

## **In a World of Glass Teardrops, the Bombing Never Stops**

Allen Feldman

When the planes disappear, the white, white doves  
Fly off and wash the cheeks of heaven  
With unbound wings taking radiance back again, taking possession  
Of the ether and of play. Higher, higher still, the white, white doves  
Fly off. Ah, if only the sky  
Were real [a man passing between two bombs said to me].  
— Mahmoud Darwish, “Under Siege”

The settler's work is to make even dreams of liberty  
impossible for the native. The native's work is to imagine  
all possible methods for destroying the settler. On the  
logical plane, the Manicheism of the settler produces a  
Manicheism of the native. To the theory of the "absolute  
evil of the native" the theory of the "absolute evil of the  
settler" replies.

— Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*

### **Césaire and the Holocaust: The Exemplary Victim and its Other**

Many of us are stricken with shock, dismay, utter disbelief, and disempowered frustration as American and European government leaders, global media, and humanitarian institutions appear sequentially warmongering, morally paralytic, and incoherently obtuse (such as Biden’s last press conference in Jerusalem) when confronted with the collective punishment inflicted on Palestinians and the new Nakba by Israel. The promise of Kantian universal peace propagated by neoliberal democracies and faux humanitarian institutions like

the UN's Security Council has dramatically imploded in the face of an utterly transparent, unapologetic, and globally televised genocide. The laws of war, the norms of "a rule bound international order"—articulated as *jus in bello* or justice in war—have all been definitively consigned to the trash heap of history by the very politicians who are expected to protect these principles. At the top of this jettisoned heap of humanitarian facades is the brazen, racist hypocrisy that sacralizes white-European Ukrainians while remanding Palestinians to Israeli aerial incineration fueled by white phosphorous ammunition. The current Euro-American pietism surrounding the invasion and occupation of the Ukraine now culminates in sacrificing the populations of Gaza and the West Bank as disposable forms of life. This dialectic confirms the Martinican poet and politician Aimé Césaire's dissection of the neocolonial racism encrypted within Eurocentric condemnation of WWII genocide:

And they wait, and they hope; and they hide the truth from themselves, that it is barbarism, the supreme barbarism, the crowning barbarism that sums up all the daily barbarisms; that it is Nazism, yes, but that before they were its victims, they were its accomplices; that they tolerated that Nazism before it was inflicted on them, that they absolved it, shut their eyes to it, legitimized it, because, until then, it had been applied only to non-European peoples... what (they) cannot forgive Hitler for is not the crime in itself, the crime against man, it is not the humiliation of man as such, it is the crime against the white man, the humiliation of the white man, and the fact that he applied to Europe colonialist procedures which until then had been reserved exclusively for the Arabs of Algeria, the "coolies" of India, and the "niggers" of Africa.<sup>1</sup>

Following Césaire, consider that in the mid to late 19th century, in fulfillment of the colonial prophecy of "Manifest Destiny" that projected the American continent as a promised land, First Nations were forced by an occupying army onto "reservations" where they were subjected to malnutrition, disease, overcrowding, enforced confinement, and de-culturalizing white schools and missionaries who preached that as "nations" they did not exist. Whatever treaties they signed with the colonizers were systematically broken as if to confirm their lack of nationhood as well as to expropriate more of their land for white exploitation and settlement. The civil war era American Lieber Code on the laws of war, viewed as a major source for contemporary international codes of warfare, disqualified Native Americans from their protection:

The Indians were not, like Spanish or Confederate *guerrilleros*, temporarily, and misguidedly, descending into savagery; they really were "savages", constitutionally and irredeemably. With Indians no compromises were possible, at least not regarding matters of *jus in bello*.<sup>2</sup>

From time to time, these captive and occupied peoples broke out of the reservation-carceral. They raided white settlements occupying the expropriated land these nations once lived upon and associated with their formative religious-cultural-economic practices and beliefs.

The escapees witnessed their sacred sites being desecrated by extractionist economies—mining, agrobusiness, and the resulting species extinction. In retaliation they burned settlers' houses and towns and killed the occupants with the modern machinic weapons that were initially used by the colonizers to decimate and subjugate them. The reservation escapees took settler hostages; some were killed, some enslaved, some raped, and others traded back to their relations. In turn the “tribal” groups off and on the reserves were subjugated to higher intensities of collective punishment than they had previously experienced. Frantz Fanon, using lessons learned from his psychoanalytic treatment of colonized Algerians, viewed the violent insurgencies of the colonized in spatial terms as a cathartic release from imprisoning and segregating topographies:

The native is a being hemmed in; apartheid is simply one form of the division into compartments of the colonial world. The first thing which the native learns is to stay in his place, and not to go beyond certain limits. This is why the dreams of the native are always of muscular prowess; his dreams are of action and of aggression. I dream I am jumping, swimming, running, climbing; I dream that I burst out laughing, that I span a river in one stride, or that I am followed by a flood of motorcars which never catch up with me. During the period of colonization, the native never stops.<sup>3</sup>

Informed by historical distance, diverse struggles for civil and human rights, and the cinematic revisionism of the western frontier narrative, a significant sector of American public culture does not consider Native Americans to be mindless, fanatical, robotic, irrational “terrorists” because they resisted genocidal colonial displacement with the only means at their disposal. These struggles are credited with a certain historical rationality and humanity denied another reservation population—Palestinians. Currently, and for decades previously, in the West Bank and Gaza the inevitable and dehumanizing trajectory and tragedy of settler colonialism, land expropriation, resource extraction, reservation confinement, and the release of cathartic violence against a superior war machine is being re-enacted. However, the recent historical generosity and agency given to the resistance and insurgency of First Nations, now demographically reduced by genocide, is not afforded to Palestinians. Confronted with the levelling bombardment of Gaza will Americans and their government emulate and replicate the white majority of the 19th century colonial era who believed the “only good Indian is a dead Indian?”

Native Americans have recently been rescripted into what Palestinian scholar and human rights lawyer Noura Erakat calls the “perfect victim.”<sup>4</sup> The question can be asked whether the pathos of this “perfect victim” regarding Native American insurgency points to a symbiosis between historically distanced empathy and the genocidal decimation of First Nations populations that the Palestinians will also undergo if the current Nakba proceeds. Israeli phobias concerning escalating birth rates of Arab citizens inside Israel appear to anticipate this pattern. In Gaza, however, population decimation is equivalent to pacification. Not to belittle their own devastating invasion and occupation, the Ukrainians have been currently selected as the perfect victim of the moment by the United States, NATO, and the

EU in an effort to revisit and replay unresolved cold war hangovers. Such victim exemplification always requires a more or less tacit synchronic and symbiotic relation to a non-exemplary victim who is denied the prestige of Ukrainian historical innocence as Césaire would have predicted. Professor Erakat writes:

Palestinians have been blamed for their own suffering for democratically electing Hamas to lead the Palestinian Authority in 2006...Fixating on Palestinians as imperfect victims is the absolution of, and complicity with, Israel's colonial domination...This is only compounded by an abject failure to uplift and celebrate the thousands of Palestinians who have attempted to resist Israel's cruel domination through non-violent protest. These include the 40,000 Palestinians who, weekly, participated in the Great March of Return in 2018 demanding their right to return to the homeland they were expelled from and the end of the siege, only to be shot down like birds by Israeli snipers. It includes the thousands of Palestinians and their allies globally who have engaged in boycott, divestment, and sanctions campaigns aimed at isolating Israel and incapacitating its lethal threat. It includes the civilian flotillas that attempted to break the naval blockade of Gaza as well as the multiple legal challenges within national courts, the International Court of Justice, and now the International Criminal Court. These efforts have not only been marginalized by Western governments; they have been demonized and smeared...The message to Palestinians is not that they must resist more peacefully but that they cannot resist Israeli occupation and aggression at all.<sup>5</sup>

Exemplary victimage at the expense of the suffering of another deemed to be nonexemplary encapsulates history in frozen and binding categories by which we are all held captive. The accusation of crimes against humanity must conscript an exemplary victim who is a testament to the humanity of human beings, which is to testify “to universality, to responsibility for universality.”<sup>6</sup> This post-genocide claim to ethical universality in the name of a universal white humanity by Europe and the USA enraged Césaire—for Eurocentric genocide condemnation and commemoration implicitly barred the nonwhite colonized of the global south from the unattainable prestige of universal humanity, thereby foreclosing an equivalent global repudiation of their colonial genocide and enslavement. Not coincidentally we have recently witnessed attempts to rehabilitate colonialism and slavocracy by scholars and politicians in the United States and United Kingdom as inherently beneficial to the colonized and the enslaved, a claim that no would dare make in reference to Jews, Roma and other concentration camp victims.

The moral command to identify with an exemplary victim coincides with an ethical bifurcation; this scission, according to Reiner Schürmann, is “the decisive cut to promote a common noun capable of laying down the law.”<sup>7</sup> That noun is not Palestine—for the international law of “the right to protect” readily and rapidly applied to Ukrainians and enforced with NATO military aid has never been assigned to Palestinians. They have been

long been overshadowed, rendered invisible and insensible—as have other casualties of settler colonialism—by the sacralized exemplar of European Holocaust victimage and more recently by the cold war anachronisms of NATO and the EU that have chosen Ukrainians as their “perfect victim.”

The Other of the exemplified victim is not the assailant who is coupled with and dialectically defines the exemplar, but rather Edward Said’s “victim of the victim.”<sup>8</sup> The superlative victim can be sustained only by the denial of a diffracted Other; for Said, Palestinians after the Nakba were the deniable victims of undeniable Jewish victimage in the WWII Holocaust. The disposable and defaced victim of the victim becomes the externalized cost of the production of the latter’s hypostatic exemplarity. The Palestinian victim of the victim is the dehistoricized, appositional, and unrepeatable alter who is barred from exemplification as an inadmissible historical contaminant, that is as Erakat’s imperfect victim and Cesaire’s non-white colonial abject. It is at this site of mis-encounter with historical reality that Said’s victim of the victim can be encountered as an infra-political and interspatial deportee, an entity who is intrinsic to the historical Real, but who cannot be historically represented without putting existing institutionalized exemplarities into crisis. Derrida writes: “In each case the structure of exemplarity (single or multiple) is unique thereby prescribing a different affect. And in each example it remains to be decided what example is to be made of the example: is it to be dropped as *extrinsic excrement* or retained as intrinsic ideality?”<sup>9</sup>

### **The Use and Abuse of History: Genocidal Anesthesia**

The myopic response of Euro-American political leaders and the American and European mass media to the October 7<sup>th</sup> Hamas attack and the consequent sociocide of the population of Gaza is powerfully enabled by a mobile archive of anachronistic and pre-conditioned Pavlovian trauma-tropes that shut down any evidence-based, historically contextualized, and humanitarian insight. Therefore, immediately after the Hamas operation, Netanyahu went on air claiming “this is Israel’s 9/11,” thereby precipitating anticipatory Pavlovian drooling from Biden, Blinken, and the sycophantic American mass media by resurrecting for the American public the xenophobia and the electoral caché of a renewed “war on terror”—a “regime change” that resulted in the unjustified destruction of Iraq, a nation-state that had nothing to do with the attack on the WTC. Netanyahu, in his mythmaking, neglected to relate that the post-9/11 war on terror culminated in humiliating withdrawals from Iraq and Afghanistan by the American military.

When a Sky Network-Melbourne reporter inquired after the safety of hospitalized, incubated Palestinian babies and hospitalized, adult casualties in Gaza under the Israeli missile barrage, Naftali Bennett, former Israeli prime-minister, screamed at the reporter: “How dare you bring this up...have you no shame...we are fighting Nazis!” While Bennett tacitly justified the bombing of infant and casualty wards, the Israeli media and state had already disseminated unfounded propaganda of Israeli infants being decapitated by

Hamas—a fabricated calumny that echoed the “blood libel” myth that Medieval Christians used to persecute Jews, and which also resembled WWI-era fictive child killing and rape-related atrocity claims leveled against the Imperial German army by the British and American press in 1914. Other Israeli commentators and interviewees, echoing Bennett's "fighting Nazis," prophesized a "second Holocaust" positioning one Hamas surprise attack against occupation and apartheid as equivalent to and the prelude for the massive mega-military, scientific, and technological machinery mobilized by the Nazis for the total extermination of millions—including Jews, Roma, Gays, Communists, Slavs and the mentally and physically disabled.

To counter and contest this mobilization of anachronistic and inflated historical trauma-tropes requires reexamination of the prior ideologemes, technologies, and tactics of blockade, preemptive counterinsurgency, and occupation through which the Israeli state reproduces itself in the time and space of Gaza and the West Bank. The Israeli political elite and the currently embarrassed military hierarchy (caught napping by Hamas) are in the face-saving process of accelerating the next stage of colonial settlement, securitization, and repression that will create “new facts on the ground” (some of which has been unfolding in the vigilante war waged by emboldened Israeli settlers, armed by Itimar Ben Gvir, against Palestinians in Area C of the West Bank, as well as by the evictions in East Jerusalem). The demand for a mass Palestinian exodus, neutrally described as “sending” Palestinians from Northern Gaza and Gaza City to the south, escalates the existing IDF technique of reclassifying micro-topographies (sectors, villages, and individual homes) in the West Bank as “closed military zones.” Under this ruling, existing inhabitants are criminalized and evicted as trespassers or arrested or executed as “terrorists.” The closed military zone is the spatial technology of collective punishment. Under a current regime of enforced evacuation Gaza’s hospitals in the north and in Gaza City, where evacuation is logistically impossible, will be effectively treated as “closed military zones” in which medical staff, patients, and the sheltering displaced will be classified as trespassing “terrorists” thus legitimating the bombardment of medical infrastructure—a potential consequence that rescripts the two prior bombings of *Al Ahli Arab* Hospital in Gaza City as a rehearsal for full exodus to be followed by the military lockdown and subsequent resettlement of Gaza. Currently in Gaza, the conversion of humanitarian spaces of shelter, sanctuary, and medical treatment to “closed military zones”—such as the assaulted 12<sup>th</sup> century Greek-Orthodox church—no longer entails prior declarations by the IDF, but is effectuated and sealed through their bombardment as a mode of space-claiming.

It is an historical and analytical error to treat Israeli militarized state formation as a static edifice that periodically unleashes the dogs of war upon Gaza, East Jerusalem, and the West Bank. The occupation and sequential collective punishment of the people of Gaza for the acts of the armed few have become the necessary conditions of reproducing Israeli counterinsurgent governmentality in which theocratic-militarized state formation requires exclusionary surveillance, sieges, and occupations for its own self-definition, technocratic

evolution and financing, and internal hegemony over the Israeli body politic as a consenting adjunct of the military-theocratic complex. Consider the upsurge of well-armed settler vigilantes in the West Bank and general mob violence against rumored and actual war dissenters in Israel. The Israeli metaphysics of securitization are not focused on permanently eliminating security risks but on their managed perpetuation in a productive symbiosis with the hegemony of the theocratic-military complex. Exiling Gazans to the Sinai Desert will only result in the relocation of Hamas and Islamic Jihad bases of attacks, not their elimination. (Though it can entail the bombardment of Egyptian national territory.) As Agamben wrote: “In a word, discipline wants to produce order, while security wants to guide disorder.”<sup>10</sup>

The deployment of historical anachronisms that occlude Palestinian realities pertains to the ideogeme of “humanitarian windows and corridors” for the delivery of foreign aid. Beyond its undeniable public health necessity and actual limited efficacy, the “humanitarian corridor” concept is an inadequate and deadly surrogate for an immediate ceasefire and cessation of collective punishment. The palliative humanitarian corridor is deployed as a public relations tactic favored by the American state to deflect from the fact that they provision the military wherewithal for long-term Palestinian blockade, occupation, and invasion. No-fire humanitarian corridors that sustain a human minimalism for Gazans advance the political anesthesiology and ratio of the ration—the rationing of the pain and suffering of wartime and the simulacral quietude of faux miniaturized truce-events that ultimately dramatize Israel’s absolute domination over Palestinian time and space. For both the setting up of humanitarian corridors and the bombing of humanitarian corridors (once abruptly converted to closed military zones) are manifestations of Israeli sovereignty and their right to “self-offense,” that is the right to be without right in the waging of war. The bestowal of what Netanyahu called “quietude” during the 2014 bombardment of Gaza constitutes a strategic temporalization of terror where the contingent and momentary absence of a war event becomes a weapon of war. Historically, Israeli truces and temporary no-fire zones in Gaza dole out what Netanyahu terms “quietude” as death temporarily desisted and thus as death promised. Israeli humanitarian windows are strategically opened only to be loudly and abruptly shut and shattered. Thousands of ethnic Tamils in northeast Sri Lanka discovered this bitter lesson in 2009, when the rationed humanitarian corridor, a strip of beach designated by the Sri Lankan army as a no-fire zone, was converted into a free fire death trap once Red Cross refugee camps had been set up. Not coincidentally, it is no secret that the Sri Lankan military in 2009 were the recipients of technical support and advice from the IDF.<sup>11</sup>

The rationality of the ration lies at the core of genocidal logic when applied to restricted corridors of bestowed humanity and to the proportionality and measures ruling life and death calculated by the ratio of population density to launched ordnance valorized by the IDF as the “humanitarian” “precision bombing” of Gaza in 2014. The rationing of human minimalism in Gaza has long been institutionalized by the Israeli blockade, which

regulates the trickle of food calories (calculated at 2,000 calories a day per person), diesel oil for electrical power and water pumps, medical supplies and technology, and other essential services and goods into the Strip. This exercise defines and redefines the lowest thresholds of viable humanity, which, like the Israeli-enabled humanitarian corridors for foreign aid delivery, administer dosages of existential minimalism to the Palestinians who are repeatedly described as “sub-human.” Humanitarian corridors are in essence the rationing of privation (not its abolition) as either proportionate or disproportionate by the Israelis who reciprocally calculate the slippage of the former into the latter through a facile political logic. Rationing proportionality and disproportionality and their indifference is an economic logic and targeting mechanism that extends the state’s monopoly of violence. The humanitarian corridor in Palestine is permitted by the Israelis as an instrument of war, not as a humanitarian concession. The institution of acceptable levels of violence indexes the ever-present possibility of the unacceptable use of force, which invariably signals the capacity and competency to actualize the latter: both postures are meant to demonstrate consummate technical control. Blockades, sieges, and humanitarian rationing are all interconnected technologies for the doling out of a provisional, impermanent, and retractable humanity.

### **Firing Trauma-Tropes**

A cherry-picked, curated media archive of legitimate historical tragedy has been falsified, weaponized, and anachronistically misapplied against the existential reality of the Palestinian people, effectively shutting them up and out. Avital Ronell once punned that when going to war we must “support our ‘tropes.’”<sup>12</sup> And the trauma-tropology being superimposed on existing Palestinian conditions is meant to insure that the elimination of Gazans under the punitive plagues of missile strikes, bone-burning white phosphorus ammunition, and enforced exodus will be passed over as an excusable use of force. The need to secure war-justifying tropes is why online speech and text critical of the war on Gaza is being systematically surveilled and doxxed by the supporters of the collective punishment of Gaza. They are obsessed with legislating, micro-monitoring, and preempting the terms of the debate rather than engaging in open debate themselves. Consistent with a bunkered theocracy, this new inquisition seeks to bunker, sacralize, and maintain unscathed the approved vocabulary and logic of the occupation by policing and punishing what they view as the “heretical” lexicons many critics are working with to make historical and humanitarian sense of what is unfolding in Gaza. They treat these deviating missives as toxic missiles and deploy an “Iron Dome” of censorial stigma and threat fueled and detonated by the radioactive epithet of antisemitism to deter their delivery. The inquisitors fear open-ended and historically informed discourse and use fear-mongering accusations of Nazis in the cupboard and under the bed and ritualistic Holocaust incantations, to excommunicate imputed pro-Palestinian or antiwar interlocutors and to punish them with blacklists. Orwellian Newspeak and thought-control in reference to Palestine is currently endorsed and recirculated by Western politicians and media as Israel’s absolutist right to lexical self-



defense—the sovereign right to institutionalize and normalize a particular vocabulary and historical grammar that narratively sanitizes and morally immunizes occupation and ethnic cleansing while criminalizing speakers of other political and historical dialects. With the complicity of the Euro-American mass media this settler-colonial Newspeak will guarantee that the imminent disappearance of the Palestinian people will be casually treated as their own fault and well-deserved fate. This misuse and abuse of history instigates genocidal hysteria in a global public culture in order to impose genocidal anesthesia upon Palestinians. Global anesthesia installs a pre-programmed collective incapacity to witness, acknowledge, and pronounce the pain and deaths of the colonized Other—a shibboleth initially identified by Aimé Césaire. Hannah Arendt predicted this dire eventuality: “It is quite conceivable, and even within the realm of practical political possibilities, that one fine day a highly organized and mechanized humanity will conclude quite democratically—namely by majority decision—that for humanity as a whole it would be better to liquidate certain parts thereof.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Aime Cesaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. Joan Pinkham. (New York: New York Monthly Review Press, 1972), 37.

<sup>2</sup> Erik Ringmar, “Francis Lieber, Terrorism, and the American Way of War,” *Perspectives on Terrorism* 3, no. 4 (December 2009): 52-60.

<sup>3</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1965), 52.

<sup>4</sup> Such empathic generosity does not extend to contemporary and overlooked reservation conditions of chronic unemployment, alcohol abuse, domestic violence and the disproportionate disappearances of Native American women that are rarely investigated.

<sup>5</sup> Noura Erakat, “The Violence of Demanding Perfect Victims”, *Jadaliyya*, October 10, 2023, <https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/45383>.

<sup>6</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Questioning Judaism: Interviews by Jacques Derrida*, ed. Elizabeth Weber (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), 41.

<sup>7</sup> Reiner Schürmann, *Broken Hegemonies*, trans. Reginald Lilly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 622.

<sup>8</sup> Edward Said, "Zionism from the Standpoint of Its Victims," *Social Text* 1 (Winter 1979): 7, 58-82; *The Politics of Dispossession: The Struggle for Palestinian Self-*

*Determination, 1969-1994* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 168.

<sup>9</sup> Jacques Derrida, "The Parergon," trans. Craig Owens, *October* 9 (Summer 1979): 15. (emphasis mine).

<sup>10</sup> Giorgio Agamben, "Security and Terror," *Theory and Event* 5, no.3 (2002): 1.

<sup>11</sup> Etay Mack, "Israeli complicity in Sri Lanka war crimes must be investigated," *Al Jazeera*, June 27, 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2023/6/27/israeli-complicity-in-sri-lanka-war-crimes-must-be-investigated>.

<sup>12</sup> Avital Ronell, "Support Our Tropes: Reading Desert Storm," in *Rhetorical Republic:*

*Governing Representations in American Politics*, ed. Frederick M. Dolan and

Thomas L. Dumm (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993), 13-37.

<sup>13</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1979), 299.