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A Manifest Evil? On Palestine, Judgement, and Justice

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In this essay, I reflect on the problem of moral judgement with respect to the horrors we have been witnessing in Palestine, especially since October 2023. I offer these reflections primarily through philosophical comparison, advancing a complementary reading of anthropologist David Scott's treatment of the evil of New World slavery and Hannah Arendt's considerations on moral responsibility during the Holocaust. In particular, I think with two provocative texts, namely, Scott's insightful book from 2024, *Irreparable Evil: An Essay on Moral and Reparatory History* and Arendt's classical essay from 1964, "Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship,"¹ to raise questions about judgement, justice, and responsibility in relation to Palestine. I present these thoughts in a particular historical conjuncture, a conjuncture I do not hesitate to judge as genocidal when treating the very problem of moral judgement. While well-publicized reports by Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and the UN Special Rapporteur for the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Francesca Albanese, have already designated – legally speaking – what is unfolding in Palestine as "genocide," I propose we treat this term not merely as a question of legal determination but also as a matter of political and moral judgement.

While the global order appears on the verge of total breakdown upon the destruction of Palestine by Israel and its allies,² as a matter of law, morality, and politics, then, I write during an unfolding genocide in Palestine that many scholars (including myself) had earlier warned about.³ Further, as both Lebanon and Iran are bombed by Israel, a wider war involving nuclear weapons looms over the Middle East and the world-at-large. How can we, internationalists in the academy and beyond, assume responsibility for this genocidal conjuncture?⁴ What is required to correct, reform, or abolish – as the

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¹ David Scott, *Irreparable Evil: An Essay on Moral and Reparatory History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2024) and Hannah Arendt, "Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship," in *Responsibility and Judgment*, ed. Jerome Kohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2003), 17–48.

² On the destruction of Palestine and the collapse of the global order, see the essay by Moustafa Bayoumi, "The Destruction of Palestine is Breaking the World," *The Guardian*, 6 July 2025.

³ "On 15 October 2023, over 800 scholars and practitioners of international law, conflict studies and genocide studies signed a public statement warning of the possibility of genocide being perpetrated by Israeli forces against Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. Signatories include prominent Holocaust and genocide studies scholars, as well as many international law and TWAIL [Third World Approaches to International Law] scholars." The text of this statement and the list of signatures can be accessed through *Third World Approaches to International Law Review*. See also "Israel's War in Gaza Amounts to Genocide, Amnesty International Report Finds," *The Guardian*, 5 December 2024.

⁴ I discuss the problem and dilemmas of constituting this "we," arguably the question of internationalism, in Ayça Çubukçu, "On Left Internationalism," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 123, no. 3 (2024): 569–86.

meaning of redress might have it – what has led to our murderous present? I do not claim to have the answers. Nevertheless, when treating the problem of moral judgement, I aim to demonstrate how the *non-manifestness of manifest evil* once again presents itself as a pertinent and perplexing question to think and act through today.

The Non-Manifestness of Manifest Evil

In *Irreparable Evil*, his thought-provoking book on the moral and historical standing of New World slavery, David Scott deploys the distinction between *zoe* and *bios* that the philosopher Giorgio Agamben has introduced into contemporary political theory.⁵ When articulating the central concerns of his book, Scott inquires why we are “more attuned morally” to the violent destruction of the *zoe*, or the biological life of human lives, than we are to the violent destruction of *bios*, or human lifeworlds and forms of life (1). Turning his critical energies to the racist institution of New World slavery, Scott argues that the destruction of *bios*, of lifeworlds and forms of life across generations – over some three hundred years – deserves as much if not more moral and reparatory attention as the massive loss of *zoe*, or biological life, through New World slavery. “The evil of New World slavery,” he asserts, “does not inhere only in its overt physical violence against its subjugated victims; it inheres also – perhaps more profoundly – in the social-cultural-psychological devastation it inflicted upon the lives of the enslaved” (2).⁶

This pervasive devastation and the coercive imposition on the enslaved of a certain kind of life, “a traumatized, terrorized life; a foreshortened, distorted, and eminently disposable life,” were elementary dimensions, Scott observes, of the transformation of African men, women, and children into “ciphers of enslaved people – into chattel” (2). For the enslaved, such a brutal transformation “ruptured and disorganized inherited modes of living and replaced them with a new rigid and constrained regime of bondage” (2). It resulted in the destruction of the enslaved’s former forms of life and in their “loss of concepts,” concepts that could only make sense in particular lifeworlds that are now, Scott asserts, irreparably and irretrievably lost. “In my view,” he writes, “this is not only wrong but is wrong that is evil – the systematic destruction of a people’s ability to reproduce their way of life” (18). For Scott, then, the sort of violence that inheres in the annihilation of entire forms of life and lifeworlds underwrites the crucial question of his book: “If the deliberate mass destruction of human lives is a *manifest evil*, why should we not also think of the deliberate mass destruction of human lifeworlds and forms of life as evil,” he inquires (1, emphasis added).

While Scott is right to insist that the destruction of lifeworlds and forms of life across generations is as much an atrocity as the destruction of biological lives, it is crucial to inquire further: was the deliberate mass destruction of human lives a *manifest evil* then, during New World slavery? Is the deliberate mass destruction of human lives a *manifest evil* now, during the genocide unfolding before our eyes in Palestine? I am less concerned here with the legal aspects of genocide or the theological concept of evil (to which Scott dedicates extensive and careful thought) than in evil’s secular qualifier, *manifest*.

⁵ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

⁶ Why “perhaps more profoundly”? If no *bios* is possible without *zoe*, if *zoe* is a precondition for *bios*, by which measure can the loss of *bios* be considered more profound than the loss of *zoe*? I thank Talal Asad for formulating this question.

Placed before evil, the adjective “manifest” seeks to assert evil’s self-evidentiality. But the question remains: *manifest* for whom, when, why, under which conditions?

I raise these questions not to relativize the racist institution and devastating practice of New World slavery. Instead, I pause over the concept of “manifest evil” because morally and politically, if not also legally, it bears on the very possibility of justice and redress for human disposability and mass atrocity. How can justice be served if a situation is not seen as wrong, let alone evil, in the first place? I question the historical and contemporary *manifestness* of “manifest evil” to register the difficult fact that what was manifestly wrong – even evil – for some was morally justified for many others during New World slavery. In the present, this difficult moral fact arises once again as what is seen by many as manifestly evil in Israel’s devastating violence in Palestine is considered morally justified – even necessary – by others, whether they tacitly or statedly rely on principles of self-defence, racism, and even humanitarianism in their moral judgements.⁷ How can we imagine possibilities of justice and redress for the horrors unfolding in Palestine if this indeed is the case?

We may recall that in the aftermath of the Holocaust, Hannah Arendt – a complex and inspiring thinker for Scott as well as myself – was obsessed with the problem of what I will call the *non-manifestness of manifest evil*. As I have argued elsewhere, Arendt attempted to deal with this vexing problem of moral philosophy under the emblem of Nazi officer Adolf Eichmann’s “conscience,” ultimately resorting to frameworks of natural law to evaluate its moral, political, and legal significance.⁸ In fact, the unsettling standing of Eichmann’s conscience – that it prompted him to seize and not to cease his murderous duties – kept Arendt thinking for years about “the very mysterious nature of human judgement.”⁹ She wrote a series of essays on this theme, including “Some Questions of Moral Philosophy” and “Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship,” which I address in some detail below.¹⁰

Nevertheless, it is important to observe at the outset that Arendt’s extensive treatment of our faculty of moral judgement was consequent to one crucial admission the Israeli judges in her *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* were not, unlike Arendt, willing to make: “that an average, ‘normal’ person, neither feeble-minded nor indoctrinated nor cynical, could be perfectly incapable of telling right from wrong.”¹¹ I insist our genocidal present necessitates this unsettling admission for our own times if we are going to dare to address the question of justice with respect to Palestine. The *manifestness* of what David Scott calls “manifest evil,” the self-evidentiality, in another parlance, of a grave moral wrong as wrong, is not and perhaps has never been, obvious to all. This is why I begin where I begin.

⁷ Israel has announced plans for the construction of a “humanitarian city” in Gaza, which human rights experts have identified as the institution of a massive concentration camp for Palestinians. See Emma Graham-Harrison, “Israeli Plan for Forced Transfer of Gaza’s Population ‘a Blueprint for Crimes Against Humanity,’” *The Guardian*, 7 July 2025. For a detailed critique of Israel’s resort to the principle of self-defence in the legal and moral justification of its genocidal campaign in Palestine, see Peter Hallward, “From a Right of Self-Defence to the Fact of Conquest,” in *Humanity Journal* Blog, 7 June 2025: <https://humanityjournal.org/blog/from-a-right-of-self-defence-to-the-fact-of-conquest/>

⁸ Ayça Çubukçu, “On the Exception of Hannah Arendt,” *Law, Culture and the Humanities* 15, no. 3 (2019): 684–704.

⁹ Arendt, “Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship.”

¹⁰ See *Ibid.*, and Hannah Arendt, “Some Questions of Moral Philosophy,” in Kohn, *Responsibility and Judgment*, 49–146.

¹¹ Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Viking, 1963), 26.

What about the theological concept of evil itself? Why is evil, according to Scott, necessary to our conceptions of justice and redress? “I believe that evil can help to concentrate our attention on especially egregious kinds of moral wrong and moral harm,” he writes, “of which New World slavery is one pronounced, if insufficiently regarded, historical instance” (26). “The discerning and clarifying value of the concept of evil,” Scott claims, “is that it allows us to discriminate among kinds of wrongful action and kinds of wrongful harm” (51). According to which criteria can such discerning clarification be achieved through the concept of evil? Scott offers some clues, yet in this very act, he evades confronting the crucial problem of judgement that obsessed Arendt: the apparent incapability of “average” people to tell right from wrong, leaving aside their capacity to discriminate among different kinds of wrong according to varying degrees of proximity to evil.

Scott asserts that the concept of evil is meant to “pick out qualitatively extreme conduct” that is “especially damaging and lethal and violating and pernicious inasmuch as it strikes at some core of our basic sense of human well-being and human flourishing” (51–52). Assuming humans share such a core in the first place, some “basic sense of human well-being and human flourishing” that certain lethal acts can then violate, is not what we are currently witnessing in Palestine also evil by that measure? But what exactly is to be gained and what might be lost by naming it so, when the very manifest-ness of evil is once again in question? The fact that millions of humans in Israel, United States, Germany, and beyond do not judge the violence unleashed on Palestinians as wrong, let alone evil, might give us pause before the universalizing humanist assumptions Scott appears to rely on.

David Scott also believes that “some past evils are *irreconcilable* and *irreparable*” (27) and that New World slavery is an evil of this sort. This is the case in his view because the evil of New World slavery was “so egregious in its injury, so extended in its unmitigated duration, and so long in the disrespectful and shameful neglect of its repair as to now stand as a permanent immovable wrong” (27). While both *irreconcilable* and *irreparable*, Scott nevertheless asserts paradoxically that New World slavery demands “throughgoing and immediate redress” (27). What does, one might ask, redress for the irreconcilable and the irreparable demand? If, for Scott, unlike other historical atrocities, New World slavery was not an aberrant *event* but “an intergenerational institution structurally integrated as an indispensable dimension of the evolution of the modern capitalist world” (27); if, that is, modern capitalism and slavery developed hand in hand as Eric Williams long ago argued, then how can the evil of New World slavery – and moral culpability and reparatory responsibility for it – be separated from the evil of modern capitalism and the racist violence of colonialism that co-constituted it? Can reparations or redistribution *within* the bounds of the current capitalist global order offer appropriate redress for the moral wrong of New World slavery? If the genocide in Gaza is a continuation of the Nakba and the establishment of Israel as a Jewish settler colony as many scholars have argued, then what do justice and redress demand today?¹² Is what Scott names “the debt of repair” (17) even payable, I would like to ask, through the capitalist calculus of a global order predicated on the exclusive logic of nation-states?

¹² On Israel as a settler colony, see Laleh Khalili, “History Lesson,” *Jewish Currents* (Summer 2025).

Before formal decolonization, Eric Williams argued in 1944 that “what is owed to the descendants of the enslaved is political freedom,” that is, *state sovereignty*, which has amounted, according to Scott, “to a claim on the part of the Creole Brown and Black middle-class elites to a right to inherit rule over the descendants of the enslaved” (32). This is evident to Scott’s mind in “our postcolonial conjuncture marked by the exhaustion of the anticolonial sovereignty paradigm” (32). Along with “the collapse of the narrative of emancipation” (40) in the present, Scott argues, “we have lost the old concept of revolution,” because “the background conditions that enlivened and secured the intelligibility of these concepts and narratives” have also been by and large lost (41). I would like to suggest otherwise. The global movement for a free Palestine as encapsulated in the popular slogan, “from the river to the sea, Palestine will be free,” breathes new life into the anticolonial sovereignty paradigm in its various imagined forms, from the one-state to the two-state and to no-state solutions.¹³

According to Scott, it is in the context of the demise of emancipatory and revolutionary paradigms and the rise of humanitarian and human rights frameworks that the demand for reparations have emerged through the language of liberal legalism in the post-Cold War era (41–45). The chief weakness of such demands for reparations for New World slavery, Scott finds, is that they leave “outside the frame of critique the basic contours of the abiding neocolonial structure of Caribbean polities” (32), embedded as they are within the framework of capitalist extraction and accumulation on a world scale. What Scott calls colonialism’s “evil enrichment” (251), in other words, is part and parcel of our present to be redressed today. Scott also observes that we are now living in a *new age*, namely the age of global humanitarianism and human rights, which “constitutes the new normative background as well as the new normative horizon in relation to which we are obliged to problematize our dissatisfactions with our world ... and what we might do to address these dissatisfactions to change it for the better” (45–46). But what is the nature of this “obligation” to problematize our dissatisfactions in a *certain* way, how totalizing or binding is it?

For Scott, “escaping or exiting the hegemony of the liberal humanitarian present is not really an option – there is no way out but *through*.” Even if that is the case, how exactly do we go through this hegemony?¹⁴ Need all roads lead to the Hague for redressing human disposability and mass atrocity? What if the Hague and its international courts are part of the problem not only in their so-called “incompetence,” but also in their competent shielding of a colonial entity from unsettling critique that questions that entity’s very legitimacy? Once again, elements of the global movement for a free Palestine are revealing in this regard: they do not merely appeal to liberal humanitarian logics and international courts at the Hague but question the state of Israel’s alleged “right to exist” as a settler-colonial entity in the first place.¹⁵

¹³ On the history and significance of this slogan, see Robin D. G. Kelley, “From the River to the Sea to Every Mountain Top,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 48, no. 4 (2019): 69–91.

¹⁴ I have explored some tested strategies for navigating the hegemony of liberal legalism and humanitarianism from an anti-imperialist perspective in Ayça Çubukçu, *For the Love of Humanity: The World Tribunal on Iraq* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018).

¹⁵ For an articulation of this point from a legal angle, see Francesca Albanese’s response to a reporter in November 2024: “Israel *does* exist. Israel is a recognized member of the United Nations. Besides this, there is not such a thing in international law like ‘the right of a state to exist.’ Does Italy have a right to exist? Italy exists. Now, if tomorrow, Italy and France want to merge and become Ita-France, fine, this is not up to us. What is enshrined in international law is the

Scott rightly worries that much contemporary thinking on evil “operates in a remarkably unexamined way through a series of interconnected exceptionalizations – that of the twentieth century as the century of evil and that of the Holocaust as the preeminent paradigm of evil,” whereby the Holocaust, thanks in part to the prominence of Hannah Arendt, has been turned in to a “meta-evil, the evil that defines evil as such” (97). The effect of Arendt’s exceptionalization of the horror of the Nazi death camps has been to explicitly diminish, Scott observes, the evil of other atrocities, including New World slavery (116). “What is troubling in this scenario,” he finds, is “that other admitted evils, New World slavery among them, can scarcely appear as anything but merely historical or empirical evils ... but never conceived as defining the theoretical class of evil as such, or as a whole, and consequently forever dependent on the meta-evil for its larger political significance” (133). I would nevertheless like to ask: Is this what is most troubling about the familiar scenario of the Holocaust as the meta-evil, that no other atrocity can define the theoretical class of evil as such? Could the acceptance of New World slavery or the genocide in Palestine as “meta-evils” help repair or redress the human disposability and dispossession produced thereby? I doubt that the answer, even merely in the domain of moral philosophy, is affirmative.

Personal Responsibility Under Genocide

While the prominence of Hannah Arendt’s scholarship has augmented, as Scott observes, the exceptionalization of the Holocaust as a “meta-evil, the evil that defines evil as such” (97), Arendt has also contributed to our understanding of the human capacity to judge and act differently than lawmakers and majorities in situations where the manifestness of “manifest evil” is not obvious to all.¹⁶ For one, in an important essay crafted in 1964, “Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship,” Arendt reflects on a difficult set of moral issues concerning our capacity to judge.¹⁷ The questions she raises in this essay remain pertinent in our own genocidal times unfolding in Palestine and beyond, including the very question: “Who am I to judge?” Arendt opens this essay by commenting on the furious controversy occasioned by her book, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on The Banality of Evil*. She subsequently considers two questions about our faculty of judgement that inform her philosophical approach to the problem of personal responsibility: “How can we tell right from wrong, independent of knowledge of the law? And how can we judge without having been in the same situation?” (22).

The context of Arendt’s reflections in 1964 is one where, not unlike today, “the fear of passing judgement, of naming names, and of fixing blame – especially, alas, upon people in power and high position, dead or alive,” is deep-seated (21). Nevertheless, Arendt is fearless in echoing accusations against Pope Pius XII for “his singular silence” during the Holocaust (20). She questions those who attempt to justify such silence by “desperate intellectual manoeuvres” and asks bitinglly: “And what shall one say of those who would

right of a people to exist. So, the state of Israel is there, it is protected as a member of the United Nations. Does this justify the erasure of another people? Hell no. Not 75 years ago. Not 57 years ago. Surely not today. Where is the protection of the Palestinian people from erasure, from annexation, from illegal annexation, from apartheid?” Quoted in Ryan McMaken, “No State Has the Right to Exist. That Includes Israel,” *Mises Institute*, 6 November 2024.

¹⁶ I have addressed and critiqued Arendt’s theorization of the cognate and collective matter of civil disobedience in Ayça Çubukçu, “Of Rebels and Disobedients: Reflections on Arendt, Race, Lawbreaking,” *Law and Critique* 32 (2021): 33–50.

¹⁷ Arendt, “Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship.”

rather throw all mankind out of the window, as it were, in order to save one man in high position, and to save him from the accusation not even of having committed a crime, but merely of an admittedly grave sin of omission?" (21). After all, she asserts not once but twice in this essay, "where all are guilty, no one is" (21).

As is the case with the extermination campaign we have been witnessing in Palestine, Arendt argues regarding the Holocaust that "the moral point of the matter is never reached by calling what happened by the name of 'genocide'" (42). Instead, she posits, "it is reached only when we realize this happened within the frame of a legal order and that the cornerstone of this 'new law' consisted of the command 'Thou shall kill,' not thy enemy but innocent people who were not even potentially dangerous, and not for any reason of necessity but, on the contrary, even against all military and other utilitarian calculations. ... And these deeds were not committed by outlaws, monsters, or raving sadists, but by the most respected members of respectable society" (42–43). Faced with such a situation, if we can find with Arendt that "it is obviously not everyone's business to be a saint or a hero. But personal or moral responsibility is everyone's business" (35), then as now, the question to ask Eichmann and other respectable members of respectable society participating directly or indirectly in mass murder becomes: "And why, if you please, did you become a cog or continue to be a cog under such circumstances"? (31). This is not an easy question to answer.

Going to the heart of the moral matter, Arendt searchingly turns to the exceptions, to those members of society – "respectable" or not – who decided *not* to serve as cogs in a murderous machine. These moral exceptions faced "the predicament of judging without being able to fall back upon the application of generally accepted rules" that spelled death – Thou shall kill – for certain demographic groups (37). Those who refused to be cogs in the legal killing apparatus, in Arendt's paradoxical formulation, "acted under conditions in which every moral act was illegal and every legal act was a crime" (40). As I have argued elsewhere, Arendt's formulation of this situation is predicated on the very possibility of a "lawfulness," denoting a sense of what is right and just, that *contradicts* "the law" and does so against the platitudes of legal positivism.¹⁸

With respect to the exceptions who refused to act as cogs, often by withdrawing from participation in public life altogether, Arendt asks, "in what way were those few different who in all walks of life did not collaborate" with the Nazi regime (43)? The answer, she claims, is relatively simple. The non-collaborators were:

[T]he only ones who dared to judge by themselves, and they were capable of doing so not because they disposed of a better system of values or because the old standards of right and wrong were still firmly planted in their mind and conscience. On the contrary, all our experiences tell us that it was precisely members of *respectable* society, who had not been touched by the intellectual and moral upheaval in the early stages of the Nazi period, who were the first to yield. They [members of respectable society] simply exchanged one system of values against another. (44)

By contrast, those who refused to collaborate with the Nazi regime, Arendt finds, "were those whose consciences did not function in this automatic way" (44). In daring to judge by themselves, non-collaborators used a different criterion than an exchangeable set of learned rules and values. According to Arendt, "they asked themselves to what

¹⁸ Çubukçu, "On the Exception of Hannah Arendt."

extent they would still be able to live in peace with themselves after having committed certain deeds" (44). "To put it crudely," she writes, "they refused to murder, not so much because they still held fast to the command 'Thou shall not kill,' but because they were unwilling to live together with a murderer – themselves" (44). Yet, the question remains: why did the problem of living in peace with oneself *not* arise in the same way for those who did collaborate with the Nazi regime?

Arendt asserts that it is *thinking*, that is, "to be engaged in that silent dialogue between me and myself," which is the precondition for the kind of judgment exercised by non-collaborators, while "the dividing line between those who want to think and therefore judge by themselves, and those who do not, strikes across all social and cultural or educational strata" (44–45). In this respect, "the total moral collapse of respectable society during the Hitler regime" – arguably comparable to the moral collapse we are witnessing in the West as a genocide unfolds in Palestine – may warn us, as she argues, that "those who cherish values and hold fast to moral norms and standards are not reliable: we now know that moral norms and standards can be changed overnight, and that all that then will be left is the mere habit of holding fast to something" (45). Instead, under such circumstances, Arendt finds, "much more reliable will be the doubters and the sceptics ... because they are used to examine things and make up their own minds. Best of all will be those who know only one thing for certain," she writes, "that whatever else happens, as long as we live we shall live together with ourselves" (45). Even if, as I suspect, Arendt's judgement on our faculty of judgement presents too generous a view of "thinking" and its moral consequences – to the extent that she underestimates our capacity for self-deception – it nevertheless offers some hope in genocidal times.

Silence and the Academy

Reading Arendt's reflections on our capacity to judge with sixty years of hindsight, what shall one say today of our own silence in the Western academy – with courageous exceptions – about the genocide in Palestine? What shall one say of our own "sins of omission," even as we pride ourselves on our expertise in politics and ethics, the Middle East and international affairs, racism, and colonialism? What is our personal responsibility under genocide when the manifestness of grave wrongs as wrongs is once again in question? What is our personal and collective responsibility under genocide when it is enabled and legitimated by institutions that we consent to – including governments and universities – to the degree that we do not disobey them actively?

In the state of Israel and the so-called West or the Global North today – in presidential offices, national parliaments, military command centres, Security Council meeting rooms, corporate headquarters, and university boardrooms where investment and firing decisions are made – the extermination of the Palestinian people and the legitimization of this extermination are neither committed nor enabled "by outlaws, monsters, or raving sadists, but by the most respected members of respectable society." And the academy and its members, no doubt, remain part and parcel of this "respectable society."

I insist that Arendt's reflections on moral responsibility remain pertinent for us, scholars making a living in "the zone of interest" that is the Western academy, members of respectable society neither living under open dictatorships, nor being asked to murder anybody

directly.¹⁹ The fact remains that today, many of our universities and governments are financially and politically invested in the mass murder of Palestinians. Our students who build encampments for Palestine, who tirelessly organize divestment campaigns, who withdraw their consent from business-as-usual at universities and actively challenge their governments – they know this fact well. Precisely because they disobey, individually and collectively, they cannot be accused of what Arendt named the “grave sin of omission.” Are we willing to think or learn, and learn from them?

Since October 2023, Israel has systematically destroyed every single university in Gaza. It has also targeted and killed scholars from across the social sciences, humanities, and beyond. I conclude these reflections then with the words of the Palestinian historian Sherene Seikaly, urging the American Historical Association in January 2025 to pass a resolution on scholasticism in Gaza: “This genocide targets the Palestinian people, our peoplehood, our capacity to narrate the past, and to imagine the future. History is screaming to the present. The [American Historical Association] has been deafeningly silent. Silence is complicity. The task of the historian is to ask the hard questions, and to take the difficult positions – not when the dust settles, but as the fire reigns.” Historians, jurists, philosophers, anthropologists, sociologists and more, it is our task as scholars to assert personal and collective responsibility under genocide while the fire continues to reign.

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¹⁹ See the forum on the “Zone of Interest” in this journal, for example, Ghassan Hage, “‘Zone of Interest’ as an Ethnography of Indifference,” *Journal of Genocide Research* (16 May 2024).