish students’ solidarity sukkah, and again in November, when they arrested four people connected to a protest on Bruin Walk. When, on the evening of the *Encampments* event, the SJP activists arrived in their backup location—Wilson Plaza, down the steps from Royce Quad—with an inflatable screen, a Student Affairs official informed them that, “the second that thing goes up,” facilities workers and police would confiscate it: Apparently, the backyard movie rig qualified as an unauthorized structure. Rather than argue, the students packed up their equipment and directed the group to Bruin Plaza, one of the few designated “areas for public expression,” where amplified sound was allowed until midnight. Ditching the inflatable screen, they opted for a more DIY approach. “We thought, ‘Hey, we have this white bedsheet; let’s just have two people hold it,’” one of the screening’s organizers, a computer science graduate student named Dylan Kupsh, told me later. “It’s not a temporary structure because it’s not attached to anything.”

The audience in Bruin Plaza—including experienced SJP members like Kupsh who’d been keeping tabs on the police while the film played—were on their feet before the UCPD officers reached them. “We’re going to move together,” a student in a black “University of California Intifada” t-shirt and a keffiyeh worn as a hood said into the megaphone. “Together we keep each other safe, right? We keep us safe!” Their number dwindling, the students walked west until they reached De Neve Plaza, a courtyard surrounded by dorms. There, having lost the police, they encountered another familiar antagonist: Eli Tsives, a curly-haired sophomore,



Screening *The Encampments* at UCLA on a makeshift screen, April 30th, 2025. Photo: Edward Ho/Daily Bruin

perched on a low wall and holding out an Israeli flag. A frequent counterprotester who had amassed a major Instagram following on the back of his post-October 7th advocacy—most prominently with an April 2024 viral video in which he portrayed encampment activists as “promoting hate” because they were blocking his preferred path to class—the 20-year-old Tsives had a proven ability to attract attention and push the administration to take a heavier hand with the student movement. In previous confrontations, the activists had been careful not to take the bait: Tsives’s own videos typically show them responding calmly to his finger-jabbing and bellowed accusations. But this time, just seconds after Tsives brought out the flag, someone snatched it and ran.

Tsives, in his muscle-hugging t-shirt and white Nikes decorated with Israeli flags, sprinted after, into the tide of arriving students, where I lost sight of him. “This person does not deserve our attention!” said a woman with a keffiyeh around her hair, urging others away. Soon, I watched Tsives shove his way out of the crowd. “Only Jewish kids getting assaulted right now,” he shouted, as if narrating for an audience. In the caption of the video he posted later, Tsives said the protesters were “violent” and suggested that they tried “to beat me up,” but the video itself doesn’t support this. Though the action is obscured, Tsives is shown roughly grabbing someone in a black hoodie and demanding his flag, while others in keffiyehs try to intercede. When I approached him afterward, he told me he’d been put in a headlock. Watching with arms crossed as the students set up their film equipment in De Neve, Tsives said, “I feel better than ever, because the police are going to come and get rid of them.”

The group of activists had just gotten the film playing again when the riot police appeared—breaking into a run as they entered the courtyard. The students stopped their chants of “Shame!” and fled. There were isolated screams as the officers, batons drawn, chased them up the steps outside the Dogwood dormitory, and as two motorcycle cops roared in from the opposite side of the courtyard, misery lights flashing. The police arrested the two people who had been holding the poles of the makeshift screen—one a student and the other an alumnus—and barred them from campus for two weeks, citing a Vietnam War-era law that the university unearthed last year and now regularly deploys against pro-Palestine student activists. The alumnus was sent to the emergency room that night with minor injuries to his hip, shoulder, and wrist that he sustained when the arresting officers pinned him against the concrete steps.

Tsives’s all-but-inscrutable Instagram video, promoted by pro-Israel accounts like Jew Hate Database and JewBelong, quickly became the latest flash point in a concerted campaign to paint UCLA as a hotbed of Israel-related antisemitism. The hardline Jewish Faculty Resilience Group at UCLA declared in a statement the next day that the film screening had “resulted in the violent assault of a Jewish student who had expressed support for Israel.” On *Fox News @ Night*, the anchor Trace Gallagher played Tsives’s video and pronounced him “the victim of an antisemitic attack.” The UCLA administration, in a statement, rushed in to apologize to the student (they did not identify Tsives by name) who had been “physically assaulted” on the night of the screening: “We are sorry for what this student experienced, and we have already been in touch with him to offer support.”

Hamilton seemed pained by the familiar pattern—the Zionist provocateur spoiling for a fight, the police gunning for pro-Palestine students, a protester taken to the ER, and the university adopting wholesale the narrative spun by pro-Israel actors.

This kind of distortion was nothing new, Catherine Hamilton, a former editor at the *Daily Bruin* student newspaper, told me. But something about the anniversary of the mob attack added insult to injury. A year earlier, Hamilton herself was hurt while reporting; assailants sprayed a chemical into her eyes and hit her in the chest, causing pain in her sternum “so intense that she could not stand up,” according to a lawsuit filed in March against university officials, police agencies, and known attackers. Though the violence at the screening was smaller in scale, Hamilton seemed pained by the familiar pattern—the Zionist provocateur spoiling for a fight, the police gunning for pro-Palestine students, a protester taken to the ER, and the university adopting wholesale the narrative spun by pro-Israel actors. “It is, in many ways, just sickening,” she said.

AN “EXCEPTIONAL FAILURE” TO PROTECT STUDENTS

This is a story about UCLA in the long aftermath of October 7th, but its outlines could apply to any number of American universities embroiled in struggles over political speech that are rapidly remaking our democracy as we know it. The dominant narrative advanced on cable news and in every major American newspaper over the last two years is one of a crisis of campus antisemitism. In *The New York Times* or on CNN, the student movement has been represented not so much by its core demand—that universities divest from companies complicit in the grinding annihilation of Gaza—as by the emotional experience of Jewish students who feel upset by it. Students at Columbia created a buddy system “so that no Jew would have to walk across campus alone if they felt unsafe,” wrote Franklin Foer in an April 2024 cover story in *The Atlantic*; Jewish students’ account of “the fear that consumed them when they heard protesters call for the annihilation of Israel” led Foer to conclude that the university was “a graphic example of the collapse of the liberalism that had insulated American Jews.” This image of the Jewish student in peril was even projected internationally: “Every place you go around the world, you hear from Jews, and they’re worried about coming here to the United States, particularly to college campuses,” CNN host Jake Tapper said on air in December 2023.

This narrative—which tends to shift public attention to American fora and away from the abundantly documented atrocities in Gaza—has cast the most outspoken Zionists on campus as representative of Jewish students. There was the student at Yale who alleged that a passing protester “stabbed” her in the eye with a small Palestinian flag “because I am a Jew” (on Fox News the next day, her eye appeared unharmed); the Florida State University student in an Israel Defense Forces t-shirt who told police he’d been “hate-crimed” in the gym by a graduate student who said, “Fuck Israel, free Palestine,” before she allegedly grazed his shoulder while making a grab for his smoothie. Such stories, often accompanied by inconclusive video, catch fire online among those predisposed to read them as examples of antisemitism, even in spite of “scant details,” Arno Rosenfeld wrote recently in *The Forward*. They evince “a kind of spiritual truth rather than a detailed set of facts.”

The students on this social media dais have become savvy ambassadors for a worldview, endemic to organized American Jewish life, that conflates Jewishness and Zionism. In his senior year of high school, for example, Tsives did an internship with the Zionist group StandWithUs, where, he told me, instructors taught him “not just Israel 101 but also everything that you need to know about how to hold an argument” with pro-Palestine activists in college. Even those young American Jews who do not attend such programs are often raised within institutions that instill in them a powerful identification with the Jewish state. “They’re taught that threats to unqualified support for Israel are threats to Jewish safety,



Pro-Israel demonstrators at a rally for the Israeli hostages on the UCLA campus, November 7th, 2023. Photo: Raquel Frohlich/Alamy

and they take it to heart,” said Marjorie Feld, a professor at Babson College and the author of *The Threshold of Dissent: A History of American Jewish Critics of Zionism*.

Long before President Trump adopted the allegation of antisemitism as the central tool in his crusade against higher education, university administrators—under pressure from their donors and trustees and from activist members of Congress—have elevated even the flimsiest reports of harm to Jewish students as justification to tamp down on pro-Palestine activism. Despite video of the alleged eye stab depicting something far more ambiguous, Yale opened an inquiry into the claim and enlisted the help of the FBI in tracking down the flag-waving student; at FSU, the graduate-student worker who’d said “fuck Israel” on video was fired, suspended, barred from campus, and charged with misdemeanor battery. Universities have suspended clubs, fired teachers, and punished their own star students for speaking out against Israel. Their official task forces to study

campus antisemitism, convened in the months after October 7th, were sometimes chaired by professors of dentistry, epidemiology, and real estate finance—nonexperts who happened to be Jewish and who produced credulous reports that relied on outside pro-Israel groups like the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) for their analysis. Yet even kowtowing, in televised grillings on Capitol Hill, to the notion that strident protest of Israel amounted to anti-Jewish hatred did not spare the presidents of Columbia, Penn, Harvard, and other universities their jobs.

What it did, instead, was help pave the way for President Trump to attack the nation’s leading sites of critical inquiry under the cover of what movement strategist Sharon Rose Goldtzvik has called “smokescreen antisemitism.” In March, the same month that *The Atlantic’s* Foer released a follow-up article taking aim at Columbia’s “anti-Semitism problem,” the Trump administration canceled \$400 million in funding for the university and, apparently acting on information provided

Contrary to the ubiquitous narrative of Jewish victimhood, a sober look at the nation's No. 2-ranked public university in this moment of fracture reveals that the power on campus overwhelmingly accrues to the most right-wing Zionist students and faculty.

by Zionist doxing group Canary Mission, sent ICE agents to detain Palestinian student activist Mahmoud Khalil. In April, the same month that *The New York Times* was amplifying the “scathing” report by Harvard’s task force on antisemitism, the Trump administration withdrew \$2.2 billion in grants over diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs and alleged antisemitism at the university. Unlike Columbia, Harvard took the feds to court—drawing praise from liberal commentators—yet the university had already fulfilled parts of their demand list, dismissing the faculty leaders of its Center for Middle Eastern Studies (CMES) and suspending the research partnership between its school of public health and Birzeit University in the West Bank.

Indeed, the Trump administration’s wide-ranging assault on universities has been built upon the successful efforts of campus pro-Israel advocates, along with donors and outside groups, in lobbying for the illiberal and violent repression of pro-Palestine speech. Though Foer contended in his March article that the Trump administration was “exploiting the issue of anti-Semitism,” its demands of Columbia substantially echoed a previous list of demands by the university’s own Zionist faculty activists. Similarly, Harvard’s CMES and its partnership with Birzeit had both come under attack by an influential Jewish alumni group in a distortion-filled May 2024 report.

The crisis at California’s largest public university, while attracting less national attention than its Ivy League equivalents, has exemplified these dynamics. I spent the spring quarter visiting UCLA and interviewing more than 40 people—students, faculty, staff, and outside advocates on all sides of this drama—in an attempt to understand how these national political trends were playing out at a single university. The picture that emerges is one of a campus besieged from without and within, caught between the crusaders in the White House and those walking its own halls. Contrary to the ubiquitous narrative of Jewish victimhood, a sober look at the nation’s No. 2-ranked public university in this moment of fracture reveals that the power on campus overwhelmingly accrues to the most right-wing Zionist students and faculty in their efforts to stifle opposition to what United Nations experts call a genocide in Gaza. Theirs is a faction supported

by well-resourced communal organizations and Trump-aligned law firms, and defended by police and the federal government. Successfully pushing their message to a sympathetic media and stoking the outrage of powerful allies, the pro-Israel advocates on campus appear more as agent than object, more doer than done to. Their concerted pressure campaigns targeting administrators have gotten results in the form of new, strictly enforced policies; disciplinary proceedings against protesters; interventions into academic curriculum; and the repeated use of police and other security forces to quell the student movement.

The picture that emerges is one of a campus besieged from without and within, caught between the crusaders in the White House and those walking its own halls.

This activist infrastructure long predates October 7th, gaining steam over the last decade in response to boycott, divestment, and sanctions (BDS) resolutions on campuses. A “complex landscape of many different campus groups” and donors, in the words of Josh Nathan-Kazis, the journalist who documented these efforts in a series of articles in *The Forward* in 2018, has collectively poured cash into “very aggressive, and very hard-nosed” strategies to counter campus activism. Nathan-Kazis pointed out in a 2019 interview that “this whole wave of hardline tactics and entities” did not come from Jewish students themselves, but rather “from ideas developed by think tanks in Israel, and leaders of the American-Jewish community.” This dynamic persists: When students in the UC Divest Coalition at UCLA established their encampment in April 2024, the Miriam Adelson-backed Israeli-American Council, the Jewish Federation of Los Angeles, and other groups quickly organized a rally on campus with the university’s permission, where Anti-Defamation League CEO Jonathan Greenblatt, draped in a combined American-Israeli flag, pointed to the nearby encampment and said, to cheers, “Their evil and their fascism will not win.” The backdrop to

“We can’t learn over the constant noise of Jews being slaughtered.”

the rally stage was a “Jumbotron” TV screen erected by an off-campus group calling itself the Bear Jews of Truth and paid for by a list of prominent donors, including Jessica Seinfeld, a cookbook author and the wife of comedian Jerry Seinfeld; Bill Ackman, the hedge-fund billionaire who has gone to war with Harvard over its student protests; and a host of local machers in real estate and law. The intention for the screen, according to archived versions of the GoFundMe page, was to create a “legendary counter move” to the encampment, drowning out student chants by playing “nonstop clips” of “the screams and cries of October 7th.” In the wake of the mob attack two days later, Jewish student leaders at the campus Hillel—who self-identify as Zionists—wrote in a pointed statement, “We can not [sic] have a clearer ask for the off-campus Jewish community: stay off our campus. Do not fund any actions on campus. Do not protest on campus. Your actions are harming Jewish students.” Of the Jumbotron, they wrote, “We can’t learn over the constant noise of Jews being slaughtered.” Yet even if the Zionist activists, like Tsives, represent only a fraction of Jewish students, they style themselves as the embattled avatars of UCLA Jews in general and are often adept at flexing the power arrayed around them. In our first interview, in April, Tsives described the network of organizations operating on campus as a “Jewish powerhouse,” adding that the new chancellor, Julio Frenk, who was “brave enough” to suspend SJP in his second month on the job, had provided “that final cherry on top.”

At UCLA, fearmongering by outside groups and their allies on campus eventually led to violence. Out-of-context audio and video clips like Tsives’s—promoted by members of the Jewish Faculty Resilience Group, by then-Chancellor Gene Block in a widely circulated statement, and by outside groups including the Maccabee Task Force and the Israel on Campus Coalition—spread through local group chats including Persian Jews of LA, Israelis of LA, and Beverly Hills neighborhood groups. In the ensuing hours-long attack on April 30th, at least 25 activists from the encampment were rushed to the ER with blunt-force head traumas, fractures, lacerations, and chemical-induced injuries, while more than 150 required on-site treatment for pepper spray and bear spray, according to a report by volunteer medics. “I thought I was going to die. I thought I’d never see my family again,” one student, who was hit in the head twice and received stitches and staples in the hospital, told Hamilton in her *Daily Bruin*

report. Thrust into an international spotlight, UCLA administrators answered this assault on their own students by directing the California Highway Patrol, armed with riot guns, to clear the encampment the following night, resulting in additional injuries and 209 arrests. In allowing “people who violently disagreed with the political message of the encampment to dictate the terms of the protest,” the university submitted to a “heckler’s veto,” as the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) contended in a lawsuit, and “trampled” on students’ right to free expression. In the weeks following, and into the next academic year, the university adopted a muscular new approach to enforcement, with the police continuing to arrest student protesters, send them to the emergency room, and temporarily ban them from campus. In the last two years, roughly 130 students have faced disciplinary charges related to pro-Palestine activism, with some of them charged multiple times, according to faculty and staff supporting their defense.

Now, like other schools, UCLA has responded to the Trump administration’s opportunistic quest by aligning itself more fully with the most radical pro-Israel activists in its midst. Frenk, who took office as chancellor in January, said in a May interview with *Jewish Insider* that the prospect of losing federal funds “occupies me at night.” His administration has rapidly expanded the crackdown that began under Block, suspending at least 11 students over Palestine solidarity activism, placing SJP on interim suspension, and launching an “Initiative to



A pro-Israel rally at UCLA, April 28th, 2024.
Photo: Brandon Morquecho/*Daily Bruin*



Pro-Israel demonstrators attack students at the UCLA encampment in the early morning hours of May 1st, 2024. Photo: Ethan Swope/AP

Combat Antisemitism,” led by real estate finance professor Stuart Gabriel, to “implement” the recommendations of the university’s Task Force to Combat Antisemitism and Anti-Israeli Bias, which Gabriel chaired. Dov Waxman, a UCLA professor of Israel studies, told me that the task force report was a “problematic” document that “presented people’s perceptions or experiences of what they considered to be antisemitism as antisemitism.” He resigned from the task force rather than put his name to the draft. Another resignee, Shalom Staub, UCLA’s assistant vice provost for community engagement, told Gabriel in a September 2024 email, obtained through a public-records request, that the draft report repeatedly “conflate[d] political speech, albeit objectionable and repugnant speech, with antisemitism,” while adopting an “ahistorical, non-contextual approach” that “minimiz[ed] the context of the severe Israeli military action in Gaza post October 7.”

Yet Frenk’s maneuvers failed to keep the Trump administration at bay. Over the summer, UCLA became the first public university penalized in the government’s anti-antisemitism gambit, facing a \$1.2 billion fine and a slew of other demands reflecting right-wing anti-DEI and anti-trans objectives. Negotiations between the two sides were ongoing as of press time, even after a federal judge restored virtually all of the \$584 million in research funds that the Trump administration had suspended as part of its efforts. Those cuts, UC President James B. Milliken said in an August statement, did “nothing to address antisemitism”; Milliken further

complained that “the extensive work that UCLA [has] taken to combat antisemitism has apparently been ignored.” But it hadn’t been ignored. On the contrary, at least one product of that “extensive work,” the antisemitism task force report, was repeatedly cited by the Department of Justice in the letter outlining its findings. Two federal grant-making agencies, the National Institutes of Health and the Department of Energy, likewise justified their suspension of funds by citing “UCLA’s own” report.

Again and again, the university’s validation of Zionist critics, far from protecting it from censure, has provided an opening for further punishment. After UCLA law student Yitzzy Frankel and other plaintiffs claimed in a June 2024 lawsuit that encampment activists had made a section of campus into a “Jew Exclusion Zone,” the Trump-appointed judge in that case noted that the university “[did] not dispute this” version of events. University officials ultimately settled the case for \$6.45 million. One UCLA administrator, quoted anonymously in the *Los Angeles Times*, conceded that the Frankel settlement—announced just hours before the Trump administration accused UCLA of civil rights violations, heralding the funding freeze—had “backfired,” inviting the federal government to pounce on the apparent admission of failure. “If you placate the bully, the bully comes back,” said legal scholar Katherine Franke, who was forced to retire from Columbia in January after being targeted with harassment and threats over her pro-Palestine advocacy.

In response to a list of detailed questions about these events, a spokesperson for UCLA said in an emailed statement that “there is no room for violence, hate or intimidation” at the university. “The events in the spring of 2024 tested the bonds that unite UCLA as a learning community and created mistrust in some corners of our campus,” the statement went on. “UCLA continues to take meaningful steps to ensure we can both maintain our commitment to free expression and make our campus a place where all Bruins feel safe, supported and able to thrive.” (The spokesperson had previously declined to make Frenk available for an interview.)

The attack of April 30th, 2024, remains an untreated wound, with the university thus far avoiding any official reckoning with its role in the most extreme night of vigilante violence endured by any Palestine solidarity encampment nationwide. The story of that night and what came after is particular to UCLA. Yet the experience of the students, treated

“The only way UCLA really has been exceptional is in its exceptional failure to protect the students in its encampment from violence.”



An injured person is carried away amid an attack on students at the UCLA encampment, April 30th, 2024. Photo: Ethan Swope/AP

as expendable by their own university, is vividly illustrative of the forceful opposition arrayed against the student movement as a whole. And it shows how advocates for Israel set the terms of the campus battle. “The only way UCLA really has been exceptional,” Waxman told me, “is in its exceptional failure to protect the students in its encampment from violence.”

THE FIRE IN THE MED SCHOOL

Not long after October 7th, 2023, Kira Stein, an assistant clinical professor of psychiatry at UCLA’s David Geffen School of Medicine, started a “support group” for Jewish faculty who felt “isolated, fearful, or demoralized” by what was occurring on campus, as she later put it in an email. Stein, who is 55 and wears a blonde bob and cat-eye glasses, was affiliated with the university on a volunteer basis, seeing patients and supervising residents in a campus clinic that her mother, psychiatry professor Vivien Burt, had founded. But while Stein did not draw a salary from UCLA, she possessed an employee ID number and a university email address—and would soon make herself into a force on campus.

In the first month after the Hamas attack—with scholars and activists already warning of an unfolding genocide in Gaza as Israel laid siege to the territory, killing more than 10,000 by early November—students at UCLA’s Westwood campus were joining their peers around the country in holding rallies, walkouts, and teach-ins to advocate for divestment. A November open letter that was signed by Stein, Burt, and more than 350 other professors and affiliates decried “explicit calls for violence” at pro-Palestine rallies, citing chants featuring the word “intifada”—a term that has been associated with periods of acute resistance in Palestinian history, both violent and nonviolent—and “event advertisements featuring images of weapons/violence.” “A number of faculty members were clearly very upset” and “traumatized” by the protests, Burt, now 81 and a professor emeritus, told me recently. According to Stein, “what started as emotional support quickly evolved.”

By January, Stein’s new group, the Jewish Faculty Resilience Group (JFRG), had collected hundreds of signatures on a letter to administrators with a list of demands, including that UCLA formally adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism—which classifies broad swaths of anti-Zionist speech (including calling Israel “a racist endeavor”) as antisemitism—and that it mobilize campus police to “respond promptly to instances of violence and hate.” The group established an antisemitism tip line, organized faculty to speak at UC regents meetings, filmed student testimonials to send to congressional investigators in Washington, and put up a billboard near campus asking the public to “REPORT Anti-Jew Hate at UCLA.” Yet its aspirations went beyond local activism: In a speech at a May 2024 fundraising event at the Museum of Tolerance, Stein described her vision for a “grassroots rapid-response



Kira Stein addressing antisemitism at UCLA, May 20th, 2024.
Still: JFRGatUCLA on YouTube

“If you’re looking for the source of the fire, in terms of UCLA, it’s in the med school.”

team and command center on every single campus.” For this, JFRG would need to “immediately” raise \$1 million to counter the “terrorist organizations and foreign governments” that she claimed were financing her adversaries, like SJP, which she described as “pro-Hamas, neo-Marxist, and anarchistic.”

Like Stein and Burt, many of JFRG’s most active members are affiliated with the medical school, which, through its teaching hospitals and government research grants, generates an outside share of revenue for the university. In the 2023 fiscal year, the most recent period for which information is available, the UCLA Medical Center accounted for about half of the university’s total \$11.2 billion in revenue, an analysis of the financial data shows, far surpassing the \$983 million garnered from student tuition and fees. This makes the medical school a particularly sensitive target—and gives the members of JFRG a powerful perch from which to lobby administrators. Elsewhere, too, medical faculty have been outspoken in their pro-Israel advocacy, with doctors organizing at the Columbia University Irving Medical Center and the University of Illinois College of Medicine. Yet in many ways, JFRG, which registered last year as a nonprofit and recently posted a job listing for an executive assistant to Stein, stands apart. As one UCLA medical school insider said, insisting on anonymity for fear of retaliation, “If you’re looking for the source of the fire, in terms of UCLA, it’s in the med school.”

Compared with faculty in the humanities, medical faculty are often highly paid, and even those who engage deeply in teaching or research rarely, if ever, interact with undergraduates. American medical education has traditionally “imagined itself as removed from social issues and social pressures,” said Lara Jirmanus, a family physician and clinical instructor at Harvard Medical School. But amid mainstream

“I was having nightmares. I was really worried someone was going to come to my office at work, which is public information. And I got extra security at home.”

recognition of mounting data showing social factors like class and race to be leading health determinants, conservative-leaning doctors have sought to cast such research as “a politicized interpretation of the world that is somehow discriminatory against white people,” Jirmanus told me. In academic contexts, this view has translated into a suspicion of DEI initiatives, including on the grounds that they harm Jews. At JFRG’s Museum of Tolerance fundraiser, Burt responded to a question about “combatting antisemitism” by declaring, to applause, “We need to end DEI,” which she said casts Jews as “oppressors,” “even more so than just your average white person.”

In early April 2024, psychiatry residents Afaf Moustafa and Ragda Izar delivered a lunchtime Zoom lecture entitled “Depathologizing Resistance” to members of the medical school community. The talk took Air Force service member Aaron Bushnell’s self-immolation in protest of Israel as a provocative entry point for a broader analysis of the ways that the field of psychiatry has “pathologized actions that counter our power structures of colonization, homophobia, and white supremacy.” To Stein, a supervisor in the same department, the talk amounted to “anti-Israel and antisemitic libel” that echoed *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, as she put it in an email that evening to Chancellor Block and other senior administrators. She lambasted the administrators for their “lack of intervention after we had alerted you to the concerning nature” of the talk, even as she and her JFRG colleagues were already launching an intervention of their own. Within hours, JFRG posted a video recording of the lecture, which Stein made with a screen-recording tool, to its website, alongside screenshots of Stein’s emails to administrators, listing Moustafa and Izar’s names. The same day, Physicians Against Antisemitism—an Instagram account run anonymously by psychiatrist Katherine Hulbert that says it works “behind the scenes” with pro-Israel doxing outfits including Canary Mission, StopAntisemitism, and Jew Hate Database—published slides from the lecture, also including the two residents’ names.

This package of internal medical school material quickly found its way to right-wing media. Even after JFRG removed the video from its website—under pressure from medical school colleagues who insisted in a faculty meeting that the recording had been made illegally—an audio-only version of it, alongside the names and headshots of the residents, appeared in the *Washington Free Beacon*, followed by the *Daily Mail*. Moustafa, who is Palestinian, immediately began receiving death threats. “I was having trouble sleeping. I was

having nightmares,” she told me. “I was really worried someone was going to come to my office at work, which is public information. And I got extra security at home.” More than 70 of Moustafa and Izar’s medical school peers signed a letter to Block and other administrators accusing Stein of “actively trying to silence and dox, and thereby endanger the physical and psychological safety of the only two female, Arab psychiatry resident trainees in the program.”

More than 70 of Moustafa and Izar’s medical school peers signed a letter accusing Stein of “actively trying to silence and dox, and thereby endanger, the only two female, Arab psychiatry resident trainees in the program.”

The department quietly suspended Stein from teaching, pending an investigation, though she remains on the volunteer faculty, Burt told me. Yet while Stein distanced herself from any doxing—“If doxing has occurred, it will be stopped,” she said during a heated exchange at the faculty meeting, a transcript of which I reviewed—the incident with the psychiatry residents was one entry in a pattern of “organized repression” of voices critical of Israel by “a small number of students and faculty” in partnership with “non-university actors,” according to the UCLA Task Force on Anti-Palestinian, Anti-Arab, and Anti-Muslim Racism in a January report on the medical school. The task force, co-chaired by two experts on race and racial violence and convened at the same time as the task force on antisemitism, described multiple instances of discriminatory abuse directed against Palestinians and their supporters of color. (In the month following the report, a Black UCLA medical student was doxed by Jew Hate Database; the post included details about her scholarship known only to a small circle at the medical school.)

Even with Stein under fire, JFRG continued to establish itself as a player in campus politics. Eight days after the “Depathologizing Resistance” lecture, it organized a group of around 25 faculty members to attend a UC Board of Regents meeting, marching from the medical center with yellow hostage ribbons pinned to their chests. They were joined by an influential outsider, Rabbi Noah Farkas, president and CEO of the Jewish Federation of Los Angeles, which is a major funder of the UCLA Hillel. “I want to say on behalf of the Jewish

“The folks affiliated with JFRG have the administration’s ear instantly.”

community that you, UCLA, are embedded in a larger city, the largest Jewish community on the West Coast . . . and we are watching you,” Farkas said when it was his turn at the microphone. “We will organize against you.”

As Trump has intensified his assault on higher education, JFRG leaders have capitalized on the opportunity, giving media interviews on “the crisis Jewish students and faculty are facing” and promoting their far-reaching demands as “the path forward.” In April of this year, two UC regents— influential Hollywood superagent Jonathan “Jay” Sures and consulting firm CEO Richard Leib—met with leaders of JFRG in a private conference room on UCLA’s campus, Burt told me. The regents, who had requested the meeting, were “obviously moved by the many things we had told them” in public-comment forums, said Burt; they saw the federal government withholding funds from Columbia and wanted to prevent something similar from occurring at UCLA. In response, JFRG created “a comprehensive, faculty-driven road map for addressing antisemitism (including anti-Zionism)” that it shared with the entire board of regents, Chancellor Frenk, and Gabriel, the antisemitism task force chair. The document recommends that the UC system adopt the IHRA definition, implement mandatory trainings “taught by vetted third-party experts aligned with the IHRA definition,” and “immediately remove antisemitic content in the medical curriculum,” among other points. “The folks affiliated with JFRG have the administration’s ear instantly,” Hannah Appel, an anthropology professor and associate faculty director of the UCLA Luskin Institute on Inequality and Democracy, told me, noting that Frenk “routinely” repeats JFRG talking points.

On campus, JFRG’s reactionary Zionist movement continues to get results: In the spring, administrators moved to end the medical school’s Structural Racism and Health Equity

(SRHE) course, which required first-year medical students to grapple with how social inequities affect patient health—and which had been a favorite target for JFRG members and their right-wing allies off campus, including pundit Ben Shapiro and Do No Harm, an anti-DEI medical advocacy group that sued the UCLA medical school in May, alleging “illegal racial discrimination” that harmed white and Asian applicants. After pausing the SRHE course for a curriculum review, the school laid off the course’s tutors at the end of June, citing the “current curtailment of federal grants and funding,” according to an email sent on June 13th, weeks before any federal funding to UCLA had actually been suspended. When I asked Burt, in our September interview, about JFRG’s policing of academic material, she insisted that limits had to be placed on “political indoctrination” in classroom settings. She was pleased with the winding down of SRHE. “Whatever is being done to lessen antisemitism, we’re in favor of”

THE “DON’T FUCK WITH US” JEW

On a Monday in late April 2024, Eli Tsives approached the southernmost entrance of the Royce Quad encampment. Now in its fifth day—having drawn hundreds to its discussions and teach-ins, and to the collective act of disruption it represented—the encampment had swelled beyond the quad to a nearby paved walkway. Tsives, then in the spring of his freshman year, was known to the activists as the student provocateur who’d shown up on the encampment’s very first day wearing an Israel Defense Forces t-shirt and holding an Israeli flag, and who’d gone on to post a video to his Instagram page of a confrontation with student safety marshals (“Let’s get a nice look at their faces. You can kiss your jobs goodbye,” he’d told them). Now, a friend filmed Tsives, a large Star of David dangling from his neck, as he demanded entry. The students at the steel barricades, in medical masks and keffiyehs, moved to form a wall with their bodies. By this point, experienced activists in the encampment had created a list of Zionist agitators from on and off campus who, for safety reasons, were not allowed in, according to a student organizer, Ethan, who asked that I not use his last name. These included “the undergrads who aren’t much of a threat—they’re just annoying—and the adults, who are there to get violent,” he said. Tsives was in the former category. “Everybody, look at this, look at this,” Tsives called out to onlookers off camera, giving the impression of a crowd. “I’m a UCLA student. I deserve to go here. We pay tuition. This is our school. And they’re not letting me walk in. My class is over there. I want to use *that* entrance,” he said, pointing past the activists toward Kaplan Hall. “We’re not engaging with agitators,” one of the students replied.



The encampment at UCLA, spring 2024.
Photo: Adali Schell



Preparing for a police raid at the UCLA encampment, May 1st, 2024.
Photo: Adali Schell



Tsives identifies specifically as a Russian Jew, not just an American one—a “chutzpah-driven, loud, don’t-fuck-with-us Jew.”

Eli Tsives in Washington, DC, in October 2025.
Photo: KT Kanazawich

The son of two Soviet Jews who emigrated to the US in their youth, Tsives grew up south of San Francisco, playing water polo and acting in school plays. His family wasn't particularly religious, but Tsives's mother, now a tech executive, often spoke about Israel as an insurance policy. "She always told us: 'If bad things happen, we're going to Israel,'" Tsives said. When he was 13 and the family was living in Shanghai for his mother's work, a science teacher at Tsives's international school "said something along the lines of 'The current state of Israel should not exist because of what they do.' And I was very confused," he told me. "My mother sat me down and grilled me on Israel education. That was pretty much the spark that lit the fire in me becoming an activist." He arrived at UCLA just weeks before October 7th, fresh from his StandWithUs internship. When pro-Palestine protests broke out that fall—

which Tsives viewed as "blatant antisemitism happening on my campus, right in front of me"—he felt galvanized. "Not a lot of things were being done about it," he recalled. "I said, 'If no one's gonna do it, I'm gonna do it.'" He identifies specifically as a Russian Jew, not just an American one—a "chutzpah-driven, loud, don't-fuck-with-us Jew." Tsives told me, "When people hate my people, my natural instinct is to be louder and prouder of who I am."

A theater major at the time of the encampment, Tsives said that the class he was trying to get to on that Monday in late April was Introduction to Lighting Design, which met in Kaplan Hall (he has since switched his major to political science, in part because of the "absurd amount of antisemitism and anti-Zionism happening in the School of Theater, Film and Television," he told me). But Kaplan Hall has six main

Though the encampment was “in a central part of our campus,” Waxman said, “it didn’t block any building. The idea that Jewish students couldn’t enter UCLA, or couldn’t go to class, is just misrepresentation.”



Eli Tsives in an April 2024 video.

entrances; the encampment was blocking only two, on the building’s western side. The closest unobstructed entrance was roughly a 45-second walk south from the spot where Tsives starred in his one-minute video. Waxman, the Israel studies professor—who was a critic of the encampment at the time, posting on X the week it appeared that “groups like SJP” were “exploiting the sympathy that many students rightly feel for the suffering of Palestinians”—told me that students “could simply walk around the encampment.” Though it was “in a central part of our campus,” he said, “it didn’t block any building. The idea that Jewish students couldn’t enter UCLA, or couldn’t go to class, is just misrepresentation.” When I asked Tsives why it was important to him to use that particular entrance with other entrances nearby, he said, “There’s no reason why masked protesters who are harassing Jewish students should tell me to walk around the school just because I’m a Jew.”

Tsives’s performance, with his insistence that the activists were promoting “aggression” and “hate,” entered the cultural bloodstream. Promoted by influential right-wing accounts, the video spread like wildfire through Jewish networks and family group chats, racking up millions of views across Instagram and X, and was soon featured on *Fox & Friends*. But its influence extended beyond the Jewish echo chamber and the culture-warring right, making its way to CNN’s *Inside Politics*, where a stone-faced Dana Bash followed the clip with sensationalized commentary: “What you just saw is 2024 in Los Angeles, harkening back to the 1930s in Europe. And I do not say that lightly.”

The university swiftly endorsed Tsives’s narrative. Flooded with complaints from parents, alumni, and politicians, Chancellor Block, in his first university-wide email about the encampment since its creation, declared that “students on their way to class have been physically blocked from accessing parts of the campus,” putting Jewish students “in a state of anxiety and fear.” By that point, journalists and other observers

had documented numerous instances of harassment directed at students in the encampment, including physical shoving and shouted threats of violence, by a loose confederation of Persian Jews, Israeli Americans, and other off-campus locals. “It was rare to have a moment where at least one random middle-aged Zionist wasn’t trying to get in,” Ethan told me. But Block’s official email, which condemned “instances of violence completely at odds with our values as an institution,” declined to say *who* was committing the violence. Graeme Blair, a political science professor who serves as one of the spokespeople for the campus chapter of Faculty for Justice in Palestine, told me that he believes Block’s equivocating statement, which validated and amplified incendiary claims, was “one of the key factors that led to the escalation of violence” in the April 30th mob attack. “They’re stopping students from going to their classes,” one of the attackers told local news channel Fox 11 that night. “We’re here to stop them from doing what they’re doing.”

Graeme Blair, a spokesperson for UCLA Faculty for Justice in Palestine, told me that he believes Block’s statement, which validated and amplified incendiary claims, was “one of the key factors that led to the escalation of violence” in the April 30th mob attack.

There are a number of Eli Tsiveses nationwide—Zionist students like Shabbos Kestenbaum at Harvard, Bella Ingber at New York University, and Lishi Baker and Eden Yadegar at Columbia—who, in one way or another, have successfully bent their schools toward their version of reality. Many of these students have been the faces, and beneficiaries, of lawsuits against their universities. Kestenbaum sued Harvard over “rampant anti-Jewish hatred and harassment” on campus; his co-plaintiffs settled in January, winning concessions

including undisclosed “monetary terms” and a pledge that Harvard would adopt the IHRA definition of antisemitism, while Kestenbaum held out for a separate settlement in May. Ingber also received an undisclosed settlement from NYU over assault claims that, though challenged by security footage, separately resulted in another student being charged with a hate crime (a grand jury could not be persuaded to indict the student, and the charges were dropped). At schools across the country, “the students who have actually caused harm are the ones winning thousands of dollars in university settlements,” Noura Erakat, the prominent Palestinian American human rights attorney and Rutgers professor, told me. “Their grievance aligns with power’s aspiration for expansion.”

At schools across the country, “the students who have actually caused harm are the ones winning thousands of dollars in university settlements.”

Beyond the financial rewards, these students’ political activism has launched them into the world of influence. The path they’re on was charted by the famed pundit Bari Weiss, who first rose to prominence as a campus crusader at Columbia in the early 2000s and whose staunchly Zionist outlet, *The Free Press*, was recently acquired by CBS. Few among the latter-day Weisses can rival Tsives’s following on social media, which numbers more than 50,000 on Instagram, but Kestenbaum provides another study in mainstream sway. He broke through on the stage of the 2024 Republican National Convention, where, in his kippah and hostage dog tag, he sold himself as a former Bernie Sanders supporter disgusted with the Democratic Party’s abandonment of the fight against antisemitism. In May, he was the subject of a sympathetic *New York Times* profile, “The Jewish Student Who Took On Harvard,” which portrayed him as the glad-handing David to Harvard’s Goliath. Tsives first met Kestenbaum, whom he described as a “good friend,” on his first trip to Israel, at 16, through the National Conference of Synagogue Youth, where Kestenbaum, who is six years older, was an assistant bus director. “He’s been part of my journey,” Tsives said of Kestenbaum, “I’ve been part of his.” This year, the two were promoted as “visionaries and advocates” on a slate of candidates, which also included Ingber, in the World Zionist Congress elections. But they have their sights on American politics: Kestenbaum told *Jewish Insider* that, at the encouragement of “New Yorkers from a broad ideological spectrum,” he was considering a run for retiring Democratic representative Jerry Nadler’s House seat. When Tsives met the Israeli celebrity and activist Noa Tishby at a May 2024 event, she anointed him the future “first Jewish president” of the US. “I will be,” Tsives told me. “That is the end goal.”

BEAN-BAG ROUNDS AND FLASH-BANG GRENADES

It was just before midnight on April 30th, 2024, when UCLA police chief John Thomas arrived on campus. By that time, attackers had begun tearing down the encampment’s steel barricades and shooting fireworks at the activists inside. One of Thomas’s lieutenants had requested help from the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) to quell the escalating violence; the university would soon call in the California Highway Patrol (CHP) as well. But the 19 officers assembled there upon Thomas’s arrival were hanging back. An LAPD lieutenant informed him that the force was too small and that they had to wait, Thomas told the *Los Angeles Times*. (He was later reassigned and left the UCLA police department in December.) “No one from UCLA PD took command of the scene,” according to a UC-commissioned report completed in November 2024 by the consulting firm 21st Century Policing Solutions; officials from outside police agencies got the impression that “no one was in charge.” That week, administrators had engaged in a “chaotic” decision-making process “without clarity on who maintained final decision-making authority,” according to the report. This resulted in “institutional paralysis” and “an inability to effectively respond and protect students from violence.” On the night of the attack, with students being bloodied, the police did nothing. In one instance, past 2 am, when assailants rushed the encampment and slammed a plank of wood into someone’s head, police officers some 200 feet away stood still, according to an analysis of video by *The Washington Post*.

The attackers viewed the student activists as “outsiders” who had “violated” the firmly rooted Persian Jewish community—as Sean Tabibian, a real estate developer on the scene that night, told me—and they assumed that the police would take their side. Tsives, who was there to observe at the behest of a *Fox & Friends* booker, said on the show that the attackers told him that “the main reason they were doing this was to attract police [to] finally go inside the encampment and start making arrests.”

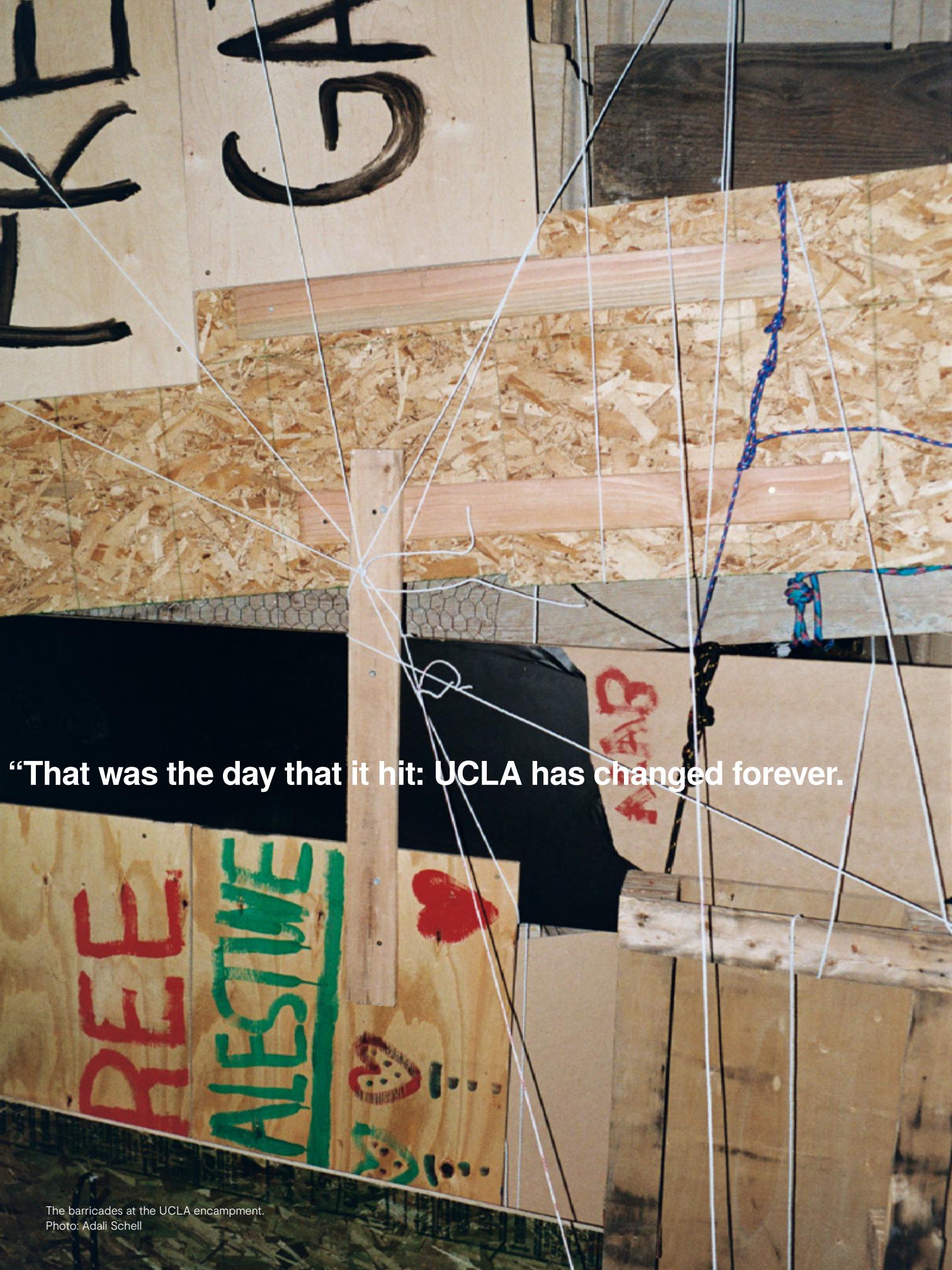
University officials have claimed in court documents that they were already planning to remove the encampment when it was attacked. Those plans quickly translated into action as the sun rose on May 1st. In a meeting that afternoon attended by Chancellor Block, UC President Michael V. Drake, and LA Mayor Karen Bass, the UCPD and outside police agencies sketched out a plan for ending the encampment: The CHP—which has authority over state property, including university campuses—would dismantle the barricades and arrest protesters, the LAPD would protect the CHP, and the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department would bus arrestees downtown for booking, according to an after-action report by the LAPD. (Such “mutual aid” requests by campus police that spring, along with private security, ultimately cost UCLA \$10 million, the most of any UC campus.)

As sheriff’s deputies pulled up to Wilson Plaza, rumors of a police sweep spread across campus. The student activists—

When assailants slammed a plank of wood into someone's head, police officers some 200 feet away stood still.

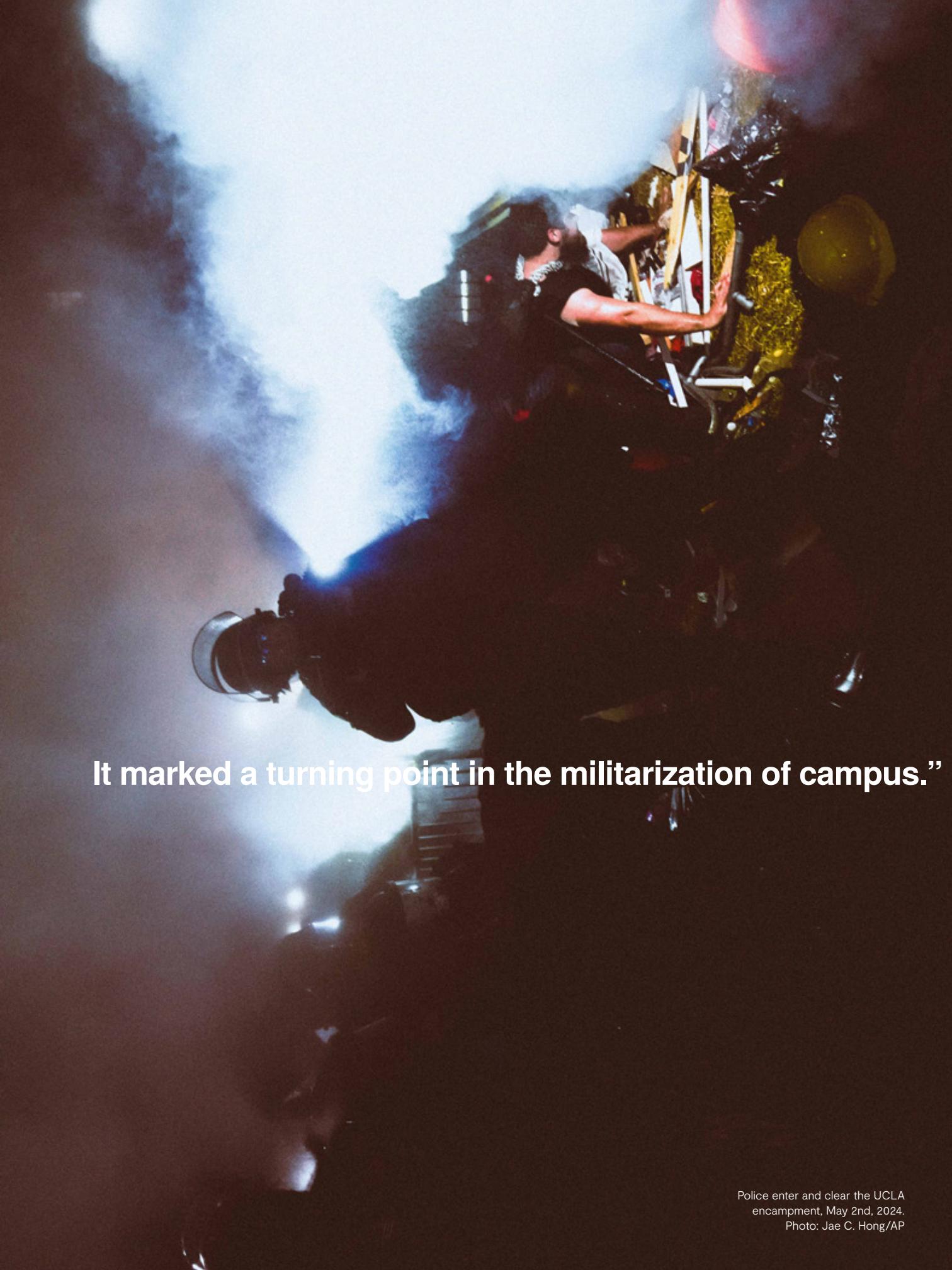


Pro-Israel protesters shoot fireworks at the UCLA encampment, May 1st, 2024.
Photo: Shay Horse/NurPhoto via AP



“That was the day that it hit: UCLA has changed forever.

The barricades at the UCLA encampment.
Photo: Adali Schell



It marked a turning point in the militarization of campus.”

Police enter and clear the UCLA encampment, May 2nd, 2024.
Photo: Jae C. Hong/AP



Police advance on the UCLA encampment, May 2nd, 2024. Photo: Ethan Swope/AP



Police clear the UCLA encampment, May 2nd, 2024.
Photo: Qian Weizhong/VCG via AP

The raid began in the predawn hours, when armored officers fired 12-gauge shotguns loaded with bean-bag rounds, as well as grenade launchers with sponge rounds at the students.

exhausted from the attack the night before—reinforced the encampment perimeter with wooden pallets and collected hard hats, goggles, umbrellas, and other protective gear. Starting just before 6 pm, a dispersal order played over loudspeakers declaring the encampment “an unlawful assembly” and telling the students to leave or risk arrest. Many people did leave over the ensuing hours, but hundreds remained, keeping up their call-and-response chants as police and news helicopters thundered overhead, and as large formations of officers marched outside the encampment walls. (Nearly 600 officers from the LAPD alone responded to the UCLA protests between April 30th and May 3rd, according to the city controller.) “That was the day that it hit: UCLA has changed forever,” Dylan Kupsh, the SJP activist, told me. “It marked a turning point in the militarization of campus.”

The raid began in the predawn hours, when armored CHP officers fired 12-gauge shotguns loaded with bean-bag rounds, as well as grenade launchers with sponge rounds designed for “pain compliance,” at the students, discharging a total of 57 projectiles, according to the CHP’s use of force report. An investigation by the nonprofit newsroom *CalMatters* found at least 25 instances in which the officers “appeared to aim their weapons at the eye level of protesters or fired them into crowds,” in apparent violation of training guidelines and state law. (The CHP, in its one-page report, said that the officers were defending themselves against frozen water bottles and other thrown items and that they did not fire “indiscriminately in the crowd of protesters.”) One student, Kira Layton, was shot in her right hand. She needed surgery to install screws in her metacarpal bones and intensive physical therapy. “It stopped my life completely,” she said, her voice unsteady under the weight of the memory, at a press conference on campus this May to announce a lawsuit, alongside other plaintiffs, against the city of Los Angeles and the state of California. A reddish mark from the injury was still visible, 12 months later, on the hand clutching the microphone. “I couldn’t work. I couldn’t go to school. I had to move out of the apartment I was living in to stay with my mom. I couldn’t sleep.” Returning to campus in the fall, she experienced panic attacks and started failing her classes “for the first time in my life.” In the course of arresting 209 people the night of the sweep, the police dealt emergency-level injuries to at least 15, including head trauma from fired projectiles and burns from flash-bang grenades. The encampment was reduced to a heap of smashed and overturned tents on the matted lawn.

In an administrative shake-up three days later, Block shifted command of the campus police to a new Office of Campus Safety, whose inaugural head, Rick Braziel, a former Sacramento police chief still living in the state capital, reported directly to him (while earning \$52,000 a month for the short-term role). Faculty activists privately referred to this new office as UCLA’s version of the Department of Homeland Security.

The administration is “willing to sacrifice the safety and physical well-being of their students to keep the money flowing in.”

The university had consolidated power in the hands of the police, and the effects were immediately apparent: On June 10th, 2024, after a long afternoon of protests that included attempts to read the names of Palestinian dead in different places on campus, UCPD officers kettled students in a narrow passage between two hedges outside the law school, forcing them back, videos show, into a line of LAPD officers. Jakob Johnson, a history major then in the final days of his senior year—and now a plaintiff in the omnibus lawsuit against university officials—saw a UCPD officer aim a grenade launcher at his chest from less than ten feet away. The sponge-tipped bullet “completely knocked the air out of my lungs,” Johnson told me. At the emergency room, after coughing up blood, he was treated for contusions on his lungs and heart. Johnson is a dedicated runner; for months afterward, the injury significantly limited his aerobic capacity. “It just felt like my lungs would stop functioning” beyond a certain point, he said. The recovery also included a period of severe depression. Having planned to matriculate to law school at the University of California, Berkeley, Johnson withdrew two weeks before the start of classes that fall. “For my own university, where I’ve come into myself in so many ways, and which has given me the education that put me out there in the first place—for that university to shoot me just shattered so much,” Johnson said, when we met on UCLA’s campus in May. “Any faith I had in the institution was lost.”

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“Parents are sending their kids to schools with the assumption that the school won’t make intentional choices to harm them,” said Ricci Sergienko, a civil rights lawyer representing Layton and other plaintiffs in the lawsuit against the state and city governments. “When you call in the police, you’re ensuring violence against young people.” The increased reliance on militarized police to suppress student protests is itself an alarming sign of UCLA’s priorities, his co-counsel Colleen Flynn told me; the administration is “willing to sacrifice the safety and physical well-being of their students to keep the money flowing in.”

LAWFARE FINDS “UCLA IN FULL RETREAT”

At 12:13 am the night of the mob attack, as the violence raged, JFRG posted on X that it “unequivocally condemns the clashes and riots on our campus.” Mainstream Jewish groups likewise moved quickly to express their disapproval of “the abhorrent actions of a few counterprotesters,” as LA’s Jewish Federation put it. Yet even then, a counternarrative was already forming—virtually from one paragraph to the next, in the Federation’s statement—that shifted the focus to the “illegal encampment” and the question of “Jewish safety.” In her speech at the Museum of Tolerance event weeks later, JFRG’s Stein asked the audience to imagine “if you [had] to show a wristband . . . to be allowed free access to public property.”

The wristbands had become a symbol, among campus Zionists, of perceived anti-Jewish discrimination. It was true that activists had used a wristband system to speed re-entry to the encampment. The requirement for getting one, organizers told me, was to agree to a set of community guidelines, including “I will not use cigarettes, drugs, or alcohol,” “I will respect everyone’s preferred names, gender pronouns, and expressed identities,” and “I will not wield a weapon or act violently.” The guidelines make no reference to Israel or Zionism. At the same time, in at least one case caught on video, an activist asked someone seeking entry if they were a Zionist—which, for the activists, served to gauge hostility toward their project. “It was never ‘encampment policy’ to ask people if they were Zionist or not,” one Jewish Voice for Peace organizer told me, while acknowledging that, in part because of “constantly shifting circumstances,” with activists “cycling in and out of roles,” the question was sometimes asked.

In June, Yitzy Frankel, then a UCLA law student, filed a lawsuit alongside other plaintiffs accusing UCLA and UC officials of failing to protect Jewish students and faculty, and specifically claiming that pro-Palestine activists in the encampment were excluding Jews. It was not that protesters had physically blocked Frankel from activities on campus; instead, he claimed that the “knowledge that he could not go through the encampment without violating his faith by disavowing Israel” forced him to change his routine. Describing the encampment as a “Jew Exclusion Zone,” the complaint pointed to the wristband system, which, it said, involved swearing fealty “to the activists’ views.”

Representing Frankel were two firms known for their conservative activism: the Washington, DC, firm Becket Fund



Protesters block a photographer from entering the UCLA encampment, April 26th, 2024. Photo: Ringo Chiu/AP

for Religious Liberty—which represented the craft store Hobby Lobby in its successful Supreme Court effort to deny birth-control coverage to its employees—and Clement & Murphy, led by Paul Clement, who served as solicitor general under George W. Bush. The lawyers pursued a careful legal strategy: As an Orthodox Jew, the complaint read, Frankel “believes, as a matter of his religious faith, that he must support Israel.” Legally, Frankel’s argument was “a little bit narrower than ‘to be a Jew is to be a Zionist,’” said Noah Zatz, a UCLA law school professor. “It’s ‘For *me*, to be a Jew is to be a Zionist,’ in a religious sense. It actually lowers the burden, because they don’t have to get into an argument about the intrinsic nature of Judaism.”

In its legal defense, the university did not dispute the idea that the encampment excluded Jews; rather, it argued that the activists’ “antisemitic conduct” was “not perpetrated *by UCLA*.” The result was that the “Jew Exclusion Zone” narrative “risk[ed] becoming the official record of the Palestine Solidarity Encampment,” wrote Thomas Harvey, a lawyer representing Jewish pro-Palestine activists and others, in an unsuccessful motion to intervene in the case. On August 13th, 2024, two months after the lawsuit was filed, Judge Mark C. Scarsi issued a preliminary injunction that prohibited UCLA officials from “offering any ordinarily available programs,

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activities, or campus areas” that “are not fully and equally accessible to Jewish students,” and specified the protection of Jewish students’ “religious beliefs concerning the Jewish state of Israel.” (Harvey, in his motion, warned that this conflation of “political perspective” and “protected religious belief” would “infringe on the free speech rights and religious freedom of anti-Zionist Jews or anyone else who criticized Zionism as a political project.”) UCLA appealed the injunction, stating through a spokesperson that the ruling “would improperly hamstring our ability to respond to events on the ground.” An injunction, the university had argued in a filing, would effectively allow “the Court to take the reins and manage UCLA’s response to protest activity on campus, down to ordering when and where law enforcement should be deployed.” Yet the appeal

“We’re glad to see UCLA in full retreat.”

immediately drew a howl of protest from JFRG. “REALLY, UCLA?” the group said in an X post, plastering the words in red lettering on an image of a court document. “Why is UCLA appealing a ruling that bars anti-Jewish exclusion on campus!?” Eight days later, the university backed down, withdrawing the appeal and accepting the injunction. Mark Rienzi, the president and CEO of the Becket Fund, said in a statement, “We’re glad to see UCLA in full retreat.”

Universities across the country have similarly retreated in the face of “nuisance suits” that “have no legal basis,” according to Franke, the retired Columbia law professor. These legal efforts typically rely on Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which protects students from discrimination based on “race, color, or national origin”—and whose use in antisemitism cases dates to a novel interpretation of the law promoted by Kenneth Marcus, who led the Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights in the post-9/11 era. Since October 7th, 2023, pro-Israel advocates across the country have filed 26 lawsuits, including the Frankel case, against colleges and universities alleging antisemitism under Title VI, compared with just two such cases in the years prior, according to data compiled by the Middle East Studies Association’s Academic Freedom Initiative. (This tally does not include the roughly 100 Title VI antisemitism investigations opened by the federal government in the last two years.) Of the 28 total suits, nine have had their Title VI claims dismissed at an early stage of the proceeding, with judges sometimes ruling that the alleged antisemitism actually counted as political speech protected by the First Amendment. One reason judges have not dismissed more of these claims, according to Radhika Sainath, a senior managing attorney at Palestine Legal, is that universities, under political pressure, are generally “not making all the arguments they should.” Nine cases have resulted in settlements. Franke called it “appalling” that universities “are settling the suits and paying out large sums of money.” She said, “The law is being used in a range of ways to extract funds from our institutions through private litigation that parallels what the government is doing in pulling public funds.”

The University of California settled the Frankel lawsuit in July. In addition to making Judge Scarsi’s injunction “permanent” for 15 years or more, the deal required UC to contribute \$320,000 to UCLA’s new Initiative to Combat Antisemitism—charged with implementing the task force recommendations—and \$2.3 million to a list of Jewish and

Zionist organizations including the ADL. UC also agreed to pay \$3.6 million to the lawyers who brought the case and \$50,000 apiece to Frankel and the three other plaintiffs. (In response, Shabbos Kestenbaum tweeted a now-deleted message of congratulations “to my friend Yitzy and the other plaintiffs at UCLA for this historic win,” adding, “I encourage ALL Americans: hold your universities accountable! DM me if I can be of help.”)

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At UCLA, legal challenges to the pro-Palestine movement have played out on an individual scale, too. In late May, Dylan Kupsh found himself in a downtown LA courtroom, looking the part of a slightly bewildered computer science grad student in a rumpled white dress shirt and black slacks. At the table to his left were lawyers for United Talent Agency vice chairman Jay Sures, who, as a UC regent, helped oversee university investments, and who had been a vocal opponent of the student movement. Sures was seeking a restraining order against the 26-year-old Kupsh, whom he had described in a sworn declaration, citing information from the UCPD, as “the ring leader” of “a pro-Palestinian mob”—a reference to the group of students who had protested outside Sures’s home in a leafy Brentwood cul-de-sac on a February morning, leaving handprints in red paint on his garage. (Kupsh told me that SJP does not have an individual leader; he believes he was targeted because, as a frequent police liaison at protests, he was known to the UCPD.)

In court, Sures’s lawyers claimed that their client, who is Jewish, was a victim of antisemitism, even postulating that the pigs depicted on a banner held by the students were wearing yarmulkes. Judge Kimberly Repecka wasn’t buying it; the pigs’ hats were clearly police hats. “They look very much like the cartoon images from the ‘60s and ‘70s of law enforcement officers that are specifically meant to mock them as pigs,” she said. She granted Kupsh an anti-SLAPP motion under the California law that protects individuals targeted for exercising their free-speech rights on a public issue.



Dylan Kupsh in Los Angeles, October 2025.
Photo: Adali Schell

Among the administration’s accusations was that Kupsh had been “repeatedly asking questions” of university officials at a Nakba Day protest “in an apparent attempt to distract” them.

Running through a list of the evidence, the judge repeatedly found that particular allegations made by Sures, including that he was targeted as “a prominent member of the Jewish community,” reflected not what had actually occurred, but rather “Mr. Sures’s state of mind.”

Yet only a week after Sures’s case fell flat, UCLA informed Kupsh that he had been placed on interim suspension and immediately barred from campus. This punishment, according to a letter Kupsh received from the Office of Student Conduct, resulted from an accumulation of five outstanding student-conduct cases he had collected for his activism over the past year; among the accusations in those cases was that Kupsh had been “repeatedly asking questions” of university officials at a Nakba Day protest “in an apparent attempt to distract” them. The office had determined that there was “reasonable cause to believe” that Kupsh’s presence on campus would “lead to other disruptive activity.” (Kupsh was one of three students who received

similar letters that day.) Kupsh—now entering the fifth year of his PhD program—may lose his employment as a graduate-student instructor or even be forced to withdraw entirely. His fate will depend on Zoom-based student-conduct hearings like the one I attended across two sessions in June and July, where a panel of two students and one university staff member heard allegations that Kupsh “participated in setting up an unauthorized encampment . . . after having been warned and ordered by University officials to disperse.”

“There’s been a full year of investigation into this case, one that’s been pretty stressful,” Kupsh said in a prepared statement in the July session, sometimes pausing to draw a steadying breath. Ultimately, after hearing testimony from a dozen witnesses, including students and professors whom Kupsh had rallied to his defense, the panel found for Kupsh, citing “insufficient information.” If he wants to remain a student at UCLA, Kupsh must successfully repeat this exercise four more times.

“VINDICATION” FOR JFRG

In August, with the Trump administration demanding \$1.2 billion from UCLA to settle claims over alleged antisemitism, David Myers, a prominent professor of Jewish history and director of the UCLA Initiative to Study Hate, joined other faculty organizers in collecting more than 360 signatures for an open letter, “Jews in Defense of UC,” intended to show the university that campus Jews and alumni representing “a diverse range of approaches and opinions about how to define and combat antisemitism” stood united against the Trump administration’s efforts. But Trump has crudely written off the many Jews who dissent from his right-wing vision, while UC administrators have offered scant acknowledgment of the intra-Jewish ideological diversity that the letter reflects.

Waxman, who also signed the letter, left his role last year as director of the university’s Younes and Soraya Nazarian Center for Israel Studies, which he had held since 2020. “I felt—I feel—strongly that the Nazarian Center is about the study of Israel. It’s not a pro-Israel center. Its mission is not to support the Israeli government,” Waxman told me. But the center’s funders, the Nazarian Family Foundation—a powerful Iranian Jewish family philanthropy run by the Tehran-born Sharon Nazarian, who also serves as a vice chair of the ADL—apparently felt differently. In May 2024, Waxman posted on X, welcoming the request by the International Criminal Court for arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and then-Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, alongside leaders of Hamas. “This is not about drawing a moral equivalence between Hamas and Israel,” he wrote. “It is about upholding international law.” That tweet led the Nazarian Family Foundation to express “that they had no confidence in my leadership,” Waxman told me. On the face of it, the dispute was over whether the director of the Nazarian Center “should take public positions.” Yet “I felt that I was only being asked [not to take public positions] because my views were critical,” Waxman said, “whereas if I had been perceived to be pro-Israel, that demand would not have been made.” (The Nazarian Center and Nazarian Family Foundation did not respond to emailed requests for comment.) Ultimately, Waxman stayed on as director until the completion of his term at the end of 2024 (he continues to be a professor at UCLA). This August, in an introspective post on Medium, he wrote, “I no longer dispute the charge that Israel is committing genocide in Gaza.” Ten days later, Waxman’s successor as director of the Nazarian Center, public policy professor Steven E. Zipperstein, staked out a different public position in *The Times of Israel*, with an article entitled “The Gaza genocide claim fails the test of law and fact.”

A former chief legal officer of BlackBerry and Verizon Wireless, Zipperstein was “highly recommend[ed]” by Kira Stein and other leaders of JFRG, in a March 2024 email to medical school dean Steven Dubinett, as a resource on “left-wing antisemitic anti-Zionism.” Yet if Dubinett had declined,



Dov Waxman in London, October 2025.
Photo: Sophie Davidson

“I felt that I was only being asked” not to take public positions “because my views were critical,” Waxman said, “whereas if I had been perceived to be pro-Israel, that demand would not have been made.”

in that instance and others, to overhaul the medical school curriculum according to Stein’s wishes, he received a letter this summer that bolstered her ongoing campaign: Tim Walberg, the Michigan Republican who chairs the House Committee on Education and the Workforce, informed Dubinett that his committee was pursuing its own Title VI investigation into reports that the medical school had not “meaningfully responded” to “hostility and fear” felt by Jewish students and faculty. In the August letter, Walberg demanded years of internal documents and aired Stein’s personal grievances, including details about the fallout from the “Depathologizing Resistance” lecture. Stein, in a brief appearance on a local Spectrum News channel, declared: “This vindicates us.”

As her advocacy gets results, Stein has had to strike a delicate balance in her public statements, neither endorsing the Trump administration’s funding suspension—which overwhelmingly affected her colleagues in medicine and the sciences—nor condemning it. “Our members did not create

“I don’t know any students now who love the university. They’re all so worn out and pissed, even those not involved in the encampment.”

the illegal encampments, occupations and acts of intimidation that brought about UCLA’s recent crisis,” Stein and a colleague wrote in an October letter to the editor published in the *Daily Bruin*. The university’s own negotiators, meanwhile, are “totally aligned” with the Trump administration “on the issue of antisemitism,” Frenk said in an online event hosted by an LA Jewish group in September; still, he objected to the Trump administration’s approach, which, he warned, could make antisemitism “worse.” “Now we hear people saying, ‘It’s because the Jewish faculty are complaining so much, now I had my grant canceled,’” Frenk said.

When we met for an interview in the spring, Kupsh, who wryly describes himself as “the most doxed person in SJP,” told me that he had gotten used to being recognized by the police and private security officers who patrol campus. “They’ll start waving at me, like, ‘Hey, Dylan!’” The morning of Frenk’s inauguration ceremony in early June, the day before Kupsh was barred from campus, he was approached, he said, by a security officer who had a photograph of Kupsh as a child, evidently pulled from the internet, as his phone background. (That same morning, UCPD officers charged at a group of activists outside Royce Hall and made four arrests.) Stories of police harassment abound. “Most of the UCPD officers know my face,” another SJP member who is currently barred from campus told me in the spring. “They’ll follow me home. When I encounter them on campus, they’ll say ‘hello’ in a way that’s like, ‘I’m watching you.’” The day after the attempted film screening, campus police detained eight students in a parking garage for at least 20 minutes after a traffic stop, according to witness accounts. The students, seven of whom were cited for not wearing seatbelts, had been wearing keffiyehs. It remains to be seen whether the mounting punishments for individual activists will succeed in permanently quieting their movement. The stately façade of Royce Hall, briefly covered in anti-colonial graffiti, is now pristine, just like in the brochures, as if the encampment had never happened.

What is special and even unique about universities in American political life is the freedom that tenured professors have to challenge authority, whether that authority is a long-dead writer, the president of the United States, or the administrators of the university itself—a freedom that professors extend to their students, whose own political identities are still being formed. “My biggest concern is not so much what the university will lose in terms of money, but what it will lose in terms of integrity,” Robin D. G. Kelley, a distinguished professor of history at UCLA who served on the Task Force on Anti-Palestinian, Anti-Arab, and Anti-Muslim Racism, told me recently. “I don’t know any students now who love the university. They’re all so worn out and pissed, even those not involved in the encampment. It’s a question of the integrity of an institution that claims to believe in academic freedom and intellectual inquiry showing that it doesn’t give a shit about any of that.” **JC**



A man power-washes the ground on the site of the UCLA encampment after it was cleared by police, May 2nd, 2024.
Photo: Mark J. Terrill/AP

THE VIEW FROM EVIN

My family's history with the notorious
Iranian prison links me to a world of unfinished liberation movements.

Sahar Delijani



Evin Prison in Tehran, Iran, January 1987.
Photo: AP

WHEN EVIN PRISON erupted in flames on the night of October 15th, 2022, Iran was already alight. A month prior, Jina Mahsa Amini, a 22-year-old Kurdish woman, had been beaten to death by the Gasht-e Ershad, Iran's morality police, for the crime for the crime of not wearing her hijab in accordance with government standards. Grief gave way to fury, and fury to defiance as women flooded the streets, tearing off their headscarves and rejoicing around bonfires. The uprising came to be known as the Woman, Life, Freedom movement, its name drawn from a slogan first popularized by the Kurdish liberation leader Abdullah Öcalan. It soon grew into one of the largest and most enduring rebukes to the theocratic regime that, for the past 46 years, has relentlessly smothered dissent and denied even the smallest acts of self-determination, attempting to control how people dress, what they eat and drink, whether they sing or dance. The state had met the movement with characteristic brutality, countering the people's hope with batons and bullets. Within the prison—which held thousands of activists, artists, and others who had dared to contest this oppressive order—chants of “Death to the Dictator” sounded in unison with the cries of the protesters outside.

The prison stamped its coordinates on my body. In the key of its fearful and tyrannical map, my destiny was fixed.

No journalists were able to report how the fire started or document the casualties. From my Brooklyn apartment, where I sat clutching my phone, I could see only what was captured by flickering videos taken from neighboring windows and rooftops. I watched plumes of smoke tower over the prison, and what looked like Molotov cocktails hurled from the hills. I heard the echo of gunfire. As sporadic news came of security forces taking injured prisoners not to hospitals but to other detention centers, and blocking streets to prevent families from reaching their incarcerated loved ones, I felt myself unravel.

I called my parents in California. “Are they about to kill everyone inside?” I asked, my voice trembling. “Burn them alive? Is this another massacre?” My parents were silent. We knew the horrific possibilities of that place intimately. My uncle Mohsen, my father's brother, was among the thousands of people executed there during the notorious 1988 massacres of political prisoners that took place around the country. My parents only narrowly avoided this fate; they had once been political prisoners in Evin. I, too, had passed through its halls. This was the place where, in 1983, blindfolded, handcuffed, and chained to a bed, my mother gave birth to me.

As flames engulfed the prison that day three years ago—and again this past summer, under Israeli bombardment—this truth confronted me: I am undeniably tethered to this place. Evin is not just a distant cluster of buildings where I happened to be born; it is the axis of my geography. The prison stamped its coordinates on my body. In the key of its fearful and tyrannical map, my destiny was fixed. This map seeks to contain not only me and my family but the very idea of us and our people. Denying the enduring evidence of resistance, it aims to trap us within a familiar script, rendering us unruly people in need of discipline or helpless victims awaiting salvation.

And yet, because Evin is, for me, where everything began, my compass points out from this narrow place toward a wider world. My origin directs me to return, always, to what the regime, along with its imperial co-conspirators, disclaims: those stubborn histories of revolt it has never been able to fully crush—the archives it has endeavored to destroy, the voices it has tried to silence, the lives it thought it had extinguished. When I look out from Evin, the view widens beyond Tehran's walls: toward other uprisings, other unfinished liberation struggles, every place where people refuse the borders drawn to contain them.



Above:
A police motorcycle burns in downtown Tehran during a protest over the death of a young woman detained for violating the country's dress code, September 19th, 2022. Photo: AP

Below:
A room in Evin Prison following a fire that killed four prisoners, October 16th, 2022. Photo: Koosha Mahshid Falahi/Mizan News Agency via AP



EVIN PRISON'S ROLE AS AN ANTAGONIST of popular struggle precedes the Islamic Republic. Opened in 1971 in the beautiful village of Evin in northern Tehran under the reign of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, the prison was originally a high-security detention center run by SAVAK, the Shah's dreaded secret police. The complex comprised two large communal blocks designed to hold 300 people, 20 cells for solitary confinement, a court room, and an execution yard. In 1953, after the US and UK, hoping to protect Western oil interests, orchestrated a coup ousting the democratically elected Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh, the CIA assisted in establishing SAVAK, and the prison became a key site for the secret police to incarcerate, torture, and kill opponents of the Shah. (In the 1960s, as relations between the US and Iran became increasingly strained, Israel's Mossad helped to train SAVAK agents, with whom they also carried out several joint operations.) By the 1979 revolution, Evin held more than 1,500 people, including 100 political prisoners in solitary confinement.

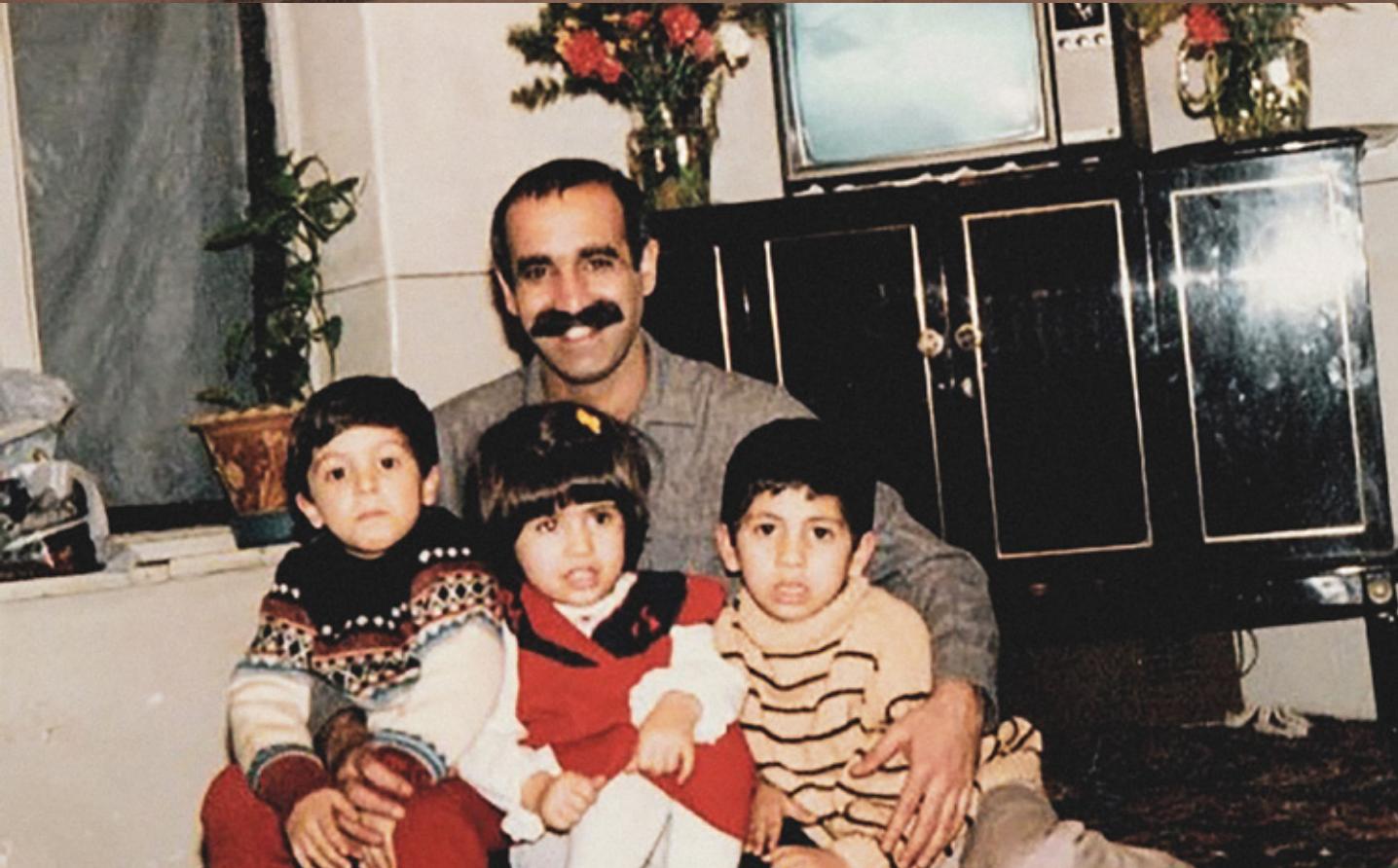
In February 1979, a month after the Shah fled Iran, as Ruhollah Khomeini rose to power, the doors of Evin opened to the public for the first and only time. Crowds stormed the prison to bear witness to the torture chambers and solitary cells that had come to symbolize the Shah's brutal rule. Hours later, the gates shut again. The revolution had prevailed; the Shah was gone for good. But what awaited the population was not the end to state violence that the newly formed Islamic Republic had promised, but a new wave of it, even deadlier than before. Inside Evin, the regime established the notorious Ward 209, where political prisoners—including dual nationals and foreign citizens—are held in particularly brutal conditions, and which has since become synonymous with fear in the Iranian imagination. People incarcerated here are kept in prolonged solitary confinement, denied legal access and medical care, and subjected to torturous interrogations designed to coerce confessions.

When the Iran–Iraq War began in 1980, the regime used the fighting as a pretext to further crush internal opposition. Among those arrested and sent to Evin were my aunts and uncles, my father, and my mother, who was pregnant when she was taken. After my birth, I stayed with her in her cell for just over a month, and then was handed to my grandparents, who raised me along with my cousin and my brother until my parents were released in the mid-1980s.

By the time Iran entered the final stretch of its eight-year war with Iraq, the Islamic Republic had suffered an estimated half a million casualties. The regime, humiliated by its failure to deliver the divine victory it had promised the nation, turned its wrath inward. In July 1988, Khomeini issued a fatwa to execute all those members of the opposition forces judged unrepentant “in their war against God.” A “Death Committee” was formed to adjudicate. The doors of Evin and other prisons were sealed shut. As desperate families camped outside prison

Above:
Evin Prison in Tehran, 2007.
Photo: sabzphoto/Flickr

Below:
The author's father on the day of his release from Evin Prison with, from left to right, the author's brother, the author, and the author's cousin, 1986.
Photo courtesy of the author.





A bracelet of date pits the author's father made while incarcerated in Evin, from the early 1980s. Photo courtesy of the author.

gates, and the world's attention shifted to the UN-backed ceasefire between the warring nations, a hidden massacre was unfolding. In a matter of months, thousands of prisoners—including my uncle Mohsen—were hanged or shot, their bodies dumped into unmarked mass graves. The massacre clarified in no uncertain terms what many had long feared: Utter impunity was the blueprint of the regime. Families like ours were banned from displaying photographs of the murdered, holding funerals, or speaking publicly about what had happened.

A few years after the massacre, my family moved to California, where a different kind of silence enveloped us. Here, no one knew anything, no one asked anything, no one seemed to care. The agonizing stories we carried felt surreal against the imperturbable placidity of our new surroundings. What was I supposed to say amid the Christmas parties, sleepovers, and green lawns? How could I possibly explain the tangled labyrinth of our inherited trauma to the people living by the bright blue ocean? In America, I wasn't afraid to speak. What I feared was the void I'd face once I did.

Still, that past was inscribed deep in me, waiting to resurface. It was as simple as that: One day I beckoned the stories, and they began to arrive. To tell them, I turned to fiction, which felt like the genre that welcomed them most fully. It offered distance from the regime's official records—its denials of the atrocities, its criminalizing of our grief—and a route to enter memory, to speak in the language not only of the survivors but of the dead and the disappeared. I began writing my novel, *Children of the Jacaranda Tree*. Drawing on my family's experience, the book traces the way the horrors within Evin's walls reverberate in lives far beyond them.

When I approached my parents as part of my research, it had been years since we had spoken about their time in Evin. As they told me about the interrogation my mother endured while in labor; about the bracelet my father carved from date stones for a daughter he'd seen only once in the

prison courtyard; about my grandparents raising three grandchildren while fleeing Iraqi bombs; about my uncle, his lifeless body swaying from a noose—something felt different. I'd heard these stories before, but now they would no longer be ours alone. They would leave the safety of the private world we'd worked so hard to build and enter the realm of a public we had never trusted. And, in 2013, as the book began to make its way in the world, I felt the warnings we had received as children to never speak of where our parents had been or what had been done to them surge within me once again. My hands shook as I read from the novel to audiences gathered in bookstores. My voice caught every time I said "Evin." At night, I dreamed of abandoning my mother and father to drown at sea. But despite my fear, making this suppressed, private history public also felt like a kind of release. For me, *Children of the Jacaranda Tree* was not the narrow story of a few people living in the shadow of Evin; it was a bid to stoke what the prison itself aims to extinguish. It was a small rebuttal to power's claim to its singular truth, to its attempts to erase our stories and deny our will to speak.

ON JUNE 23RD, 2025, Evin Prison was once again targeted, this time by Israeli airstrikes. Bombs struck the visitation center, administrative buildings, and multiple wards, including Ward 209. The assault came during Israel's Twelve-Day War, which struck not only government targets, as Israel claimed, but also hospitals and residential buildings. When Israel, followed by the US, attacked Iran, it was no aberration but a continuation of a long, bloody campaign of domination and control: the slaughter of Palestinians, the bombing of Syrians, Lebanese, and Yemenis. Within hours of the attack on the prison, Minister of Defense Israel Katz took to X to boast that Israeli forces were assailing "regime targets and government repression bodies in the heart of Tehran"; an IDF press briefing called Evin "a symbol of oppression for the Iranian people," emphasizing that "individuals defined as enemies of the regime" are imprisoned there and "subjected

The Israeli attack against Evin Prison was part of a long, unholy alliance between imperial forces that claim to free us and the regimes that claim to protect us from them.



Iranian journalists gather outside an office building at Evin Prison, destroyed by Israeli strikes in northern Tehran, July 1st, 2025. Photo: Morteza Nikoubazl/NurPhoto via AP

to severe torture.” With this familiar rhetoric, Israel attempted to frame its assault as an act of solidarity with the Iranian people, even as the bombs reportedly killed not only staff and guards but also prisoners, visiting relatives, social workers, and a five-year-old child.

According to testimonies from political prisoners inside, security forces stormed the prison just hours after the bombing, not to offer protection to the besieged inmates but to force terrified prisoners back into blown-out cells at gunpoint. Wounded, thirsty, and starving, many lay trapped for hours while the shaken regime scrambled for its next move. As dusk fell over Tehran and Israeli bombardments continued, prisoners were ordered to prepare to evacuate under the threat of death. Given just minutes to gather what remained of their belongings, they were chained together, passing corpses in body bags as they were marched at gunpoint through the wreckage. Those who had been held in Evin were dispersed to other prisons and detention centers, and, yet again, all information was withheld from anxious families outside the prison. Days later, some relatives received brief phone calls. Many received nothing at all. Once more, people who lost loved ones were interrogated and made to promise their silence in exchange for the return of the bodies of their kin.

I sat with this torrent of news, struggling to assimilate another iteration of the same structure of violence that has terrorized my family, my people, for generations. Following events from the US, which had endorsed and participated in Israel’s strikes, the terrible logic they revealed was especially clear. Despite their outward antagonism, and beneath a thin pretense of care, the Islamic Republic and Israel—along with its sponsor—acted in unison against the Iranian people; the attack was thus part of a long, unholy alliance between imperial forces that claim to free us and the regimes that claim to protect us from them.

It should come as no surprise that the locus of this shared assault was Evin. The prison, filled with generations of dissidents, contains—and attempts to extinguish—a story that defies the one upheld by dictatorship and empire alike. Its crowded cells speak not of masses cowed into submission or awaiting salvation, but of a people fiercely committed to their own liberation. Contrary to the isolation these oppressive orders seek to impose, those who reject the imposition of such violent enclosures—from Kurdistan to Iran to Palestine—draw the lines of a different map pointing the way toward a future where not only the prisons, but the very orders that sustain them, will burn. **JC**

DEGREES OF SEPARATION

Israel's new international college programs offer American students an escape from campus activism while training them as state cheerleaders.

Maya Rosen



Scholastic Distinction

in the course of studies towards a Bachelor's Degree in Government during the 2023-2024 academic year

The Dean's List ceremony at Reichman University in Herzliya, Israel, May 2025. Photo: Reichman University Facebook page

ON A SUNNY AFTERNOON IN APRIL, I filed into an auditorium at Reichman University in Herzliya, just north of Tel Aviv, with some hundred prospective students and their families. Outside the auditorium, staff handed out brochures, pens, and tote bags emblazoned with the motto of Reichman's international school: "Live in Israel, study in English." We watched a short promotional video for the school, featuring smiling students and grassy quads. Afterward, Jonathan Davis, the head of the international school and the university's vice president for external relations, took the stage. His presentation was largely like any other college information session: We heard about the school's majors, dorms, sports teams, and an alumni network he boasted was comparable to those at Ivy League universities. But there was one important difference between those schools and Reichman, Davis explained: "We're a university where you won't find any woke or cancel culture or antisemitism." The crowd cheered.

At a time when university campuses around the world regularly erupt in protests against Israel, Reichman University offers a markedly different option. "We're not embarrassed to call ourselves Zionist," Davis told the prospective students. "You're going to find yourself in a very comfortable situation on this campus." On the other hand, he noted, "if you're an avowed anti-Zionist and you support BDS, I don't think you'll feel comfortable here." Davis went

on to describe the "tremendous amount of unity" on campus in support of the Israeli military, boasting that 55% of Reichman students had served in reserve duty since October 7th. The school encourages former combat soldiers to enroll by offering them reduced admissions requirements and has even adapted aspects of Israeli military hierarchy into its own social structure: Each new student is assigned to an older student counselor, most of whom, Davis explained, are former military officers.

Reichman, Israel's only private university, has an enrollment of some 8,500 students, about a third of whom came to the school from outside the country. This international student body is growing, including since October 7th: For the 2024–25 academic year, it increased by 6%. Among the influx were several dozen students who transferred to Reichman from US universities in the middle of the school year. Applications were up for this year, too, and Davis believes the school's unabashed Zionism is "a big selling point. People don't want anti-Israel, antisemitic demonstrations," he told me. "They don't necessarily want Palestinian flags in their face. And they don't want to be made to feel bad."

Reichman has operated its English-language international school since 2001, making it something of an outlier among Israeli universities. Most of its peers have run study abroad programs for decades, and in some cases have offered

**“We’re a university where you won’t find any woke or cancel culture or antisemitism.”
The crowd cheered.**

undergraduate degrees to a small number of international students in particular fields—but full-scale undergraduate BA programs for foreign students were by and large not part of their educational model. Now, though, these schools are following Reichman’s lead; in fact, nearly every research university in the country—including Hebrew University, the Technion, and Tel Aviv University—has opened or significantly expanded English-language BA programs since October 7th or plans to soon. The trend is also spreading to smaller colleges like Kiryat Ono and Western Galilee, which are opening English-language BA programs for the first time in the 2025–26 academic year.

Overall numbers of international students in Israel remain small, but they are growing quickly. According to a report by the Kohelet Forum, an influential conservative Israeli think tank, some 1,500 international undergraduates were enrolled in BA programs in Israel in the 2021–22 academic year, a number that doubled to around 3,000 in 2023–24. A spokesperson for Ariel University, which is located in the occupied West Bank, told me the school had seen a 50% increase in enrollment in its English-language program since October 7th; a promotional video for Bar-Ilan University, posted by Jamie Geller, an online influencer who has worked with the school to promote international recruitment, claimed that applications to its international school were up by 40% in the same period. Many of these students’ home

communities report the same trend: “It’s night and day in terms of how many students are considering college in Israel, more than ever before,” Esther Genuth, a college-guidance counselor at the Modern Orthodox Frisch School in New Jersey, told me. A few years ago, she said, “there’d be a handful of students looking into Israeli colleges.” Now, “the numbers are really astounding.”

They are increasing in the context of a post-October 7th Israeli immigration boom: Between October 2023 and September 2024, Israel’s Ministry of Aliyah and Integration reported a 62% increase in American Jews opening immigration files—a total of more than 6,000 applications—compared with the same period the previous year. (“Aliyah” is a term used to describe Jews moving to Israel; it literally means “ascension.” Anyone with at least one Jewish grandparent is eligible for citizenship in Israel under the country’s Law of Return.) Increases in applicants from other countries during that period were striking as well: France’s pool of would-be immigrants to Israel topped 5,550, an increase of 355% from the previous year, and Canada’s files numbered over 800, an increase of 87%. The Israeli military is seeing the same trend: During this past March–April recruitment period, for example, enlistment of new immigrants arriving to join the army increased about 40% compared with the same period in 2023. Many of these immigrants are “October 8th Jews,” a term coined by the right-wing American commentator Bret Stephens—and now broadly

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PROUD

on campus!

Promotional material from
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popular among conservatives—to describe Jews whose commitments to Jewish identity and Israel intensified after October 7th. When I spoke with Geller, the Bar-Ilan-associated influencer, she referenced the “October 8th” concept and explained that “there’s a pipeline” from increased Jewish engagement to studying in Israel to, eventually, aliyah—“the ultimate realization,” she explained, of a “Great Jewish Awakening” that followed October 7th.

Some on the right have been trying to direct diaspora Jews into this pipeline for years, focusing especially on university students. In a 2019 article for right-wing *Tablet* magazine, the writer Liel Liebovitz called for American Jews “to radically rethink their choices when it comes to higher education” in response to the alleged phenomenon of campus antisemitism and promoted the “crazy idea” of college in Israel as a way forward. When campus pro-Palestine organizing accelerated two years ago in response to Israel’s military campaign against Gaza, the same pundits seized the moment to normalize this “crazy idea” and render it urgent. “Jews need to get out of academia, and they need to get out now,” Liebovitz urged in November 2023 in *Makor Rishon*, a newspaper associated with Israel’s Religious Zionist movement. “They must understand that there is nothing left for American Jews in the world of academia.” A few months later in the *Jerusalem Post*, conservative historian Gil Troy proposed “encouraging America’s best students” to attend college in Israel as a way of “draining the academic swamps” in the United States.

Far from empty rhetoric, this sort of hyperbole advertises a political project with increasing formal backing by the State of Israel. Since October 7th, and especially following the rise of encampments on US campuses in the spring of 2024, Israeli university administrators, politicians, and organizations have been urging their government to do more to absorb Jewish students from abroad. Last April, Peretz Lavie, the former president of the Technion—a highly ranked university in Haifa that specializes in science and engineering—published an op-ed in the business newspaper *TheMarker* comparing the situation of Jewish students at Ivy League schools today to that of German Jewish students in the 1930s. “Now is the time to open wide the doors of Israeli academia to Jewish students,” he wrote, calling on lawmakers to make this project “a national operation.” Days later, Israel’s Association of University Heads released a statement offering to assist Jewish students and faculty “who wish to join Israeli universities and find a welcoming academic and personal home.” In January 2025, the Kohelet Forum published a policy report proposing a plan for doing just that. Like other iterations of this idea, the report argues that at Israeli universities, these students would find “a much more supportive and welcoming environment than at elite institutions” abroad. Projecting this vision into the longer term, it goes on to argue that, over time, “parents and children will change their views on continuing education in American universities. The idea of pursuing a degree in Israel will begin

to permeate.” Perhaps most notably, the report positions young diaspora Jews as an “important human capital reserve” for the State of Israel, imagining international students as “strategic assets” who would go on to serve an ambassadorial role on the country’s behalf. In the future, the report concluded, this “Zionist reserve” might play a pivotal role in “enhancing the global reputation of Israeli universities” and “creating a foundation for the advancement of Israel’s academia and economy.” The reports’ authors told me that the Ministry of Diaspora Affairs and Combatting Antisemitism adopted this plan and has begun implementing it this year.

Israel is developing this new soft power strategy as an older one breaks down.

The calculating language of the Kohelet report underscores the fact that the push to expand Israeli international schools is not just ideological but strategic. As the scholar Maya Wind, whose book *Towers of Ivory and Steel* maps out Israeli universities’ role in Palestinian dispossession, noted in an interview, foreign students function as a tool of soft power in the practice of Israeli statecraft: These students, and the esteem and connections they bring with them, have the potential to burnish Israel’s image on the world stage. “It’s a question of prestige, a question of funding, a question of political legitimacy,” Wind explained. Similar to the Kohelet report, multiple advocates I spoke to explicitly framed the presence of international students in Israel as a matter of national interest—even if they don’t ultimately complete the pipeline and move to Israel. “A certain percentage will want to tie their fate to Israel. That helps the state. On the other hand, those who return to the US will be ambassadors of goodwill,” Lavie told me. This comes in the context of Israeli officials’ concern that “what’s happening on US campuses is a strategic threat” to the State of Israel, as Knesset member Oded Forer declared during a parliamentary hearing last May. “The American president, in another 15, 20, 30 years, is a student today . . . on one of these campuses.” For the recruiters of American students, this same threat can also be recast as an opportunity. Yuval Sinai, the co-author of the Kohelet report, was blunt about his plans: He and his colleagues hoped, he told me, to “take advantage of the crisis of antisemitism and the difficulties that students are experiencing” as “an opportunity that would bring diaspora Jews closer to the State of Israel.”

Israel is developing this new soft power strategy as an older one breaks down. Since the 1990s, the Israeli government and Zionist organizations in and outside the country have tried to shore up attachment to Israel among diaspora Jewish youth through tourism and exchange programs that promote

an image of Israel as a liberal democracy and support for it as apolitical. As that image becomes increasingly difficult to maintain, these programs have struggled. Their flagship initiative, Birthright Israel, which has brought a total of close to a million diaspora Jews on free trips to Israel since 1999, is now a bellwether of this decline: Participation in the program had already significantly dropped by the summer of 2023. This shift also marks the broader collapse of a multigenerational liberal base receptive to Zionist messaging, particularly in the United States. “There’s a bifurcation going on,” said Nadia Abu El-Haj, an anthropologist and scholar of Middle East studies at Columbia University, referring to the emergence of two opposing poles: a left-wing student movement galvanized by the genocide and a countermovement of young Jews who have embraced a stridently right-wing pro-Israel identity.

The push to expand Israel’s international student body represents an attempt to cultivate a smaller, more committed base that can substitute for the broad liberal constituency that has been lost.

The push to expand Israel’s international student body might be understood as an attempt by pro-Israel institutions to cultivate a smaller, more committed base that can substitute for the broad liberal constituency that has been lost. Multiple sources for this piece described Israel’s growing international school network as an intensified heir to Birthright; as the Kohelet report puts it, the older program was like “a good first date; now it’s time for the relationship between Jews abroad and Israelis to take the logical next step” of integration into Israeli society. In framing this narrowing as a “logical next step,” rather than as evidence of contraction, Zionist organizations appear to be attempting to rebrand retreat as progress—and to transform the loss of wider appeal into a show of vitality. In the process, they are drawing on a long-established international tradition of using foreign study programs to serve political goals. Internationalizing its campuses is a “very important legitimizing mechanism” for the state, according to Wind, even if the strategy “has mostly succeeded in attracting Zionist Ashkenazi Jews.” Furthermore, she added, “escalating this strategy over the past two years and in the wake of the student encampments is intended to reinforce the Zionist narrative that American campuses are dangerous for Jewish students and that Israel”—a country that has committed itself to perpetual war—“is the safer choice.”

THE CAMPAIGN TO RECRUIT INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS to Israeli universities has involved the combined efforts of the Israeli government, American Jewish foundations and communal institutions, and the universities themselves. Israel has supported the project largely through its Ministry of Diaspora Affairs, which has grown significantly in the past few years (its annual budget increased from 93 million NIS to 230 million NIS—or \$27.8 million to \$68.8 million—between 2022 and 2024, including subsidies for settler and other right-wing propaganda initiatives). According to Sinai, the Kohelet report author, the ministry has started funding scholarships for eligible foreign students beginning in the 2025–26 academic year. It has also advertised money for Israeli academic institutions that want to establish additional English language programs and market them to Jewish students abroad, prioritizing those from “hotbeds of antisemitism.” The call specifies that programs must be “Zionist and pro-Israel in nature” to receive funding and that they must require students to participate in a Zionist ideological program developed by the ministry called “Right to Identity.” Other Israeli state funding has been provided by the country’s Ministry of Aliyah and Integration, which recently launched a slew of “academic integration programs” geared toward students coming from abroad who plan to stay in Israel. Last year, 15 tracks opened at 11 institutions, and at least seven more tracks are opening in the 2025–26 academic year, according to Avital Feldman, the head of the English language desk at the Israeli government’s Student Authority, a department within the Ministry of Aliyah and Integration that offers potential immigrants guidance on college admissions. Participating students receive a year of English language courses alongside intensive Hebrew language study, then transition into courses taught in Hebrew.

Much of the private funding for the creation of these academic integration programs in Israel has come from an American venture capitalist named David Magerman via his foundation, Tzemach David. Formerly a major donor to the University of Pennsylvania, Magerman cut ties with his alma mater shortly after October 7th. “There is no place for self-respecting Jewish people at an institution that supports evil,” he wrote in an open letter castigating the university’s president and chairman for failing to explicitly condemn Hamas. “My only remaining hope is that all self-respecting Jews, and all moral citizens of the world, dissociate themselves from Penn.” Magerman told me he now believes that American Jewish parents are engaging in “a form of child abuse” if they send their kids to a top university with a pro-Palestine presence. “The golden age of Jews in America is over,” he added, echoing the title and argument of former *New Republic* editor Franklin Foer’s popular 2024 piece in *The Atlantic*. “I view myself as post-America.” Magerman’s pessimism has prompted him to take on a new role in the university fundraising landscape: “diverting money, students, and other resources from American



“I did not feel
safe on campus
in Toronto...”



Promotional material from Thrive Study Abroad
via Instagram



It may not be easy to sell many American Jewish families on abandoning the elite American universities that serve as core status symbols.



Left:
Promotional material from
College in Israel

Opposite:
A College in Israel
fair in New Jersey where five
Israeli universities shared
information about their English
language programs,
November 2024. Photo: College in
Israel Instagram page

colleges to convince people to support and attend Israeli colleges." Last summer, he began by redirecting a \$5 million gift of his own: Originally earmarked for Penn, the money went to five Israeli institutions of higher education in order to implement the Ministry of Aliyah and Integration's academic integration program for Hebrew language learners.

One of Magerman's guiding conceits is that families are more likely to take the idea of college in Israel seriously if it is presented early and often in kids' secondary education. "Ultimately," he told *eJewishPhilanthropy* last June, "we need to get middle school parents to start thinking about Israeli college." For now, he hopes to make the idea ubiquitous at Jewish high schools in the US and has enlisted college-guidance counselors, mostly from Modern Orthodox schools, to serve, in his words, as its "cheerleaders." To that end, last summer, Tzemach David—together with Israel's Ministry of Diaspora Affairs, a Religious Zionist organization called World Mizrahi, and an Orthodox Union program called the Jewish Learning Initiative on Campus—flew ten guidance counselors to Israel, where they toured nine college campuses in four days. Several participating counselors I spoke with afterward seemed to embrace their mission. Rafael Blumenthal, the director of college guidance at the Modern Orthodox Ramaz School in New York City, told me Ramaz has started sharing information about college in Israel with its freshmen and sophomores because "there's a better chance that they will be intrigued and [the idea will] catch hold earlier on." Tzemach David ran a second trip to Israel for a new cohort of counselors this summer, and more are planned. The foundation has other initiatives in the works: Early next year, it will debut a new program that will send American Jewish high school sophomores to school in the West Bank settlement cluster of Gush Etzion for a semester, in the hope that they will later attend college in Israel and ultimately settle there.

Israeli universities have also increased their direct recruitment in the US. Last year, Israeli consulates launched college fairs in cities including Chicago, New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Houston, and Washington, DC. Multiple guidance counselors I spoke to credited these fairs with their students' rising interest in college in Israel. "We're planning to make these annual events," said Gal Braun, the director of academic affairs at the Israeli consulate in New York. "Jewish high schools are asking us to do them even more often." Israeli university representatives have likewise ramped up visits to high schools—mostly Jewish ones, but sometimes public schools with large Jewish populations—as has the Israel Student Authority.

Israeli universities can advertise some concrete advantages to American students facing soaring tuition costs at home. Public universities in Israel cost around \$4,000 annually (and are free for students who decide to officially immigrate), and even private Reichman, the country's most expensive school, tops out at \$16,900 a year—a fraction of

the cost of most US private colleges. Most bachelor's degrees in Israel take three years to complete rather than four, and professional degrees in fields like law or social work can be attained in the course of undergraduate study. "It's kind of a no-brainer," said Orit Coty, the marketing director for Tel Aviv University's international school, for American students to accept a steep discount on "the level of education equal to a very, very highly ranked university in the States." Still, it may not be easy to sell many American Jewish families on abandoning the elite American universities that serve as core status symbols in certain milieus. Magerman admitted that one obstacle to his project is that he sees parents "burying their heads in the sand and hiding from reality because they so desperately want their kids to get a diploma with a famous college name on it." As a result, he said, he anticipates that getting enough American students on board will be a more significant challenge than building Israeli capacity to absorb them.



IN THE LAST FEW DECADES, universities around the world have undergone a process scholars call internationalization, pouring resources into programs that foster academic cooperation across borders: study-abroad programs and faculty exchanges, joint research projects, foreign-language degree tracks, and grant partnerships. These projects often have clear economic benefits: NAFSA, a nonprofit that supports international education, estimates that foreign students contributed \$43.8 billion to the US economy in the 2023–24 school year and that decreases in international student enrollment for 2025 due to new US immigration practices could cost the country some \$7 billion. Universities also get a prestige boost from the presence of international students, with higher-education rankings using this data as a factor in their metrics—a fact that the authors of the *Kohelet*

For Israel, international partnerships are important not simply for research or profit, but also as a means of securing legitimacy for institutions facing international scrutiny.

report pointed out to me numerous times. But foreign student programs have also served a more directly political function since they were popularized during the Cold War. In the mid-1940s, for instance, the US government started the Fulbright Program—one of the first large-scale academic and cultural exchanges of its kind—as part of an attempt at “establishing a democratic empire,” the education scholar Ravinder Kaur Sidhu writes in his book *Universities and Globalization*; the program’s goal, Sidhu argues, was to “persuad[e] elites from other nations to regard the United States as a friendly authority with whom they shared common interests as members of a ‘free world.’” (The Soviet Union maintained its own international student programs, including Patrice Lumumba Peoples’ Friendship University, founded in the early 1960s to educate elites from newly decolonized countries tuition free.) Today, the US may be retreating from such tactics because of Trump’s preference for hard power over soft—in addition to suspending student visa opportunities, the president has proposed slashing Fulbright funding—but the approach remains alive and well around the globe: In the words of a 2018 Chinese government document, foreign students were meant to “tell China’s story and spread China’s voice” upon returning home, while British government documents from the aughts and 2010s refer to their international students as “unofficial ambassadors” and “long-term advocates.”

Israel has participated enthusiastically in this global trend. In 2017, the country’s Council for Higher Education (CHE), the body that oversees higher education policy and allocates university funding, launched a national five-year plan, with a budget of 435 million NIS (\$130 million), to centralize and accelerate the internationalization process. The council’s Study in Israel initiative, which began in 2019, aimed to more than double the number of international students in the country by 2022. The CHE has been explicit about the fact that international partnerships are important not simply for research or profit, but also as a means of securing legitimacy for institutions facing international scrutiny: After a government committee convened in May 2024 allocated 90 million NIS (\$26.9 million) to fighting academic boycotts against Israel, of which 32.6 million NIS (\$9.8 million) was allocated to the CHE, the Chair of the CHE and Minister of Education Yoav Kisch said that he would work “to incentivize international collaborations in research, and to enable the brightest Israeli and Jewish minds who wish to do so, to complete their research in Israel through unprecedented

research grants.” Historically, this tactic has been evident at Ariel University, the only Israeli university located in the occupied West Bank. Ariel has long been excluded from prestigious international research collaborations and funds and has responded by boasting of its international partnerships, which number at least eight with universities in the US, including a 2019 agreement with Florida Atlantic University and most recently with the University of Utah. International collaborations thus become evidence of normalcy; global recognition from certain quarters becomes a defense against boycott from others.

Today, Israeli universities within the country’s 1948 borders are being treated as pariahs in ways once more typical of Ariel, in part because of increased attention to their violation of Palestinians’ rights and their role in supporting the military—the latter of which includes 57 current programs at Israeli universities for active soldiers and those set to be conscripted. The push to boycott Israeli academic institutions, as called for by the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement, continues to gain steam. Many student encampments in the spring of 2024 explicitly called on their universities to cancel exchange programs and research collaborations with Israeli universities, as with a campaign at Columbia University to close the university’s Tel Aviv Global Center and end its dual degree program with Tel Aviv University. In February 2025, the Association of University Heads in Israel released a report warning of a dramatic increase in boycott activity, documenting a 66% rise in “incidents”—including suspended partnerships, canceled conferences, rescinded invitations, grant refusals, and journal editors declining to publish Israeli scholarship—between October 2024 and February 2025 compared with the previous year, with US cases doubling.

The CHE’s five-year plan was in part an attempt to get ahead of this shift: It established internationalization offices at every Israeli university and tasked them not only with academic collaboration but also with responding to the growing pressure of boycotts. Over the past several years, these offices have gone on to establish programs like Ben-Gurion University’s Desert Academic Research Experience, or DARE, which brings scientists from abroad to the university for a funded summer sabbatical. Ben-Gurion’s vice president for global engagement, Michal Bar-Asher Siegal, told me that the program aimed to humanize Israelis in the eyes of visitors: “They’d meet us, they’d know who we are, and it would be



Students in the Thrive Study Abroad program participate in a 24-hour “training” experience with the Israeli military. Still via Thrive Study Abroad’s YouTube channel

The Thrive program for international undergraduates was designed to counteract media narratives around the Israeli military by giving students a “first-hand understanding” of life within it.

much harder afterwards to imagine us as monsters who eat Palestinians for breakfast.” The name, she noted, was meant to challenge them: “We dare you to come.” She hoped that exposure to Israeli academia would cultivate a more “balanced” perspective less likely to lead to support for BDS. Other initiatives have taken a more overtly political approach to shaping international perceptions. This October, for instance, Ariel University opened an English master’s degree track in “communication, public advocacy, and combating antisemitism” aimed to help students “be ready to legally and rhetorically resist antisemitism in a campus environment.” In another case, an organization called Thrive offers international undergraduates at Hebrew University, Tel Aviv University, and Reichman University a “boot camp” experience to simulate Israeli military training. The program, explained marketing director Rena Zoldan, was designed to counteract media narratives around the Israeli military by giving students

“a first-hand understanding” of life within it: “They spend 24 hours under fake fire learning how to shoot and crawl,” followed by a weekend with soldiers. “If you’re just at Tel Aviv University going to the beach every day, maybe you’ll meet soldiers,” Zoldan said, “but you’re not going to get to these conversations and these nuanced views of Israeli life.”

This dynamic—at once embattled and opportunistic—has helped shape the state’s approach to encouraging foreign students to come to Israel, especially for full-degree programs. Emmanuel Nahshon, a former Israeli diplomat who works to combat academic boycotts for the Association of Israeli Universities, said he has been in talks with the country’s Foreign Ministry to promote Israel as a destination for international students. His office proposed a 20 million NIS (\$6 million) annual initiative to fund tuition and scholarship aimed at “turning Israel into a safe haven for Jewish students from around the world,” though Nahshon stressed the program would also recruit non-Jews. “The idea is to open the doors of the Israeli universities as much as possible,” he told me. “Those who are looking to destroy Israel know that our universities need to interact with the broader academic world,” he explained, “and they see this as a weak point. We must make sure they don’t succeed.”

Israel’s academic community is now confronting a situation reminiscent of South Africa’s in the 1980s, scholar of Middle Eastern studies Seth Anziska said in an interview. The African National Congress first called for an academic boycott in the late 1950s; in December 1980, the United Nations passed a resolution calling for the academic boycott of South Africa, initiating an era of heightened debate and polarization in the international community about how to relate to collaborations, conferences, exchanges, and other

UNIVERSITY OF CLEVELAND SHOWS HOW STUDENT LEADERSHIP MAKES A DIFFERENCE



There's "a fragility about dealing with the reality of Palestine, a fragility in thinking about Israel as a perpetrator of obscene violence," Anziska said. In Israel, by contrast, these students feel like "lords of the land."

work with South African institutions and scholars. As Anziska noted, the South African boycott's power ultimately lay in "creating an atmosphere of unacceptability," marking apartheid as beyond the bounds of legitimate engagement. Even if the boycott's material impact remains a subject of debate among scholars, it helped designate South Africa as an international pariah—an outcome that resonates in Israel today, where boycotts are producing the very sense of isolation that many American Jewish students imagine they are escaping when they choose to study there.

EVEN BEYOND THE REACH of the boycott movement as such, it is unclear whether the project of internationalizing the Israeli university remains viable in the face of perpetual war. In the past two years, US State Department travel warnings have complicated exchange programs between American and Israeli universities, and many American universities have called off and suspended their programs. Flight cancellations, inflated ticket prices, and limited airline options have further hindered mobility. Israel's own international student programs are not immune to these logistical challenges: While every program administrator and government official I spoke to had their sights set on expansion, several also reported serious barriers to increasing international enrollment since October 7th.

Still, for the students who will choose Israeli universities, such material barriers, and even dangers, may not outweigh the emotional comforts on offer. When I spoke with Anziska, he emphasized that what Israeli campuses really offer their potential applicants—who feel increasingly alienated in the diaspora yet are insulated from the material realities of Israel's war in Gaza—is psychological refuge. "It's a fragility about their identity in America," he said. "A fragility about dealing with the reality of Palestine. A fragility in thinking about Israel as a perpetrator of obscene violence." In Israel, by contrast, these students feel like "lords of the land." The Israeli international schools have made this a clear selling point. A video advertising Hebrew University's new English-language bachelor's program opens with footage of Palestine solidarity encampments and the sound of explosions. "Stop. You're Jewish, yet you're considering attending universities that you know don't support your

heritage and facing dangerous groups that you know want your people erased?" its narrator asks. "Don't do this to yourself. Come to Israel . . . Israel is your home. Choose pride. Choose your people." Now that that program is in its second year, it can also use current students to deliver this message themselves. "The biggest thing for me is that I can proudly assert my Jewish identity on campus," Shira Litvack, a student in the program, told prospective applicants at an open house. Litvack said that she had started her degree in Canada but had dropped out because of antisemitism. At Hebrew University, she said, "I don't feel like I have to hide." The cost, according to Anziska, is that students will accede to "a suspension of reality. They're in a silo of anxieties, fears, and messaging," he said.

At the same time, history suggests that there is no guarantee that study abroad programs will achieve their desired political goals. Scholarship shows that students often arrive in a host country on the basis of preexisting sympathies and maintain them—but as the education researcher Sylvie Lomer notes, international study can also lead students to "reach their own, potentially critical, conclusions and act accordingly." While Israel has made a bet on recruiting passionately Zionist students who are unlikely to change their views, it could still be hard to keep all of them in the fold under the pressure of Israel's never-ending, and increasingly escalating, aggression. Although the organized Jewish community wants to use the turmoil on US campuses to their benefit, "without resolving the political crisis at the heart of it, it's just window dressing," Anziska said. "There's mass killing 40 kilometers away. It's dissonance—an illusion." **JC**

Left:
Promotional material for study in Israel via
Rimon Jerusalem's Instagram page

Right:
Graduation day at Reichman University in
Herzliya, Israel, June 2025.
Photo: Reichman University Facebook page

THE UPPER



ROOM

Coleman Collins's exhibition considers how attempts at making a new world risk reproducing the cruelties of the old.

Joseph Earl Thomas

ON SCREEN, A PLANTATION BURNS, while a voiceover by the artist verifies a feeling: "For us in particular, there was no hope," not in what "I would (begrudgingly, unfortunately) describe as my homeland." My satisfaction at witnessing this classic iconography of escape is tempered, though, by the encroachment of a certain uncanniness. Our speaker's voice is deep and somber and familiar, definitely black; that is to say, it resonates beyond both pop culture's fixed repertoire of staid signifiers and the speaker's own denotative claims. *What are you really after?* I wondered—waiting, not without delighting in the film's knowing humor, for the conditions of the scene's strangeness to reveal themselves. Gazing at the too smooth texture, it struck me: Of course, the plantation is AI generated; the scene transformed from one emblematic of escape into an ouroboros of obliteration. I'm reminded of how the massive energy expenditure required for this technology's supposedly limitless calculations falls upon the planet, and particularly on the same populations ravaged by the plantation; our acquiescence is manufactured for everything from Grok's incessant revelation of the obvious to a barrage of nonhuman replacements for the kind of love we never learned to practice ourselves.

The film, *The Upper Room*, is from Coleman Collins's exhibition of the same name. The show, first mounted last year at Brief Histories in New York City, crystallizes the artist's inquiry into fraught efforts at absconding from the anti-black capture at the heart of the American project. It orbits several attempts at escape—most robustly the colonization of Liberia, an endeavor by a cohort of "free" African Americans who, in the early 19th century, sought to resettle in the West African territory in order to escape the United States. (Notably, the process was initiated by the American Colonization Society, a group led by white elites who sought to dispense with black people who were, for the moment, not enslaved, as well as to quell rising abolitionist sentiment.) African Americans then subjected Liberians to a series of displacements and humiliations common to any history of colonization. In a series of low-relief fiberboard wall works based on the interiors of Liberian buildings, Collins draws out the architectural resonances between colonized Liberia and the plantation structures that African Americans carried over from the antebellum South. The reliefs are accompanied by archival photographs; most of the images depict interactions between African Americans and native Liberians—such as Liberian artifacts changing hands amid upper class soirées—and some are drawn from the collection of an African American police officer who trained Liberian police. As Collins makes plain, this attempt at revalorizing the norms of Western conquest should make us hesitant about the heroic gestures of any nascent nationalist enterprise.

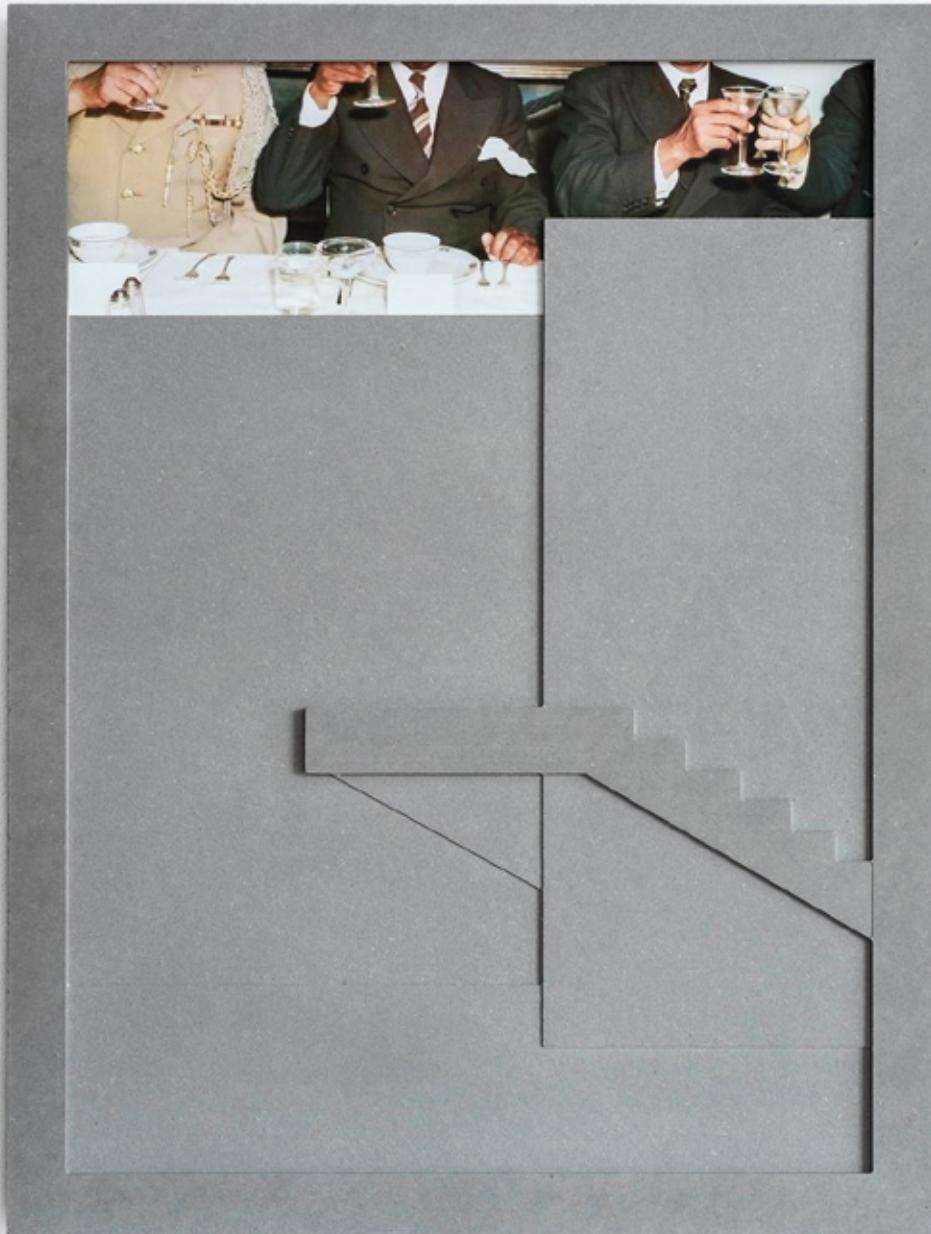
While these wall pieces amplify the unsettling spatial continuity between the forms of control African Americans sought to flee and those they reproduced in this experiment of escape, the film unmoors the viewer's relationship to linear time. As Collins's voiceover sutures archival footage and AI imagery, I feel alongside the narrator a "vague, yet menacing sensation": This line of flight does not fulfill its promise to wholly leave behind the past for a new future. Nor should it. The unfinished project of freedom is, well, unfinished. Collins's work refuses the allure of didactic ease and moral absolutism; instead, it offers a poised reevaluation of mimesis, lest we forget, chasing the promise and necessity of flight, that there's always a chance we might slide back into a celebration at the heart of that same burning building.



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macinating sensation,





Previous:
Still from *The Upper Room*, 2025
UHD video, 20 minutes

Opposite:
Untitled (EJ Roye), 2025
Engineered wood, UV print on Dibond
18 x 24 inches

Top, left:
Untitled (Ducor basement), 2025
Engineered wood, UV print on Dibond
18 x 24 inches

Top, right:
Untitled (Ducor), 2025
Engineered wood, UV print on Dibond
18 x 24 inches

MEMOIRS OF A PALESTINIAN COMMUNIST

Najati Sidqi's reminiscences, which chronicle the upheavals of the early 20th century, resonate with shocking familiarity today.

Translated from the Arabic by Anas Farhan,
Gideon Gordon, and Margaret Litvin
Introduced by Margaret Litvin



Moustaki
& El

A photo of Najati Sidqi circulated by the French police in 1935. The text refers to the alias he used when editing the clandestine Communist publication *The Arab East*.

IN THE OPENING CHAPTER of his posthumously published memoir, the activist and intellectual Najati Sidqi (1905–1979) wryly recalls how, in the early 1920s, “Jewish immigration to Palestine brought customs, ideas, and social practices alien to the conditions of Arab life” there. He reminisces about the cultural heterogeneity of his birthplace, Jerusalem—various tongues, intermingling styles of dress—as well as the influx of foreign ideologies:

We started hearing of Bolshevism, of Anarchism, of Marx, Lenin, and Trotsky, and of Herzl. We got to know the workers' movements among the Jewish immigrants, such as the Histadrut (the Federation of Jewish Workers), the Fraktsiya (the leftist opposition within the Histadrut), the Po'alei Tzion (Workers of Zion) party, and the kibbutzim . . . The Jewish workers with leftist inclinations sought to propagandize among the Arabs.

Sidqi, then a teenage postal worker, frequented a coffee shop where he learned of these competing leftist tendencies and of the socialist revolution in Russia. All this, he reflects, at first seemed “distant from our local concerns,” yet “we were ready to listen to anything, to accept anything that might lift from us the nightmare” of the hardening British occupation in Palestine.

At the café Sidqi befriended former members of the Po'alei Tzion who had broken with the party over its commitment to “a socialist Jewish state.” These activists, who coalesced into the Palestine Communist Party (PCP), rejected both British imperial rule and Zionism, which they considered “a bourgeois movement that benefited only wealthy Jews.” They insisted that their party, which “was for all inhabitants of Palestine,” could “reconcile the interests of the working classes” of Jews and Arabs alike. After the PCP was admitted to the Communist International (Comintern) in 1924, Sidqi became one of its first Arab members. When Moscow pushed the party to “Arabize” its upper ranks, he joined the youth central committee and was sent to the Soviet Union to study.

A freethinker and protean public intellectual, Sidqi has been admired from many sides. The Palestinian writer and revolutionary Ghassan Kanafani hailed him as “probably the first” materialist chronicler of the Arab nationalist movement. Historians of Arab antifascism celebrate his 1940 book *Islamic Traditions and Nazi Principles: Are They Compatible?*, written to counteract Hitler's appeal to the Muslim world and amplified by the British war effort. Sidqi also translated Pushkin and Chekhov, published comic short stories such as “The Millionaire Communist,” and helped popularize Descartes, Darwin, and the medieval Islamic sociologist Ibn Khaldun among Palestinians. But few readers have encountered his masterpiece: this rich and riveting memoir, now available in English for the first time.

Completed in 1976, Sidqi's memoir—which I co-translated with Gideon Gordon and Anas Farhan—traces the arc of his early life as it intersects with the upheavals of the early 20th century, mixing reminiscences on the day's political movements with winding digressions and gossip. We learn about his years at Moscow's Communist University of Toilers of the East, his role in the PCP's organizing against Zionism and the British Mandate, his cat-and-mouse games with police and nearly two years of imprisonment in Jerusalem, and his activist and intellectual

work abroad—including stints in France, where he edited a clandestine Communist newspaper, and Spain, where he wrote Arabic anti-Franco propaganda during the Spanish Civil War. He chronicles all this with verve, noting the Communist movement's hypocrisies and subtle racism. The memoir cuts off abruptly in 1940 with his expulsion from the party for writing against Nazi Germany—then an ally of the Soviet Union under the 1939 Molotov–Ribbentrop nonaggression pact—and for doing so with reference to religious texts.

Sidqi's rollicking tale reads like a political travelogue from a bygone age, partly because it omits the tragic experiences that followed his Communist adventures. After coming back to Jerusalem in 1940, Sidqi left Palestine shortly before the Nakba and never returned. Exiled in Cyprus and then Beirut, he and his family endured poverty and separation from many relatives; they saw Arab nationalism falter and many postcolonial hopes turn to ash. (During the Lebanese Civil War, they fled to Athens, where he died in 1979.) The memoir also suppresses his personal life during the period it covers: It barely mentions Sidqi's 50-year marriage to Lotka Lorberbaum Sidqi—who had immigrated to Palestine from Lviv as a teenager, joined the PCP, and converted to Islam—or their three children; the eldest, their daughter Dawlieh ("Internationale"), was raised in Soviet children's homes long after her parents' release from British Mandate prison and even after her father's expulsion from the party. The family petitioned bureaucrats in three countries for the right to live together, to no avail. Dawlieh was still under Soviet power as Sidqi wrote, which may help explain this elision.

However carefully depersonalized Sidqi's story, it still resonates with shocking familiarity today. The following excerpt, the memoir's seventh chapter, focuses on the five debates Sidqi sees as most central for the PCP between 1929 and 1931. These include the Comintern's directive to "Arabize" the party, which Jewish members resisted, and the party members' divergent responses to the intercommunal violence of August 1929—events now known in Jewish historiography as "the Western Wall riots" and "the Hebron Massacre" and in Palestinian memory as "the Buraq Uprising." Some activists saw only an anti-Jewish pogrom, while others (and Moscow) saw a national liberation uprising. Sidqi, his Jewish-born partner already pregnant with their first child, must have seen both. Though his account is matter-of-fact, it evokes the torment of this moment when the PCP—and the global left—was riven between mutually incompatible interpretations of history that fed on, and in turn reinforced, contradictory structures of feeling.

It is striking that this pattern, which has repeated after the October 7th attacks, was already present even before the accumulated trauma of the Holocaust, the Nakba, and the Israeli occupation. Today, as in 1929, the left is forced to reckon with these irreconcilable perspectives. Sidqi cannot help us do so. But he can at least help us understand the challenge.

— Margaret Litvin

FIVE LEADING ISSUES arose in the time I spent as a party official, from 1929 until my arrest in 1931. The issues were: Arabization; the uprising of 1929; Jewish immigration; the rural land issue; and our stance with respect to the Arab national movement.

1. ARABIZATION

The directive to “Arabize” the party came directly from the Comintern. This meant that the party had to give more opportunities for Arab members affiliated with it to enter sensitive positions, from the local committees to the Central Committee. This didn’t mean that the membership had to become majority Arab and minority Jewish, but we were meant to tilt the leadership more toward the Arab side. What drove this decision was that the party’s Jewish members and supporters comprised about ten thousand people, while Arabs numbered fewer than one thousand.

Arabization was not easy or effortless. The Jewish Communists were very cautious about it, as they were convinced that the Jewish Communist was more ideologically and organizationally prepared than the Arab Communist, and that the Arab member would collapse if ever exposed to pressure and persecution, causing problems for others.

The Jewish leadership were the ones who put forward this argument. They stalled Arabization, supporting it in theory but impeding it in practice. Meanwhile, messages from the Comintern urged us to courageously implement Arabization. They highlighted how the movement in Palestine was chaotic and confused relative to the rest of the Arab world, and that as a consequence, “the wheat was being separated from the chaff”

The Jewish party leadership wavered about implementing the Arabization policy and could not find the courage to open the doors to Arab leadership. It decided to send the largest possible number of Arab members (and even Arabs who were just sympathetic to the party) to Moscow to be educated. Then when they returned to Palestine, they could take up sensitive positions in the party once the Comintern knew them, had gauged their capabilities, and assigned their role within the party. Agreeing to the leadership’s proposal, the party took to sending student missions of every class and profession.

These included ironworkers, woodworkers, students, peasants, office workers, journalists, and street vendors.

The party had a fixed leadership, composed of known people like Tepper, Barzilai, Berman, and Lichtinsky,¹ who managed to keep themselves well out of prison, and a shifting leadership in the local committees, composed of people who entered sensitive positions only when spots opened up there, although the nature of their work and their constant contact with the public (running unions, organizing strikes, and leading protests) exposed them to arrest. This therefore produced a “leadership crisis.” A matter that exacerbated this serious crisis was that many Jewish Communists who carried Soviet passports or Russian birth certificates got deported to the Soviet Union by the British authorities. Some Jewish Communists had every hope that they would meet this fate—until they stumbled into it. They were crammed into prison for three to six months, then were shipped from Jaffa to Odessa on the next Soviet ship.

Despite all this, the party actively worked on the issue of Arabization. In 1931, the Comintern dispatched a representative named Mueller to investigate the progress of Arabization. I joked to him, “In Moscow, the acronym for the Communist Party was V.K.P., the Communist Party for the Nations of the Soviet Union, and they added a B to it, to stand for Bolshevik.”

He replied, “Yeah . . . so?”

I said, “We abbreviate the name of the Palestine Communist Party as P.K.P. So what do you think about adding an A to the end, for Arabized?” He shook his head, laughing, and said, “That could also stand for ‘antisemite’ . . .”

On that note, Mueller almost fell into the hands of the police in the suburb of Nahr al-Uja near Jaffa. We had held a meeting with him in a safe house, and after the meeting about eight of us set off together in the direction of Jaffa. We were halfway there when we ran into a Jewish cart driver who knew that some of us were Jewish Communists. He said, “Don’t go on along this route; there’s a police squad stationed ahead. No doubt they would love to do you mischief!” We thanked him, split up, and went in different directions, thus evading the trap planned for us. But we were burning to know: Who had told the police about our secret meeting? Was the informant among us?

The Jewish leadership stalled Arabization, supporting it in theory but impeding it in practice. Meanwhile, messages from the Comintern urged us to courageously implement it.

Suspicion fell on an Arab journalist from Jerusalem, D. Sh., who had hosted the meeting. Considering the evidence, we decided not to rely on him for party activities anymore.

Anyway, Arabization was a central concern of the party at all levels and during all its conferences. In the end the Jewish Communists conceded central leadership to the Arab comrades, while they remained in their leadership positions in Jewish areas. The creation of a sort of “federal” structure within the single party allowed us to implement the concept of Arabization and kept peace with the part of the party apparatus that the Jewish leadership administered.

2. THE UPRISING OF 1929²

The uprising of August 23rd, 1929, shook the party quite violently, and left the Jewish Communists completely at a loss. There were some who defended their countrymen, and others who clung to neutrality and preferred to distance themselves from it. However, this situation created a problem in the party between the Jewish comrades and the Arab comrades. We held a contentious meeting in which we discussed the uprising and its consequences. The main dispute was over how to define the nature of this uprising: Was it a nationalist revolt, or a sectarian massacre?

Here a division emerged in the party. Among the Jewish Communists, some said that it was a massacre, but others supported the Central Committee in saying that it was a national uprising caused by unjust British rule, the seizure of lands, and the impoverishment of the peasants.

After a heated back-and-forth, it was decided that it was a nationalist uprising that had no connection to outbreaks of incidents of sectarian violence like the murder of the sheikh of the Jaffa mosque and his family;³ the massacre of students in a Talmud school in Khalil [Hebron], or other anomalous incidents uncharacteristic of uprisings. Some of the Jewish members complied with this decision; others were enraged by it and withdrew from the party, or were expelled by the party until they changed their stance.

At the time, I was overseeing the party’s activities in Haifa in close coordination with the Federation of Trade Unions, which was managed by a Lebanese man, a railroad employee from Qlailah. He had also opened a school to

1 Eliyahu Tepper, Joseph Berger-Barzilai, Yankel Berman, and David Lichtinsky all served on the PCP’s Central Committee. Sidqi recounts that Lichtinsky briefly “lived in Cairo disguised as a Talmud student” to rekindle Communist activities there but then was discovered and deported. Tepper and Berger-Barzilai were each imprisoned in the Soviet Union under Stalin (the former for “Zionist deviations,” the latter for allegedly meeting with Nazis); both survived.

2 The 1929 violence began in a dispute over the Temple Mount/al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, where Jewish protesters had raised Zionist flags and chanted, “The Wall is ours,” on August 15th, 1929. As fighting spread to a dozen cities, Arabs killed 133 Jews and injured between 198 and 339, while Jews and British Mandate police killed 116 Arabs and wounded at least 232 in one week (August 23rd–29th). The violence peaked on August 25th, when an attack on Jewish civilians in the West Bank city of Hebron killed 67 Jews and wounded 53. The British investigating commission found that the violence was sparked by tensions over communal rights at the Western Wall but fed by a broader Arab feeling of animosity and hostility towards the Jews consequent upon the disappointment of their political and national aspirations and fear for their economic future.”

3 This refers to an attack on Sheikh ‘Abd al-Chani ‘Awn and his family during the August violence in Jaffa.

The main dispute was over how to define the nature of this uprising: Was it a nationalist revolt, or a sectarian massacre?

fight illiteracy in Qlailah, with the help of another young Lebanese man, who was from Fathallah.

In Haifa, I communicated secretly with the Sheikh of the mosque, 'Izz al-Din al-Qassam, a towering man who lived on the slopes of the mountain, east of the bridge over the Rushmiya wadi. He told me about his struggle against the French in Syria in 1920, his flight to Haifa since then, his fight with the English in Palestine, and how the authorities were pursuing him. I found out in 1935, while I was in Paris, that al-Qassam had been martyred with four of his comrades near Jenin.⁴

While I was stationed in Haifa during the uprising, I came down with dysentery from eating polluted food at a restaurant in the fish market. I was taken to the government hospital, where I stayed ten days until I had recovered. I had barely left the hospital when I was asked to make my way to Jerusalem to join the Central Committee. So I put on a [Jewish-style] hat⁵ as a disguise and took a seat on a half-empty train. When the train stopped at Lydda [Lyd], I looked out the window and saw two Arab youths approaching my seat. In each one's hand was a knife; they were waiting to attack me once the train was in motion. So I laughed and said, "I'm an Arab, like you." They both put their knives back in their pockets and said, "Take that thing off your head and go away."

The train arrived at the Jerusalem station at nine in the evening. The station was shrouded in darkness, and the streets were empty. Here and there, I heard the whistle of bullets. I hired the only carriage in the square to take me to the home of my co-worker from the post office, from before I went to Moscow in 1925. This was Qustandi Rofa, who lived in the Greek colony near the railway station. I knocked on the door; he opened the latch with great caution. He saw me in the dim light after my long absence. But he welcomed me and hosted me for three days until I could rendezvous with my comrades in Jerusalem.

The Central Committee had assigned Joseph Barzilai to rent a house in his name in Beit Safafa, an Arab-majority neighborhood, from an Arab farmer. I moved there and lived there. While in Jerusalem, I contributed to a report to the Comintern about the 1929 uprising and the party's stance on it.

An odd event occurred at the time. The landlord had advised Barzilai to leave the house, so that he and whoever he hosted would not be endangered. The landlord helped Barzilai pack up the furniture, then, pistol in hand, he escorted Barzilai in the moving truck to safety in the Jewish neighborhood of Talpiot, on the eastern side of the al-Fawqa neighborhood. Then the landlord bid Barzilai farewell, saying, "I have fulfilled my duty to you; go on your way. If I run into you again, I'll kill you!"

So the 1929 uprising placed the party actively on the side of Arab rights, and opened the door to a new push from Arab activists and officials. It also highlighted the Communists as an organized and active party, present and influential in both the Arab and Jewish camps.

In the process, the party's headquarters was transferred to a house deep in a pine forest owned by Jamil al-Shakir al-Husseini, on the western side of al-Fawqa. Joseph Barzilai paid the rent, as usual, using his cover as a journalist.

4 Sheikh 'Izz al-Din al-Qassam (1881–1935) was a Syrian-born Muslim preacher and fighter who helped organize resistance movements against Italy in Libya, against the French army in Syria, and finally against British colonialism in Palestine. He declared jihad in Haifa on November 12th, 1935, and was killed by British forces in a forest shootout a week later. His funeral drew more than 3,000 mourners, mainly workers and peasants.

5 The Arabic word used here, "qub'ah," is cognate with the Hebrew word "kippah," but pre-1948 photographs and dictionaries generally show the yarmulke to be strictly indoor headwear in Palestine. This word likely refers to a European-style brimmed hat such as a fedora, which would have marked Sidqi as Jewish because a Muslim man would have worn a fez. However, it is also possible that Sidqi actually wore a yarmulke in public, or misremembered himself doing so.

The 1929 uprising placed the party actively on the side of Arab rights, and opened the door to a new push from Arab activists and officials.

3. JEWISH IMMIGRATION

The party was preoccupied by the issue of Jewish immigration and was led to debate it and publish pieces about it more than once. Which stance were we to take on it? There were a few different positions that the comrades took at the time, and they were:

First—that the door should be closed to immigration, since the country's economic situation could not support more newcomers. Among the immigrants were some who competed with the Jewish labor force itself in the fields of manufacturing and agriculture, in addition to their negative effect on the Arab community, which intensified public hostility toward Jews.

Second—that it was impossible to stop all immigration so long as it was a pillar of the Zionist movement, and that it was better to try to prevent illegal immigration and to stick to a stance of limiting Jewish immigration, a policy which the Arabs themselves demanded. This would unite the party with the Arab national movement, so that cooperation between the two groups could take place on a point of serious political importance.

Third—that we should seek a halt to Jewish "bourgeois immigration" while supporting Jewish "working-class immigration," as workers were the sinews of the socialist movement. Their presence would produce a conscious proletarian movement, which would help to create social change in Palestine. Those of the latter opinion converged with the theory of the Po'alei Tzion party, which called for the greatest number possible of Jewish workers in Palestine, considering them the educated and conscious vanguard of socialism. In the Po'alei Tzion platform, the Arabs would be integrated into the Jewish socialist society through social mixing and marriage.

Ultimately, the position the party adopted was that immigration should be halted in principle, and that immigration should be restricted and limited to a certain number annually so long as it was impossible to prevent it in practice. The party benefited from this stance, which pleased the Arabs and mollified the Jews.

4. THE LAND QUESTION

The agricultural situation in Palestine was not feudal, i.e., one in which the large feudal landowners ruled vast expanses of land while peasants worked the land like slaves, as was the situation in Russia, Egypt, and Iraq. Rather, Palestinian agriculture consisted of: a relatively limited area of land, distributed among a few large landowners (farms and orchards, including orange groves); "common" land, which villagers worked with crude cooperative methods; state land, of which some was useful for farming and some was fallow; and finally, many small plots of lands dispersed among small farmers. The latter category made up most of the agricultural land.

As the Jews were making preparations to establish their state with the help of the Mandatory Power, and as this state required ownership of the land, their leaders established two funds to implement plans for the colonization of Palestine. The first of these was the "National Fund" (Keren Kayemeth), the purpose of which was to collect funds from Jewish capital: donations in "shekels" (an ancient Hebrew unit of currency), levies, investments, and so on. The second was the "Establishment Fund" (Keren HaYesod; the United Jewish



Najati Sidqi (center) with his father and older brother.
Courtesy of the Sidqi family.

Appeal), the mission of which was purchasing land and utilizing it in every possible way.⁶ It prevented the resale or transfer of land: The land became the national property of the Jewish people, and only Jewish labor could work there.

The Establishment Fund was active in purchasing land through skilled Jewish and Arab agents. The process of land “purchase” often took on tragic dimensions, as all the departments of the Mandatory government were mobilized to support it, from the agricultural courts to the criminal courts. The result was that the central prison in Jerusalem was overflowing, as were the ‘Atlit quarry near Haifa and the Acre fortress, with immense numbers of peasant “rebels.” The sentences issued to these people ranged from ten years to life imprisonment to execution.

The party had taken a unified stance on this land issue, calling for opposition to the Mandate’s policy, which was designed to impoverish Arab farmers, coerce them into selling their land, then drive them from that land, and against the “businessmen” and landowners—the wealthy farmers and the effendis [educated, middle-class Arabs]—who were selling their land to Jewish institutions. The party wanted to force them to take responsibility for these sales. In this position on agricultural policy, the party worked closely with the Arab national movement, serving our ideological and social struggle.

5. THE ARAB NATIONAL MOVEMENT

The party took a stance distinct from that of the Arab national movement, as the nationalists were divided: Some were activists struggling against Zionist colonialism, but others were opportunists, collaborating with the occupiers.

The activists were divided into two groups. The first was the Executive Committee, elected by the seventh Palestinian conference in 1928. It was a bourgeois activist group and worked within a framework of Arabism and Islamic solidarity. The second was the leftist nationalist movement, which represented the middle class; it was a petit-bourgeois group that worked in a framework of Arabism combined with internationalism.

The party cooperated with the Executive Committee, supporting its campaigns against the Mandate and Zionism, and collaborated closely with the leftist activists both individually and collectively, even if we did not fully merge with them in a fixed organization at that time. As for other Arab parties in Palestine at the time, the party considered them to be either lacking a popular base or opportunistic and paid them little attention. **JC**

6 These organizations still exist today—the former as Keren Kayemeth–Lelsrael (or the Jewish National Fund), the latter as Keren Hayesod (or United Israel Appeal)—and serve essentially the same functions for the State of Israel.

Excerpted from Memoirs of a Palestinian Communist: The Secret Life of Najati Sidqi, by Najati Sidqi, translated by Margaret Litvin, Anas Farhan, and Gideon Gordon © 2025, published with permission from the Center for Middle Eastern Studies, University of Texas at Austin.

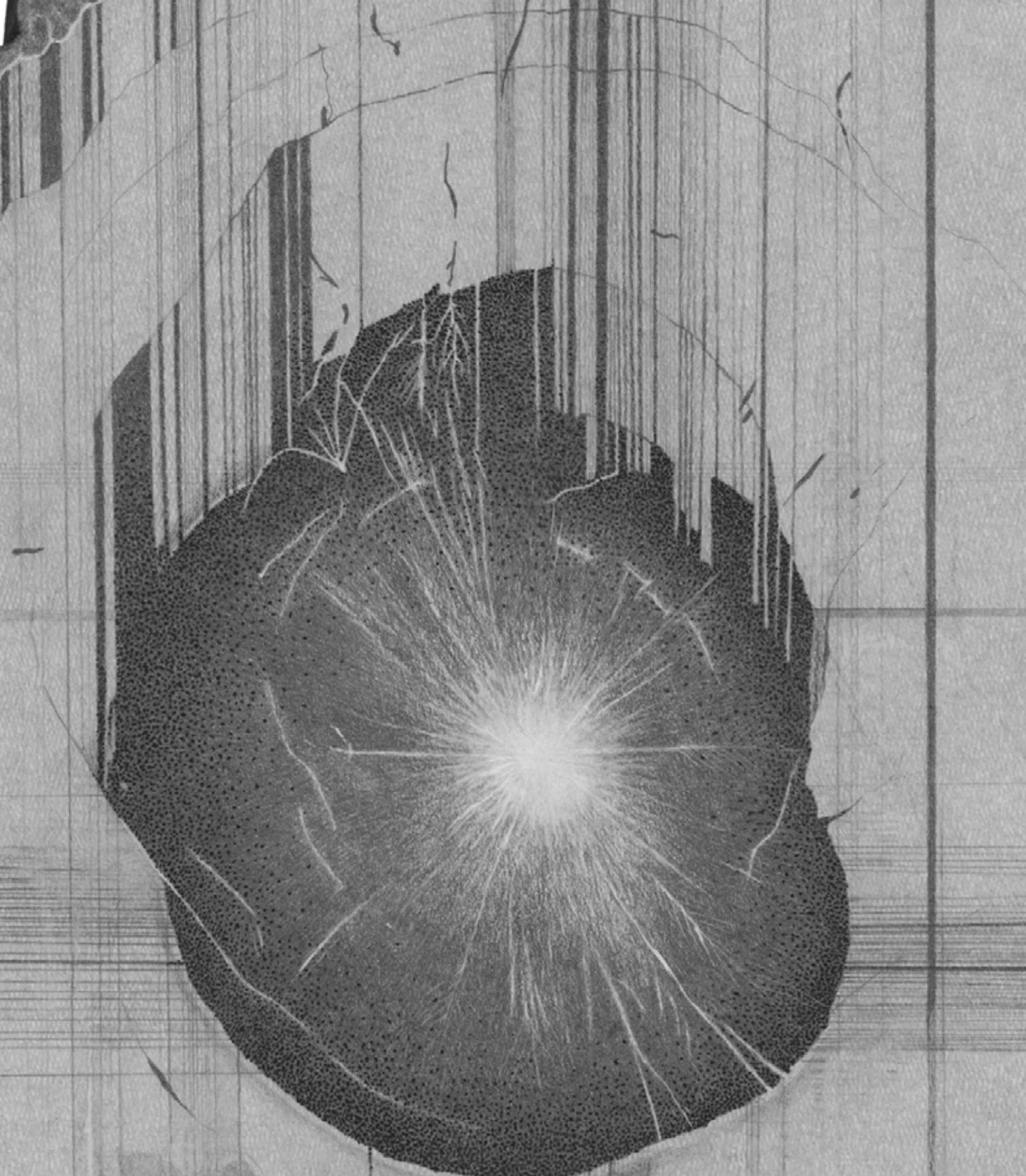


Najati Sidqi at the Post and Telegraph Office in Jerusalem, v. Courtesy of the Sidqi Archive at the Institute for Palestine Studies, Beirut.



THE

EVENT



Fiction by **Henry Bean**

Art by **Adam Liam Rose**

1

It is still not possible to determine how the fire began or when or precisely where. Did it have, in fact, a single ignition, then subdivided as it spread, or were there several fires that started separately and joined together as they consumed the fuel between them? (And, if we are to take Nolan's speculations' seriously, we have to ask: Was it even a fire?) Individual reports from outside the Event Field—there are, of course, none from within—are contradictory and of little value.

DIRECT, OVERHEAD SATELLITE IMAGERY (>60°) was lost three years ago on March 30 at 09:17:54 GMT (11:17:54 local time)² after which the only recorded orbital surveillance is “angular” (<45°, much of it <30°) with limited detail. All satellite footage *preceding* loss of contact, direct or angular, is open source and has been studied as closely as the Zapruder film, by far more people, without discovery of a consensus “initiating moment” or, indeed, any definitive evidence of a fire prior to 09:00:00 GMT. (The “thermal points” south of Hebron, visible from 03:29:06 GMT, are now generally accepted to have been Bedouin campfires.) All angular footage (<45°) that continues *through* the Event remains classified and unobtainable and, in any case, is said to be inconclusive. (Since the US withdrew from the IAST, the EU Directorate-General for Science & Technology has coordinated international research, set security policy, and monitored data release. This has not kept US spokespersons from disputing IAST figures and conclusions. Himmelfarb, Reed, and others have argued that these disputes and the resulting uncertainties are not accidental; that “authorities”—possibly rival authorities—have devised and deliberately spread conflicting accounts and competing rumors to effect a “reassuring unknowability.” As Himmelfarb put it, “Better seven theories than one.”)

We have spoken to nine individuals who claim to have seen at least some of the classified angular footage. Four refused to sit for a polygraph or fMRI, and those conversations went no further. Three gave vague or evasive accounts, lacking persuasive detail. The two we judged most reliable were interviewed separately, by different teams; each reported that in the footage viewed (roughly 11 minutes in one case, 19 in the other), the fire had already begun, and they could see almost nothing but smoke and, here and there, what they took to be flames. When asked, both asserted that the smoke blanketed not only the land itself, but also significant portions of the eastern Mediterranean.

Because the Event Field remains inaccessible to both humans and machinery, proper soil and debris tests cannot be performed. Atmospheric analysis in regions bordering incidents of this kind (Bhopal, Chernobyl, Fukushima, Rahway, Koeberg, as well as of various volcanic eruptions) is notoriously unreliable and, in any case, what readings we do have reveal nothing as to the source or progress of the fire. Airborne particulate matter (inorganic compounds, vegetable ash, fragments of carbonized animal remains) has, of course, blown across borders into accessible regions, but the samples reveal very little other than that all were subjected to extremely high temperatures, and that heat intensity appears to have been constant and uniform across much and perhaps all of the burn zone, a finding that contradicts everything we know about wide-area fires.

1 Nolan, Erich, “Disputing the Combustion Theory: A Quantum Wind Hypothesis,” *Earth Science Review* vol. 41, issue 2.

2 Benveniste, Byers & Oswego, *An Ongoing Chronology*, proposed considering this moment, loss of direct satellite contact, the beginning of the Event. As nonsensical as that sounds—how can a consequence be the beginning?—it anticipates Bardach's notion of the “reporting record.” (See below.)

WHAT HAPPENED WAS SO VAST AND TERRIBLE, “absolute in its terribleness,”³ and its cause so obscure that it became, in Marguiles’s sardonic formulation, “a perfect culture for growing theory.”⁴ The number of “explanations” offered in the first month alone, by experts and amateurs, was beyond count,⁵ many of them untestable, absurd or meaningless (“a local suspension of the laws of physics”; “invasion by an alien species”; something called “renumerology”).⁶

The most credible and widely accepted account of the fire was that an explosion (likely preceded by a meltdown) had occurred in one of the nuclear power plants or a missile silo. This, it was speculated, had ignited a coal seam or natural gas deposit, which, in turn, ran through underground formations to other power plants or silos and so forth. The theory had several virtues. It explained the remarkable speed of the fire, particularly in desert areas lacking sufficient vegetation to sustain it; the intensity and uniformity of the heat; and, importantly, the seeming omni-directionality of its advance—how it could appear to spread north across the Negev, south through the planted forests of the Galilee, and, as if at the same time, east from the coastal plain. The theory also contained an important promise: that once the relevant isotopes had been identified, we would be able to calculate when scientists or at least robotic equipment might be able to re-enter the land and gather evidence for further study. As Skomorovsky wrote at the time, “Of the several traumas inflicted by the Event, the epistemological is hardly the least serious.” The prospect of knowing more at some point in the future, however far off, was comforting not just to the technical community, but to the public at large.

Therefore, when tests conducted by satellite and at 23 sites around the perimeter of the burn zone—in the four contiguous states and from ships on the Mediterranean—failed to reveal elevated levels of radiation or even of atmospheric carbon and the nuclear theory began to deflate, there were urgent attempts, some of them quite ingenious, to patch the hole and pump it back up. As these failed, one after another, a strange silence began to descend over the subject. Even the professional talking heads one had heard from the start, the “experts” who, though they understood nothing, indeed precisely *because* they understood nothing, never lacked for a reassuring explanation—a new one each day when needed (theories which were, as Pauli used to say, “not even wrong”), even they managed finally to stop speaking. The ensuing silence was a relief. For the first time in months, it became possible to think.

2

OUT OF THAT SILENCE, an unexpected consensus soon emerged: to put aside all theory and explanatory effort and focus instead on the so-called “reporting record.” Bardach (citing Benveniste, et al.) had proposed precisely that in the immediate aftermath of the Event.⁷ But it would have taken a great deal of work to gather the reports and devise a methodology for analyzing them, and in those shocked early weeks, everybody wanted, as Michaelson wrote at the time, to “consume the whole apple in one bite”; few had the patience for such a dogged, tedious, and, frankly, modest method of inquiry. As it turned out, however, Bardach and her

3 El Koussa, “First Anniversary,” *Die Zeit*.

4 Marguiles, Leah, private correspondence with her son, Julian, made available to me by him; cf. also her numerous skeptical posts on her Substack, *Dubious Battle*.

5 For a useful survey of discussions and conspiracy theories proliferating on X, TikTok, various subreddits, independent message boards, etc., see Perić, S.N., “Event Chatter” in *Journal of Media Studies* vol. 61, no. 4

6 The commonest of these, unsurprisingly, was “an act of God,” though why God might have done it and to what end is a matter of dispute. Many saw it as a reproach or punishment of “the occupying power” (notwithstanding that the power’s victims suffered the same fate); certain eccentric rabbis, however, maintain that, as one of them wrote, “G-d [sic] did this out of his love for the Jewish people.” What that might mean is unclear.

7 There has been, of course, considerable disagreement as to exactly when—or if—the Event actually ended.

team had begun even then the work of collecting the extant record, so that when, months later, the Theorists finally yielded the stage to the Reporters, they already had a considerable part of what there was to find; and they knew where to look for the rest.

In the end, Bardach's group had neither the manpower nor the conceptual apparatus to make full use of all the data they assembled. They tried for some months, but after her death, it became harder to go on, and eventually they—specifically Lagomarsino and Prempeh—approached us for help. I agreed at once (even before I got board approval) and quickly made two important decisions. First, that we would look only at exchanges between persons inside the Event Field and those outside. As I put it in a memo at the time: "We will presume that any communication which took place wholly within the field has been lost (and all participating parties are gone) and that any communication taking place entirely outside it is irrelevant." If neither premise was strictly true, we would act as if they were. Second, we confined ourselves to communications occurring (though not necessarily commencing) in the 11 minutes between 09:12:00 and 09:23:00 GMT (11:12:00–11:23:00 local time). Loss of direct satellite contact (LDSC) occurred, as I've said, at 09:17:54 GMT, and the telecommunication record ends precisely there. We included the final six seconds of that minute and five additional minutes as a "safe margin" in case of stray or missed messages, or ones delayed in their delivery. These limitations produced a paucity of data that made the task possible. Instead of wading through tens of millions of telephone calls, emails, social media posts, and the like, we began with just under 9000 relevant communications, complete or interrupted (the latter, obviously, more important), 807 of which contained apparent reference to the Event as it occurred. The great majority of these are sudden silences, followed, a second or two later, by a break in the connection. In 241 we found an unarticulated vocalization, a half-blurted sound, usually just a gasp, an intake of breath, a grunt; sometimes, the beginning of a word that is never completed. These are not without a cumulative power. If you listen to them often enough—especially to some of the compilations ("playlists") Braunschweig put together—they constitute, as he often said, a kind of music. Life being cut off so suddenly it is gone before the speaker can register its going. (El Koussa called it "death without dying" and "a kindness.") All of them bear further study, but these notes will focus on three that are more elaborated.

The earliest real-time reference we have to the Event appears in an SMS exchange (in Arabic) between Ghena al-Masri, a kitchen worker at Grille Brasilia in Eilat (18 Derekh Begin) and her son Bassem, a porter at the Golden Tulip Hotel in Aqaba, Jordan. (The al-Masri home is in Aqaba, and Ghena would walk across the border every day to go to work. The Aqaba-Eilat checkpoint had recently reopened, and she had completed a full retinal scan, allowing her to pass through security in a matter of minutes.) The texts begin with Bassem's complaints about the hotel (the "vulgarity" of the guests, the harshness of his supervisors) and Ghena's response that his unhappiness at the job is not important, much less grounds for quitting. ("Think about what you are working for, not why it is difficult . . .") She then turns to the grocery shopping Bassem has said he will do after his shift. She is listing the items she wants him to buy (eggplants, peppers, cheese) when she abruptly types *shob kt*—(presumably *shob kteer*, "so hot" or "very hot") at which point the text breaks off, seemingly in mid-word, yet was nevertheless transmitted. Ghena may have accidentally pressed "send" before she meant to, or perhaps the heat of the fire somehow caused the message to be sent. Whatever the reason, according to Bassem's recollection in an interview conducted that September, at the same moment that his phone pinged with this message, he heard what he took to be fighter jets buzzing the city. He looked out over the Gulf of Aqaba—he had just brought a guest's dry cleaning up to a penthouse suite—expecting a squadron of low-flying F-47s ("I was already furious"); instead, he saw Eilat completely engulfed in smoke, "like a corpse," the translation reads, presumably referring to a shroud. He remembers turning to pick up the room phone, but nothing more. Apparently, he passed out and fell, hitting his face on the bedside table. The field notes record that he still had a scar at the time of the interview.

Ghena's final message reached Bassem's phone at 09:16:06 GMT, one minute and 48 seconds before LDSC. There follow more fragmentary but similar reports from Be'er Ora (09:16:15), Yotvata (09:16:39), Lotan (09:17:11), and Neot Semadar (09:17:39), as if the fire were traveling northward, albeit at a velocity not only greater than anything on record, but which thermal physicists maintain is physically impossible; molecules cannot transfer heat that quickly, regardless of wind speed. (There was very little wind that morning, pre-Event.) Lobadil has speculated that other fires were already burning in those places—perhaps separate ignitions—but, absent the nuclear theory, he cannot explain how they could have gone unnoticed and unreported.

Prior to the start of the al-Masri SMS exchange, we have an account of a telephone call placed from Mas'ade (not to be confused with Masada), a Druze village in the Golan Heights, over 400km to the north. A car dealer, Kadir Zeitouni, had gone to a local mediator to settle a dispute with a former employee over sales commissions. (Zeitouni appears to have been something of an outlier in the Druze community. He drove flashy cars, married a Sunni woman from Akko, and, his wife told us, took the dispute to this particular mediator hoping to "repair relations" with local authorities.) After presenting his case, Zeitouni stepped outside and telephoned his wife, Badia, who was on Cyprus vacationing with their children. He was—she told Prempeh in a phone interview—in a foul mood, worried that he had been "too argumentative" with the mediator, felt certain the decision would go against him and that he would lose a lot of money. Therefore, he was canceling his plans to fly over that afternoon and join them. Badia suspected that this was simply a ruse to spend the weekend with his mistress, whom he had sworn not to see again, and they argued about her with increasing vehemence until suddenly, in the middle of his rage, Kadir fell silent. She said, "What's wrong?"—worried he had given himself another heart attack. He said nothing for several seconds then pronounced a single word: "*Nar*" (fire). There followed a sound she describes as "like the roaring of a great beast." Just as it became so loud that she had to move the phone away from her ear, the connection was broken (09:17:51 GMT). She expected him to call back, and when he didn't, she tried him several times without getting through. About 15 minutes later there was a tremendous noise. Everyone on the beach looked up and saw smoke billowing thousands of feet into the eastern sky. At the same moment, phones began buzzing all around her. She says she knew at once that she would never see her husband again and could not help thinking, though it made no sense, that whatever had happened was Kadir's fault, that he had brought it on with his endless anger and impatience. Even so, she tried his number repeatedly for several hours. We know how many times she called and precisely when because, like Ghena al-Masri in Eilat, the Zeitounis used Orange Telecom as their carrier, a French company whose data is stored in the Alps. (The records of all local carriers are inaccessible and presumed destroyed.)

An hour and 17 minutes before the Zeitounis lost connection, long before Ghena al-Masri's final text to her son, Eleanor Reynolds-Richards, an intellectual-property lawyer in London, initiated a three-party Zoom meeting with her clients Idit Geller and Aryeh Zachai, partners in a software design firm, ZGD; Geller was at the company's offices in Tel Aviv, Zachai at his husband's parents' home in Goa. The call was recorded, audio and visuals, and we have obtained a copy.⁸ The copy is technically damaged, or perhaps has been redacted to conceal proprietary information, but it brings us closer to the Event than anything else we have found. For that reason, I'd like to put a warning before what follows, some version of: Read at your own risk.

THE PREVIOUS WEEK, the US Patent Office had rejected an application by ZGD (their initial application for this process), and the purpose of the call was to formulate an appeal.

⁸ Pursuant to our agreement with the provider, we cannot discuss how we received it or from whom, except to say that it was *not* from Reynolds-Richards or anyone in her office.

There is intermittent static on the audio track, but one understands that they are taking up the Patent Office objections, point by point. It is a technical conversation, a mix of IT engineering and patent law, and quite interesting. Reynolds-Richards explains an objection; Geller and Zachai propose amendments to their claim; Reynolds-Richards discusses why she thinks each of these will work or won't; and on they go. Seventy-seven minutes into the call, at 09:17:21 GMT, Geller (in Tel Aviv) turns to look over her shoulder at a window that has been visible behind her throughout. She seems to have heard something not yet audible on the recording, or to have noticed a shift in the light, imperceptible to us. Or perhaps she has sensed a sudden change in temperature. This turn—I've watched it thousands of times—appears entirely ordinary, indistinguishable from other movements Geller has made during the conversation, yet Reynolds-Richards immediately asks, "Is everything all right?" Geller says, "Something's happening." Zachai (in Goa) says, "Idi . . . ?" Geller doesn't respond, but begins to rise and turn toward the window, which is covered with one of those shades made of very thin bamboo strips; through it we get an odd, rippling view of the apartment block across the street.

It is difficult to describe what follows. As mentioned, there are dissenters even from the idea that it is a fire,⁹ and while our internal consensus remains that what we see are flames, fire as we understand it cannot consume matter (steel, glass, poured concrete) at the rate at which it appears to be happening. Chen and Eftekhari have postulated that a sudden "massive transfer" of energy from the sun or, perhaps more plausibly, the center of the earth (the temperatures are similar) could conceivably have generated the heat capable of what we see on the recording.¹⁰

But what, in fact, do we see? Viewing the footage at normal speed (30fps), most people, myself included, perceive only chaos: incomprehensible disorder, impossible movements, and a shattering. (The camera mic blows out immediately, and it is hard to determine how much of what we hear thereafter is the Event itself and how much is audio distortion.) Even when we slow the footage down—going through it essentially frame by frame—the images remain largely nonsensical. (It would be simpler if they were entirely so). Often, one frame bears no obvious link to the next. Certain architectural features, the window in particular, persist throughout, but in unpredictable relationship to other elements: the aluminum electrical conduits, the ventilation ducts, even the ceiling soffit. Viewing it like this, of course, we miss details that are perceptible only in motion. Therefore, a serious study of the footage—and we regret not being allowed to make it publicly available; if there was ever a project for crowdsourcing, this is it—requires watching at many different speeds and trying to correlate one's own (multiple) responses with those of colleagues. As Braunschweig wrote in an internal memo during our initial study of the footage: "These images cannot be 'seen' directly. They must be felt first, then seen . . . In the right state of mind (relaxed, open, without intention or purpose) they become legible; we are *admitted to them*. If one struggles, attempts to 'will' understanding, there will be nothing" (emphasis original). Yet it is important to say that when I describe, as I am about to, what "can be seen," these are *not* just private, subjective fancies—the rhinoceros or outline of Virginia one divines in a passing cloud. Several dozen people from a variety of disciplines (and amateurs with no technical expertise at all) studied this footage over a period of months and recorded their individual responses. We then began to meet in groups and exchange impressions, sharing with one another what we thought we saw. We spoke, and we also listened. In time, each of us came to feel that at certain moments others had seen more clearly than we had, and—this is crucial—we began, in those places, to see what they had observed. The description that follows constitutes our collective understanding of "what is there," much of which has been confirmed by persons outside the subgroup who, not privy to our conclusions, saw substantially the same things.

⁹ Nolan, *op cit*, and after him others.

¹⁰ They don't suggest how this transfer might have occurred.

To wit: Geller rises from her chair and turns in a single movement.¹¹ As she takes a first step (left foot) toward the window, i.e., away from the camera, the Zoom image is engulfed in flames. These do not appear to come from outside—through the window— or from the floor or the ceiling, but from all directions at once, in an instant. If, instead of 30fps, the camera had been running at 60 or 300 or 1000, it would have further subdivided the instants, and conceivably we would see the fire appear and then advance. But this is all we have; in one frame there is no fire—no smoke, nothing—and in the next, it is everywhere. Geller immediately pivots back toward the desk (13 frames), her eyeline searching for and then finding the laptop's camera lens, i.e., Reynolds-Richards and Zachai (22 frames). Her upper body inclines toward them, while her weight remains on the left foot, so we do not think she is coming back this way, yet she clearly appears to be seeking them out. Braunschweig, whose intuition in these matters was uncanny, believed that Geller was imploring their attention, saying, in effect, "Look. See this." Not because they might fail to see it, or somehow overlook it, but in the sense of, "Behold . . ."

Once Braunschweig had proposed this, many of us began to read the positioning of Geller's arm, reaching back behind her, like a gesture in an allegorical painting directing our gaze to the essential subject, though what that is, we cannot see. In the next frame, her hair is on fire—all of it, at once, a corona. As it blazes, a living crown, her face remains calm. Her eyes are open. Her mouth forms a perfect circle,¹² yet there is no sign of pain— or horror, or even surprise. Then, in a single frame, she is gone. Everything is gone. The image is unreadable. There follow eight more frames (nine total) in which Geller is entirely absent (or has become indecipherable) each more chaotic than the previous, if that's possible. On the final frame, the image pixelates, freezes, then stutters erratically for another 23+ seconds, at which point the connection breaks, and the screen fills with static. The break occurs at 09:17:54 GMT, 14 seconds after the end of the Zeitounis' call, Golan to Cyprus, and well over a minute after Ghena Al-Masri's final text in Eilat. LDSC takes place at the same moment, suggesting that it may not have been the fire in the room that ended the recording, but London losing the satellite feed. Conceivably, the camera in Geller's laptop went on receiving images for some additional interval—seconds, even minutes— without being able to send them. If such footage exists, we would, to say the least, very much like to see it.¹³ In any case, the reporting record ends with that frame.¹⁴

I WANT TO PAUSE HERE and make a comment not really relevant to my purposes in this document, yet I feel compelled to say it. There have been countless attempts, both in fiction and in what we might call "speculative journalism" to "re-create" (imagine) what happened on the ground during the Event. These seem to me futile and pointless. That the fire left no survivors now goes without saying. That was not initially evident, but in late May, when the smoke and clouds began to clear, there was a fresh deployment of surveillance drones and low-orbiting satellites. Those sent directly over the region again disappeared; however, the ones that passed nearby survived, returning patchy but useful images, both optical and

¹¹ Geller had been a gymnast and a dancer, and one feels that.

¹² Physically impossible, but measurements confirm it.

¹³ Nolan contends that it would simply depict "more chaos," and tell us nothing, a conclusion I agreed with at the time, though today I'm less certain. Skomorovsky recently offered what he calls a "proof" that the term *chaos* is itself now without meaning, and though I have trouble following his math, the conclusion has an intuitive appeal.

¹⁴ Braunschweig made a still from that final image of Geller's face—flaming corona, mouth in a circle—blew it up to 24 x 18 and hung it on the wall of his cubicle. It so disturbed the staff—Lagomarsino called it a Gorgon—that a lot of them stopped going in there, and I was asked more than once to have him take it down. I didn't, though frankly whenever I saw it, something in me shuddered, and I wished he would do it on his own. (He certainly knew how people felt.) Yet as Prempeh later pointed out—I hadn't noticed this myself—I kept finding excuses for going in there and discussing matters I could have handled by text or email. Prempeh believes I wanted to see it; that the shudder had become a need. Others seemed to need it, too, and the complaints stopped. After Braunschweig left, someone suggested moving this image out into our cramped little "lobby," but we never did; it remains hidden away in his former cubicle, like one of those cave paintings nobody sees.

thermal. From these and other data, one was forced to conclude that in the entire area west of the Jordan River—the state proper and the territories¹⁵—no human or large animal could have survived. The heat (which remains constant to this day) would have boiled off all water, blood, lymph, and mucus. The long-held hope of finding people alive in bank vaults, bunkers, underground caves, and the like had to be abandoned, and we were forced to accept that all that the many rescue efforts accomplished, heroic and selfless as they might have been, was to add to the number of victims.

About that, we can do nothing. But to then “depict” deaths no one has seen, a catastrophe and horror of which we know almost nothing, to try to “humanize” these moments with our fantasies of suffering and grief, seems to me not just naive but obscene. Perhaps we are all tempted in that direction; we want to personalize the impersonal. Yet that is exactly what cannot be done. When Prempeh asks me where I was when I first learned of the Event—people seem to love that conversation—I tell her this or that (it was 4 am in Washington; I was asleep; the calls woke me about 6), but never the truth. Not just because it’s none of her business, much less that there is anything to hide, but because all that is irrelevant. Who cares what I felt or thought or did? I am convinced that the best we can do by way of understanding (and honoring) what has happened—and this is important, it is necessary—is to recognize that it is beyond our grasp, beyond our selves. Something has taken place that we cannot speak of or know or even fully perceive, yet the fact of which sits before us.

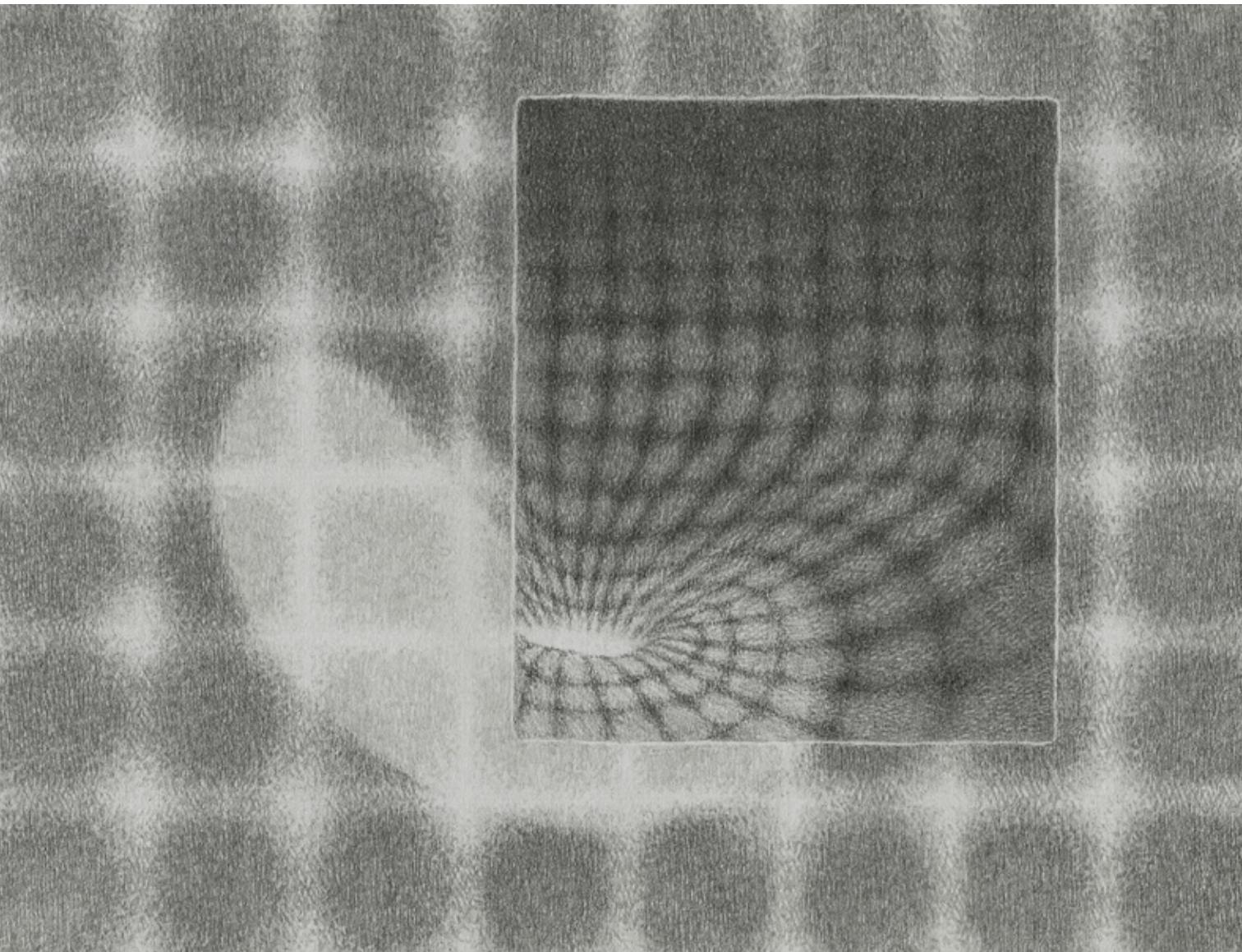
It is for this reason that, despite agreements not to, I have described what appears on the Geller video—hoping to replace these nightmare speculations with what scraps of reality we possess, however fragmentary. All evidence suggests that any actual “experience” on the ground was extremely brief, and—given the fire’s speed and intensity, not to mention the physiology and neurology of the human body—no one felt more than an instant of astonishment. There was literally no time for suffering. There would have been, at most, a brief confusion or a sudden awareness—we see it in Geller—then nothing. Nothing. I am convinced there was no suffering there at all. The suffering is ours.

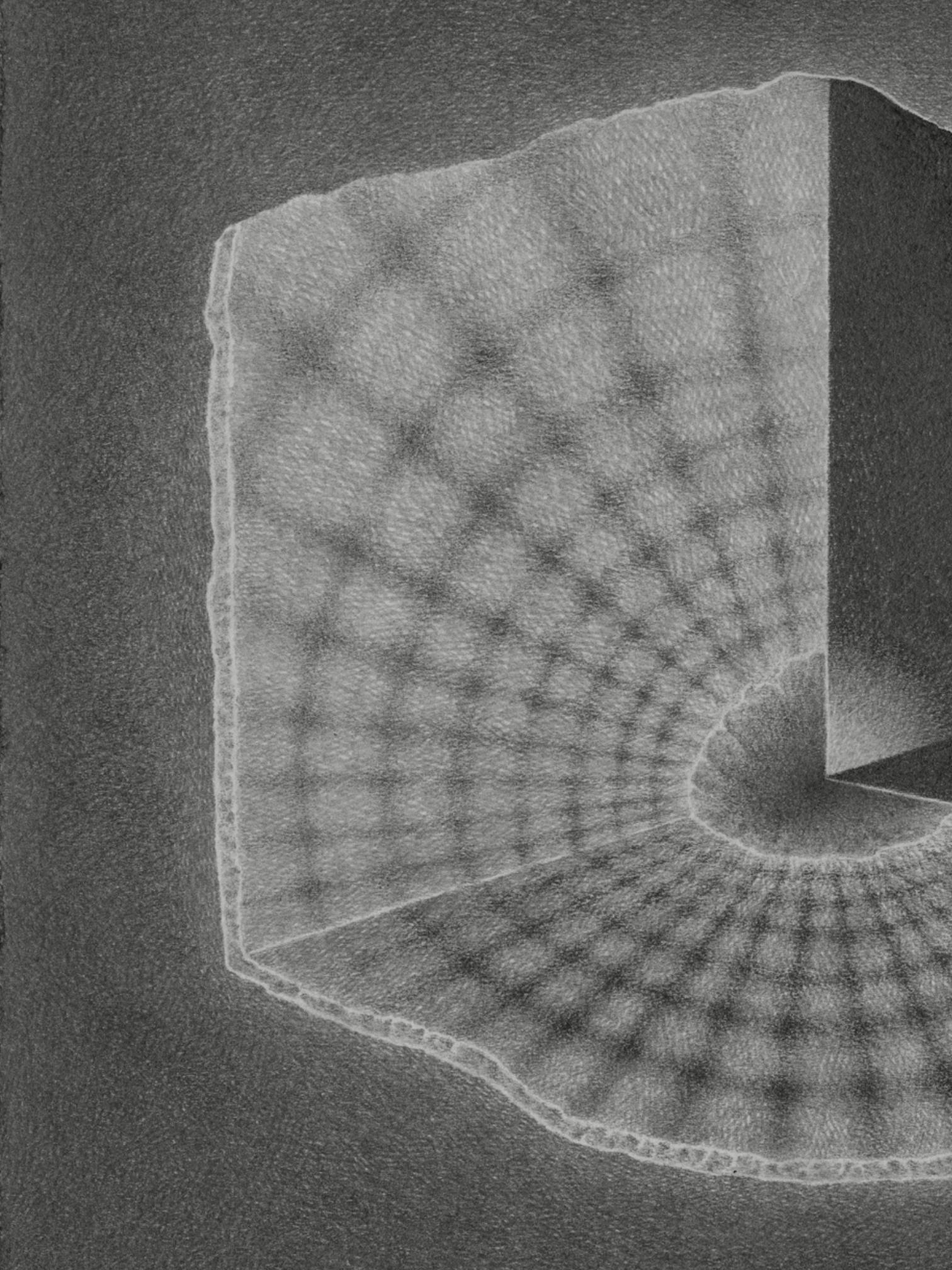
3

WITHIN 36 HOURS OF LDSC, military forces from Lebanon, Syria, and Egypt had massed on the borders of the Event Field.¹⁶ This occurred under a complete news blackout, so what followed remains largely unknown, and it has taken us months to piece it together. As early as the night of March 31—unaware of or ignoring initial accounts of failed rescue missions—the first troops crossed into the Event Field and were immediately incinerated. (We believe that crucial information, including the disappearance of advance drones, was deliberately withheld from the soldiers and even from their field commanders.) In several places, the ash of the forward units blew back into the faces of the men behind them; but because these incursions took place at night, in radio silence and under thick clouds of stinging smoke, those at the rear were often unaware of what had happened up ahead, so they kept going and were similarly destroyed. Military strategists tended, in those first hours, to dismiss these deaths as “local anomalies” and ordered squad leaders to try crossing at other points, first here, then there, looking for “vulnerabilities.” Only when the troops began to refuse orders, leading to summary executions, followed by the “fragging” of COs, did the generals and the politicians begin to accept that there were no vulnerabilities, that, at least within its boundaries, “the anomaly was universal.”

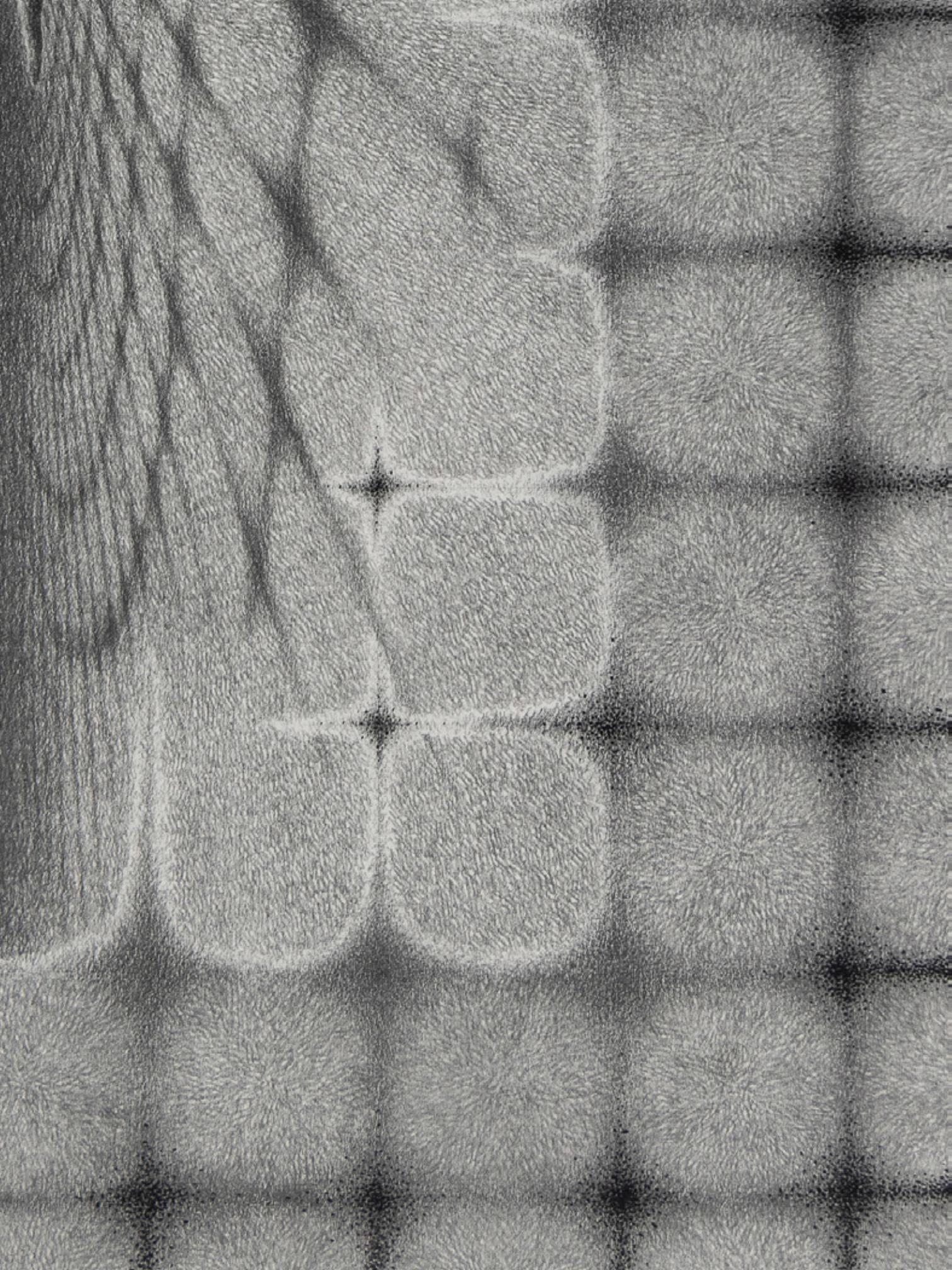
¹⁵ Many, of course, maintain that there never was a clearly defined “state proper”; that its borders were always shifting and disputed.

¹⁶ Jordan declined to participate; the Egyptian government sent troops only after massive street demonstrations in Cairo, Alexandria, and other cities.









THERE IS A PIECE OF DIGITAL FOOTAGE, made at about this time by an Egyptian soldier near Al Kuntillah in eastern Sinai. It was shot on an HH L6 and lasts just under eight minutes. We see a pack of 40-odd Nubian ibex (*Capra nubiana*, a desert-dwelling goat with large, curved horns) moving along at a decent clip. Without warning, the lead three animals burst into flame, one after the other, and are reduced to ash in a matter of seconds. The pack immediately veers off and pauses. After a moment, a few of the larger males warily approach the charred remains, and while they sniff the air, a kid of about six months wanders too close and is similarly destroyed. A mature female runs after the kid and is destroyed. The pack exhibits alarm and confusion. One of the large males, inadvertently it seems, steps too close; its right foreleg and shoulder suddenly ignite like a gas jet and crumble. The animal emits a terrible, piteous braying. For whatever reason, maybe a shift in the wind, we can hear the flesh crackle, but then it topples forward, burning; its magnificent horns burst into twin arcs of flame, and its vocalizations cease.¹⁷ The other ibex now back away, turn and, without further ado, trot off in another direction. As the camera watches them go—not one looks back this way—a large bird appears in the upper right corner of the frame, and the Egyptian soldier, whoever he was, abandons the departing pack and follows this new subject. We quickly realize that it is an enormous creature (the wingspan estimated at over eight feet) with brown-tinged black feathers and rose-colored markings around the eyes. It would later be identified as a lappet-faced, or Nubian, vulture (*Torgos tracheliotos*), but we know on sight that it is a bird of prey, a scavenger come to see about the still-smoldering ibex. It passes once near the carcass, then, circling back for a second look, crosses directly over the animal and drops out of the sky, a ball of fire before it hits the ground.

Bardach, by means I still don't understand, obtained a copy of this video only days after it was made.¹⁸ Based on visible features of the terrain and her knowledge of Egyptian troop movements, she concluded that it had been shot right at the border¹⁹ and that the goats and the vulture were destroyed when and as they crossed it. If you look closely at the images of that last ibex as it burns, you can see its blood running across the sand, then abruptly turning to pink steam precisely—we presume—where it transects the international boundary. Unlikely as that sounds, we have similar footage shot along the borders of the four contiguous nations, in which eagles, seagulls, camels, horses, donkeys, rabbits, tortoises, frogs, toads, scorpions, and snakes are obliterated in similar fashion. In the most difficult to watch (and hardest to obtain), a clan of Bedouins, perhaps confused by the absence of border patrols, attempts to drive its flocks west across a shallow stretch of the Jordan River into the smoky haze; they fare no better than the ibex.

It is strange how long it took us to accept what we were seeing. Watching those tapes hundreds and in some cases thousands of times, certain facts became apparent. The perimeter of the Event Field had been drawn as if with scientific precision, and it was inviolate; nothing could cross it and live. This was true not only on the ground, but to an altitude of at least 20,000 meters: Insects, birds, drones, aircraft, weather balloons, and so on were destroyed, at once and entirely. How far up this zone extends has still not been established. High-orbiting satellites have reported few difficulties, hardly more than pre-Event. The moon, the planets, and the stars appear to continue on their usual paths, though the IASA has scheduled high-precision observations over the next two years to confirm this. Yet for all that, it was not until September of year one, after a series of storms

17 Reading this document at our campfire last night, Prempeh asked how I could reconcile the ibex's agonized bellows with my assertion above that the fire caused no suffering. She suspects I am indifferent to the pain of animals (Leah once said something similar). My presumption is that the animal was caught between two zones—inside and outside the Event—and was therefore, in a sense, torn apart. That is, I feel certain, an exceedingly rare occurrence. Still, perhaps I am insufficiently concerned with animals.

18 At Bardach's memorial service, her brother told me that as a child she never failed to find the *afikomen*. This is a piece of matza, hidden during the Passover seder, that has to be brought back to the table and eaten before the service can be completed.

19 There had been a fence on the eastern side, but, of course, it was incinerated in the first moments.

had swept through the region²⁰ and the skies cleared, that satellites on steep angular paths sent back the first comprehensive images of the area and, as El Koussa put it, “we finally saw what we already knew”; that the shape of the burn zone was a perfect outline of the vanished state and its territories, “from the river to the sea.” That and nothing else. This seemed impossible, yet it was so.²¹ Where there were natural boundaries (the Jordan, the Dead Sea, the Gulf of Aqaba on one side; the Mediterranean on the other; even the hills of Golan in the north), this was easier to account for. But where it was simply—and literally—an invisible line drawn in the sand (Sinai, Lebanon, the Arabah region of the Jordanian border), life on one side, death on the other, a different sort of explanation was needed.

The religious had answers, as always, but they satisfied only the religious.²² The practical had questions, the most salient being: Could this have been an attack by a hostile foreign power or asymmetric entity? Several terrorist groups had claimed responsibility, albeit without offering credible evidence. AllWorld, 4chan, Reddit, frommissouri, and similar sites teemed with speculation ranging from detailed foreign policy assessments to theoretical weapons systems (orbiting lenses to focus solar rays; “nano-explosives” dropped from the air or somehow “sown” into the land). The most astute of these, by Kaplan and Meyers,²³ argues that even in theory the resources required to develop such technology are beyond the capacity of any known terrorist organization and all but five state actors. Of the latter, they dismiss out of hand both the US (politically inconceivable) and China (not on their agenda); they maintain that “the Zionist state” as a US client was so useful to Russian ambitions in the region that Moscow would not have benefited from its disappearance. The Iranians were no doubt delighted when this happened, and had long been considered the most likely to attack, but “nothing in their weapons programs points even vaguely in such an exotic direction.” The authors then turn to the final and most interesting “suspect” on their list: the Jewish state itself. They theorize that a country surrounded by enemies committed to its destruction and waging a demographic war it seemed destined to lose might decide to build its own Doomsday Machine to assure that should the land ever ceased to be theirs, it would become no one else’s; and that, having done so, the device might have been triggered by an accident or conceivably by an act of sabotage.²⁴ Yet what was this device, and how did it work? Even if one could explain the fire’s ignition, how had the destructive force been sustained for three years without evident fuel or visible flames? Above all, what would contain it *precisely* within historic borders? Kaplan and Meyers don’t know: “We continue to believe that a military strike (a conscious human act) is the only plausible explanation for the observed phenomena, yet we cannot propose or even theorize a credible technology for one.”

20 For a general discussion of the effect of burn zone heat on regional weather patterns, see Lobadil and Marmo, “Atmospheric Repercussions” in *Report on Atmospheric and Meteorological Studies*, no. 137.

21 On the night of the Event, I was, in fact, up late, proofing a paper, saw the first news alerts as they came in (none of this matters), and, without really thinking, I telephoned Leah, though we hadn’t spoken in months. I assumed I’d wake her—it was 1:30 am in California, and she is invariably in bed by 10—but she was up and in tears (Julian had already told her and was on his way over), which puzzled me since that whole subject had never seemed at all important to her—to her parents, sure, of course; to her right-wing brother, no doubt—but Leah, the Leah I knew, had always been on the political left, very critical of everything that happened there; yet here she was sobbing so hard she couldn’t speak. As she used to tell me, “You’re not a Jew. You don’t understand how these things work,” which I clearly don’t. In any case, she thanked me for the call, said she’d try me later, though of course she never did. Julian texted me some sort of explanation. As I say, all this is irrelevant.

22 I’m being unfair. There are a number of excellent collections of religious writing on the Event; even putting personal considerations aside, I would recommend, in particular, *Fire This Time*, Marguiles, Leah and Astroth, Julian, eds.

23 *Jane’s Unconventional Warfare: 3003 Report*.

24 Their list of possible saboteurs includes various foreign agents (remnants of Hamas, Hezbollah, etc.), former CIA/MIS “cut-outs” now in private employ, anti-Zionist Hasidim, left-wing radicals, and, curiously, members of the nation’s own intelligence community—Shin Bet, Aman, Mossad—who “had begun to despair.”

4

“IS THE EVENT SINGULAR OR EXEMPLARY?” El Koussa has repeatedly asked this, not for himself, I take it, but by way of thinking about the Christian response and particularly that of the Evangelical community. He finds in the latter’s writings and sermons three recurring themes: (1) grief for their Zionist friends; (2) joy at the impending Rapture, Apocalypse, Second Coming, and Final Judgment; (3) competing predictions about the timetable for these eschatological events. It is the problem of Judgment that especially interests him. He asks without irony—indeed, with his unfailing graciousness—if what has happened is unique to this one place, a single Judgment that for obvious reasons has been rendered in what he calls “the navel of the world.” Or is it the first in a series to be visited on various “trouble spots”? Should we understand it as a warning to humanity to shape up, or the material consequence of our having failed to do so? Or is it, rather, on the order of a plague, a comet, the explosion of a star, too vast to contain a mere “message” or “meaning”?

In attempting to discuss the religious and political aspects of what has occurred, I am hampered by both a general incompetence in these subjects and, I confess, doubt as to their explanatory value. Since comprehensiveness demands it, however, I will try to be brief.

The fire was greeted by an outpouring of what the Western press labeled “regional jubilation,” though that was a deliberate oversimplification. In fact, the celebrations extended well beyond the Arab world, to Iran, of course; to parts of Central and Southeast Asia, not all of them Islamic; across much of Africa and into the Muslim communities of Europe. One even heard a note of grim satisfaction in the responses of many European and North American leftists, progressives, and “pacifists” at what a commentator in *The Guardian* called “this inevitable reckoning.” To a gentile like myself, one who gives religion and politics barely a passing thought, it was difficult to understand how people who had been incensed at the destruction of olive groves and houses could accept so calmly, with almost a hint of approbation, an event which, after all, entailed the deaths of more than 15 million human beings. But the reality on the ground, even and perhaps especially in the Middle East, was more complex; not only Arab and Muslim grief for their Palestinian brethren and for the loss of beloved holy sites, but also terror and awe in the contiguous nations when they grasped the full power of the destructive force and how close it had come to their own borders. (Thus, the “miracle of our survival.”)

The response of diaspora Palestinians (the only Palestinians left) is of particular interest; the Event has generated myriad forms of denial that their homeland is gone—none more shocking than the “Children of the Return” (see below) even as many intellectual and spiritual leaders are advocating new varieties of *sumud* (steadfastness, perseverance), many of them reconceiving their national identity as “a way of life, rather than a place.” A number of these have remarked on the similarity to diaspora Judaism; as Y. Basharat put it in their “Family of Abraham” essay, “The Arabs and the Jews, brothers from the first, are together again at the last.”

Perhaps stranger still has been what one can only call the Zionist reaction. When, in the first hours after the Event, a visibly devastated Reuven Arieli, the legendary former ambassador (still residing in the Virginia countryside), said on CNN, “If you had told me it was just the settlements, maybe I would have understood. But the whole country, everybody . . . ?” he was denounced by allies, friends, and two of his own children; and he received sufficiently credible death threats that he had to disappear for several months. The stance of the former state’s apologists and defenders has been largely denial that anything fundamental has changed, mixed with outrage at the monumental “injustice” and “disproportion” of what has undeniably taken place. Many of them have continued arguing to this day, as if before a court that might somehow be persuaded to change its mind, that Syria or Saudi Arabia (not to mention the major powers) were “vastly worse” and “more deserving” of punishment; there was particular bitterness that

recent diplomatic breakthroughs had been ignored or given insufficient weight, that the catastrophe had occurred just when peace was “within reach.” An AIPAC spokesman actually insisted that the “sovereignty of the Jewish State has not been altered in any way, nor its size diminished by one square centimeter.” An Iraqi minister agreed, telling a Paris luncheon, “The Zionist entity has been granted all the territory it ever claimed, from the river to the sea. And its borders are secure.” (He later denied saying this.)²⁵

5

OVER THE PAST MONTH, Prempeh and I have been making our way around the perimeter of the Event Field. It is a trip I had been scheduling and postponing for over a year, and in the end both the board and the staff strongly urged that I take her with me—i.e., they think I’m getting difficult, perhaps unreliable, and want someone along to confirm (or refute) my reports. They also know that I trust her completely. In fact, she is an excellent ambassador, not just for her youth and appearance, but even more for her manner: direct, pleasant, dignified, almost regal. Just the other day, thanks to her gentle non-insistence, we got to view some extraordinary, unedited footage shot near a refugee camp in one of the contiguous states.²⁶ From the codes on the tape and other details, we know that this was recorded on April 4, five days after LDSC, and already we see people holding up for the camera weathered parchment scrolls and crumbling documents, many of them hand-lettered in gorgeous Arabic script. As they speak in a variety of accents and languages, we realize that these are Palestinians come from all over the world—from Amman and London, Brooklyn and Brazil—bearing 19th-century Ottoman title deeds in the expectation that they will, at last, be able to recover their ancestral properties. By this point, the fate of the rescue missions and military incursions had been widely reported, so it is not clear what these “Children of the Return” (a phrase we see on countless signs and t-shirts) were telling themselves, but one feels the crowd working itself up. Some sort of anthem is playing on a PA system; there is a good deal of cheering and fist-pumping and, one infers, alcohol. A disparate collection of vehicles has assembled, everything from military personnel carriers to expensive Land Rovers, all-wheel drive SUVs, broken-down jalopies, and a couple of camel-drawn wagons. A man in a keffiyeh makes a speech in Arabic, and even without subtitles, one understands that he is rousing the crowd, inciting them to action. When he dismisses the “alleged dangers” attendant on entering the land as “Zionist lies” (the people showing us the footage translated), there are shouts of approval. Many appear to remain skeptical, but more than a few, caught up in the excitement, climb into their vehicles, start the engines, and drive in a large circle, waving their colored smoke sticks. Then, as if at a signal I fail to hear, they all head off toward the mountains of dark cloud looming over the border. After the last of them has vanished from sight, we still hear their engines and stereos, but these sounds eventually fade, and the green and red smoke dissipates into the desert air. None of them was ever heard from. Nevertheless, over the following days, others arrived with documents of their own, and some of those took the same path. Eventually, the contiguous nations stationed troops along these borders to keep people from coming to harm.

THE LAND’S REFUSAL TO BE POSSESSED or repossessed by anyone at all did not bring the celebrations to an immediate end, but it muted them, after which, as Braunschweig reported last year, they transformed into something quite different. The living continued to

25 I have omitted—for lack of space and because, frankly, I don’t know what to make of it—claims that the Event constituted “a second Shoah”; the launching of “fertility drives” to replace the “lost Jews”; the war of competing memorials (including physical violence in the dispute over giving “equal mention” to the Palestinian victims), the negotiations for a new homeland in the Western Sahara or the Canadian Arctic. And so on.

26 For complicated reasons, we have agreed not to identify the camp or the nation.

visit the borders alone and in pairs, in family groups and on tour buses, but now, instead of firing guns into the air and blasting music over battery-operated loudspeakers, they simply stood or sat or walked along marked footpaths looking out over what the locals had begun to call *almakaan almustahil* ("the impossible place"). There was no music and very little conversation. Some left flowers or cakes or dyed eggs; some lit candles and said prayers for the dead. A grizzled figure along the Syrian border told Braunschweig in broken but impassioned English, "We are dead! We are all dead!" I was surprised how easily Braunschweig had gotten into the country, but it turned out that Jews had been making this pilgrimage almost from the beginning, though at first only on boats and ships that would anchor off the Mediterranean coast, where they would stand at the railings, looking eastward into the same silence that others were watching, looking westward across the Jordan. Many Jews initially refused to enter Arab countries, and the countries likewise restricted tourist visas for Jews, especially those with Israeli passports. But that, too, changed. During April of Year 2, a group of American yeshiva students made a well-publicized trek across Sinai with Egyptian friends,²⁷ and after that, others came to Jordan, Lebanon, and eventually Syria. Following some initial chilliness, hotels rented them rooms, and kosher meal plans were introduced.

LATE LAST SUMMER, a 19-year-old youth, reportedly healthy, intelligent, and in good spirits, walked across the 1974 ceasefire line in the Golan Heights and was incinerated before his father's eyes. They were affluent Tamil Hindus, living in France, and the family had been camping for a week in the Syrian Golan. They cooked over a wood fire, swam in a small lake, and spent extended periods each day on the large rock formations that look out over the border. Prempeh and I visited there this winter, and we were told that although the number of visitors has fallen in recent months, back in August, on an afternoon of good weather, upwards of a hundred people, all ages and nations, many of them families, would have been scattered across the rocks, rarely speaking, sometimes reading or sleeping or quietly eating; yet whatever their eyes or mouths or hands were doing, they all sat facing in the same direction, like compass needles. Because it is hill country and the winds are strong, one can get excellent long views out to the west over the silent land. They are breathtaking.

The boy, Sharav, had not wanted to come on the trip; he was an athlete and had to miss an important Tae Kwon Do competition and was quite bitter about it. Yet from the moment he went out on the rocks, his complaints vanished. He sat in one spot for two hours saying nothing and seemed, his mother told us, "like a different person."²⁸ He became helpful and good-humored in a way that the parents found almost worrisome. At home he was often surly, even a bully, but here all that changed. He would get up before dawn and go out on the rocks to see the land in the first light, spend much of the day there, coming back to help around the campsite, then going out again, especially at sunset; when he returned to camp at night it was pitch black and one could see nothing. On their last full day, he begged his parents to extend the trip or let him stay on by himself (there was another French Tamil family that could have brought him back to Paris), but they had their return tickets, and, frankly, the mother told us, they wanted to get him home and "back to normal."

The next morning, they were all up early, and after everything had been packed in the rental vehicle, Sharav asked his parents if he could go sit on the rocks one last time. An hour later, his father came to get him. He couldn't find him at first—that particular formation is large and elaborate, with scrub pines growing up out of crevices; you have to scramble about to see it all—and he called the boy's name. Sharav's voice answered

²⁷ See "Pharaoh and Moses Take a Road Trip," in the February issue of *Strange Journeys*.

²⁸ Prempeh and I visited with the family in Paris on our way out there.

him. The father waited, gazing out at the view, and perhaps his thoughts wandered, but after a couple of minutes, when he hadn't appeared, he called again. This time there was no answer. He climbed about looking for him and reached a point where he could see out over the small, steep valley through which the Purple Ceasefire Line ran. There was a solitary figure down there, walking west toward the border, and he wondered for a second who that crazy person could be; then he realized. He says he knew at once what was happening. He called, shouted, waved his arms. Sharav turned and waved back, seemed to smile, but he kept walking and didn't turn again. The father ran down the rocks into the valley, shouting the whole time. From the westward base of the rocks to the border is just under a kilometer, and the father, who had been an athlete himself, felt sure he would be able to catch him in time. But somehow the conformation of the land was deceiving, and though he ran as fast as he could—faster, he felt, than he had ever run—and though Sharav kept walking at the same unhurried pace, he saw finally that he was not going to make it, and he told himself that if the boy went across he would go, too, and either bring him back or die there with him. He was still 200 or 300 meters behind when the figure of Sharav turned to ash before his eyes. He slowed then; there was no longer a need to hurry. He realized that he lacked the strength or inner will or whatever it was to follow his son, and this seemed to him unbearably shameful. "The worst feeling of my life," he told us. "Worse even than his death." He stopped about ten meters from the line, and, as he stood there, a light breeze scattered the last of the ashes. With that, all trace of the boy was gone, and it somehow lifted his spirits.²⁹

6

FOR OBVIOUS REASONS, accounts of Sharav's death and especially the way he met it (smiling, open-eyed, serene) were largely suppressed—over his parents' objections, the local coroner ruled it an accident—so it is hard to argue, as both Statler and Katadin try to do,³⁰ that what followed was triggered by this incident. More likely, whatever moved Sharav moved others as well, and only when the number of "accidents" reached into the hundreds and then the thousands, and the world could no longer ignore them—passing in an instant from denial to panic—was the tale of the "happy martial arts champion" retrofitted as an origin myth. What strikes us both now, as we finally get access to the actual records, is the variety of people who, as they say, "took a walk."³¹ There were, inevitably, the old and the sick, troubled adolescents, brokenhearted lovers, and a few who declared it a form of martyrdom. But there were also middle-aged couples in good health with adequate means, farmers, lawyers, store owners, government bureaucrats, emergency room nurses, trust fund babies, at least two professors of philosophy, and a husband and wife wanted for several murders. Perhaps because of travel costs, there were not many poor people and, as far as we can tell, nobody who was actually homeless. Once Jews could easily enter the contiguous states, many of them crossed over, and because traditional *halacha* (Jewish religious law) requires withholding mourning rites for suicides, various rabbis have issued rulings that these people had not taken their own lives, but, rather, had "made *aliyah*" (literally had "ascended," i.e., from the diaspora to the Holy Land). Before long, the neighboring nations had to redeploy the forces they had originally used to keep out returning property owners. But, as usual, the enterprising and the committed found ways around these impediments; the soldiers proved easy to bribe.

Indeed, the Jordanian troops here in this campground are so lax it is almost comical. When Prempeh and I arrived the other day, just to test their response, we walked down the

29 His actual words were, "C'était bien."

30 *National Geographic* "Special Edition Year 3"; *The New Realist*, issue no. 4.

31 In fact, many drove or pedaled; a number even flew.

embankment and across the mud flats toward the trickle that is the river at this time of year.³² We had gone well more than halfway when a soldier with a bullhorn told us to come back; we could easily have made it across before anyone reached us. That evening, I asked one of them if they got in trouble when people died. He shrugged and told me: "They yell at us, but nothing happens." We learned later that the soldiers themselves cross over more often than the tourists.

We are in the same part of Wadi Araba where the Bedouins are seen in that shocking video (and where Bardach disappeared). We have watched the footage so many times that, as with Dealey Plaza, I recognized the place almost before we got here, and felt such dread I might have turned back if I'd been alone. But Prempeh, who knows the footage as well as I do, simply said, "Here we are," and we went on. A moment later, coming over a rise, we saw the nearly deserted campgrounds (which would have been crowded with visitors six months ago), the trash-blown parking lot, the desultory watchtower, and my fear dissolved into a kind of numbness or vacancy or something for which I cannot find the word. Pushed into a far corner of the parking area is a collection of vehicles left behind by people who have crossed over. These are now the province of rodents, snakes, scorpions, and their prey, which, one of the soldiers told us, is usually one another. The handful of tourists have spread themselves out over the vast grounds so that each party is almost alone, but there is a family camped near us, and that first evening, after we had pitched our tents and eaten something, we walked over and introduced ourselves. They are Palestinians, descendants of people who fled Jaffa in 1947, and they have traveled here from Southern California and Vancouver. Prempeh hit it off with them at once, especially the women; they were dazzled by her, the Oxford accent, the deep blackness of her skin and hair. They showed us a rusted iron key the size of my palm and talked about reclaiming their property, especially "a marvelous orange orchard" that none of them had ever seen. It is gone, of course, since long before the fire. Prempeh asked how they expected to take possession "with things as they are." The oldest of them, a woman in her 70s, a dentist who had been born in Egypt after the family fled, told us, "We will never stop waiting." She said it calmly, as if the waiting itself were sufficient. Her middle-aged children, a physical therapist, a drug counselor, a "first A.D." (whatever that is), kept a respectful silence.

AS I MAY HAVE MENTIONED EARLIER, the number of new technical papers about the Event (the fire and its aftermath) has declined steadily over the past year, and I'm told that recent submissions are even lower. Whether this indicates gloom, acceptance or a quiet gathering of energies is unclear, but it feels like a second silence, the first having followed the collapse of the nuclear theory. In the absence of significant new work—without which, Prempeh maintains, I don't know what to do with myself—I have gone back to my favorite thinker, the Russian physicist E.I. Skomorovsky, and during the trip have been rereading some of his major papers³³ while keeping up with the shorter posts that still appear every week or so on his website. It was Skomorovsky who famously said that we know more about the Big Bang, which no one observed, than about the fire, of which we have actual video evidence. Lately, he has gone further, arguing that we will never know what happened, indeed, *cannot* know, that the obstacle is not "the impenetrability of certain events occurring in the Levant on 30 March" three years ago, but the shape of the human mind. We are "blind" to those events and even to our blindness. Yet we sense what we cannot see, "as if by the mental version of touch." (El Koussa speaks of "seeing with our lips, our skin, our proprioceptive systems.")

In a post that went up this Monday, Skomorovsky describes a Norwegian study that found an observable tendency in people living just outside the burn zone to avoid

32 Without the snow runoff from Mount Hermon and other peaks, water levels are dangerously low.

33 See especially "The Blind Men Agree," "Repeating Backwards," "Has the Event Yet Begun?"

looking in that direction. He links to a video in which we see the subjects performing bizarre contortions for just that purpose, “averting their gaze from what they cannot fathom.” They have no idea they are doing it. When shown the videos, they are astonished and often laugh at themselves. Yet 30 minutes later, they are doing it again—again unawares. As usual, Skomorovsky draws unexpected conclusions: He believes that, in a cognitive sense, the Event Field is disappearing, “withdrawing from human consciousness,” even as the actual space remains before us. He predicts that within a few decades it will rarely be mentioned.³⁴ And if that is so, he speculates, it must surely have happened before in human history; other places (persons, colors, sounds, ideas, words) have vanished and been lost “like the sea closing over a sunken ship.” He wonders “if that is what became of Atlantis,” which I take to be a joke, though I’m not certain.

I read the whole post aloud to Prempeh yesterday afternoon as we sat on the embankment looking out over the river. What with questions, discussion, and going back over difficult passages, it took a couple of hours, and when we finished, we were silent, watching a pair of large black birds (Monk’s vultures, I believe³⁵) circling over the desert to the south, looking for prey. They kept wheeling closer and closer to the perimeter without ever crossing it, and Prempeh remarked that they were not, as one might think, “avoiding” the Event Field; for them it had already ceased to exist. It was no longer there. The same appears to be true for most animals. Only a few humans (and a rapidly dwindling number of those) continue to be interested in that boundary and what lies beyond it. Prempeh recalled a paper she had read recently, a soil analysis of sand that had blown across the borders from the burn zone; it found a “complete lack” not only of burrowing animals and insects (their scat or DNA) but of microorganisms, fungi, even bacteria, actinomycetes, algae, or protozoa; there was no evidence of mitochondria. She pulled up the article on her phone and read aloud the final sentences. The author, Gosha, writes, “The sand is inert in a way one would not have thought possible in Nature. All life is absent, presumably burned up and consumed. Spinoza held that for every finite mode of extension (for every *thing* in the world), there exists a corresponding mode of thought from which it is not truly distinct. That is, every *thing* has a *mind* (of some sort) and is, to that extent, alive. But not this land. It is without life and without mind. It is not just dead. It is death.”

We sat there the rest of the day, reading, talking a little, and watching the river crawl past—it seemed to have freshened somehow, as if from an underground source. Around sunset, the clouds broke up, and we got a decent view of the blasted terrain on the other side. It was featureless in a way photographs cannot convey—there are no words for the color—and, as everyone remarks, it was entirely silent. When it began to get dark and cold, I said, “We should go,” and stood up. Prempeh, who is usually so responsive and accommodating, sat there as if she hadn’t heard me, staring out at the barely visible, barely audible river and the emptiness beyond it. Silence in daylight is one thing—sight fills the void—but in the dark we want sound, insects, animals, wind, *something*. Finally, she got to her feet, and we walked back to our campsite. The Palestinian family had left during the day, and the few remaining visitors were all at the far end of the grounds, their fires mostly lost in the darkness. Prempeh heated some food, we ate, and then, as I cleaned up, she went into her tent to read. With everything put away, I sat in one of the camp chairs meaning to answer emails and look at a few websites, but I did nothing. Prempeh’s electric lamp had turned her tent a glowing yellow orange, like a giant lantern, and I stared at it without a thought in my head.³⁶

34 Unlike, say, Holocaust survivors, who dread the world forgetting what they have gone through, Skomorovsky treats it as natural, necessary, beneficial.

35 The guards told us these have reappeared in the region lately after a long absence.

36 Maybe this is the time to say that nothing has happened between Prempeh and myself, and nothing will. Twenty-five years ago, when I was her age, I probably would have made a clumsy attempt in that direction—one way I helped wreck my marriages—but at this point it’s hard even to imagine such things.

7

I WOKE UP an indeterminate number of hours later in my own tent—maybe 30 minutes ago. It was cold and dark, and there was no light anywhere, which seemed odd since she is invariably up long before me, making our fire. Possibly, she had slept late for once, but that felt unlikely. I went outside with the small torch (Prempeh's word for it) and let it play around the site, hoping she would see it and emerge. I said her name aloud—her Christian name, which I almost never use—then shone the beam through the netting; there was no one inside. I clicked it off, hoping that would make it easier to see her light if she was out there somewhere, but I saw nothing, not the other campfires, not the moon and stars, which were presumably hidden behind overcast, though I couldn't see that either. I couldn't see even the ground before me, yet the darkness felt more hospitable than the light, which had just bounced off the moisture in the air, obscuring more than it revealed.

I decided to walk out to the river; in case she had headed back over there. My body half-remembered how to go, what direction we'd turned as we left the campsite, and my feet felt their way across the uneven ground. I told myself I would sense the embankment when I came to it and the land started to slant downward, but, in fact, I wasn't sure. I'd seen it in daylight, but hadn't paid close attention, hadn't thought to, and I could imagine stepping off the edge, or the ground tapering down to the river so gently I wouldn't notice. After a bit, I felt . . . What I felt, in addition to the ground beneath my feet, was a chill in the air against my skin, more on one side than the other, which I took to be a breeze. If the wind was out of the west, as usual, and I walked into it, i.e., toward the cold side, it would take me to the river. So, I went that way and soon enough heard what sounded like moving water. Yet every step was so uncertain—I stumbled repeatedly without ever quite falling—that I couldn't tell where I was or how far I had gone. Over and over, at each slight downward slope, I would think I had reached the embankment, yet it always seemed to lie farther ahead—unless the wind was out of a different direction, what sounded like water was something else, and I'd gone the wrong way altogether. Skomorovsky has written somewhere—I think it was Skomorovsky—that if truth is a correspondence between certain statements and the world they purport to describe, the Event corresponds to nothing at all, so no truthful statement can be made about it. (In which case, this report is useless, yet its very uselessness is a comfort, almost a purpose.)

Then I heard something I knew at once was neither the water nor the air. I stopped and listened. It came, and it went; and then it came again. I wondered if the breeze was carrying away the sound and bringing it back, but it rose and fell too steadily for that. It sounded, in fact, like something breathing. I stopped my own breath and held completely still. I filled those moments with thoughts of what it might be, a human, an animal, possibly a plant, even the land itself. Gosha had called the land death, but death might have its own sort of life. Maybe there was a realm, a truer reality, where death was ascendant. I found myself picturing Geller's face in that final frame—as I often do, I think all of us do—the black circle of her mouth. I couldn't hear the breathing anymore and wondered if whatever it was was holding its own breath, listening for me. But then, just before my air gave out, I heard it again, a soft, living exhale that was not myself. I could have spoken to it, I suppose, or shouted in a threatening way to frighten it off, but I didn't. I don't know why. It seemed important not to. The area is home to wolves and jackals, which travel in packs, and to striped hyenas, which hunt alone. Yet I had no fear—I had, in fact, a complete absence of fear—and for whatever reason I moved toward the sound. I didn't care what the thing was or what it might do. I meant it no harm and felt it would know this, and that it was similarly disposed toward me. Even if it killed me, I believed, it would do so in all innocence.

The reason I closed my computer last night was that there was an email from Leah I wasn't ready to look at; it had been there for two days, actually. Yes, I've made a mess of my life—who hasn't—but the great blessing of the Event is that in its shadow none

of that matters. It doesn't take our sins on itself; it renders them meaningless. I began to smell mud and the odor of old, burnt things, like after a fire or in a ruined house. I sensed a vastness before me—it is before me now—sound and air, cool, fresh, yet with traces of fetidness coming up from below, and just then my foot felt beneath it a distinct lip of earth, beyond which the ground dropped away, and I knew I had reached the embankment at last. I sat down right there. Here. My legs reached over the edge; my feet rested on the downward slope. From this spot, I can hear the river quite clearly and, much closer, the other thing, whatever it is, still breathing to my left; I can hear particles of earth shifting beneath it, as if, like me, it is sitting or lying on the ground. I smell its fur or hair or skin, or what might be soap (though, if it is Prempeh, why hasn't she spoken? but why haven't I?) and feel heat coming off its body, for which I am grateful. I am not looking at it and feel certain it is not looking at me, but that we are both facing out to the west, toward the land we cannot see. **JC**

Art, in order of appearance:

Stages of Fallout (Flower II), excerpt, 2021, graphite on paper, 9 x 12 in

Impact Glitch, 2023, graphite and acrylic on paper mounted panel, 12 x 9 x 1.5 in

Stages of Fallout (window grid), 2022, graphite on paper, 9 x 12 in

Stages of Fallout (mirror portal), 2022, graphite and charcoal on paper, 11 x 15 in

The Kiss, excerpt, 2023, graphite and paint on paper mounted panel, 24 x 18 x 1.5 in

Balık

Birhan

Keskin

Zokayı yutmuşum ben bir zaman
ah dilim yaralı
konuşamam

Translated from the Turkish
by Öykü Tekten

Fish

i took the bait some time ago
ah! my tongue's wounded
i can't speak

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The Dream Logic of Fascism

Discussed in this essay: *The Third Reich of Dreams: The Nightmares of a Nation*, by Charlotte Beradt, translated by Damion Searls. Princeton University Press, 2025. 152 pages

Raphael Magarik

SEVERAL WEEKS AFTER TRUMP'S INAUGURATION, I dreamed that my wife and I wanted to have our infant daughter's room painted but could not afford to at today's rates. Fortunately, we had access to a time machine; a house painter from the past would be much cheaper. Concerned about our workman interfering with history upon his return, we knew we would have to keep him absolutely insulated from current events. I suggested that we hire a young Adolf Hitler, whom we would have every incentive to hide from the world. He did good work, and we happily sent him back to the 1920s, but I soon noticed that we had somehow slipped up and made the Holocaust even worse. We agreed that if we did this again, we would have to be more careful.

By enlisting the past-future führer (and mediocre painter) in our home-improvement project, my mind seemed to express absurdly what, in those days, I found myself constantly remarking upon to friends: namely, the absolute incongruity between the unfolding catastrophes of the world at large and my nuclear family's tiny Eden. The ominous tendrils to creep in under the nursery door was, appropriately, a rise in prices—a proximate cause of Trump's victory and thus our current authoritarian woes. The dream also evoked an uncomfortable truth: Much as my imaginary Hitler was serving rather than threatening our domestic tranquility, in the increasingly nightmarish real world, fascism was purporting to protect my family. A week before the dream,

Mahmoud Khalil, a US permanent resident, had been kidnapped, detained, and threatened with deportation under the pretense that he, and the pro-Palestine protests he helped lead at Columbia, represented a threat to young Jews, which is to say that our daughter was, in a sense, the rationale for storm trooper thuggery. Indeed, my fantasy of a Hitlerian TaskRabbit resembles the mainstream Jewish institutions' delusion of collaborating safely with Trumpists to quash criticism of Israel.

At the time, I had Nazi dreams on the brain; I was reading the new edition of *The Third Reich of Dreams: The Nightmares of a Nation*, a remarkable book by German journalist Charlotte Beradt, originally published in 1966 and now freshly translated by Damion Searls and reissued by Princeton University Press. Inspired by her own terrible nightmares, Beradt began collecting them from friends and acquaintances in 1933. She eventually assembled more than 300 dreams, which she anonymized, rendering certain key terms in code—Hitler became "Uncle Hans," an arrest was "the flu"—and hid in the spines of her books. Before she and her husband, both Jews and Communists, fled to London in 1939, Beradt mailed some to friends abroad for safekeeping. In 1943, living in New York, she wrote a short article for the left-liberal magazine *Free World* about the material she had amassed, before finally releasing the collection of several dozen dreams with her commentary. (An English edition, translated by Adriane Gottwald, followed in 1968.)



Images from a 1943 Charlotte Beradt essay in *Free World* that became the basis for *The Third Reich of Dreams*

The Third Reich of Dreams makes a powerful impression; I found it literally breathtaking. Some of the dreams are terrifying, as when a girl imagines that the angelic figurines hanging above her bed were surveilling rather than shielding her. Others are more subtly ominous. Many people reported dreaming: "It's forbidden to dream but I'm dreaming anyway"; one hatmaker imagined that "to be safe" from government persecution, she was "speaking Russian . . . so that I wouldn't understand myself." As Beradt exposes the fears and desires of ordinary Germans, one feels oneself encountering an unmediated underbelly, as if the Holocaust had been made to lie on an analyst's couch.

The marketing of the new edition suggests that Beradt's book offers not just historical insight but lessons for our frightening present. A front-cover blurb by novelist Zadie

As Beradt exposes the fears and desires of ordinary Germans, one feels oneself encountering an unmediated underbelly, as if the Holocaust had been made to lie on an analyst's couch.

Smith describes it as "essential reading for anyone who has known what it is like to live within a totalitarian state—or is worried they're about to find out," and a new preface by poet Dunya Mikhail calls the text "strikingly relevant" and "incredibly timely." Some of the reception has been even more direct: Mark Dery wrote in *The Washington Post* that "this travelogue through the German unconscious will look chillingly familiar to anyone living in Trump's America." Smith says much the same in her own essay about the edition for *The New York Review of Books*.

Right-wing authoritarianism is at its worst globally since the 1930s; some analogy between the two moments is unavoidable and even useful. But comparison can easily lead to analytic imprecision. For instance, despite conceding that there are significant differences between Nazism and Trumpism, Smith's review nonetheless describes both as "totalitarianism," with the ideologies sharing a common "propaganda machine." (Now it's the "algorithm," instead of the "megaphone, the radio, and the printing press," that is "imposing mandatory conformity.") Thus the relevance of Beradt's "straightforward picture of the psychological effects of propaganda and manipulation upon a populace." However authoritarian and fascist our contemporary regime is, it is generally not described as "totalitarian"—and for good reason. Far from subsuming private life into the public state, Trump is aiming at something like the reverse: the federal bureaucracy



dismantled, health care regulated by innumerable quack influencers, more “school choice” and church charters. Even his assertion of federal authority hinges on the preservation of the private sphere, like state repression to secure the private rights of Zionist students to their “safe spaces.” (And whatever social media’s baneful contributions to Trumpism, ten minutes on X will confirm that it enforces not “conformity” but abrasive, partisan disagreement.) Careless analogizing produces not just platitudes but actual obfuscation.

One can hardly blame an author for her posthumous reception, but Beradt’s text itself offers the kind of too-tidy conception of Nazi totalitarianism that facilitates facile analogies to the present and impedes a knottier mode of historical comparison. Reading the dreams she collected as invested with a pristine clarity and oracular foresight, Beradt posits a single shared psychology of life in the totalitarian state. In so doing, she oversimplifies the past, leveling the social contradictions out of which Nazism arose and treating 1930s

German society as if it were already the uniform singularity toward which the state aspired. *The Third Reich of Dreams* is thus easily assimilable into straightforward tales of authoritarian power and valiant resistance, and satisfying to those seeking the consolation such stories can offer. Those binaries comfortingly cast us as heroes or victims. But dreams can do much more interesting work. As my own surreal reflection of my family’s role as authoritarian pretext suggests, they can instead reveal the web of complex conflicts, both psychological and political, in which we are caught. Ultimately, Beradt’s dreams thus have most to teach us if we attend to the ways they exceed her interpretations—to their stubborn hints of the entanglements from which fascism emerges.

BERADT WAS FASCINATED by her dream archive’s apparent prescience; she repeatedly calls attention to moments and images that anticipate later events. Although their visions are “not prophetic,” she writes in the first chapter, “these dreamers,

Beradt's tendencies toward consolidation and abstraction were part of a broader contemporary trend that elevated the Holocaust above the contingencies of ordinary history and into the realm of indelible myth.

with sensitivity sharpened by fear and repulsion, perceive almost imperceptible symptoms in the profusion of daily events." The hatmaker's dream about speaking a language she did not understand "in case [she] said anything about the government," Beradt writes, "has since become reality in Auschwitz, where the impossible became possible"; at the 1947 Auschwitz trial, a camp prisoner who had worked as a secretary testified to her fear of having revealed state secrets in her sleep. Elsewhere, a young woman dreams of hiding beneath a pile of corpses. "What comes to mind," Beradt writes, "is that ten years after this dream, during the mass exterminations of 'the Final Solution,' people without the right papers really did have to hide beneath piles of corpses."

But the uncanny portrait of a nation glimpsing its inevitable fate depends on Beradt's editing and commentary. Sometimes, in its commitment to predictive reading, the exegesis discards or obscures the past and present. In the case of the dream about the pile of corpses, the dreamer herself connects the gruesome scene to "a description of the pile of corpses left outside of Khartoum after the Mahdist revolt," a brutal struggle in which Sudanese rebels fought first the Egyptian army and then the British Empire. Beradt's emphasis on the dream's anticipatory quality requires turning away from the Holocaust's precedents in the colonial violence that anticipated Auschwitz. Later in the book, Beradt writes that a Jewish woman's dream of a "Vermin Keep Out" sign at a restaurant in proves the dreamer's ability to "predict in detail the upcoming campaigns," because such signs "had not yet started showing up in restaurants"—except the dream occurred in "the winter of 1936-'37," when they certainly had. In such cases, Beradt's book contains what biblical scholars describe as prophecies "ex eventu," that is, ones written after, and with consequent knowledge of, the events they purportedly predict. More often, though, Beradt extends early symptoms of Nazism's ultimate catastrophe into premonitions of a more general concept of 20th-century oppression. After an account of a dream involving surveillance, Beradt remarks, "It is important

to realize that this dream . . . dates from 1933. What today are political facts, everyday realities, were not yet described in novels: Orwell's ever-present Big Brother did not yet exist."

Beradt's tendencies toward consolidation and abstraction were part of a broader contemporary trend that elevated the Holocaust above the contingencies of ordinary history and into the realm of indelible myth. The sociologist Jeffrey Alexander describes the 1950s and '60s as pivotal decades for the "removal of the Holocaust from particulars of time, place, and person" and its transformation into a "moral universal." What early observers often understood as various specific war crimes were reinterpreted as a single, unified event and given the name we now take for granted—a conceptual shift that made the Nazi genocide newly available for abstract analogizing. In her 1951 classic *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Hannah Arendt interpreted Nazism and Stalinism as twin instances of the same phenomenon; this analysis not only gave intellectual heft to a common-sense, liberal anti-communism by casting the USSR as absolutely villainous but also helped fashion from the Holocaust an explanatory paradigm to be applied elsewhere. A decade later, the Milgram experiments proffered universal, social-psychological theories of human susceptibility to authoritarianism (one participant reported that his wife told him, "You can call yourself Eichmann"). Gradually, the Holocaust came to be seen as potentially relevant to everyone, the global paradigm for genocidal evil.

The details of history are less important in *The Third Reich of Dreams* than the clash of moral forces and the degeneration of the individual personality under totalitarianism.

As in this emerging myth, the details of history are less important in *The Third Reich of Dreams* than the clash of moral forces, from which Beradt derives an analytic typology concerned with the degeneration of the individual personality under totalitarianism: The majority, who submitted to the regime, lost their very personhood, whereas the few who resisted were rewarded with continued psychological coherence. She describes a woman who dreams of hiding her copy of the possibly subversive Schiller play *Don Carlos* under her maid's bed; when the storm troopers find it, she realizes the book she hid was actually a harmless atlas but nonetheless "stood there feeling horribly guilty and let them throw it on the truck." Here, Beradt identifies "the new kind of individual created by totalitarianism." Even though innocent, she is ashamed—it hardly matters whether for her

subversive intentions or her failure to speak up, since in either case the point is that totalitarianism has induced an absurd self-alienation. Similarly, a construction worker dreams that a post office refuses to sell stamps to the regime's critics; he stands meekly waiting his turn until, eventually, an Englishman cuts the line and tells off the postal clerk. The construction worker sees clearly the moral of the dream: "I made myself a ridiculous man." Beradt explicitly outlines this near-universal template in her sustained analysis of the dream that opens the book:

Goebbels came to my factory. He had all the employees line up in two rows, left and right, and I had to stand between the rows and give a Nazi salute. It took me half an hour to get my arm raised, millimeter by millimeter. Goebbels watched my efforts like a play, without any sign of appreciation or displeasure, but when I finally had my arm up, he spoke five words: "I don't want your salute." Then he turned around and walked to the door. So there I was in my own factory, among my own people, pilloried with my arm raised. The only way I was physically able to keep standing there was by fixing my eyes on his clubfoot as he limped out. I stood like that until I woke up.

The dream, she writes, reveals a paradigmatic devolution into "a non-person"; it "depicts not so much an individual's fate as a typical event in the process of transformation," exhibiting "the nature and effects of totalitarian domination as numerous studies by political scientists, sociologists, and doctors would later define them."

According to Beradt, only dissidents' dreams—which involved "decisive action" and lacked the absurd, paradoxical distortions that characterized others'—show them holding fast to their agency and individuality. In one 1934 dream from a "resistance fighter's wife," she explains, the dreamer "defends herself and is neither a non-hero nor a non-person." Another finds an underground journalist being discovered and cunningly evading capture, all while knocking down Nazi flags and ripping a picture of Hitler from a café wall; in this "action-packed" narrative, Beradt notes, "every blow is followed by a counterattack." The strict binary strains credulity—and, indeed, it is absent from the original 1943 article. There, she views resisters' dreams as less distinctive: Although they notably included struggle against Nazism, they finally "shifted back from the realm of action into that of suffering" that characterizes the other dreams.

The book's more rigid division, conceived and retrofitted sometime in the ensuing decades, suggests a misunderstanding of the moment from which many of these dreams emerged. In the early 1930s, after all, the distinctions

in Germany were not yet between a singularly obsessive and murderous state, on the one hand, and resisting heroes, on the other; totalitarianism, like everything else, develops historically, congealing from a complex stew of political antagonisms. Beradt's key binary leads her to downplay more salient differences: those between social groups variously affected by the rising Reich. This tendency is perhaps most strikingly illustrated in her treatment of Jews. Though they are accorded their own chapter in the book, she insists that their dreams "occupied the same realm of fear and oppression as the dreams of all the other groups" and thus exhibited exactly the same themes "we have seen so much of, but to an extreme." (When the British rabbi Lionel Blue quipped, "The Jews are just like everyone else, only more so," I do not think he had the Holocaust in mind.)

Beradt's neat buckets of moral abstraction prove too small for her dreams, which repeatedly overflow with details, offering not straightforward dichotomies but a messy hermeneutic surfeit. At stake in the factory owner's dream, for instance, is not just his "humiliation" before his workers but also his transformation into one. Thus, the unnaturally slow arm, reminiscent of Charlie Chaplin's *Modern Times*, depicts the thoroughly material alienation of the factory, in which the employee's body acquires its own mechanical, inhuman rhythm to complement the assembly line's. (It is not Mr. S's soul that is deformed but his body, as accentuated by his final gaze at Goebbels's "clubfoot.") To generalize the experiences of a factory owner into a universal paradigm implies a theory of Nazism to which labor exploitation is irrelevant: She pointedly notes that Mr. S was a "Social Democrat" who "had employed many of his old Party comrades," as if to forestall any thought of class conflict. For Beradt, the mortification lies in the inversion of traditional hierarchies, the unmaning of a solid, upstanding bourgeois. But to me, the bracing force of this dream is rather the continuity between the authoritarianisms of the factory floor and of fascism—the anticipation, partial yet undeniable, of Nazi dehumanization in the objectification of capitalism itself.

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THE THORNY PARTICULARITY of dreams is, of course, one of the great themes of psychoanalysis. Nowhere is the de-particularizing spirit of Beradt's book more explicit than in the contrast she draws between her own approach and the therapeutic one, which she declares inadequate to the circumstances of totalitarianism. While for Sigmund Freud, dreams are coded expressions of private neuroses, Beradt asserts in the first chapter that those she collected refer to a public, overwhelming reality, and communicate unambiguously: "They have no façade concealing personal contexts and association, and there is no need for anyone else to interpret how events in the dream are related to events in waking life." In other words, the dream is not the object to be interpreted but rather itself the interpretation of political life. Later, considering a dream in which a child of a "mixed marriage" dreams of fleeing with her Jewish mother on her back, only to experience "a horrific sense of relief" when she realizes her mother is dead, Beradt absolutely rejects speaking of any "latent, repressed hatred of the mother . . . waiting for an outlet," and quotes the philosopher Karl Jaspers on the "existential nonsense of dream interpretation," part of a "trend of degrading the individual person," presumably by postulating that our psychic lives are determined by shared subterranean desires. Her suggestion that psychoanalysis collaborates with the Nazi debasement of the individual is dubious as well as ironic: Here, Beradt is the one insisting on the absolute priority of a single shared public situation over private history.

By contrast, Jewish psychoanalysts and cultural theorists on the left claimed from the beginning of Nazism that its pathologies interacted complexly with specific histories and social contradictions, especially of class—and were therefore experienced psychologically in radically different ways by different sectors of German society. Already in 1933, Wilhelm Reich, an Austrian student of Freud and one-time communist, was arguing that fascism grows from the "reactionary germ cell" of the nuclear family, so that the sexual repression of the proletariat funnels erotic energy toward authoritarianism. In his 1941 *Escape from Freedom*, the German analyst and socialist Erich Fromm tried to profile Nazism psychologically; placing Freud's ideas in dialogue with the longue durée development of capitalism, he theorized that the material precarity of the middle classes encouraged certain ego insecurities, which in turn rendered them prone to fascism. Theodor Adorno's analysis of the *Los Angeles Times* astrology column from the early 1950s mixed Marxist and psychoanalytic insights, rooting fascist tendencies in the banal humiliations and commodity consumerism of middle-class life. The particulars of such interpretations have aged variously, but they all share virtues that Beradt's analysis lacks: a sense of Nazism as the product of concrete histories and social dilemmas, and the understanding of individual psyches as differing not just through their moral choices but because of their places in social hierarchies.

Yet, as the stray allusion to Khartoum or the questions raised by the factory owner's class suggest, Beradt's dreams are often fraught with luminous wrinkles, ironed out by her readings. Take that half-Jewish woman who dreamed of bearing her dying mother on her back. (She thus resembles not Freud's Oedipus but Virgil's Aeneas, who similarly schleps his father Anchises out of a burning Troy, and who must prize himself free from the old man's death grip before he can sire Rome, his new fatherland.) Beradt's dichotomy between the psychoanalytic and the political ignores how Nazism grew from, reinforced, and remade all manner of nasty familial structures, through its hypermasculinity, fascination with racial genealogy, and invocations of the Vaterland. In 1936–37, this unfortunate young woman was classified by the Nuremberg Laws as a "*mischling*," situated in an agonizing ambiguity and tantalized by the possibility—almost invariably elusive—of admission into a new fatherland. Thus she also dreamed she "had a child with an Aryan man and the man's mother wanted to take the child away from me because I wasn't pure Aryan. I screamed, 'Now that my mother is dead none of you can hold anything against me!'" This fantasy of simultaneously spurning and replicating her mixed lineage, of disowning and becoming her mother, shows she experienced the rise of the Third Reich and the personal fixations of her own nuclear family as tightly, excruciatingly knotted.

We owe Beradt a debt for preserving such dreams, even if her analysis seems inadequate.

We owe Beradt a tremendous debt for preserving such dreams, even if, or in fact because, her analysis often seems inadequate to them. They incite us to the torturous, particularized, and necessarily speculative interpretations of the innumerable hidden and contested pathways between public and private; it is this invitation, not a general exhortation to resist, that we could use now. (We lack, after all, not political will but a winning strategy, which will require a richer understanding of our conditions.) Indeed, such a mode of analysis may even serve as an alternative model for historical thinking. Today, one most commonly reaches for a Holocaust analogy desiring clarity or moral authority. But at its best, dream interpretation involves a sequence of tentative symbolic identifications, proposed and revised in a fraught dialogue. We'd likewise be best served by looking to history not as an anthology of nightmares reminding us what we already know but as a shifting storm of social forces whose meaning never settles. For there are in fact no universal morals, any more than there are universal dreams. **JC**

Whose Jewish Dystopia?

Discussed in this essay: *The Third Temple*, by Yishai Sarid, translated by Yardenne Greenspan, Restless Books, 2024. 320 pages

Lily Meyer

Next Stop, by Benjamin Resnick, Simon & Schuster, 2024. 320 pages

IN 1895, the journalist Theodor Herzl wrote in his diary that he had “been occupied with a work of infinite grandeur”; that is, developing his vision of Zionism. Despite his utter commitment—“for days and weeks it has possessed me beyond the limits of consciousness”—he wasn’t yet sure what would come of his “mighty dream.” But even if the “conception is not translated into reality,” he mused, “at least out of my activity can come a novel. Title: *The Promised Land!*” Of course, his efforts did dramatically shape the real world, but not before they produced a work of mediocre fiction. In 1902, he published a utopian tale called *The Old New Land*, which expounded on the political program set forth in his 1896 pamphlet *The Jewish State*. The novel showed readers a former “wasteland” transformed into a technologically and politically modern society where suffering Jews, liberated from both antisemitism and religion, thrived alongside Palestine’s Arab occupants, represented in the novel by one man, an engineer from Haifa who supports Jewish settlement and becomes a political leader. *The Old New Land* envisions Israel as a society where, as scholar Jeremy Stolow writes, “‘rationality’ and ‘liberal tolerance’ have become the supreme principles of state.” Many of Herzl’s mighty dreams came true; this one, needless to say, did not.

In that period of perilous uncertainty about Jewish life in Europe, Herzl wasn’t alone in articulating possible Jewish futures through utopian fiction. Many of his contemporaries turned to the genre to imagine what might become of them in a Europe that seemed increasingly hostile to Jews. Adolf Agai’s 1877 story “Budapest One Thousand Years Later,” which scholar Stefania Ragaù identifies as the first piece of modern Jewish utopian literature, offers a quite different vision, imagining a Hungary free of antisemitism; in his 1918 sci-fi novel *In the Future City of Edenia*, Kalmen Zingman did the same with his home country, Ukraine. The lapsed Zionist

Nathan Birnbaum channeled his rejection of the movement into a 1907 novel in which Jews multiply enough that the world’s metropolises come to contain their own Jewish utopias. After the Holocaust and the founding of Israel, Jewish utopian literature more or less vanished—perhaps many Jews outside Israel were too scarred by the Shoah to imagine a perfect world, while Zionist true believers turned their utopian energy toward building the fledgling Jewish state. But as Israel gained and abused power, some of its writers began turning to the inverse genre: dystopian literature. (Unsurprisingly, there is a strong dystopian current in Palestinian national literature.) Amos Kenan’s best-selling and influential *The Road to Ein Harod* (1984), which begins with a fascist coup in Israel and ends with Armageddon, was followed by other works foretelling varyingly disastrous futures, from Yitzhak Ben-Ner’s *The Angels Are Coming* (1987) to Dror Burstein’s *Muck* (2016) and Shimon Adaf’s *Shadrach* (2017).

Among the most acclaimed of these Israeli dystopias is Yishai Sarid’s *The Third Temple* (2015), which was released in Yardenne Greenspan’s English translation last year. After a faux-scholarly preface identifying what follows as a record from a conquered kingdom, we meet the narrator, a priest named Jonathan, whom we soon see sacrificing a lamb in a temple on Jerusalem’s Mount Moriah. He does so carefully, conscientiously, determined that the animal shouldn’t suffer as it carries out its “superior destiny” of pleasing God with its aroma. Sarid lingers on the scene, writing it with deliberate beauty and collaging in a line from the binding of Isaac in Genesis and Leviticus’s injunction that “the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar.” This ancient act unfolds against an explicitly futuristic milieu; in order to enter the temple, Jonathan had to go through a scanner that “read from the computer chip implanted beneath the skin of my neck:

After the Holocaust and the founding of Israel, Jewish utopian literature largely vanished. But as Israel gained and abused power, some of its writers began turning to the inverse genre.

'Jonathan son of Jehoaz, Jewish, priest, authorized to enter.'" As this suggests, the novel is set in a world in which the State of Israel has transformed into an authoritarian theocracy. Its ruler, Jonathan's father, Jehoaz, has destroyed the Al-Aqsa Mosque and erected a new temple, replaced the Supreme Court with a rabbinic one, and instated biblical law. He's also gone to war to annex more of historic Palestine, expelled all Palestinians, and implanted "Judaism chips" in his subjects to track their movements and ensure the kingdom's ethnic purity. He brutally suppresses dissent, enriches his own family while his subjects starve, and keeps the country in a constant state of war that has left it a pariah nation without a single friend, besides the diaspora Jews who continue to support it and send funds.

Just a few months before Sarid's Israeli nightmare landed in the US, American Conservative rabbi Benjamin Resnick published his debut novel, the diaspora dystopia *Next Stop*. This debut novel, set in an unnamed city that is unmistakably New York, it describes a near future in which the State of Israel has not degraded but disappeared entirely and mysteriously, consumed by a black hole. In the aftermath of this cataclysm, countries around the world rush to restrict Jews' rights and movements. Soon smaller "anomalies" begin to appear in major cities across the globe, causing minor miracles and emitting a siren song that beckons Jews to descend into them; some do so, living underground and riding a "subway below the subway," presumably searching for a permanent home. Aboveground, the anomalies inspire increasingly rampant antisemitic conspiracy theories, interpersonal violence, and state discrimination. In the city where *Next Stop* is set, Jews are banned from public spaces and certain lines of work, forced to live in a ghetto called "the Pale," and subjected to brutal policing by robotic dogs.

Read alongside each other, *Next Stop* and *The Third Temple* offer dark visions of the future that illuminate two frighteningly relevant—and mutually incompatible—forms of contemporary Jewish fear. While Sarid's dystopia is rooted in a terror of untrammelled Jewish power, Resnick's is grounded in the notion that antisemitism is an inexplicable, ineradicable force only kept in check by the strength of the Jewish state. This deeply Zionist idea, consciously cultivated by Israel and promulgated by mainstream Jewish communal

voices, has become enormously influential; in the wake of October 7th, President Joe Biden repeated variations of the remark that "were there no Israel, there wouldn't be a Jew in the world that is safe." Indeed, though *Next Stop* doesn't explicitly address Zionism—and was written well before the Hamas-led attack on Israel and the genocide in Gaza—it's hard not to notice the resonance between the novel's premise and the worldview of those who see any hostility toward Israel as antisemitic. After all, Resnick imagines a world in which the fabric of time and space itself discriminates against Jews; its dystopia is essentially just the exaggerated existence of antisemitism, which Jews can escape only by reaching some mysterious homeland. Sarid's dystopia, by contrast, hinges on the conviction that a Jewish ruler can be venal, brutal, and authoritarian enough to destroy an entire society, and that his subjects can be manipulated into such fervent Jewish chauvinism that they'll let him do it. That is, while *Next Stop* rests on an old and dangerous delusion, *The Third Temple* has proven alarmingly prescient.

WHEN THE THIRD TEMPLE CAME OUT in Israel in 2015, it was responding to political developments that sowed the seeds of the catastrophic present. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was solidifying power and welcoming far-right religious hard-liners into his coalition, including those who aspired to demolish Al-Aqsa and build a new temple where it stands. Sarid, raised in a family of committed leftists and secularists—his father, Yossi Sarid, spent decades in the Knesset, arguing for civil and human rights, a two-state solution, and a complete separation of religion and state—was appalled. He wrote *The Third Temple*, his fourth novel, to warn against the future he feared his government was ushering in.

The Third Temple's narrator does not share its creator's view. Jonathan is a naive, repressed loyalist who clings to the sense of purpose he gets from his priestly duties; even when an angel of God urges him to reconsider his commitments, he refuses. Through Jonathan's worshipful eyes, Sarid shows us the horrors of life in a despotic, warmongering nation that is unmistakably a hyperbolized version of contemporary Israel. The dystopian features of the new "Kingdom of Judah" are all amplifications of existing

Israeli policies and dynamics or manifestations of real political currents. The mandatory “Judaism chips,” for instance, are an eerie advance on the ID cards that facilitate Jews’ safe passage through Israel’s apartheid checkpoint system. Dissenters from the regime are considered “defeatists,” or worse, “inciters and sinners”; the chief of the secret police brags that he can “punish you for your thoughts.” With Palestinians expelled from the territory under its control in *The Third Temple*, the kingdom generates internal scapegoats. In a clear evocation of Nazi ideology, this Jewish fascism espouses racial purity, physical strength, and a “clean life of harmony with nature” and oppresses the disabled and anyone else understood as weak or imperfect. This remains a source of ongoing shame and grief for Jonathan: He was severely injured by a grenade in his childhood, and treated with great scorn as a result of the lasting damage.

Meanwhile, the kingdom’s aggression toward its neighbors—referred to collectively as “Amalek, the ancient and evil enemy of Israel”—is unmitigated, though the Jewish nation understands itself as the victim. Reflecting on the steady stream of casualties within the kingdom, Jonathan declares, “We all knew who was to blame: the Amalek and the nations of the world whose hatred for us is eternal.” (The reference to a biblical foe the ancient Israelites are enjoined to exterminate, long used by the Israeli far right to justify violence against Palestinians, was deployed by Netanyahu to announce his genocidal intentions after October 7th.) This is not the only time Sarid has explored the dangers of the narrative of eternal Jewish victimhood; his 2017 novel, *The Memory Monster*, which appeared in Greenspan’s English translation in 2020, satirizes Holocaust memorialization in Israel to suggest that this self-understanding has allowed Jews to become perpetrators. Discussing that novel in *Haaretz* just after its US release, Sarid said of his nation, “We’re no longer helpless Jews, but we still make allowances for ourselves as if we were still weak, helpless Jews.” In *The Third Temple*, these allowances—and the sense of impunity they foster—lead directly to endless devastation.

Next Stop springs from a variation on the very beliefs Sarid criticizes. Resnick has said that he views antisemitism as a “monster living in the closet”—a beast that may sleep, but always “wakes up . . . hungry.” With the novel, he explained, he was “trying to imagine what it will look like when the monster, inevitably, wakes up here in America.” The book opens with the meeting of its protagonists, Ethan and Ella, two Jews in their mid- to late thirties, who attempt to launch a relationship and lead normal lives, even as antisemitic animus grows and society crumbles around them. Ella, a single mother, is far more anxious about their fate than her boyfriend, who feels that their dystopian black-hole situation “would resolve itself and . . . things would be fine because they were always fine.” Whatever the narrative justification for his comparative optimism—perhaps the fact that, unlike Ella, he

The dystopian features of the new “Kingdom of Judah” are all amplifications of existing Israeli policies and dynamics or manifestations of real political currents.

has no child to worry about and no family who vanished with Israel—he ultimately functions as a straw man of sorts; the novel swiftly disproves his point of view and validates Ella's. The implication is obvious: For Jews, nothing is *ever* fine.

Next Stop, which is built on that belief, is so convinced of its obviousness that it makes no effort to imagine the political conditions that would actually imperil Jews. Indeed, Resnick's decision to dump readers straight into his antisemitic dystopia implies a fundamental assumption that his audience—like his novel—is paranoid enough that he doesn't need to establish the details of his dystopia and the antisemitism that drives it. Why is it the case that the majority of world Jewry disappearing suddenly makes all non-Jews more inclined to hate and ghettoize those who remain, rather than ignoring, pitying, or even trying to save them? How does the circulation of ambiguous antisemitic conspiracy theories trigger dramatic legislative shifts and social upheaval? And what, by the way, is the status of other religious and ethnic minorities in decaying societies that discriminate against

***Next Stop* tells a story of Jewish vulnerability at the very moment many American Jews have retreated into victimhood to avoid confronting Israel's crimes.**

Jews? Resnick answers none of these questions.

While *Next Stop* is carefully and even somewhat lyrically written—full of lovingly drawn scenes of childhood, holidays, and miraculous events—it's marred by this rampant imprecision, which even extends to its sense of Jewishness itself. Despite occasional vague references to "registration apps" that track Jews' movements, Resnick gives no account of how the coffee shops and bakeries that refuse to serve Jews identify them as such. They have no chip, as in *The Third Temple*, nor any special ID or armband; sight alone seems sufficient. (In fact, at one point a sympathetic non-Jew remarks to Ella that "everyone seems to be able to spot a Jew these days," himself included.) This representation, combined with the anomalies' inexplicable machinations—their "strange interior pull" manifests physically within all Jews, and according to the government, scientists suspect that Jewish mobility around the globe somehow makes them grow—makes it clear that in *Next Stop*, Jews are an essentially and visibly distinct race.

Given the novel's emphasis on inescapable Jewish precarity, it's no surprise that one review, written by Megan Peck Shub for the Jewish Book Council in August 2024, declared that despite its implausibility, the narrative may seem "familiar, as if its events, in one form or another, have

already happened—or are happening right now." *Next Stop* tells a story of Jewish vulnerability at the very moment many American Jews have retreated into victimhood to avoid confronting Israel's crimes. In fairness, *The Third Temple* could also be accused of telling certain Zionist readers what they want to hear: Its emphasis on a single corrupt leader may appeal to readers who blame Israel's ongoing slaughter solely on Netanyahu, while its association of violence with Orthodox extremism might seem to let mainstream, secular Israeli society off the hook. Notably, in a postscript to the English edition in which he contextualizes the novel within the gradual rise of the religious far right, Sarid writes that in 1948, "reconstructing the temple was not on the agenda" because "the nation's secular leaders were focused on building a home for their persecuted people," declining to mention the violent dispossession wrought by those secular leaders. The novel itself is likewise not interested in interrogating the violence and dispossession involved in the building of that home.

Still, *The Third Temple* is a lucid and chilling examination of just how easily the belief in eternal Jewish victimhood gives rise to a terrifying politics of Jewish impunity—an urgent warning in 2015, and all the more so now. Last November, four years after insisting in *Haaretz* that Jews shouldn't consider themselves weak and helpless, Sarid told the same journalist, now interviewing him about *The Third Temple*, that he feels we "are in a fight . . . over the image of Judaism. Will it continue to be a Judaism that includes morality, and also creativity, and free thought? Will it have tolerance for others? Or will it be a Judaism of extremism, and racist, as I describe in the book—the direction we are going in today." For Resnick, dystopia is always just around the corner, and fear is the natural, practical response to the Jewish condition. But for Sarid, such fear, felt only for ourselves, is the sure route to a dystopian future. **JC**

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Lily Meyer is a translator, critic, and the author of the novels *The End of Romance* and *Short War*.

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Najati Sidqi (1905–1979) was an activist, journalist, translator, and writer. One of the first Arab members of the Palestinian Communist Party, he studied in Moscow, ran a clandestine newspaper in Paris, served in the Spanish Civil War, and opposed Hitlerism.

Öykü Tekten is a poet, translator, archivist, and editor. She is also a founding member of Pinsapo Press and a contributing editor and archivist with *Lost & Found: The CUNY Poetics Document Initiative*.

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43yo F health policy nerd. Likes art, plants, outdoor activities, reading, dog walks, silliness. Seeking a guy who would like to join and will watch movies with the captions on.

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29yo Eastern European Jewish F, incarcerated federally, seeking funny, kind, intelligent penpals. I love books, chocolate, God, and chest hair. I enjoy working out, learning, crocheting/knitting. I'm a tall brunette with toned fit curves.

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24yo trans F seeking M. An introvert who wants to break out of their shell. I like having a laugh. A life long learner and involved communist. Hobbies: Lego, movies, music, and a desire to explore more interests!

TAYLOR4641@GMAIL.COM KITCHENER, ON

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30yo F, goofy and blunt non-denominational Jewish leftist in environmental urban planning. Into fashion, David Graeber, art, cooking. Seeking anti-Zionist main squeeze M in NYC for Metrograph dates, Greenwood picnics, snuggling. Must be funny!

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JAIMEMGRANT@GMAIL.COM WASHINGTON, DC

PRAXIS MAKES PERFECT

24yo blewish (black and Jewish) non-binary leftist seeking companionship and healthy challenge. Special education teacher, drag performer, and JVP organizer. Let's get out of our heads and into praxis together.

MAYA.STEINHART@GMAIL.COM SACRAMENTO, CA

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Foundation





Asking critics to hold their tongues until their institutions are more secure belies the fact that universities entwined with the military can only purchase security at the price of subservience.