

# Gaza, Truth, and the Anti-colonial Injunction:

## An Interview with Ariella Aïsha Azoulay

Ariella Aïsha Azoulay and Angela Dimitrakaki

**Angela Dimitrakaki** We can start with history. Is Gaza where imperialism, settler-colonialism, the North-South divide and the capitalist extractivist economy (the control of the ‘large gas deposits... discovered in the east Mediterranean over the past decade and a half’)<sup>1</sup> meet as the first quarter of the twenty-first century is drawing to a close?

**Ariella Aïsha Azoulay** The answer is yes. Your list of imperial projects that intersect in Gaza is accurate and exhaustive. And yet, I would like to add one more imperial project in which Europe has been invested since the time of the crusades: the fight against Islam and the ‘liberation’ of what is referred to as the ‘holy land’ from Arabs, Muslims and Muslim rule (or, at least, the provision of a Euro-Christian footing in this place). Alongside this project, the West also had to deal with ‘the Jews’, who, mainly gathering in small communities, were scattered across the globe and thus part of a Jewish Muslim world. This crusade-like project of fighting Islam while concurrently managing the presence of ‘the Jews’ sheds light on why this particular spot – Gaza, and more generally Palestine – became so important to Euro-American imperial powers in the time period you mention. Napoleon’s incursions into North Africa and the Levant in the late eighteenth century are mainly remembered as the invasion of Egypt, not as the earliest attempt in modern times to conquer Palestine. But seizing the port cities of Jaffa and Gaza was part of this aggression. The omission of the existence of Jewish communities as integral parts of the putatively ‘Muslim’ worlds invaded by France is a symptom of the Euro-Christian investment in refashioning ‘the Jews’ as a cohesive group apart, a group detachable from this world and thus prone to either disappear or nationalise.

And here is the core of this Christian-Zionist vision of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries: Christian Zionists believed that the Jews could play a role in their crusade.

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<sup>1</sup> See Ari Rabinovitch and Steven Scheer, ‘Israel awards gas exploration licences to Eni, BP and four others’, *Reuters*, 30 October 2023, [www.reuters.com/business/energy/israel-awards-gas-exploration-licences-eni-bp-four-others-2023-10-29/](https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/israel-awards-gas-exploration-licences-eni-bp-four-others-2023-10-29/); see also United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, ‘The Economic Costs of the Israeli Occupation for the Palestinian People: The Unrealized Oil and Gas Potential’, 2019, [https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/gdsapp2019d1\\_en.pdf](https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/gdsapp2019d1_en.pdf) (downloadable PDF)

Napoleon's military campaign against Egypt was a vicious onto-epistemological attack on the Jewish Muslim world; it was orchestrated through combined use of military technologies and technologies of museums and archives, which organised the world according to European taxonomies. Against this background, Christian Zionism emerges. It took a century for some Jews to embrace those Euro-Christian-Zionist ideas and to actively seek to detach themselves from the places in which they lived and incite other Jews to do the same. The majority of the Jews around the world were not inspired nor convinced by Zionism's nationalist programme; this small Jewish Zionist movement could have evaporated if it was not fuelled by Europeans who had their own interests in the affair.

Presently, the handful of Western countries that support Israel don't simply support the state. They are invested in this genocide as much as they are, if not more than they are, in Israel. Their material and ideological support for the Israeli state and its genocidal regime didn't start yesterday, and this is why it is necessary to track down the history, often ignored, of how the West invented the 'Jewish Question' and the 'Question of Palestine' as inseparable ones. I expanded on this in my text published recently in *Hyperallergic*,<sup>2</sup> so I'll merely emphasise a few points: the proclamation of a Zionist colony in Palestine as a state in 1948 was desired, sustained and facilitated by Euro-American imperial powers, who designed it as part of the New World Order they imposed as the outcome of World War II. By recognising the Zionist leaders as representatives of the Jews worldwide, those imperial powers laid the foundation for this confusion between Jews and Israel, and consequently between antisemitism and criticism of Israel, which continues to be weaponised by Israel and the West in its alleged fight against antisemitism, as a way to silence anti-Zionist and non-Zionist Jews and others who protest against the genocide. The commitment to maintain a Jewish majority in Palestine at any cost – including genocide, as we see more clearly today<sup>3</sup> – was made into a constitutive component of Israeli identity and of the 'history of the Jews'. This violent onto-epistemological campaign, which culminated in the creation of the state of Israel, included the termination of diverse Jewish communities that once formed part of a Jewish Muslim world, and the production of a unitary and separate Jewish history punctuated by European milestones in which Europe's enemies – Arabs and Muslims – became the enemies of Zionist Jews. Growing up in the Zionist colony, I heard genocidal intents expressed toward Gaza and its inhabitants constantly. Such expressions preceded and followed numerous violent campaigns to 'eliminate Gaza', as they were discussed in common Israeli lingo.

Why Gaza more than other parts of Palestine? With the UN's recognition of the state of Israel, the birth of 'Israelis' served as the imperial proof that this territory called Israel laid

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<sup>2</sup> See Ariella Aïsha Azoulay, 'The Ruins Should be Inhabited as Part of a Process of Repair', *Hyperallergic*, 11 December 2023  
<https://hyperallergic.com/861590/the-ruins-should-be-inhabited-as-part-of-a-process-of-repair>

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, the letter of resignation by Craig Mokhiber sent to the UN High Commissioner on 28 October 2023, [www.documentcloud.org/documents/24103463-craig-mokhiber-resignation-letter](http://www.documentcloud.org/documents/24103463-craig-mokhiber-resignation-letter)

outside of Palestine. Except... that on the Western lower part of this state was this delineated territory – the Gaza Strip – that was actually produced in 1948 by the Israeli state. The Gaza Strip thus became a constant reminder that there is no ‘Israel vs Palestine’, as if there existed two separate entities; rather, there was either an ‘Israel within Palestine’, whereby Israel was figured as Palestine’s enemy-from-within, or a ‘Palestine within Israel’, whereby Palestine was figured as Israel’s enemy-from-within. In 1948, Israel pushed 200,000 Palestinians, who were expelled from other parts of Palestine, into Gaza where eight refugee camps were created, and it imposed a border to forget about them. But the existence of this Palestinian ghetto created in 1948, as well as its inhabitants’ desire to return to their homes in Palestine-cum-Israel, didn’t disappear despite the erection of a border. Ever since, the state has exercised violence to achieve what all colonial projects dream about – ‘pacification’, meaning the continuation of all those projects you mentioned minus the resistance of those whom such projects abuse.

**AD** My second question concerns the suppression of solidarity in relation to Gaza, but also more broadly. In recent years, we have seen the criminalisation of help to refugees and migrants.<sup>4</sup> Today, speaking about the Palestinians’ right to self-determination is suppressed with unprecedented intensity in ‘liberal democracies’, targeting individuals and counter-publics that oppose the slaughter. We are seeing a redevelopment of the so-called public sphere through a McCarthyist type of policing, brought on to silence voices even just calling for peace – of which ‘ceasefire’ is a synonym, according to the dictionary. The question used to be: can the subaltern speak?<sup>5</sup> Are we at a historic moment in the decline of ‘actually existing democracy’,<sup>6</sup> where a new question is added to the old one: can the non-subaltern speak if they express solidarity with the subaltern?

**AAA** I questioned in the past the category of ‘solidarity’, and I continue to do it now. Based on my reply to your first question, you can understand that I see the colonisation of Palestine as a two-pronged project. On the one hand, it involves the constant dispossession of Palestinians so much so that their grievances, constrained by the terms of humanitarian discourse, could not render into the obvious demand – for the decolonisation of Palestine and reparations for seventy-five years of life under a regime-made disaster; on the other hand, it involves holding Jews, or at least a large majority of them, captive to the Zionist project, the Zionist identity and ‘Israeli’ and Euro-Zionist history, such that they are inevitably identified with it, either by choice

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<sup>4</sup> See Research Social Platform in Migration (ReSOMA): ‘The Criminalisation of Solidarity in Europe’ (downloadable PDF, no date)  
[www.migpolgroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/ReSoma-criminalisation-.pdf](http://www.migpolgroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/ReSoma-criminalisation-.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> See Gayatri Spivak, ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’, in C Nelson and L Grossberg, eds, *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, Macmillan Education, Basingstoke, 1988, pp 271–313

<sup>6</sup> Nancy Fraser, ‘Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy’, *Social Text* 25/26, 1990, pp 56–58

or force, regardless of whether or not they live in Israel, ever went there, or identify themselves as non- or anti-Zionists.

This didn't happen by itself; it required a lot of work and violence, and it required the active involvement of many in those Western countries that created international legal and cultural institutions through which the fabricated histories of Palestine, Palestinians and 'the Jews' could be repeated and defended through the sanctioning of those who refute them. This is a spine-tingling project of human engineering through which the lives of members of thousands of Jewish communities, which persisted for centuries in different places across the world, had to be sacrificed, in order to allow for the birth of the 'Jews as a nation', and consequently as a group who must have a state of their own. Forced to become a nation (or a people), those Zionists leaders pretended to represent all Jews and enjoyed the recognition of Euro-American powers, which since 1945, and through the mediation of the UN, imposed nation-states as the ultimate political model (hence the spectacular growth in the number of nation-states from a few dozens in 1945 to almost 200 today!).<sup>7</sup> From 1948 onward, the Zionists not only destroyed Palestine and expelled the majority of Palestinians, they also killed thousands of Palestinians who tried to return, put those whom they didn't manage to expel under military rule for nineteen years, invaded many of the surrounding refugee camps in which Palestinians were forced to live, and generated a humanitarian crisis in a circumscribed Gaza where a third of the refugees that Israel had created found shelter. It is *not* the suppression of solidarity with Palestinians that is at stake; it is the potential to question the legitimacy of this colonial and genocidal regime that is being suppressed. Why?

Because such questioning also puts under scrutiny the 'solutions' imposed by those Western countries on the Jews at the end of World War II through the mediation of the Zionists, who were, until then, a minority among the Jews worldwide. The cynical dimension is that these countries, which are instrumentalising antisemitism in order to continue to justify their support of the Israeli genocidal regime, are the same ones that led or participated in the genocide against Jews and other groups – Germany and France, and Britain. While the New World Order imposed by the Allies at the end of World War II sought to impose a clear divide between Nazi and fascist regimes and the West, anti-colonial history refused to accept this onto-epistemology, which absolved those other imperial powers of their genocidal regimes in the places they were still colonising. France was directly involved in the Holocaust, responsible for sending 75,000 Jews to their death,<sup>8</sup> and Britain was directly involved in the first phase of the destruction of Palestine, before it facilitated the transition of power from the British Mandate to Israel. To absolve themselves, and Europe, of their crimes, these imperial powers led the sacrifice of

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<sup>7</sup> Founded in 1945, and having originally 51 Members, in 2024 the United Nations has 193 Member States; see [www.un.org/en/about-us](http://www.un.org/en/about-us)

<sup>8</sup> Indicatively, see Lizzy Davies, 'France responsible for sending Jews to concentration camps, says court', *The Guardian*, 17 February 2009, [www.theguardian.com/world/2009/feb/17/france-admits-deporting-jews](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/feb/17/france-admits-deporting-jews)

Palestine in turn. The term ‘solidarity’ prevents us from seeing the responsibility that citizens of the West have not only to disrupt the genocide now but also to upend the genocidal regime more broadly.

Unlearning Western onto-epistemology also requires questioning the Western paring of ‘self-determination’ and the nation-state that was imposed as the unavoidable horizon of liberation and decolonisation, and involved, as in the case of Palestine/Israel, the imposition of technologies of borders, partition, population transfer, army and police. This genocide against Palestinians is the essence of this regime, and we should be grateful to South Africa for putting it straight that the genocide didn’t start on 7th October 2023, but in 1948. It is not only solidarity with the suffering of Palestinians that is expected from the world, but also the putting-straight of the history of crimes. In doing so, we pave the way for decolonisation and for the attendance to, and repair of, all these crimes perpetrated against Palestine, a place that did not have to be destroyed, and in which, before being invaded by European onto-epistemological imperial violence, multiple different groups lived together, not haunted by this poisonous notion of self-determination, scripted to tear people apart from other groups.

**AD** As reported in the press, South Africa’s ‘case [wherein Israel is accused of genocide] opens in The Hague with judges shown pictures and video as evidence of alleged genocide’.<sup>9</sup> Such indexical images, with their alleged power to function as evidence, have also entered the public sphere through social media. Your article in the *Boston Review* (in December 2023), which offered a very nuanced analysis of how images can be read in relation to genocide as indexical of a long-term violence (and so no single image can ‘show’ it), was titled ‘Seeing Genocide’.<sup>10</sup> I have two questions in relation to this seeing: first, why is indexicality never enough for such seeing? And second, what other conditions must exist to permit the indexical image to function as a social document?

**AAA** Photographs are fragments, and, in the same way that words alone are never enough for us to make sense of the world, they, too, are never enough. This is not to suggest that photographs are not important or that they do not function as social documents. On the contrary, their social function is exactly what doesn’t allow anyone of us to appropriate them and determine their meaning once and for all, given that their meaning does not exist outside of their social life. In other words, photographs do not ‘contain’ their meaning. As for the beginning of your question, allow me to make a minor correction. Unlike the state of Israel, which trades in images of the victims of 7 October 2023, and abuses the victims and their

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<sup>9</sup> See Haroon Siddique, ‘Israel shows “chilling” intent to commit genocide in Gaza, South Africa tells UN court’, *The Guardian*, 11 January 2024 [www.theguardian.com/law/2024/jan/11/south-africa-accuses-israel-of-genocide-gaza-the-hague-international-court-of-justice](http://www.theguardian.com/law/2024/jan/11/south-africa-accuses-israel-of-genocide-gaza-the-hague-international-court-of-justice)

<sup>10</sup> Ariella Aïsha Azoulay, ‘Seeing Genocide’, *Boston Review*, 8 December 2023 [www.bostonreview.net/articles/seeing-genocide](http://www.bostonreview.net/articles/seeing-genocide)

families' pain and suffering, the South African team refrained from showing publicly images of violence inscribed in the bodies of the victims of Israel's genocide. The act of refraining from using photographs in this or that way doesn't negate the social function of photographs. On the contrary, this act is part of what people do with photographs of violence: ask questions about the event and the conditions under which they were taken, express concern about the meaning of their circulation and the proper way to circulate and recirculate them, and raise questions about who should share them, when, how many times, and for what purpose, etc. Showing or seeing photographs are only two gestures among many others, and what one sees in a photograph cannot be reproduced automatically as if there existed within it a single or innate meaning.

**AD** My second question concerning this seeing is that it occurs in a visual culture that presumably turns whatever it touches into the proverbial spectacle. As Guy Debord put it over half a century ago, this visual order 'is not a collection of images, but a social relation among people, mediated by images'.<sup>11</sup> Yet is not this seeing, this watching, the least (not the most) we can do in the case of Gaza? Isn't there a moral obligation to look, to not avert our eyes, despite the threat of the spectacle; to not say, as some do, 'oh I cannot bear to look at this horror' or 'I refuse to consume these images'? In other words, are there perhaps cracks in the condition of the spectacle?

**AAA** Unlike hegemonic narratives of photography, which emerge out of imperial and colonial regimes of violence that also seek to monopolise the meaning of a moral stance, the moral obligation in time of genocide is not to treat one's looking at images of horror as a test of their morality. I'm not saying that looking is not important, but it is not always necessary in order to recognise that a genocide is unfolding and that one should join the forces struggling to stop it. If, after a few days of the genocidal violence against Palestinians – which includes relentless killing and maiming, destruction of vital infrastructure and neighbourhoods, forced displacement, and more – one doesn't understand that Israel is perpetrating a genocide (crimes against humanity or ethnic cleansing), witnessing another photograph of violence inscribed in the body of the victim will not help.

Genocide is a concept we use to describe what a regime does against a certain group; it is a notion that helps us make sense of a certain campaign of extreme violence, which often includes the elimination of narratives about the campaign other than the one that justifies it and its urgency. But genocide is not a visible object. Seeing genocide is not about looking at photographs, no matter the number; it is about committing oneself not to be blinded by the genocidal regime and acknowledging that a genocide is unfolding, despite all the mechanisms put in place to make one believe it is not. Photographs are only one source of information out

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<sup>11</sup> Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, Ken Knabb, trans, Bureau of Public Secrets, Berkeley, California, 2014 [1967], p 2

of a variety of sources and formations of knowledge required for the nomination and acknowledgment charge of a genocide. After all, in the case of Gaza, there is no argument about the facts of which this genocide consists – the killing, the destruction, the decades of humanitarian crisis, the starvation, etc; the argument only concerns their meaning, causes and justification. Meaning and causes are not to be found in images. The moral obligation, thus, *is not to look at images but rather to refuse the narratives provided by those who perpetrate the genocide about the meanings of the actions of their violence*; it is, furthermore, to account for the patterns of genocidal violence that have been waged across a longer durée than what the present-day perpetrators impose as the temporal marker justifying their violence on 7 October 2023.

*The moral obligation is not to look at images but rather to look for Palestinian sources of information within them* (such images are not necessarily images of atrocity). Such information is being produced despite the extreme violence perpetrated against Palestinian journalists and media workers, the sabotaging of their work through internet blackouts and power shortages, the ban on the entry of international journalists into Gaza, and the intimidation and terror waged against anyone who challenges and counters the perpetrators' narratives. I am also not a fan of the discourse of the condition of spectacle, since it is out of these kinds of insights and theoretical frameworks that we were taught to think about images as operating in a realm apart from social life. It is a result of these sorts of theoretical understandings of visual culture that we endow the act of looking with a moral value, forgetting that what is reified is the morality of members of colonising societies and not the morality of the colonised, the racialised, the terrorised, the oppressed. *If the colonial injunction of morality is to look, the anti-colonial one is to look for the truth*. One must refuse to surrender to the perpetrators' terms, narratives and meanings, even when they are imposed through intimidation and terror, and to adhere to the truth, articulate it, inscribe it with or without images and together with racialised victims.

**AD** Following on the previous questions, could we perhaps speak of a dual and contradictory power of photography? As you have pointed out in your work – your chapter in the volume *Capitalism and the Camera* would be an example<sup>12</sup> – photography was not an 'after' to the edifice of this imperialism but was rather co-extensive with it, being a constitutive part of imperialist violence. It is with this in mind that 1492 is proposed as photography's start date – long before the technology was invented in the nineteenth century. Yet, on the other hand, can photography not be activated as the memory of imperialist destruction? Settler colonialism and imperialism strive for an eradication from history of everything that might indicate the existence of a prior world. Arguably, photography can destabilise the completeness of this erasure, even if the meaning of surviving indexical images can be debated in societies of antagonisms, however

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<sup>12</sup> Ariella Aïsha Azoulay, 'Toward the Abolition of Photography's Imperial Rights', in Kevin Coleman and Daniel James, eds, *Capitalism and the Camera: Essays on Photography and Extraction*, Verso, London, 2021; see also Ariella Aïsha Azoulay, *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism*, Verso, London, 2019

unequal the involved parties are. That is, the fight over the interpretation of such images, and even their enclosure in the archives of the powerful, does not preclude that they can be activated in struggles against oppression. How do we deal with this (hypothetical or at least contextual) contradictory power of photography – its historical and ongoing co-extensiveness with imperialism and its potential to generate militant memory against imperialism?

**AAA** I would not describe this as a contradictory power. These are two different registers. One is that of photography as a technology of extraction, which operates in tandem with other imperial technologies and enabled the West to accumulate an incredible amount of visual wealth. The second is that of the political ontology of photography, which makes photographs irreducible to the actions and intentions of the operators (the photographers) holding the means of its production, or those who became the owners of those images. Thus, what is inscribed in the photograph is not the meaning assigned to it by its maker, but the plurality of the event of photography itself, which can be reconstructed through it in unpredictable ways by the many who view it. This is why photographs can assist us in destabilising certain histories, but we should not forget that photographs need us in order to do this work just as much we need them. This is why I'm speaking about the *political ontology of photography* and not about the ontology of the photograph, the image itself and for itself.

The colonial tension between these two registers manifests in the paradox that photographs are needed to destabilise narratives that emerged as a result of primitive accumulation performed by photography itself. However, the situation in Gaza inverses this scheme in the sense that it is the victims now who produce a huge number of photographs – not under the modality of extraction but under one of survival and survivance. It is out of this wealth of photographs that the narrative of the genocide is being told, and those who are trying to destabilise this narrative of the genocide are in fact its perpetrators. It is exactly a kind of anti-colonial power that Palestinians generate as they come together to help each other in conjuring this narrative from out of the rubble. Their convoys are journalists, photojournalists and media workers who act as prophetic figures who will not be silenced, despite all efforts to silence and kill them – despite the fact that Israel has already killed more than one hundred of them, at a rate of approximately one journalist per day, many of whom were killed with their families.<sup>13</sup> The propagation of the persona of the media workers with their blue protective gear and

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<sup>13</sup> As long as the genocide continues, the numbers of victims published are conservative estimates (they do not count missing people, and people still under rubble). On 13 December 2023, the Reliefweb OCHA Services counted 94 journalists ('Ninety-four journalists killed in 2023, says IFJ' <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/ninety-four-journalists-killed-2023-says-ifj>); at the end of January 2024, reporters on social media indicate more than 125. On 6 February 2024, the UN reported that 'over 122 journalists' were killed in Gaza since October 7, 2023, and that '[d]ozens of Palestinian journalists have been detained by Israeli forces in Gaza and the West Bank, where harassment, intimidation and attacks on journalists have increased since the 7 October attacks'. See United Nations, 'GAZA: UN experts condemn killing and silencing of journalists', 6 February 2024, <https://unric.org/en/gaza-un-experts-condemn-killing-and-silencing-of-journalists>



helmets – a persona which children also impersonate and tout as a model for ‘being with others’ – is not part of an attempt to present an idiosyncratic image or to introduce a crack in imperial narratives; rather, it is the figure out of which truth appears.



From Ghalia Hamad's Instagram account, 6 December 2023: 'A thousand tears in the eyes and a pang... we should have gathered in our destroyed homes instead of sitting and watching the helplessness of children passing by us in dozens.'

Thus, contrary to the Israeli expectations that through the killing they will achieve the end of journalism in Gaza, the profession spreads like different professions used to spread in precolonial guild formations, as older or experienced (even if only a few days of experience) members would teach the young in order to maintain and secure a communal practice. So, too, these prophet-journalists in Gaza mutually train each other in a horizontal and friendly way, not around principles of expertise which serve colonial powers but through the shared anti-colonial premises of not letting the truth of this genocide disappear. These Palestinian journalists and photojournalists care to tell their stories, and, at the same time, they also tell the story of the Israelis and the West as relentless perpetrators.

Will the Israelis, who were drawn into this role of mercenaries of the West against Arabs and Islam and were poisoned with self-determination in the form of a nation-state against others rather than a process of healing after the Holocaust, abscond from this poisonous colonial role? Will they acknowledge that instead of attending to them after the Holocaust and allowing them to mourn, recover and heal, Europe nominated the Euro-Zionists as their representatives, drawing them into this scheme where they would become perpetrators of genocide? Will they



1 February 2024: many Palestinian journalists and photojournalists in the crowd are making sure the world will know that Israel not only murdered these Palestinians, it had stolen their bodies, and returned them, some of them dismembered, with no explanations for when and how they were stolen, information which could have helped in giving them names rather than numbers and a proper burial. Creating divisions along this collective grave, mourning and praying together, Palestinians are resisting the Israeli campaign to turn Gaza into a mass grave. (Images from the 'lovinpalestine' Instagram account)

stop denying that they are the colonisers in a colonial project and acknowledge what they are doing to Palestinians, who were never their enemies?

The blue gear not only refuses to disappear, but in it materialises the resilience and power of Palestinians. Such power is being activated in multiple exchanges between and among those media workers. They act as a talisman, signalling not only a group that is stronger than its individual members but one of messengers of anti-colonial truth that will not be extinguished.



**AD** In speaking about the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza, should we perhaps be considering a new humanism as a vital anti-imperialist imperative? The people in Gaza demand to be treated as human beings. The refugees arriving at Greek shores, the survivors of hellish voyages of displacement only to find themselves in new hells, also ask to be treated as humans. At the same time, the term post-humanism dominates several intellectual projects, some of which are associated with the unsettling of Western epistemologies and Eurocentrism. Yet the oppressed do not cry out ‘treat me as a post-human’. How can we continue speaking about humanitarian catastrophes in an intellectual context that increasingly tends to identify humanism either with human supremacy over other species or with an idea suited to a



modernity past, before anticipated technologies that promise to make the idea of humanity obsolete? I mean, is not the world already prepped ideologically to disregard dehumanisation? Are we not losing the vocabulary through which we can refer to humanitarian catastrophes and human rights? If post-humanism ‘seeks to undermine the traditional boundaries between the human, the animal and the technological’, what can the response be to those who point to ‘human animals’ as legitimate targets for destruction by advanced military technologies?<sup>14</sup> Above all, how do we respond to those who claim agency by stating that they belong in humanity?

**AAA** I refuse to think within these progressive narratives which tell us that ‘we’ moved from one episteme to the next, and that ‘we’ are ‘losing the vocabulary’, etc. Firstly, because this ‘we’ is dubious. It presumes that people under different conditions have a shared corporal and discursive experience; secondly, the narratives presume that if some vocal thinkers decided that we moved forward, all the others agreed and renounced their other epistemologies and grievances; and thirdly, because these narratives endow more weight to what those in power say and do than they do to the opposing voices, which have historically been silenced, denied the right to speak, and were defined by the institutions that were imposed on them as part of the rule of law. Attending to the discourse about Palestine since the beginning of the genocide – the polysemic choir of Palestinian voices, the voices of anti-Zionist Jews and other co-strugglers against centuries of imperial onto-epistemological violence – is quite extraordinary, and it feels like millions around the world are not losing their tongue but rather regaining the power and confidence to call out the lies they are told by their governments. In this sense, while it is symptomatic of the imperial nature of the ICJ [International Court of Justice] that it failed to issue the right order – to stop the violence (which, in any case, Israel didn’t plan to obey, as its leaders said openly)<sup>15</sup> – the narrative presented by the South African team, as well as the court decision, was a glorious moment whereby Zionist propaganda, which for decades was sustained by Western powers, was broken publicly, disrupting a significant echo chamber. To attend to this proliferation of discourse about Palestine, which seeks to bring justice to the seventy-five years of Nakba, we must decentre academic polemics that unfold along a progressive line and replace them with centuries-long accounts of struggles between colonial and anti-colonial onto-epistemologies.

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<sup>14</sup> The above description of post-humanism is drawn from Jay David Bolter, ‘Posthumanism’ (2016), *Wiley Online Library*, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118766804.wbiect220>; the Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant used the phrase ‘we are fighting human animals’ on 9 October 2023, in announcing the Israeli government’s enactment of their military response ‘following a surprise attack by Hamas on Israel’ on October 7, see ‘Israeli defence minister orders “complete seige” on Gaza’, *Al Jazeera NewsFeed*, 9 October 2023 [www.aljazeera.com/program/newsfeed/2023/10/9/israeli-defence-minister-orders-complete-siege-on-gaza](http://www.aljazeera.com/program/newsfeed/2023/10/9/israeli-defence-minister-orders-complete-siege-on-gaza)

<sup>15</sup> Neri Zilber, ‘Netanyahu says “nobody” will top Israel including Hague court’, *Financial Times*, 14 January 2024, <https://www.ft.com/content/77aaf251-df7d-44f8-bf4f-96acff64b6dd>

**AD** You have referred to the possibility of a future study examining the current betrayal of the Palestinians by historians and intellectuals. Let me quote you at length:

The current totalitarian regime of speech orchestrated by Israel, which turns truth into ‘terrorist content’ and looks for or reproduces it into a criminal form of ‘consumption’, didn’t emerge yesterday. Global imperial mechanisms were already in place to silence, distort, censure, intimidate, and punish those who countered the true meaning of the regime that was imposed in Palestine. It was under this regime that Palestinians were made disposable and deported to concentration camps called refugee camps, where life was impacted by humanitarian crisis and slow death, and simultaneously Israeli citizenship was shaped to prevent their return and redress, thus beckoning the militarization of all aspects of Israeli life. The way historians and other intellectuals globally betrayed Palestinians by complying with the triumphal narrative of this regime’s emergence in 1948 is still to be studied.<sup>16</sup>

But doesn’t the existence of such a future study presuppose an epistemological breakthrough through which the idea of ‘truth’ would be restored against the dominance of positionality, which reigns supreme since the consolidation of postmodernism in the late twentieth century? Is there hope for such a restoration in the societies of post-truth and the alt right (where things magically turn into their opposites, such as who perpetrates genocide on whom), and where so-called civil society has been overtaken by lobbyists?

**AAA** I reject also the term of postmodernism, or ‘societies of post-truth’, for similar reasons as I explained in my previous answer. One has to build on a certain account of scholarship from which the anti-colonial voices, many of which are not necessarily academic, are removed in order to achieve ‘an epistemological breakthrough’. However, the anti-colonial voices that could have stood for such an epistemological breakthrough were always there. This is the idea behind my articulation of potential history as a concept and an anti-colonial tool. Those who were dispossessed by the West didn’t align with the idea of post-truth. Palestinian refugees who refuse to forget Palestine not only refuse to renounce the truth, but they also expect everyone to recognise it; and from their perseverance for seventy-five years, their refusal to forget what was taken from them and to move on, they gifted the world with the hope of justice, with the belief that imperial violence should not only be opposed but reversed.

**AD** How do you see the future of decoloniality after Gaza’s present?

**AAA** The future of Gaza is in its past, in the recovery of all the pre-state forms of life that the Euro-Zionist colonial project buried but are not gone.

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<sup>16</sup> Ariella Azoulay, *Boston Review*, op cit

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