

David Palumbo-Liu on Chandler Davis ♦ Malik Miah on MLK

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# AGAINST THE **CURRENT**

A SOCIALIST JOURNAL

## Solidarity Against Genocide!



### Israel's Gaza Slaughter & Global Resistance

♦ JOSEPH DAHER, CYNTHIA G. FRANKLIN, SARA AWARTINI & ATC EDITORS

### Weaponizing "Antisemitism" and Campus Repression

♦ PURNIMA BOSE, PETER HUDIS

### Women in Struggle

♦ JILING DUAN ON CHINA, MARIA BUCUR ON ROMANIA,  
MARLAINA A. LEPPERT-WAHL ON OHIO REFERENDUM VICTORY



# A Letter from the Editors

## What Genocide Looks Like

THE TELEVISED AND live-streamed war in Gaza following October 7th gives new insights into things that previously couldn't be seen in real time. In their essay "Gaza: A Ghastly Window into the Crisis of Global Capitalism" William I. Robinson and Hoai-An Nguyen observe:

*"The twentieth century saw at least five cases of acknowledged genocide, defined by the United Nations Convention as a crime committed with the intent to destroy a national, ethnic, racial or religious group, in whole or in part. The century started with the genocide of the Herero and Nama by German colonialists from 1904 to 1908 in what is today Namibia. This was followed by the Ottoman genocide of Armenians in 1915 and 1916, the Nazi holocaust of 1939-1945, and the Rwandan genocide of 1994. [To this list should be added, for example, the Belgian colonial genocide under King Leopold in the Congo. The genocide of Native Americans in the United States, of course, is another case although largely completed in the 19th century.—ed.]*

*"As Israeli genocide in Gaza is livestreamed, the rules of warfare no longer apply, if they ever did, for Tel Aviv and Washington. There were more civilian deaths recorded in Gaza in the first two months of the conflict, nearly 20,000, than in the first 20 months of the Russia-Ukraine conflict [the full-scale 2022 Russian invasion —ed.] which took 9,614 civilian lives." [first published at *The Philosophical Salon*]*

In the popular imagination, "genocide" probably conjures up the Nazi industrial death apparatus of cattle cars and gas chambers, mass machine-gunning of victims forced to dig their own graves, Jewish ghetto populations earmarked for transport and extinction. But that ultimate 20th century horror doesn't exhaust the definition.

Article II of the United Nations "Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide" (1948) specifies "any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: (a) Killing members of the group; (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group."

Four of these points, (a)-(d), were fully documented in South Africa's submission to the International Court of Justice on Israel's assault in Gaza. (The ICJ is a separate body from the International Criminal Court, which indicted Vladimir Putin on the fifth point, the kidnapping of Ukrainian children for "adoption" in Russia.)

If anything, "measures to prevent births within the group" stand out, with women and children making up over half the Gaza deaths, with medical collapse forcing women (50,000 are pregnant in Gaza) to give birth without prenatal or proper hospital care, and with malnutrition making nursing practically impossible — all this before Israel's pending invasion of Rafah, with close to 1.5 million displaced Gazans living in unspeakable conditions.

Frankly, in the eyes of the great majority of the world, calling this a genocide is not a close call. Israel's rather pathetic rebuttal to the South African legal team's submission did not refute a single factual point, and barely even tried. Stripped of rhetorical flourish, Israel basically raised two arguments: (1) We're the Jewish State born from the Holocaust, how dare anyone accuse us of genocide? (2) Hamas committed mass atrocities on October 7, and Israel has "the sacred right and responsibility to defend itself."

Of these, point (1) is a demand for permanent immunity. (Wouldn't Donald Trump be proud?) And (2) is *irrelevant to the case at the ICJ*, which deals with charges against

states. Leaders of Hamas, and Israel, could be charged at the International Criminal Court but Hamas as a non-state entity is not a party in ICJ proceedings.

Before probing the status of Israel's "right of defense," let's be clear about basic facts, whatever ultimately emerges from many tangled claims about who killed how many people in Israel on October 7. The military wing of Hamas (whatever other parts of the organization, or Gazans in general, may have wanted) carried out a *terrorist attack on a terrorist state*. It included killings of noncombatant civilians and, by credible reports, hideous and murderous sexual violence.

The ICJ case, however, is not about the character of the Hamas attack, but about whether Israel's state terrorism in Gaza amounts to "intent to destroy, in whole or in part," its population.

As a rough analogy, let's imagine that China — with or without some kind of provocation — were to wage a bombing campaign and ground invasion in Xinjiang province (the Uighur territory) and in just over three months killing one percent (an undercount) of the population, deliberately destroying almost all the hospitals and blasting ambulances with tank shells, killing over 100 journalists in what are clearly targeted attacks, instructing the civilians to move and bombing them as they flee, suggesting that the population might be "voluntarily" transferred, and openly saying the war will continue for a year.

It is not hard to imagine what the world, the U.S. government and media would call that. And what if, say, a power like Russia were supplying China with the bombs and artillery for the assault? That analogy suggests that the South African case at the ICJ had one shortcoming, in failing to call out the United States as a partner in the Gaza massacre, which Washington funds and supplies.

### Occupation and "Right of Defense"

Israel's right of self-defense against Hamas is so widely repeated, across the political and media spectrum, that it's taken as axiomatic. That's why it needs to be sharply interrogated.

Under principles of international law — even if in practice Israel ignores them, under the umbrella of the United States' protective dispensation — Gaza has the status of Israeli-occupied territory. The withdrawal of Israeli settlements continued on the inside back cover



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Cover: Palestinian flag hangs from the Showalter Fountain at Indiana University, Bloomington.

Above: Solidarity with Palestinians in Gaza is worldwide. AFP

Back Cover: Boris Kagarlitsky, now imprisoned in Russia.

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## Impact of Israeli Genocidal War: Middle East Tensions Grow

By Joseph Daher

THE ISRAELI OCCUPATION army is continuing more than 125 days after its outbreak to wage a genocidal war against the Palestinian population in the Gaza Strip. This immediately followed the October 7th Hamas attack, which led to the death of 1,139 persons, including 695 Israeli civilians, 373 members of the security forces and 71 foreigners.\*

The 2.4 million inhabitants of the Gaza Strip are living under a constant Israeli bombardment of unprecedented violence. By mid-February 2024, according to the lowest estimates, over 28,000 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli strikes. The vast majority of victims are women and children.

This is not to forget 10,000 others missing under the rubble, presumed dead. More than 1.9 million Palestinians are displaced within the Gaza Strip, representing over 85% of its total population. [This article was written before the massive concentration of Israeli firepower on Rafah —ed.]

In many ways this is a new *Nakba*. The 1948 *Nakba* resulted in over 700,000 Palestinians being driven out by force from their homes, becoming refugees. This process has continued until today.

As of now regional tensions continue to intensify without transforming (yet) into a wide and violent war, although tensions have increased dramatically since the beginning of January.

Faced with the violence of the Israeli occupying army and supported by its Western imperialist allies, the people of Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Lebanon face the growing risks of a more deadly regional conflagration.

### Syria Targeted

Since October 7th Israel has repeatedly targeted Syria with targeted assassinations of significant personalities.

South of Damascus, Israeli missiles assassinated Brigadier General Razi Mousavi, a key commander of the Quds Force, the foreign operations branch and elite unit of the Revolu-

tionary Guards (the ideological army of the Islamic Republic of Iran). Iranian leaders have promised a response to the December 25th assassination.

A few days later, on January 8, Hassan Akkacha, a Hamas member responsible for firing Hamas rockets from Syria towards Israel, was killed by the Israeli military operating in Beit Jinn, an Israeli town located southwest of Damascus.

Between October 12 and January 8, no fewer than 18 Israeli strikes repeatedly targeted the Damascus and Aleppo airports. They also struck positions and installations of Hezbollah and pro-Iranian forces in the Damascus region.

In middle-to-end of January and beginning of February, new Israeli attacks occurred in Syria targeting several members of the Revolutionary Guards, including a general who headed the intelligence services of the al-Quds Force. The strikes also killed Syrian civilians.

Although dictator Bashar al-Assad has rhetorically declared solidarity with the Palestinians, the Syrian regime seems to possess neither interest nor capacity to directly participate in a response to the Israeli war on the Gaza Strip.

This is historically in line with the Syrian regime's policy since 1974 to try avoiding any significant and direct confrontation with Israel. Further, condemnation by Syrian officials of the Israeli war will not lead to any form of military or political support for Hamas.

There will be no strengthening of relations between the two actors, no return to the pre-2011 setup, which was cut off after the Palestinian movement voiced its support for the Syrian uprising.

While the Syrian regime restored ties with Hamas in summer 2022, that took place through Hezbollah mediation. Future relations between Syria and Hamas will be mainly governed through interests structured by and connected to Iran and Hezbollah.

### Focal Point of Conflict

Meanwhile there has been an intensification of violence in the north of Syria. Northwestern Syria has become a focal point

of conflict marked by a surge in bombing by Russia and Syria.

This escalation follows a devastating attack on a military academy graduation ceremony in the city of Homs, claiming the lives of at least 89 individuals. The incident, involving explosive-laden drones probably originating from neighboring areas controlled by the Turkish authorities or Hayat Tahrir Sham (HTS), has set the stage for a series of heightened bombardments.

The attack in Homs served as a pretext for the Syrian regime and its Russian ally to escalate military actions in the region and has led to severe humanitarian consequences. Since early October, more than 100 people have been killed — almost 40% of them children — and over 400 others injured.

Because of the shelling and bombing by Damascus and Moscow's armed forces, 120,000 people have been forced to flee their homes, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

The Turkish military has expanded its operations, targeting areas controlled by the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES).

This strategic move came in the aftermath of a suicide attack on October 1st at the entrance to the Interior Ministry in Ankara; two policemen were injured. A group affiliated with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) claimed responsibility.

This prompted swift and decisive action by the Turkish government. Notably, on October 17th, Turkey's parliament voted to extend for two additional years its mandate allowing the armed forces to launch cross-border operations in Syria and Iraq.

Numerous airstrikes and drone attacks since October 2023 have deprived large segments of the population in the northeast of electricity, water, heating and related services, whether temporarily or throughout the coming cold winter months.

By the end of December, Turkish warplanes and drones launched a series of airstrikes on northeast Syria, targeting oil sites and vital infrastructure facilities. The attacks led to power outages in several cities and in

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\*It should be noted that Israeli civilians on October 7, 2023 were also killed by Israeli occupying forces, including by firing tank shells at houses where Israelis were detained.



*Israeli artillery shells hit Lebanon village al-Zahajra as conflict escalates.*

the countryside of Jazeera Canton, reducing the production capacity of electrical stations by 50%.

The Turkish attacks have killed at least 176 civilians and injured 272 others in 2023. Throughout January 2024, Turkey carried out new series of airstrikes against the northeast of Syria and northern Iraq.

### **Maneuver and Chaos**

This overall escalation of bombing in northern Syria is intricately tied to an effort to exploit the ongoing international focus on the Israeli war on Gaza.

Key state actors involved — including Turkey, Russia and the Syrian regime — are strategically capitalizing on the heightened global attention garnered by the Israeli war. This calculated maneuver allows them to operate with a perceived degree of impunity in the northern theatre.

In this chaos, U.S. military bases in Syria — and Iraq — have become targets of increased drone and rocket attacks orchestrated by Iranian-affiliated groups. It is a way for these forces to further both their political and local objectives.

U.S. troops and bases in Syria and Iraq have been attacked by mid-February 2024 more than 170 times by rockets and drones since October 17th. These attacks have been a direct response to Washington's support for Israel's military action in the Gaza Strip.

Since the end of October, U.S. airstrikes have been systematically targeting several

facilities utilized by pro-Iranian militias and Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps in eastern Syria.

### **Battlefield Iraq**

In Iraq, tensions have also arisen between U.S. armed forces and pro-Iranian militias. U.S. forces struck an Iraqi security headquarters in the heart of the capital, Baghdad, on January 4th. This killed two members of the al-Noujouba faction of the pro-Iranian militia group Hashd al-Shaabi.

Among the militiamen murdered, Commander Abou Taqwa was accused by Washington of being actively involved in attacks against U.S. military bases in Iraq. As Hashd al-Shaabi is officially integrated into the Iraqi national army, the Iraqi Ministry of Foreign Affairs strongly condemned the attack.

The office of Prime Minister Mohammad Chia al-Soudani, for its part, described the January 4th strike as a "dangerous escalation." It announced the formation of a bilateral committee responsible for taking steps to definitively end the presence of the international coalition forces led by the United States.

This is not the first time that the Iraqi ruling political class has called for the departure of U.S. forces. After the 2020 U.S. assassination of Kassem Soleimani, head of the Iranian al-Quds force of the Revolutionary Guards in Baghdad, interim Prime Minister Adel Abdel-Mahdi had asked Washington to establish a plan to withdraw its troops. That request was categorically rejected by the U.S. State

Department.

The Iraqi Parliament had also formulated a bill requiring U.S. withdrawal, but the resolution was non-binding. Officially, the 2500 U.S. soldiers in Iraq provide assistance, advice and training to the Iraqi armed forces.

Their presence was at the invitation of the Iraqi government, which had requested assistance to combat the so-called Islamic State (IS) jihadist group in 2014, but it was also part of the strategic agreement signed in 2008 between Washington and former Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki — now part of the pro-Iranian Shia Coordination Framework.

The deal was then approved by the Iraqi Parliament. For its part, Washington wants to maintain its military presence in both in Iraq and Syria.

### **Assassinations and Consequences**

Tensions in the region increased tremendously once again in the end of January and beginning of February after the U.S. bombing of a total of 85 targets on seven different sites (four in Syria and three in Iraq) against infrastructures and sites linked to militias affiliated with Tehran in Syria and Iraq.

This action was described as retaliation for the death of three American soldiers in the military base of Tower 22 in Jordan, in an attack attributed to the Islamic Resistance in Iraq, made of pro-Iranian militias in Iraq, including Kataeb Hezbollah.

A few days later the United States in a drone attack assassinated the senior Kataeb Hezbollah commander Wissam Mohammad Saber, known as "Abou Bakr al-Saadi" in Baghdad, along with another leader of the brigade and a driver.

The consequences of these attacks were direct. Fearing large-scale reprisals and probably under pressure from Iran (which seeks to avoid direct confrontation with the United States), Kataeb Hezbollah had recently announced that it would temporarily renounce attacks on American bases following the deadly strike in Jordan. Subsequently, the militia vowed revenge for the assassination of one of its commanders.

Iraq has become the main battlefield for the United States and Iran to carry out proxy attacks. Tehran for example also launched



strikes on the city of Erbil in Iraqi Kurdistan in mid-January to send a message of deterrence to Israel and its American ally.

While neither Iran nor the United States intend to engage in direct confrontation or drag the region into all-out war, Baghdad is likely to suffer the consequences of their clashes so long as tensions remain high in the Middle East, in the context of the continuation of the Israeli genocidal war against the Gaza Strip.

### Yemen and Merchant Shipping

Likewise on the Yemeni side, tensions have been mounting between the Yemeni political and armed movement of the Houthis and the U.S. armed forces and its allies.

Since October 7, pronouncing solidarity with the Palestinians, the Houthis have increased attacks in the Red Sea against ships considered linked to Israel. For instance, on November 19, they seized a merchant ship, the *Galaxy Leader*, owned by an Israeli businessman, with its 25 crew members.

The Houthis have stated on numerous occasions that they will stop these attacks only with the end of the Israeli war against the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. Between November 18 and January 13, more than 27 commercial boats traveling in the southern Red Sea and Gulf of Aden were attacked by the Houthis.

Faced with this situation, at the beginning of December, Washington set up a multinational naval force to protect merchant ships in the Red Sea, through which 12% of world trade passes. The main objective is to guarantee one of the most essential shipping corridors for international trade.

On the last day of 2023, ten Houthi militants were killed when the U.S. military claimed to have sunk three ships in response to attacks on a Danish carrier's container ship. This was the first deadly strike against the Houthis since the multinational naval force was set up.

A few days afterward, the United States and United Kingdom carried out a new series of air strikes against the Houthis. Additionally, Washington imposed sanctions targeting the Houthis' financing circuits, targeting several people and entities in Yemen and Turkey.

Throughout the month of January and beginning of February, U.S. and British military forces launched new attacks. Despite these strikes, the Houthis have continued their attacks in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, against ships linked to Israel "in solidarity" with Gaza, and declared that they will not stop until the end of the war.

### Lebanon Under Attack

While Lebanon has been the target of Israeli missiles since the beginning of the Israeli war on Gaza, risks of a larger confrontation between Hezbollah and Tel Aviv

has increased after the Israeli assassination of Saleh al-Arouri, the number two person on the Hamas political bureau and a founder of its military wing, the al-Qassam Brigades.

This occurred in the southern suburbs of Beirut on January 2nd. Two other Hamas officials, Samir Fandi and Azzam al-Akraa, as well as four others affiliated with the movement — but also with the Lebanese Jamaa Islamiya (a branch of the Muslim Brotherhoods in Lebanon) — were also killed in this attack.

Hamas leader Arouri had been based in Lebanon since 2018. Imprisoned twice, he spent a dozen years in Israeli jails before being released in April 2010. He was one of the privileged interlocutors of Hassan Nasrallah, the secretary general of Hezbollah.

Next to be assassinated by an Israeli drone in south Lebanon was Wissam Tawil, a commander of the Al-Radwan Force, a military unit of Hezbollah. He was the most senior Hezbollah military official killed since October 8. In reaction, Hezbollah targeted military bases in the north of Israel. In the following weeks, tensions continued to rise.

Israeli attacks have caused the deaths of more than 180 Hezbollah members and more than 27 civilians, including three journalists, between October 8 and mid-February 2024.

Israeli air and drone strikes on villages in southern Lebanon have also led to the forced displacement of more than 80,000 people from their homes, as well as damaging large areas of agricultural land.

For the time being, the assassinations of Arouri and Hezbollah commander Tawil have not altered the position of the Lebanese Islamic party nor its main sponsor, Iran. Reluctance to launch a more intense military response to the Israeli war comes from their desire to preserve their own political and geopolitical interests.

Hezbollah continues to serve as a "pressure front" against Tel Aviv, as expressed in speeches by Hassan Nasrallah. Similarly, Iran does not want its crown jewel Hezbollah to be weakened.

Iran's geopolitical objective is not to liberate the Palestinians but to use these groups as leverage, particularly in its relations with the United States. In this context, Hezbollah is sticking to "calculated and proportional reactions" against Israeli attacks.

The threat lies in the probability that Israel will continue its assassinations and attacks on Lebanese territories. A section of the Israeli ruling class wants, through the Israeli war on Gaza, to force Hezbollah to withdraw 10 kilometers from the border, that is, north of the Litani river. This would represent a political and military gain for Israel.

The escalation of Israeli attacks in Lebanon is connected to Israel's new military phase. Withdrawing five brigades, composed mostly of reserve soldiers, from Gaza at the beginning of the year is part of Israeli strategy

of "low-intensity war."

The objectives include tightening control over most of the Gaza Strip that has fallen under its sway, destroying the network of underground tunnels and eradicating all remaining resistance. The increased threats and attacks in Lebanon reveal Hezbollah's missed opportunity to force Israel to fight on two fronts. This is turning against them.

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*...the people of Syria, Iraq,  
Yemen and Lebanon face  
the growing risks of a more  
deadly regional conflagration.*

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### Conclusions for the Left

While the genocidal war against Palestinians locked into the Gaza Strip continues unabated, Israeli government leaders have announced that the war will continue "throughout" 2024.

Israeli impunity is a permanent threat to the regional working classes and continues to increase the dangers of a regional war. Similarly, U.S.-led Western imperialism is only deepening the misery of local popular classes through support to Israel, regional authoritarian states and continued bombings.

In this situation, what can the left and progressive actors do?

It is important to reiterate our opposition to the Apartheid, colonial and racist Israeli state while continuing to defend the right of Palestinians to resist. Indeed, like any other population facing the same threats, Palestinians have such rights, including by military means.

Similarly, Lebanese have the right to resist Israeli military aggression and war. This should not be confused with support for the political perspectives and orientations of the various Palestinian and Lebanese political parties, including Hamas and Hezbollah.

That is also true for all kinds of military actions these actors might take — particularly actions that lead to the indiscriminate killing of civilians.

The main task for the left remains developing a strategy based on a regional solidarity from below. That means opposing the Western states and Israel on the one side while also opposing regional authoritarian states (whether Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Qatar, UAE, etc.) and the political forces linked to them.

Based on class struggle from below, this is the only way to win liberation from these regimes and their imperialist backers (whether the United States, China or Russia).

Through that struggle, Palestinians, Lebanese and those in other countries must also embrace the demands of all those who suffer national oppression — like the Kurds and others under forms of ethnic, sectarian and social oppression. ■

## Challenging the New McCarthyism: Charges of Antisemitism Weaponized

By Peter Hudis

THE RISE OF a new McCarthyism in the United States and elsewhere in the Western world, fueled by the drive to quell criticism of Israel over its genocidal war against Palestine, is producing an unprecedented level of suppression of free speech and expression — both inside and outside of the academy.

In some respects, it is even more dangerous than the McCarthyism of the 1950s, which tended to target well-known figures in government, entertainment and education. The effort to stifle expressions of solidarity with Palestine and condemnation of the Zionist project is now reaching into all levels of society, placing potentially anyone in the position of being silenced and dehumanized.

Central to this effort is the weaponization of the charge of antisemitism against critics of Israeli imperialism. This is of course not new: the effort to smear critics of Zionism with antisemitism has been a staple for supporters of the Israeli state for many years. Yet since Hamas' brutal attack of October 7, 2023 it has reached a whole new level.

What is new today is the coalescence of two seemingly opposed political tendencies that both work to demonize critics of Israel: far-Right Populists driven by a clearly racist agenda, and left-of-center neoliberals who present themselves as fair-minded democrats defending diversity and inclusivity.

### Coalescence of Attacks

The Republican Right is consumed with purging schools of curricula that critically analyze race, gender and sexuality as part of an effort to counter the heightened social consciousness produced by the massive protests for Black lives in 2020. It is now extending this to penalize anyone in the academy who criticizes Israel — and it is being joined in this effort by many Democrats.

The coalescence of Republicans aiming to shut down critical discourse and mainstream Democrats (including many liberal ones) trying to suppress criticism of Zionism places the liberals in a difficult position — the last thing they want to be accused of is being

indifferent to DEI initiatives or facilitating the far-Right's fervent defense of what is left of U.S. democracy.

Yet this is precisely what they are doing in accepting the premise that attacking Zionism and the genocidal policies of the Israeli state are inherently antisemitic.

The irony here is that it is no secret that the far-Right's fervent defense of Israel is often accompanied by antisemitic stereotypes — from the notion that the world economy is governed by a cabal of “East Coast elites” (often with Jewish names) to the belief of many rightwing Evangelicals that the second coming of Christ will occur once the last Jew abandons her faith and embraces Christianity.

What Nazi ideologue Joseph Goebbels decried as “exaggerated Jewish cosmopolitanism” is exactly what the far Right has been railing against under a different name for years — with the new wrinkle that it is now coupled with total support for an Israeli state that massacres Muslims and Palestinians while acting as U.S. imperialism's closest ally.

A striking example of this was the “Take Our Border Back” rally in Texas on February 2, which included Sarah Palin, Ted Nugent and Christian nationalist Lara Logan as speakers. Michael Yon, a regular guest on Steven Bannon's “War Room” podcast, also addressed the crowd, stating: “These immigrants flooding over our border is being funded by Jewish money — Jewish, that's right — by the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, they are funding the people to come here and shout ‘Allahu Akbar.’”<sup>1</sup>

Robert Bowers, who murdered 11 Jews at the Tree of Life Synagogue in 2018 in the bloodiest antisemitic attack in recent U.S. history, justified his act by expressing animus for the HIAS's support for immigrant rights.

No force in the United States today poses a graver threat to Jewish lives than the racist far-Right. Yet one would never know this from listening to Congresswoman Elise Stefanik, whose accusations of antisemitism against the Presidents of Harvard University and the University of Pennsylvania led both to lose their jobs — even though Stefanik has befriended Nick Fuentes, an avowed antisemite and friend of her new-found mentor Donald Trump (she is a leading choice to be chosen to run as his Vice President).

Nor would one know this from the ranks of Nancy Pelosi, who has called students denouncing Israel's murderous assault on Gaza paid agents of Russia — an odd charge, given that Putin's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov recently declared, “Israel has similar objectives [in Gaza] to those of Russia” in Ukraine.

### Antisemitism in Reality

The attack on leftwing critics of Zionism by left-of-center Democrats plays directly into the racist narrative of the far Right — regardless of how much they try to convince themselves of the contrary.

Some forces opposed to Israel are antisemitic, as in the Yemeni Houthi militia's slogan, “Death to America, Death to Israel, a Curse Upon the Jews.” That does not justify the United States and its allies bombing Houthi bases in Yemen, showing they are more invested in the free movement of capital through the Red Sea than in lifting a finger to force Israel to halt its destruction of Gaza and its attacks on the West Bank.

Some leftists also harbor antisemitic views. If that were not the case, August Bebel wouldn't have had to call popular antisemitism “the socialism of fools” 150 years ago. It is antisemitic to claim that all Jews by nature support Zionism or that all Israelis, regardless of their background or political beliefs, are accomplices in the genocidal acts of their government.

That there are two worlds in every country is a basic principle of Marxism — one that racists of all stripes virulently oppose. But there is no evidence that such antisemitic views characterize the outburst of protests against Israel by the new generation of activists that have flooded the streets in the past four months.

### Muslims and Palestinians Under Attack

I reside in Chicago, home to the largest number of Palestinians of any U.S. city. Massive protests have been held by Palestinian and Muslim organizations protesting Israel's genocide, often involving tens of thousands on a weekly basis. Organizations like Jewish Voice for Peace, Not in My Name, and IfNotNow (as well as large numbers of unaffiliated Jews) have been integrally involved in virtually all of them.

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This culminated in a mass rally and sit-in on January 31 that led the City Council to approve a resolution, by 24 to 23 — Mayor Brandon Johnson cast the deciding vote — calling for a ceasefire and end to hostilities. It is the largest U.S. city to have done so. At none of these rallies and events were Jews made to feel unwelcome.

Alvin Tillery, director of the Center for the Study of Diversity and Democracy at Northwestern University, recently stated, “No Jewish students have really been subjected to violence on most of the campuses” — with the exception of an assault on an Israeli student at Columbia University and a bomb threat at a Jewish center at Cornell University (which turned out to come from a single unaffiliated disturbed student).

Tillery added, “There’s a huge generational divide on campuses, and young Jews are in the movement to support Gaza,” since they know “the Republicans all serve a master in Donald Trump, who is quoting Hitler in his speeches; people see through that.”

Nevertheless, Virginia Fox, a Republican Congresswoman from North Carolina and Chairwoman of the Education and Workforce Committee that has held hearings on antisemitism on college campuses, stated: “We want students to feel safe on their campuses, our number one issue is that Jewish students have not felt safe.”<sup>2</sup>

I have seen no evidence of this at the college where I teach at — which has campuses in both Des Plaines and Skokie, the latter a historically Jewish area that is now also home to many Muslims and Palestinians.

A short drive from my college is Plainfield, where Wadea al-Fayoume, a six-year-old Palestinian-American, was murdered in a hate crime on October 14. Some of my students attended his funeral.

While no overt harassment against Muslims that I knew of occurred at our college, several students told me that they were being harassed by their neighbors and verbally abused for being “terrorists.”

Many Palestinian youth are keeping a low profile and staying silent as a way to protect themselves — except when they join in the demonstrations. If any group has the right to say they don’t feel safe given the current political climate, it is Palestinians.

The most egregious aspect of this new McCarthyism is not the high-profile figures such as university presidents — tragic as that is. Worse is the silencing, the sense that one can’t say what one feels about the present moment out of fear of being tarnished with the smear of antisemitism.

This fear is ubiquitous in academia, on an assortment of levels. It impacts faculty as well, especially those without tenure or who work part time (over 70 percent of those teaching at public colleges in Illinois are adjuncts with little or no job protection).

## Fanon on Antisemitism

To combat this effort to silence critical thought, discussion, and action it is important to keep in mind what defines antisemitism. One thinker who had a lot to say about this was Frantz Fanon, the outstanding theorist of race and racism.

In *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) Fanon made the following observation:

*“At first thought it may seem strange that the anti-Semite’s outlook should be related to that of the Negrophobe. It was my philosophy professor, a native of the Antilles, who recalled the fact to me one day: ‘Whenever you hear anyone abuse the Jews, pay attention, because he is talking about you.’ And I found that he was universally right — by which I meant that I was answerable in my body and in my heart for what was done to my brother. Later I realized that he meant, quite simply, an anti-Semite is inevitably anti-Negro.”*<sup>3</sup>

Fanon’s point was that all forms of racism, whether directed against Jews, Blacks or Arabs, share “the same downfall, the same failure of man.”

His evocation of Aimé Césaire’s comment that those who hate Blacks invariably hate Jews is no mere casual observation. It is a *philosophic insight* into their *shared structure*. He argued that Jews and Blacks are victims of *substitution*, that is, they are objects of misdirected frustration on the part of those who refuse to face the reasons for their social and psychic distress.

Of course, these racisms are different: “The Black man represents the biological danger; the Jews, the intellectual danger.” (127)

Blacks are viewed as sub-social, biological and physical; Jews are viewed as supra-social, controlling the world through their intellect. They suffer from radically different forms of substitution, but the content of dehumanization — insofar as they are viewed as objects to the point of not really being “seen” at all — is the same.

Fanon is crystal clear on this in declaring, “Colonial racism is no different from any other racism. Anti-Semitism hits me head-on: I am enraged, I am bled white by an appalling battle, I am deprived of the possibility of being a man. I cannot disassociate myself from the future that is proposed for my brother.” (65)

It goes without saying that Fanon was fervently anti-Zionist. He was a leading figure in the Algerian Revolution, which Israel actively worked to subvert. Yet it would never occur to him to conflate anti-Zionism with antisemitism, since his critique of white racism was on behalf of advancing a struggle for universal human emancipation that transcends any narrow nationalist approach.

Today, the conflation of anti-Zionism with antisemitism — whether by those on the Right or the Left — serves the purpose of rendering invisible the perspective of universal human emancipation, which Fanon referred

to as a “New Humanism.”

## Clarity on Antisemitism

For this reason, it is worth noting a more recent document that tackles the issue of Zionism and anti-Semitism — the Jerusalem Declaration on Anti-Semitism, penned by figures in Jewish as well as Middle East studies in March 2021, in response to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance’s conflation of criticism of Israel with hatred of Jews.

The Jerusalem Declaration states that it is not antisemitic to “criticize or oppose Zionism as a form of nationalism, or... support arrangements that accord full equality to all inhabitants ‘between the river and the sea,’ whether in two states, a binational state, unitary democratic state, federal state, or in whatever form.”

Nor is it antisemitic, it states, to criticize “the conduct of Israel in the West Bank and Gaza, the role Israel plays in the region, or any other way in which, as a state, it influences events in the world. It is not anti-Semitic to point out its systematic racial discrimination” against Palestinians.

Moreover, “Criticism that some may see as excessive or contentious, or as reflecting a ‘double standard,’ is not, in and of itself, anti-Semitic.”<sup>4</sup>

Apologists for bourgeois society practice double standards all the time. The United States and European Union clearly do so in supporting Ukraine’s resistance to Russian imperialism while opposing Palestine’s struggle against Israeli imperialism. The same can be said for conservatives and liberals who rail against human rights abuses in China, Venezuela or Myanmar but have little or nothing to say about crimes committed by U.S.-allied regimes like Saudi Arabia, India or Guatemala.

The politics of the double standard also characterizes many leftists, as when Israel’s crimes against Palestine are correctly condemned while the Syrian regime’s murder of tens of thousands of civilians in Aleppo or Russia’s ethnic cleansing of the Ukrainian city Mariupol is not.

## Free Discussion Needed!

While some leftists who employ double standards might be motivated by antisemitism, it is obvious that the vast majority are not. They are motivated by *bad politics* — or what amounts to the same thing, the mindset that the enemy of my enemy is my friend.

The struggle against that mindset is one of the most important challenges facing the new generation of anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist activists. A viable alternative to all forms of capitalism-imperialism cannot emerge without it. That is all the more reason to counter the ongoing effort by supporters of Israel to shut down free discussion and debate.

continued on page 8





Indiana University campus activists made their position clear: Reinstat Sinno!

## Campus Politics: Restrictions and Surveillance

By Purnima Bose

FOLLOWING PAMELA WHITTEN's installation as President of Indiana University and her appointment of Rahul Shrivastav to serve as Provost and Executive Vice President of the university, all but one of the exterior doors to Bryan Hall, which houses their offices, were permanently locked.<sup>1</sup>

During previous administrations, Bryan Hall had been the setting for student protests such as the "study halls" organized by the student group NO SWEAT! against the university licensing of garments produced in sweatshops, along with graduate student demonstrations against mandatory fees. But no longer.

In another part of the Bloomington campus, an imposing metal gate suddenly appeared and blocked the driveway to the presidential residence; surveillance cameras were positioned around the grounds.

Bodyguards materialized to accompany Whitten to routine university functions, in yet another sign that she fears her constituents.

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The restriction of space, shrinking of access to upper administration, surveillance of members of the university community, and the attendant construction of students, staff and faculty as threats to public safety are consistent with President Whitten and Provost Shrivastav's curtailment of debate and free exchange of ideas on campus.

They invoke the threat of public safety as a pretext to limit academic freedom and freedom of speech, particularly to quell discussions of Israel's war on Gaza and Palestinian statehood.

The use of lawfare against public protests, as Jeffrey C. Isaac notes, has a long tradition. During the French Revolution, the Cold War, and apartheid-era South Africa, he writes that "authorities acting in the name of the common good have all too [often] invoked 'public safety' to justify the violent repression and imprisonment, and more commonly the harassment and firing, of dissenters."<sup>2</sup>

The alarm over public safety has been trumpeted by the IU provost and his minions to foreclose debate on Israel's Occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, namely through the suspension of a tenured faculty member, Associate Professor Abdulkader Sinno, and

the cancellation of an art exhibit by renowned Modernist Palestinian artist Samia Halaby.

Both violations of academic freedom are contemptible. While Halaby's cancellation has rightly received national and international coverage and condemnation, Sinno's suspension has not.

For this reason, I focus on Sinno's case here. (Details and documents about both are posted on the "IUB Organizing Hub" website, created by students, faculty, and community members to compile a record of the administration's misdeeds.)<sup>3</sup>

Vice Provost of Faculty and Academic Affairs (VPFAA) Carrie Docherty charged Sinno with improperly making a room reservation for the Palestine Solidarity Committee (PSC), a registered student organization.

The room reservation form asks faculty to name a department without specifying whether this information is to identify the faculty member's academic affiliation or to signal the unit's sponsorship of the event.

Sinno had reserved a room for an outside speaker, Miko Peled, an IDF veteran, who vocally supports the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions campaign. On November 14, 2023, two nights before the event, at the behest

of the provost, Sinno was told to cancel the room reservation for allegedly implying that the event was sponsored by his department rather than a student group.<sup>4</sup>

When PSC members attempted to secure a new room reservation, their request was denied on the grounds that reservations had to be made at least 10 business days in advance of the event. PSC held its event anyway without incident in the original room.<sup>5</sup>

The students' act of quiet civil disobedience resulted in the IU administration levying a disproportionate and ludicrous penalty on Sinno, suspending him from teaching in spring and summer 2024, and barring him from contact with student groups and his graduate advisees.

VPFAA Docherty impugned Sinno's credibility and his ethics in her suspension letter, opining "This sanction reflects my grave concerns about your lack of credibility in participating in the investigation, the potential consequences of diverting police resources for an event that did not have proper approval, as well as the impact of your conduct on our students."

She moralized: "Your past and most recent behavior constitutes an emerging pattern of unethical and unprofessional conduct."<sup>6</sup>

As John K. Wilson observes in *Academe Blog*, "The only unethical conduct here involves the attempts by the administration to suppress an event and the harsh punishment by the administration against the professor for the 'crime' of reserving a room. Even if Sinno had reserved a room incorrectly, the only appropriate punishment would be to limit his ability to reserve rooms in the future, not to ban him from teaching over an extracurricular event that says nothing about his pedagogical abilities."<sup>7</sup>

An honest appraisal of Sinno's "pedagogical abilities" would include his record as the 2020 recipient of Indiana University Trustees Teaching Award.<sup>8</sup>

### Threats and "Procedures"

In leveling a sanction disproportionate to Sinno's supposed infraction, Docherty violated campus procedures which require her to consult with the Bloomington Faculty Council ahead of suspending a faculty member. (Note the irony of the administration violating campus procedures in order to charge a faculty member with violating campus procedures.)

The only rules and procedures that matter to the Whitten administration seem to be the ones they can impose on others and arbitrarily change. Case in point, the room reservation form cautions faculty: "Your event is subject to change or cancellation in the event that the University makes a decision to revise its meeting guidance."

It is difficult to avoid concluding that IU's suspension of Sinno is an attempt to reverse

engineer his eventual firing. Docherty's suspension letter ominously threatens to investigate "further allegations" against him, and to level possible "sanctions up to and including separation of employment."<sup>9</sup>

Indeed, her suspension letter was preceded by a "Conduct Violation" notice, sent by Hamilton Lugar School Interim Dean Nick Cullather, which scolds Sinno for being "selfish and uncollegial" because he failed to consult with his department about sponsoring Peled's talk prior to filling out the room reservation form. "Further, violating university procedures by falsifying a form is actionable," Cullather warns him, "with consequences that could affect your career."<sup>10</sup>

At IU, under President Whitten and Provost Shrivastav's leadership, incorrectly filling out a room reservation form is now grounds for overriding the protections of tenure.

Among many faculty, the administration's sanction against Sinno is widely interpreted to be motivated by the external pressure on the university exerted by Indiana Representative Jim Banks, who demanded an account of antisemitic activities on campus last November and implied that PSC was responsible for them.<sup>11</sup>

Banks, the founder of the "Anti-Woke Caucus" in the House, is part of a national movement of right-wing politicians, who are clamping down on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion [DEI] programs. The brutal October 7 Hamas attacks has fueled their campaign against DEI programs. In their convoluted logic, they blame DEI for antisemitic incidents on university campuses.<sup>12</sup>

### The Right-wing Agenda

Political interference in universities represents attempts by right-wing Republicans to police and eliminate liberal and progressive perspectives from our campuses. Such interference seeks to impede the pedagogical mission of universities to nurture the curiosity of our students and to impart knowledge of the world to them.

Along with eroding tenure, Sinno's suspension impoverishes the educational experiences of IU students by cheating them

of the opportunity to take courses with him on the Middle East. Shame on President Whitten and Provost Shrivastav for caving to outside pressure and making a mockery of the university's pedagogical mission. Students deserve much better from university leaders.

Demand Prof. Sinno's reinstatement by signing this petition: [https://www.petitions.net/studentalumni\\_petition\\_in\\_support\\_of\\_prof\\_abdulkader\\_sinno](https://www.petitions.net/studentalumni_petition_in_support_of_prof_abdulkader_sinno).

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1. On the circumvention of shared governance in Pamela Whitten's presidential appointment, see Steve Sanders, "'You Have No Idea How Strange This Process Has Been: The Long Difficult Search for IU's 19th President.'" *Medium*, October 6, 2021. <https://medium.com/@stevesan/you-have-no-idea-how-strange-this-process-has-been-the-difficult-search-for-iu-s-19th-president-f61b473014d4>
2. Jeffrey C. Isaac, "From MLK Jr. and Bull Connor to Gaza and Indiana University." *Common Dreams*, January 16, 2024. <https://www.commondreams.org/opinion/martin-luther-king-jr-gaza>
3. "IUB Organizing Hub," <https://iub-organizing-collective.github.io/>
4. Maggie Hicks, "When a Threat Becomes an Excuse to Muzzle." *Inside Higher Education*, February 6, 2024. <https://www.chronicle.com/article/when-a-threat-becomes-an-excuse-to-muzzle>
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6. John K. Wilson, "In Defense of Abdulkader Sinno." *Academe Blog*, <https://academeblog.org/?s=abdulkader+sinno>
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9. Marissa Meador, "IU Suspends Professor after Palestine Solidarity Committee Event. Other Faculty Denounce the Decision." *IDS*, January 9, 2024. <https://www.idsnews.com/article/2024/01/iu-political-science-professor-sinno-suspended-psc-administration-palestine>
10. Cloteaux and Meador, "IU Denied."
11. Jim Banks, "Letter to President Whitten," November 15, 2023. [https://banks.house.gov/uploadedfiles/11.15.23\\_iu\\_campus\\_antisemitism\\_letter.pdf](https://banks.house.gov/uploadedfiles/11.15.23_iu_campus_antisemitism_letter.pdf)
12. See Nicholas Confessore, "America Is Under Attack: Inside the Anti-D.E.I. Crusade." *New York Times*, January 20, 2024. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2024/01/20/us/dei-woke-claremont-institute.html?searchResultPosition=9>

## Charges of Antisemitism Weaponized — continued from page 6

The fact that increasing numbers of Jews no longer accept the mythology of Zionism and stand in support of the Palestinian right for self-determination is driving the Zionists into fits of apoplectic frenzy.

Since they equate Israel's continued existence as an imperialist-apartheid state with the maintenance their power and privilege, the last thing they want is for their lies to be exposed by those they claim to represent.

Weaponization of charges of antisemitism is therefore increasingly a cudgel to silence

the views of leftwing and independent-thinking Jews. I leave that up to the reader to judge — is not such weaponization itself antisemitic? ■

### Notes

1. "Far-right Convoy Protesting Migrant Crisis Nears Southern Border," by Jacob Rosen, CBS News, February 3, 2024.
2. Quoted in "GOP to Extend Colleges Inquiry Beyond Antisemitism," by Anne Karni, *The New York Times*, January 6, 2024, A11.
3. *Black Skin, White Masks*, by Frantz Fanon, translated by Charles Lam Markmann (London: Pluto Press, 1988), 92. All page numbers in the text are to this edition.
4. <https://jerusalemdeclaration.org>



## Solidarity with Palestine: Refusing Colonial Constructs

By Cynthia G. Franklin

*Where should we go after the last frontiers?  
Where should the birds fly after the last sky?  
Where should the plants sleep after the last  
breath of air?*

*We will write our names with scarlet steam.  
We will cut off the hand of the song to be fin-  
ished by our flesh.*

*We will die here, here in the last passage.  
Here and here our blood will plant its olive tree.*

— Mahmoud Darwish,

from “Where Should the Birds Fly After  
the Last Sky?”<sup>1</sup>

ISRAEL AND THE United States have sus-  
tained the genocide taking place in Gaza  
since October 7, 2023 — and legitimated  
decades of Israeli settler colonialism and eth-  
nic cleansing — through language concerning  
who and what counts as human.

The colonial rhetorics that underwrite  
what poet and professor Refaat Alareer  
called “the most brutally wild occupation the  
world has ever known”<sup>2</sup> establishes sharp  
lines between Israeli Jews as humans and Pal-  
estinians as animals. But rather than petition  
for admission into this way of human being,  
many Palestinian artists and activists offer  
another way of life — one that is necessary  
not only to realizing a free Palestine, but to  
creating futures in which we all can not only  
survive, but thrive.

Descriptions of Palestinians as animals  
that have been made by leaders of the right-  
wing Israeli government and echoed by oth-  
ers — referring to them as human animals,  
as inhuman animals, as snakes, as dogs, as  
beasts, as insects — prop up Israel’s Dahiya  
Doctrine, a military doctrine of collective  
punishment and deterrence that began in  
2006.<sup>3</sup>

This labeling of Palestinians as “human  
animals” that serves to explicitly justify geno-  
cidal methods, dates back to the rise in Israel  
of the post-1967 militant national-religious  
ideological settler movement. In contrast,

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the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel, and  
cofounder of Students and Faculty for Justice in  
Palestine at the University of Hawai‘i.*



the early Zionist colonial-settler movement  
may have regarded the Indigenous population  
as backward or culturally inferior, but in the  
words of Vladimir Jabotinsky, founding guru  
of rightwing Revisionist Zionism, the Arabs  
would refuse to surrender “in return for  
either kind words or for bread and butter,  
because they are not a rabble, but a living  
people.”<sup>4</sup>

This relatively recent phenomenon ani-  
malizing Palestinians, which helps to establish  
an understanding of the human premised on  
domination, expendability and degradation  
of all deemed not-or less-than-human, is far  
from unique to Israel. This language supports  
Franz Fanon’s insight that “the terms the  
settler uses when he mentions the native are  
zoological terms,”<sup>5</sup> ones that construct col-  
onizer and colonized as “different species.”<sup>6</sup>

Even as this animal-human divide is a  
familiar colonial construct, attention to its  
specificities matter. In their most seemingly  
insignificant as well as consequential manifes-  
tations, they expose the urgent need — and  
insights into how — to practice other, deco-  
lonial ways of being and belonging, those that  
“teach life,” to draw on Rafeef Ziadah’s 2011  
poem condemning Western journalists for

their complicity in the dehumaniza-  
tion of Palestinians in besieged Gaza.<sup>7</sup>

### Tears for Gaza

This need was on my mind as I  
attended and then followed respons-  
es on social media to a Jewish Voice  
for Peace-Hawai‘i event, “Tears for  
Gaza.”

On November 29, 2023 some 75  
of us gathered in the University of  
Hawai‘i English Department to grieve  
the lives lost since October 7, 2023  
to Israeli settler colonial violence.  
We painted red teardrops on a  
white cloth and lit candles, as Nahed  
Minawi read out the names of 1200  
of the martyrs.

With Rebecca Maria Goldschmidt  
holding a related event in Hiroshi-  
ma spearheaded by Palestinians in  
Japan, JVP-Hawai‘i members Imani  
Altemus-Williams, Julie Wareh and  
Luanna Peterson coordinated read-  
ings of the Gaza Ministry’s list of the  
then-10,000 names — a list that as  
2024 begins has more than doubled.

Ours was a solemn gathering, a time to sit  
and breathe in the stealing of so many lives  
that were not just numbers, an occasion to  
sit with that loss, in the company of others  
feeling that sorrow, together with the mix of  
love and rage compelling millions of people  
across the globe to rise up and demand not  
only a permanent ceasefire but a free Pales-  
tine, from the River to the Sea.

My own breath caught when Nahad, read-  
ing out names, came to the Joudah family.  
Nour Joudah was known to some of us in  
the room. Now a professor at UCLA, Nour  
had spent time in Honolulu working on her  
dissertation exploring connections between  
Hawai‘i and Palestine.

In the wake of the wildfires that ravaged  
Maui in August 2023, she had participated in  
a “Palestine for Hawai‘i” webinar and fund-  
raiser organized by Sarah Ihmoud and hosted  
by Jadaliyya.<sup>8</sup> I had heard from Nour and then  
read from her brother Fady Joudeh that Israel  
had killed over 50 members of the Joudeh  
family.<sup>9</sup> Through the reading of names, Nahed  
was bringing Nour’s kin into the room.

When I posted photos from this event



to the Students and Faculty for Justice in Palestine at the University of Hawai'i (SFJP@UH) Facebook page, a heckler, "Tim Warner," accompanied his "hahaha" emoji with a meme of an Asian woman greedily biting into a very large roasted pig head which she clutched in her hands.

As it manifests the misogyny and racism as well as the Islamophobia that so often characterizes Zionist trolling, the meme also represents the Asian woman, as well as the pig, as objects of disgust. Presumably the Islamophobic equivalent of a movie-goer enjoying a box of popcorn, this meme was a reminder that antisemitism is perfectly compatible with Zionism (did "Tim" know or care that Jews, like Muslims, traditionally do not eat pork?)

"Tim's post brought to mind Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant's October 9, 2023 chillingly consequential call for the annihilation of Gaza. Announcing, 'I have ordered a complete siege on the Gaza Strip. There will be no electricity, no food, no fuel, everything is closed,' Gallant asserted, 'We are fighting human animals and we are acting accordingly.'"<sup>10</sup>

### Suffocation of All Life

Let me connect the dots between an everyday Zionist troll's mocking meme and the Israeli Defense Minister's call for collective punishment of — and genocidal violence against — Palestinians in Gaza.

What conjoins the two is not only a blatant disregard for Palestinian life — and refusal to situate Hamas's actions in their historical and political contexts — but also the assertion of a way of human being that depends upon separation from, dominion over, and depraved indifference to anyone designated as less-than-or-not human, most particularly animals and Palestinians.

As Gallant fulfilled the promise of "a complete siege," the world has witnessed the suffering and suffocation of all life in Gaza: humans, cats, dogs, donkeys, cattle, citrus and olive trees, strawberry fields.

This claim extends even to ownership over the elements, including the rain.<sup>11</sup> Prior to October 7, owing to 75 years of occupation, and 17 years of Israel's land, naval and aerial blockade and intermittent warfare targeting the Gaza strip's infrastructure as well as its people, 63 percent of Gazans were already food insecure, and the water situation was already dire.

The World Health Organization had deemed Gaza unlivable by 2020. As Israel enacts collective punishment against Palestinians in Gaza, the situation is truly catastrophic. Ninety-seven percent of the water is unfit for human consumption, Israel has displaced nearly two million people from their homes, and Gazans are dying of starvation and dehydration, as well as lack of access to medical

services and other basic goods.

In the months following October 7, Israel has allowed entry to only an average of 60 rather than 500 supply trucks per day for a population of 2.2 million people. The occupying army is bombing cell phone towers, water tanks, homes, schools, mosques, churches, hospitals, shelters, bakeries and markets, and razing and poisoning farms, orchards and greenhouses.

Such genocidal violence depends upon a narrative of humanity — or what I call in *Narrating Humanity: Life Writing and Movement Politics from Palestine to Mauna Kea*, forms of "narrative humanity" — that establishes through narrative codes and conventions who counts as human. As they dehumanize Palestinians, hegemonic forms of narrative humanity also set humans as apart from, and assert their absolute dominion over, animals.

Although these narratives have proliferated post-October 7, they predate, have paved the way for, and have been employed to maintain the Israeli state and the Zionist project for over 75 years. Noting Menachem Begin's 1982 reference to Palestinians as "beasts walking on two legs," Raphael Eitan's 1983 description of Palestinians as "drugged cockroaches in a bottle," and Eli Ben Dahan's 2013 assertion that "Palestinians are like animals, they aren't human," Ramzy Baroud has likened this language to that used in Rwanda to justify the genocide of the Tutsis.<sup>12</sup>

Ali Abunimah has also analyzed how language animalizing Palestinians accompanies calls for genocide. He observes how on July 1, 2014, the day before Israeli Jewish youth kidnapped and burned alive Palestinian teenager Muhammad Abu Khudair, Israeli lawmaker Ayelet Shaked advocated for the mass murder of Palestinians.

In a post widely shared on Facebook and "liked" by thousands before she removed it, Shaked stated, "Behind every terrorist stand dozens of men and women .... They are all enemy combatants, and their blood shall be on all their heads. Now this also includes the mothers of the martyrs, who send them to hell with flowers and kisses. They should follow their sons, nothing would be more just. They should go, as should the physical homes in which they raised the snakes. Otherwise, more little snakes will be raised there."<sup>13</sup>

This proclamation resonates with Gallant's, both in Shaked's advocacy for a complete siege, and in her assertion that Palestinians, as animals, should be obliterated. After Khudair's cousin Tariq Abukhdeir was badly beaten the next day, on July 6 an Instagram post juxtaposed his raw and swollen face next to that of a pig's.<sup>14</sup>

### Motivating Genocide by Mythology

Accounts of Palestinians as animals play an integral part in supporting what Israel has been unleashing these past few months, with the full support of the United States and

other Western governments.

Dan Gillerman, former Israeli ambassador to the United Nations, dismissed UN concerns about collective punishment by calling Palestinians "horrible, inhuman animals who have done the worst atrocities that this century has seen."<sup>15</sup> Ron Prozor, Israel's Ambassador to Berlin, said the Western world must stand with Israel as it fights Hamas, whom he described as "bloodthirsty animals."<sup>16</sup>

Israeli General Ghassan Alian proclaimed, "Human animals must be treated as such. You wanted hell, you will get hell."<sup>17</sup> Rabbi Meir Maroz told Israeli Channel 7, "If they [the people of Gaza] were humans, we would have sent them humanitarian aid...but this is about animals."<sup>18</sup> Ezra Yachin, Israel's oldest army reservist at age 95, was filmed calling for the Israeli military to kill families and children along with Hamas militants, stating, "These animals can no longer live."<sup>19</sup>

The Zionist casting of Palestinians as "Amalek," the Jews' archetypal symbolic enemy, roots this violent divide between humans (Israelis and their supporters) and animals (Palestinians), in the Old Testament. To justify the October 27, 2023 ground invasion of Gaza, on October 28, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said in Hebrew that in their battle against Hamas, Israelis "are committed to completely eliminating this evil from the world," adding, "You must remember what Amalek has done to you, says our Holy Bible. And we do remember."

Netanyahu here invokes the first Book of Samuel, where the prophet Samuel tells King Saul that God has commanded Saul to kill every person in Amalek, the rival nation to Israel: "Now go, attack the Amalekites and totally destroy all that belongs to them. Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys."<sup>20</sup>

In this genocidal command, the inclusion of these other-than-human animals owes not only to humans' dependency upon them for food and labor, but also because Amalekites were considered to be able to transform themselves into animals to avoid capture.<sup>21</sup>

Amalek is a Biblical fiction about an archetypal enemy of ancient Israel; there is no evidence or reason to believe that "Amalekites" actually existed, certainly not in anything like the way the Biblical legend tells.

The purpose of that story and others like it was to show how "our god can beat up their god." Secular in his beliefs, Netanyahu knows this perfectly well, making his rhetoric even more cynical and genocidal in intent. Netanyahu's appeal to his base and to the Israeli Army to treat Palestinians as "Amalek" is a signal calling for mass murder.

### Erasing Humanity

In calling upon Israelis to "remember Amalek," Netanyahu follows in the bloody footsteps of Brooklyn-born settler, Baruch

Goldstein. In 1994, equating Palestine with Amalek, Goldstein massacred 29 Muslims praying at a mosque in Hebron, a city sacred to both Jews and Muslims.<sup>22</sup>

As he builds on this history, Ariel Gold contends that Netanyahu also appeals to Christian Zionists, and to “the religious-nationalist Kach party, founded in 1971 by Brooklyn-born Rabbi Meir Kahane, who argued for “the immediate transfer of the Arabs’ out of Israel and the occupied territories, referring to Palestinians as ‘dogs.’”<sup>23</sup>

On X, in a December 8, 2023 post (since removed), Aryeh Yitzhak King, the deputy mayor of Jerusalem, also invoked the story of Amalek and reinforced the Zionist narrative of Palestinians as animals.

Referring to footage the Israeli Army published in northern Gaza of abducted Palestinians stripped to their underwear, whom he described as “Muslim Nazis,” King stated, “If it were up to me, I would have dispatched D-9 bulldozers and put them behind the mounds of dirt and would have given the order to cover all these hundreds of ants, while they’re still alive.”

He continued, “They aren’t human beings and not human animals. They’re subhuman and that’s how they should be treated.” He followed this by saying, “Eradicate the memory of Amalek, and never forget.”<sup>24</sup>

King’s call to wipe out Amalek/Palestine and those who might remember it, while also enjoining Israelis to never forget their enmity for Amalek/Palestine, encapsulates settler logics. This is even as the reference to the men as “Muslim Nazis” simultaneously positions Israeli Jews as the victims here.

For Israel to complete its colonial project requires both erasing Palestinians and their memories, while preserving the memory of Palestinians as forever enemies. As with Netanyahu, King instrumentalizes Biblical references to normalize violence while continuing the myth that Israelis are engaged in an ancient religious feud, rather than a settler colonial project of dispossession. Taking up the story of Amalekites as subhuman/animal shapeshifters, works to remove Palestinians from the realm of history and the human.

### “We Will Never Stop Sharing”

This story is unsustainable, as must be all narratives that attempt to justify genocide. First, Palestinian humanity and memory are not so easily eradicated: as Palestinians, joined by allies, remind us daily on social media as they document Israel’s inhumanity and assert their own, “We will never forget. We will never stop sharing.”

Second, this narrative requires denying that all humans are animals. Third, there is the glaring inhumanity of the position that only those deemed human are deserving of dignity and of life — and this is why Israel’s counternarrative must keep company with this colonial narrative. This profoundly



hypocritical counternarrative posits the Israeli army as the most moral in the world, boasting of its high rates of veganism, and its rescue of pets from Gaza.<sup>25</sup>

Where does this story of the human leave Palestinians and others fighting for a free Palestine? On the one hand, who would want to struggle for recognition as human, when defined so inhumanely? Clearly, it is those wielding title to the human who are deprived and indifferent to the lives of others.

On the other hand, without laying claim to the human, how to put a stop to a genocide premised upon dehumanization? How else to assert the right to live and the other most basic of human rights?

Throughout Gaza, throughout all of Palestine, and throughout the *shataat*, many Palestinians are answering such questions through the practice of another way of human being and belonging, one that exposes and refuses the inhumanity of those seeking to violently exclude them from their land as well as from domain of the human.

As we turn to Gaza, we see not only Zionism desperately practicing a way of being human that, ultimately, may be the death of us all. We also see Palestinians teaching life — asserting rage and resistance towards those who dehumanize and kill them, while also rehearsing a humanity premised on care for one another, for their other-than-human relations, and for the land that they will never abandon.

On social media, in Whatsapp, Telegram, and Signal groups, Palestinians are taking care of one another. In addition to journalists holding orphaned and injured babies, medics refusing to vacate hospitals full of sick and injured people, families sharing tea and bread cooked over makeshift stoves on bombed out streets, we also see the people of Gaza extending their empathy to the non-human creatures suffering alongside them.

When I scroll through Instagram, such acts of kindness exist in heartbreaking and infuriating contrast to reels of Israelis playing victoriously in the emptied playgrounds of Gaza neighborhoods, exploding buildings, and spraying from helicopters what appears to be white phosphorus.

I see an Al Jazeera video of an elderly woman who, feeding her birds before herself, explains that “Just as I protect my own soul, I protect them, because they are also spirits (souls), and I fear for them.”<sup>26</sup> I see reels of men and children giving interviews or taking shelter as they cradle cats; I see journalist Wael Al Dahdouh making sure cats who are now homeless have food and water.

Shortly before the Israeli army assassinated him, also killing his sister and her four children, I see a video of Refaat Alareer, who served as a Gaza municipality volunteer, describing with sadness and anger the starvation and dehydration of those animals at the Gaza Zoo who survived the Israeli airstrikes.<sup>27</sup>

I see videos of Sulala Animal Rescue members risking their lives to care for donkeys and dogs. All this accompanies rage over a genocide that, in the name of a human war against human animals, continues even as the world witnesses it.

These instances of connection between Palestinians and their non-human relations extends to the land that Palestinians love as a part of them. We see this in photos of women who face Israeli bulldozers as they hold fast to the olive trees, whose roots and fruits hold Palestinian blood.

As Darwish tells us, “Here and here our blood will plant its olive tree”; or, as Fadwa Tuqan proclaims in “The Deluge and the Tree,” the Tree survives the colonial onslaught; it has not really fallen,

“...Not with our red streams flowing forever,  
not while the wine of our torn limbs / feed the  
thirsty roots, / Arab roots alive / tunneling deep,  
deep, into the land!”<sup>28</sup>

Artists and poets tell us how the trees who provide shade are home, as does Mosab Abu Toha in his poem “What Is Home?”<sup>29</sup> They show us, as in the paintings of Nabil Anani, women as one with Palestine’s lands, its rolling hills.<sup>30</sup>

They let us know how, alongside them, the pebbles weep, as they do in Refaat Alareer’s 2015 poem, “Drenched,” written in the wake of Israel’s 2014 killing spree in Gaza (“Only the pebbles wept. / Only the pebbles.”).<sup>31</sup>

### Grounded Narrative Humanity

This empathy, care and kinship bespeaks a way of human being and belonging that does not depend upon the violent hierarchies that make practices of death — war, occupation, land and “resource” extraction — natural or inevitable ways of sustaining human life.

Though specific in its iterations, such a way of being human is normative for many Indigenous peoples. I conclude *Narrating Humanity* with attention to Kanaka Maoli (Native Hawaiian) kinship and respectful reciprocity with Mauna Kea as their sacred mountain and relation, and with their other-than-human relations, including land, sky, waters, elements.

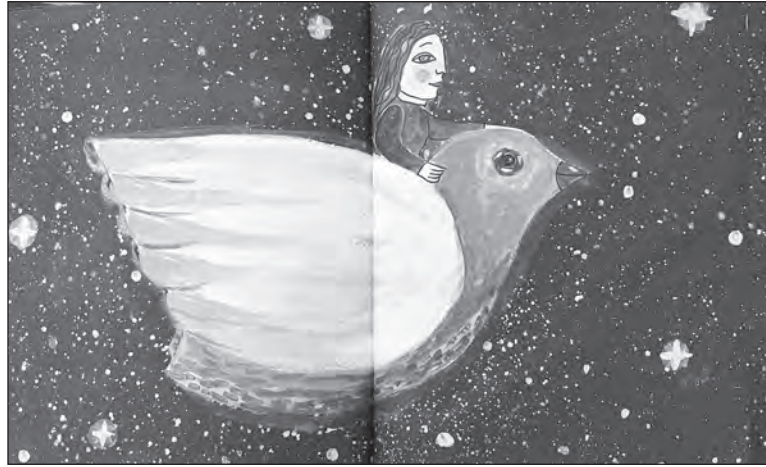
I view the stories that convey this decolonial relationship as instances of “grounded narrative humanity,” distinguishing them from forms of narrative humanity that uphold colonialism, racial capitalism, and heteropatriarchy. Living in a time of genocide, climate catastrophe, and war without end against all deemed inhuman or less than human, our collective survival depends upon learning these ways of human being and belonging.

In my living room, I look daily at a painting by the internationally acclaimed artist from Gaza, Malak Mattar, who began painting during Israel’s 2014 siege on Gaza.

One of her earliest paintings, this one is of a girl whose chest contains an open cage. Her eyes, as she faces her viewers, are portals; they bespeak starry skies. Around her, birds

fly free against a background that is sky blue, but brighter.

Mattar tells a similar story in her children’s book *Sitti’s Bird: A Gaza Story*. In it, the girl in the story, Malak, tells of how, after surviving the terror of 2014, she finds her grandmother’s bird on her windowsill, and “feels like the cage inside her had been opened.”<sup>32</sup>



The bird here is her grandmother’s companion, and her own in the freedom dreams that conclude the story as Malak takes flight into the star-studded night, sitting on the bird’s back.

As in the painting, the freedom of birds and Mattar are interconnected. The bird is not only a symbol of peace, not only a metaphor for having the freedom to fly away from

but also to return home.

Together with the girls and women who populate Mattar’s art, the birds are, to revisit the words of the woman who feeds the birds before she herself eats, companions, souls who provide and receive comfort and care.

In “After the Last Sky,” Mahmoud Darwish asks, “Where should the birds fly after the last sky?” while also promising that the land will continue to live, nourished by Palestinian blood.

Mattar adds to this vision of grief but also regeneration through the land, through her art that envisions how she and the birds are free, undivided from and as one with each other and their land, skies and waters.

In the company of so many other Palestinians who are painting and writing and telling stories and singing; who are throwing stones and breaching walls; who are making shelters of their bodies even as they themselves have none; who are sharing poems and

music, bread and tea; who relate to their other-than-human animals and land as kin, Mattar breathes life into a way of human being and belonging that refuses and resists colonial violence and death propagated in the name of the human.

Our collective survival depends upon listening to and learning from these decolonial practices of being human. ■

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## Beyond Historic Parallels: Puerto Rican Solidarities with Palestine

By Sara Awartani

SINCE OCTOBER 7, an unprecedented number of Puerto Ricans across the archipelago and the diaspora have taken to the streets to organize and march in solidarity with Palestinians.

Whether calling for a ceasefire to halt Israel's siege on Gaza or demanding the liberation of Palestine, many Puerto Ricans describe being called to action because Puerto Rico, like Palestine, faces a similar struggle against colonialism.

"There is a situation of humanitarian crisis and genocide. There are clear intentions of racial extermination," explained Ricardo Santos Ortiz, the spokesman for Puerto Rico's Palestine Solidarity Network, to journalists from TelesUR. "Therefore, we see as urgent the solidarity from the people, the entire world, and Puerto Rico, which is also a colonized and intervened country."<sup>1</sup>

From *Axios* to *Al Jazeera*, journalists have clamored to explain this uptick in pro-Palestinian sentiment amongst Puerto Ricans; my own email inbox is filled with media requests.<sup>2</sup> Together, these reports paint Puerto Rico and Palestine as parallel struggles.

"At this juncture, it is imperative to address the self-determination of people in Palestine. If so, we must also speak about Puerto Rico, the world's oldest colony,"

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*Puerto Rican-Palestinian solidarity has deep roots. 2017 Puerto Rican Day parade in New York City. Note Dr. Rabab Abduhadi, well-known educator (in sun glasses).*

writes Susanne Ramírez de Arellano of *Fierce*. "The similarities," she later goes on to explain, "are too many to ignore."<sup>3</sup>

Like the Palestinian struggle, these articles astutely observe, the struggle for Puerto Rican independence has been met with state-sanctioned criminalization and persecution. "Many of our revolutionaries have been murdered fighting for the liberation of Puerto Rico from the U.S.," said New-York based artist Danielle DeJesus in an interview with *Axios*.<sup>4</sup>

Yet Israel's genocidal violence against Gaza calls us to uncover not just historic parallels between Puerto Rico and Palestine, but to also uncover the long history of Puerto Rican solidarities with Palestine. Of course, this is not to say that the revolutionary politics of the 1970s — the peak of the decolonization era — can or should be replicated today.

Rather, such a retrospective on the relationships between these two anti-colonial movements reminds us of the rich histories of struggle and solidarity movements that precede us. These solidarities, much like that of the Black and Palestinian Left, were birthed in the aftermath of the 1967 Arab-Israeli War and were rooted in a broader politics of anti-imperialism and Left internationalism.

Even more importantly, the most robust of these solidarities were rooted in the militant politics of the most radical — and controversial — sectors of the Puerto Rican Left:

those committed to achieving Puerto Rican decolonization through any means necessary, including armed struggle. It is a story that invariably leads us to Puerto Rican Chicago.<sup>5</sup>

### Palestine and Puerto Rican Chicago

To tell the history of Puerto Rican solidarities with Palestine is to tell a history of Puerto Rican Chicago. Take, as example, the story of former Puerto

Rican political prisoner Edwin Cortés.

In the summer of 2014, as Israel was leading yet another brutal assault on Gaza, photographs of Cortés attending a rally in solidarity with Gaza surfaced online. In downtown Chicago, amid pro-thousands of Palestinian supporters, Cortés waved a Puerto Rican flag.

His shirt, meanwhile, featured Oscar López Rivera, arrested in 1981 for his participation in the *Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación Nacional*, and then still imprisoned on a number of charges, including conspiracy to overthrow the United States government.

Despite ostensibly attending a pro-Palestinian rally, the shirt and flag Cortés (and other Puerto Ricans in attendance) donned that day were neither careless nor accidental. As I've argued elsewhere, Cortés's presence at the protest, including his sartorial choices, actually reveals decades of Chicago's Puerto Rican community organizing alongside Palestinians and in defense of Palestine.<sup>6</sup>

Much of this history of solidarity can be traced back to the *Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación Nacional* (FALN), a clandestine organization — largely based out of Chicago, though its members also stemmed from New York and the archipelago itself — committed to achieving Puerto Rican independence through armed struggle.

"To be truly revolutionary," argued the

FALN, “a party must educate and organize the masses for the seizure of power by way of an organized and disciplined vehicle, a People’s Revolutionary Army.” So began the rearguard struggle in the development of Puerto Rican people’s war: an operation the FALN believed must work in tandem with other forms of revolutionary organizing.<sup>7</sup>

Across their headline-grabbing and controversial lifespan, the FALN (1974-83) launched over one hundred attacks throughout the United States in an attempt to expose the colonization of Puerto Rico.

These roughly nine years of FALN-led “armed propaganda” deliberately targeted state apparatuses, the state itself, or state supporters, not the civilian population: a replication of the anarchist strategy, propaganda of the deed, which intended to wake up the masses to structural injustices.<sup>8</sup>

“Our main strength lies in our ability to carry on a rearguard struggle inside the very territory of the enemy, which can result in large economic and psychological losses for them and threaten to unleash the frustration of the American working people and the wrath of their minorities,” explained the FALN.<sup>9</sup>

Among Puerto Rican and other New Left radicals who remained committed to a revolutionary politics, the FALN’s actions constituted a legitimate national liberation movement fighting for self-determination against an imperial power.

They understood the fight against U.S. colonialism in Puerto Rico as part of the global history of Third World liberation. It was in this global struggle that the FALN saw Puerto Rico and Palestine as linked together — part and parcel of the same revolutionary struggle. Puerto Ricans and Palestinians were bound together against imperialism.

Much like Robin D.G. Kelley writes of Black-Palestinian solidarities, what mattered most to Chicago’s Puerto Rican radicals was less any precise parallels between Puerto Rico and Palestine than the insistence that “the struggles were *linked*, not only to each other, but to injustice and oppression around the world.”<sup>10</sup>

After all, the demands of Puerto Rican citizens — even if, in the archipelago, second-class citizens — are different than the demands of stateless Palestinian refugees, Palestinians in the occupied territories, or Palestinian citizens of Israel.

Nor is Puerto Rico a militarily occupied nation — although, of course, Puerto Rico has served as an important military base for the United States, not to mention the decades-long use of Vieques for bombing target practices by the U.S. Marines.<sup>11</sup>

Nor have Puerto Ricans been historically usurped by a settler population that continues, to this day, in confiscating homes, businesses, and lands in the name



The Latinx Project at NYU

From Puerto Rico to Palestine, the global South nations are test sites for the “advanced” industrial products of capital’s war economy. Mass struggle forced the U.S. Navy to withdraw from Vieques.

of establishing an ethnic majority state, as is the case of Israel. Although, of course, many scholars and activists have begun to explain the migration of American citizens to Puerto Rico in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria and PROMESA as “speculating settlers comb[ing] the archipelago.”<sup>12</sup>

#### Vital Linkages

We too see the notion of linkages rather than precise parallels reflected in the story of Edwin Cortés. Throughout his own 16 years of imprisonment — Cortés was arrested in 1983 and, like López Rivera, charged with seditious conspiracy — Cortés stayed abreast of political developments across Palestine.

For example, with the onset of the First Intifada (1987-93), Cortés found himself compelled to write — from behind bars — a defense of the Palestinian struggle. Published in *Libertad*, the official journal of the campaign to free the Puerto Rican political prisoners, Cortés wrote:

*“Within the past two months renewed resistance in the Middle East has once again captured world attention. This time it is not the tragic Iran-Iraq war but Palestine, a nation in struggle that represents a vital threat to the existence of Zionism, Arab reaction, and U.S. imperialism in the Israeli occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip.”*

He warned *Libertad*’s readers to refuse the U.S. and Israeli media’s attempts to cast the uprisings as “temporary civil unrest caused by outside agitators.” “Nothing could be further from the truth,” insisted Cortés. Rather, these “massive acts of resistance by a wide spectrum of Palestinians are led by genuine and experienced indigenous leadership.”

As such, Cortés called readers to listen, center and trust Palestinian voices in our movement work. “The task of progressive and freedom loving people, national liberation

movements, and socialist countries is to concretely and materially support the Palestinian people’s uprising, their right to self-determination and the establishment of a Palestinian state,” he explained.<sup>13</sup>

But tracing this long (and partial) history through the story of Edwin Cortés can enrich the archive of Puerto Rican-Palestinian solidarities even further.

Indeed, as I’ve written elsewhere, Chicago’s Puerto Rican radicals stood in solidarity with Palestine not only out of an ideological commitment to shared revolutionary struggles and Third World liberation, but also — and perhaps more importantly for the intensifying political repression occurring today — out of *shared organizing histories in Chicago*.

In the 1970s, both Puerto Rican and Palestinian Chicago found themselves consistently monitored by local and federal authorities: the former as part of a broader federal investigation into the Puerto Rican independence movement, the latter in response to Palestinian “terrorism,” including the Nixon administration’s Operation Boulder, a federal program dedicated to monitoring, interrogating, and deporting Arab and Arab Americans deemed suspicious of terrorist activities.<sup>14</sup>

It was these mutual experiences of state surveillance and political repression that brought Puerto Ricans and Palestinians in Chicago together — especially among student activists at the University of Illinois at Chicago (then known as Chicago Circle), who would face additional repression from a university administration hostile to progressive movement building, especially toward Palestine solidarity movements.<sup>15</sup>

While this story of repression against student organizing is best told elsewhere, it remains a formidable, foundational moment



in this long history of Puerto Rican-Palestinian solidarities — and a moment that echoes the political climates unfolding across university campuses today.<sup>16</sup>

As Edwin Cortés himself later reflected, organizing alongside Palestinian and other Third World student movements was critical to his own political trajectory:

*"It was at the University that I became aware and involved in other Third World peoples' liberation struggles. I met and became personal friends with members of the Iranian Students Association, supporters of the Organization of Iranian Peoples Fedayee Guerillas (OIPFG), the Organization of Arab Students, supporters of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and the Eritrean Students Association, supporters of the Eritrean Peoples Liberation Front (EPLF). These organizations uphold the necessity of armed struggle through a prolonged peoples' war to liberate themselves from a common enemy."<sup>17</sup>*

### Honoring the Radical Protest Tradition

To trace the long history of Puerto Rican solidarities with Palestine back to Puerto Rican Chicago may be controversial.

At the height of their political activity, not everyone viewed the FALN as a legitimate national liberation movement. Surely the United States government did not. Neither did the *Partido Nuevo Progresista*, the archipelago's emerging conservative movement advocating for Puerto Rican statehood. To both, the FALN was a terrorist organization, and Chicago's Puerto Rican community still struggles to distance itself from accusations of terrorism and anti-Americanism.<sup>18</sup>

But the FALN drew skepticism even among other factions of the Puerto Rican Left. The most well-known story of these divisions was the rumor that the FALN was a state-designed operative meant to destroy the Puerto Rican independence movement internally.<sup>19</sup>

Yet the most telling example of the controversy may lie in an unlikely place: the pages of the English-language journal of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, the *PFLP Bulletin*. In June 1980, the *PFLP Bulletin* editorial board found itself issuing an apology to the Puerto Rican independence movement.

Four months earlier, the *PFLP Bulletin* had published an article by the *Liga Socialista Puertorriqueña*, an archipelago-based organization that supported the FALN's armed activities. The essay traced the historical legacy of armed struggle in order to justify its use in the movement for Puerto Rican liberation. But its steadfast support for armed struggle drew condemnation from other factions of the independence movement, who apparently voiced their disapproval to the editorial board.

"In any case, some of the questions dealt with in this article are best resolved among the Puerto Rican left forces and the solidarity

organizations supporting them, and not in the pages of our *Bulletin*," wrote the board.<sup>20</sup>

The long history of Puerto Rican solidarities with Palestine cannot be divorced from these radical protest traditions. The story of Puerto Rican solidarities with Palestine, much like the story of Puerto Rican Chicago, is also a story of the United States' unrelenting efforts to cast the independence movement as a terrorist — and therefore illegitimate — political menace. This is a story that Palestinians themselves know all too well.

But it is also a story — to once again draw from Robin D. G. Kelley's work on Black-Palestinian solidarities — that calls us to consider how Puerto Ricans have long generated new visions of "worldmaking" that bound Puerto Ricans and Palestinians as comrades in revolutionary struggle.<sup>21</sup>

Yes, a crucial part of this history lies in Puerto Rican Chicago. Yet as our current moment reveals, this history also lies in New York City, where Puerto Ricans and Palestinians have long lived alongside and organized with one another.<sup>22</sup> And it also lies in Puerto Rico itself, where a sizeable Palestinian diaspora community has existed since 1948.<sup>23</sup>

There are, then, far more than historic parallels. There are many long, rich histories of Puerto Rican solidarities with Palestine nurtured by the intertwining of Puerto Rican and Palestinian communities, whether in Chicago, New York, or Puerto Rico. ■

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## Sergey Lavrov & Vulgar Anti-Imperialism By Howie Hawkins

*"Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced that Hamas must be destroyed as a whole and as a military force. It sounds like demilitarization [of Ukraine]. He also said that extremism must be eliminated in Gaza. It sounds like denazification [of Ukraine]."*

— Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, December 28, 2023

THERE IS A longstanding critique of Vulgar Marxism as a simplistic economic determinism that claims that the ideological and social superstructure of a society is determined by its economic infrastructure or mode of production.

Vulgar Marxists (notably Stalinists) have tended to support as societies as "socialist" simply because they had state ownership of the means of production, no matter how much that state exploited its workers and denied democratic rights to its people in violation of the socialist values of freedom, equality, and democracy.

Vulgar Marxism was not the approach of Marx who analyzed society as an interacting whole in which economic, social, and ideological conditions mutually affect each other.

We also need a critique of *Vulgar Anti-Imperialism*, which considers U.S.-led Western imperialism as the only imperialism in the world today, and which therefore supports any state in conflict with the United States as anti-imperialist and "objectively" progressive, no matter how oppressive that state may be toward its own people and imperialist toward other nations.

For Vulgar Anti-Imperialists, such as the "United National Antiwar Coalition," U.S.-led imperialism is the "main enemy," oppression and aggression by anti-U.S. states are at most "secondary contradictions," and therefore any

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enemy of my enemy is my friend.

Vulgar Anti-Imperialism employs geopolitical analysis of state interests that renders people struggling against oppression invisible. This view yields some very reactionary friends like Russia, the mothership for the authoritarian bigots of the global far-right, and patrimonial police states — such as the Assad's Syria and the Kim family dynasty's North Korea.

A consistent anti-imperialism in contrast relies on a concrete class analysis of each conflict to see who is the oppressor and who is oppressed with view toward acting in solidarity with the oppressed.



*From one genocidist to another, Sergey Lavrov proclaims Russia's aims in Ukraine are like Benjamin Netanyahu's in Gaza.*



### Lavrov Spills the Beans

Ironically, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov recent highlighted the hypocrisy of Vulgar Anti-Imperialists who oppose the U.S.-backed Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories, while not opposing the Russian occupation of Ukrainian territories because the United States opposes it. But their "anti-imperialist" Russian ally recently contradicted this position.

After twice reiterating Russia's stated goals in Ukraine of "denazification" and "demilitarization" in an interview with the state-owned Russia-24 news channel, Lavrov equated Russia's goals in Ukraine to Israel's goals in Gaza:

*"Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced that Hamas must be destroyed as a whole and as a military force. It sounds like demilitarization. He also said that extremism must be eliminated in Gaza. It sounds like denazification."*<sup>1</sup>

Russia's state-owned domestic news agency RIA Novosti published the transcript of Lavrov's interview, which the foreign

ministry published in English on its website. The state-owned international news agency RT published a story that featured Lavrov's remark on Russia's and Israel's similar military goals in their respective offensives, titled "Israel's declared goals similar to Russia's — Lavrov."<sup>2</sup>

Vulgar Anti-Imperialists have not tried to explain why their "anti-imperialist" ally Russia would identify its goals in Ukraine with those of U.S.-backed Israel in the Palestinian territories. I can find no comment on Lavrov's statement from the Vulgar Anti-Imperialist camp.

The Western mass media seem not to have reported on Lavrov's remarks, except in some of the pro-Israel press where Jerusalem-based *Times of Israel* and the Brooklyn-based *Jewish Press* found Lavrov's remarks newsworthy for their readers.<sup>3</sup>

From the camp of consistent anti-imperialists, Lavrov's remarks were condemned. Gilbert Achcar, a socialist critic of Vulgar Anti-Imperialism, or what he has called the Anti-Imperialism of Fools, tweeted that Lavrov's statement showed that "All of them, Biden, Russia and Israel resort to hypocritical justifications."<sup>4</sup>

Ramzy Baroud, the editor of *Palestine Chronicle*, has supported Ukraine's right to defend itself from Russia's invasion and condemned Western hypocrisy that condemns Russian aggression against Ukraine while not opposing Israeli aggression against the Palestinians.<sup>5</sup> Baroud said:

*"Lavrov's position...is bizarre and greatly offensive, to say the least. Bizarre because it is entirely inconsistent with Russian foreign policy since the start of the Israeli genocide on Gaza, and objectionable because it resembles some kind of a political nod for Israel to continue with its lethal war on Palestinian civilians without worrying about a strong Russian response. Arab governments and Palestinian Resistance groups must demand clarification from Russia following these offensive statements and inquire if they represent an official change of policies regarding Israel and the Palestinian fight for freedom."*<sup>6</sup>

I can find no reporting on whether Russia clarified its position to Arab governments and the Palestinians. But the question remains: Why did Lavrov make these remarks and why did RT choose to amplify them internationally?

One clue is that in his interview Lavrov specifically praised Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for his position on the war in Ukraine, noting that “Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has not criticized Russia despite the numerous critical statements [about his actions] made around the world.” The RT story pointedly added that Netanyahu “has refused to send military aid to Ukraine.”

### **Cynical Geopolitics**

It seems Lavrov was signaling to Israeli leaders that Russia wants to maintain their positive relations that have been tested since the October 7 attack on Israel by Hamas, and Israel’s subsequent devastation of Gaza.

Since coming to power in 2000, Vladimir Putin has pursued close relations with Israel for political and strategic reasons. Politically, Putin has to account for nearly 600,000 people living in the Russian Federation who are considered Jewish under Israel’s Law of Return, as well as the 1.5 million Russian-speaking Jews in Israel, who are nearly 20% of all Israeli Jews and have roots and family in Russia and Ukraine.

An estimated 100,000 Israeli Jews live in Russia, with about 80% of them living in Moscow. Hundreds of thousands of Russian-speaking Jews have dual Israeli-Russian or Israeli-Ukrainian citizenship.<sup>7</sup> For his part, Benjamin Netanyahu, with the sizable Russian-speaking Israeli voting bloc in mind, campaigned for office in 2019 with a multi-storey banner on the Likud party headquarters showing him shaking hands with Putin.

In terms of geopolitical strategy, Lavrov seems to be signaling that Russia wants to renew its partnerships with Israel despite the Gaza war. At end of 2019, Putin and Netanyahu reached an agreement that Israel would not sell arms to Ukraine and Georgia, both partially under military occupation by Russia, in return for Russia not selling arms to Iran.<sup>8</sup>

Russia wants Israel to continue its policies of denying Ukrainian requests for military aid, particularly Israel’s vaunted and much-needed air-defense systems, as well as not participating in economic sanctions against Russia.

Russia and Israel have other military relationships. They are allies in the Libyan civil war where they support the insurgent Libyan National Army against the UN-recognized Government of National Accord that is supported by Turkey. In the Syrian civil war, Israel has quietly supported Russian intervention in Syria in opposition to Turkey and in competition with Iran. In return, Russia has quietly allowed Israeli airstrikes on Iranian military assets in Syria through airspace that Russian controls.<sup>9</sup>

Russian-Israeli trade and investment have been significant for both countries. Russia has particularly valued the high-tech contributions of Israelis who work and invest in Moscow, but many Israeli high-tech firms left Russia voluntarily after its full-scale invasion

of Ukraine.<sup>10</sup>

The Greek socialist and anti-debt activist Yorgos Mitralias has suggested that Lavrov was also speaking to the American and European establishments, seeking rapprochement around their common interest in the stability of the capitalist system.<sup>11</sup>

The stability needed for business-as-usual has certainly been disrupted by the wars in Ukraine and Gaza. Lavrov may have been signaling as one big power to the Western powers that they should work together on deals to stop both wars and restore global big-power stability.

### **Courting the Far Right**

I would suggest also that Lavrov’s message was particularly aimed at the rising far-right in America and Europe, whose top mobilizing issue of anti-immigrant nativism has been extended into Islamophobic rants against Palestinians and claims that budget-draining aid to Ukraine and Ukrainian refugees is shortchanging unmet needs at home.

With the far-right positioned potentially to make gains in both American and European elections in 2024, Russia is hoping for governments that will push Ukraine to settle for a peace deal that concedes occupied Ukrainian territories to Russia.

Meanwhile, the aid that Ukraine has received in the last two years has been threatened in both Europe and America. Although the \$54 billion European aid package finally passed at the beginning of February over objections from the far right, it is a four-year package of mostly economic aid in the form of loans. The amount is far below Ukraine’s budget needs and deepens the debt trap in which Ukraine is caught.

Meanwhile in the United States as of early February, the far-right Republicans in the House remain committed to blocking a proposed \$60 billion Ukraine aid package which includes \$48 billion in military aid.

### **Status of the War**

The Kremlin narrative, which Vulgar Anti-Imperialists tend to amplify, is that Ukraine is now losing the war and therefore the United States and the West should use their leverage over Ukraine to force it into a land-for-peace deal that accepts what Putin recently called Russia’s “conquests” in Ukraine.<sup>12</sup> But Ukraine is not losing the war.

In 2022, Ukraine defeated the world’s third largest military that expected to take Kyiv in few days and install a puppet government. Over the remainder of 2022, Ukraine took back half of the Ukrainian land that Russia initially occupied. Ukraine’s limited air defense systems were enough to stop Russian military aircraft from conducting bombing raids beyond the frontlines.

In 2023, the frontlines hardly moved despite offensives by both sides. But over the course of 2023, Ukraine’s expanded air

defense systems became very effective at intercepting Russian missiles and drones aimed at civilian infrastructure and neighborhoods far from the frontlines.

In recent months and weeks, Ukraine has made significant strategic gains with strikes in Russia’s rear. Russia’s Black Sea Fleet has been so crippled by Ukrainian drone boats that it cannot operate safely in the western Black Sea, can no longer block Ukrainian grain exports, and can no longer harbor its ships safely in Crimean ports.

Russia’s Su-34 fighter jet fleet has had so many losses in early 2024 from Patriot air defense missiles at Ukraine’s disposal that the fighter jets can no longer safely fly close enough to the front lines to launch their glide bombs at Ukrainian targets.

Russia’s oil refineries from the Baltic Sea in the North to the Black Sea in the South have been so stricken by Ukrainian drones that the Russian energy ministry was forced to announce at the end of January that it is reducing oil exports by over a third due to reduced refining capacity, a big blow to Russia’s income to finance its war machine.

It is true that Ukraine has not succeeded in its goal of pushing Russia out of all Ukrainian territories. It is also true that Ukraine is holding the frontlines against continued Russian offensives. However, that may change if U.S. military aid to Ukraine remains blocked by the Republican far-right.

Ukraine is running low on artillery rounds, essential for pushing back Russian offensives on the frontlines. The capacity to produce artillery shells in both European and U.S. facilities is limited, and the United States has diverted rounds to Israel for the war on Gaza.

Ukraine is also running low on air defense missiles, which are essential to protecting Ukrainian cities from becoming the next victims of Russian carpet bombing like Grozny, Aleppo and Mariupol.

The Vulgar Anti-Imperialists don’t care what a disarmed Ukraine would mean for its people under Russian bombardment and occupation. In their cynical geopolitical calculations, a Russian recolonization of Ukraine is positive because it is seen as a defeat for U.S.-led Western imperialism.

A victory for Russian imperialism in Ukraine would certainly be a defeat for the Ukrainian people, but less so for U.S. power.

U.S. imperialism has had many military defeats in recent decades, from Vietnam to Afghanistan, but its global military deployment and economic exploitation of poorer nations remain strong. A defeat for Ukraine would have little impact on this global structure.

U.S. imperialism will have to be defeated by an anti-imperialist movement at home. The hypocritical selective anti-imperialism of the Vulgar Anti-Imperialists does not have the moral consistency to inspire a mass anti-im-

perialist movement. The movement we need should oppose *all imperialism*. ■

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## Free Boris Kargalitsky!

BORIS KAGARLITSKY, PROMINENT Russian sociologist and a leftwing critical analyst, has been snatched from court and sent to a prison camp on a five-year sentence for criticizing Russia's annexationist invasion of Ukraine.

Kargalitsky's jailing is especially alarming in light of the February 16 news that the most famous Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny has died in a penal colony, undoubtedly murdered by the prison authorities — whether by poisoning, neglect or some other method.

Shocking many observers, on February 13 the military court reversed a mid-December sentence by a different court imposing a \$6500 fine, without prison time, for Kargalitsky's online post about Ukraine's 2022 attack on the Crimea Bridge.

Prosecutors had appealed the verdict as too lenient, leading to the military court hearing. This turnabout clearly reflects the Putin regime's intent to crush all remaining dissenting voices in Russia in advance of the coming staged pseudo-election.

To help the defense, you can use Patreon ([https://www.patreon.com/freedom\\_kagarlitsky](https://www.patreon.com/freedom_kagarlitsky)) or Busti (<https://boosty.to/freekagarlitsky>) of the international support group of Boris Kagarlitsky or write to their email: [boris.solidarity@gmail.com](mailto:boris.solidarity@gmail.com). Any help is welcome.

After paying the fine and prior to his re-arrest, Kagarlitsky spoke with *Jacobin* Radio host Suzi Weissman about his case and four-month earlier detention in the case. The following are brief excerpts from that discussion.

I'M HAPPY TO see you again, Suzi. And of course, well, there are plenty of other political prisoners who are not as well known, who do not have so many friends around the world and so on. So even when you are fac-



ing political persecution, when you are more famous, more popular, more influential, you have a better chance to get out of jail.

I think it's very important to know that there are still plenty of people of different political trends and tendencies, from left to right, who are still in jail in Russia, and we definitely need to advocate their release, and I hope they will all be released. I hope very much that that will happen soon.

In the current situation, the global South is still important for the Russian policymakers. Again, this is one of the good aspects of being a leftist, by the way — because if you're a leftist, you care about the global South, you care about the Third World, you care about people outside of the Western countries. And that makes you more known also and more popular among these people outside Europe and North America.

As I learned, during these four and a half months, there were eight other political prisoners together with me at the same time. There were different people — those guys whom I met were intellectuals and political activists — but I knew that there were other people who probably got less attention, like a truck driver, people like that, working-class guys. And again, speaking about injustice and so on, they've gotten less attention.

Certain layers of the Russian bureaucracy are unhappy with what's going on — ex-

remely unhappy. They don't want the kind of neo-autarkic state which some of the Russian leaders are trying to build up.

They are unhappy with the military operation in Ukraine, at least when it is not producing the expected results. So in that sense, of course, it's true that Russian army is not losing the war at this stage, but it's not winning either.

So this kind of war can continue endlessly, and there are plenty of people who aren't happy with that. They don't want the war forever. They don't want their children to serve in the army within ten years from now, fighting the very same Ukrainian guys. By the way, I think the same happens in Ukraine as well. I have a reason to suspect that Ukrainian society is also tired. But I should say that there are people who are unhappy...

There is a lot of anti-war sentiment, but there is not much of an anti-war movement. Let's be clear in Komi, I failed to see anyone who was supportive of the so-called military operation, just no one. At the same time, I didn't see any strong opposition to it.

You see, it was just a kind of negative sentiment: *This nasty thing going on, it's better if it didn't happen. It's better if it ends. It's better if we don't take part in it. You know, why should we shoot at Ukrainians? Is there anything we have to fight for?*

At the same time, there was no message about "Let's protest." No, no, no, no. There was almost no protest. And more and more, I met quite a few people who were quite ready to join the military in exchange of being released from jail.

I'm going to stay in Russia. Of course, if you are asking about that, I'm not going to leave. My plan is to stay over and to work with my friends. I know that some political emigrants are now returning. Well, we have to wait for the better times. And I think, the changes are going to happen quite soon. ■



## Reclaiming Reproductive Rights: Ohio's Citizen-Led Victory

By Marlaina A. Leppert-Wahl

WITH THE SUPREME Court's blessing, ultra-conservatives in the Ohio government tried hard to take away 50 years of reproductive rights using political manipulation and illegal tactics.

But Ohioans rose to the challenge to successfully regain those rights through a citizen-led initiative on the ballot on November 7, 2023. The passage of Issue 1 amended the Ohio Constitution to enshrine abortion and reproductive rights including contraception, fertility treatments and miscarriage care.

Even with this victory, we cannot be complacent. Ohioans, and all Americans, need to be aware of the tactics and manipulation of the opposition and the dire consequences if these protections disappear.

When the news leaked out in early May 2022 of the Supreme Court draft decision overturning *Roe v. Wade*, my own fears came flooding in like a dam break.

Most Americans at my age — 58 — have no recollection of a world without the protections of *Roe*. I, however, had spent formative years of my life as a teenager and young adult in Spain, which in the 1980s, criminalized most abortions.

I vividly remember young women's desperation at contemplating unwanted pregnancies. I remember those with the financial means who got on planes to seek abortions in other countries. For those less fortunate, the stories included attempts to end pregnancies with wire coat hangers, overdoses, or by throwing themselves down flights of stairs.

I remember always feeling thankful that my country, the United States, protected women from being forced into these unthinkable situations during the most difficult moments of their lives. As a young American woman, I felt safe, valued, and empowered at home.

Today, as a mother of seven adult children of child-bearing age, I was both incredulous



The author (left) and her daughter at a May 2022 rally in Cincinnati's Fountain Square to protest the leaked news of the Supreme Court's impending decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade*. Her handwritten sign reads: "I'm here for my 4 daughters. Keep your bans off their bodies."

and dismayed to think that my four daughters would no longer have the autonomy over their own bodies and lives that I had been afforded under *Roe*.

With our rights still momentarily intact, my oldest daughter and I joined protests in Cincinnati's Fountain Square against the impending decision. The prognosis for our beloved Ohio was especially horrifying, as the reversal of *Roe* meant that a six-week abortion ban would go into effect in our state under a hitherto unconstitutional law passed by the Ohio legislature in 2019.

### From Canvassing to Courtrooms

On June 24, 2022, the U.S. Supreme Court's *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* decision handed abortion legislation back to the states. Within hours, one of the most restrictive abortion laws in the country went into effect in Ohio.

The Heartbeat Law, with no exceptions for rape or incest, banned abortion after the detection of fetal cardiac activity, usually six weeks into a pregnancy.<sup>1</sup> This unconstitutional law was deliberately pushed through Ohio's shamelessly gerrymandered Republican legislature and signed by Governor Mike DeWine in April 2019 in anticipation of changes in the Supreme Court's position.

The end of *Roe* marked the start of a race

against time. Ohio citizens went to work to get an initiative on the ballot to protect the rights of pregnant individuals. The Ohio Constitution allows "citizens to place an issue directly before voters on a statewide ballot" including initiatives to amend the constitution.<sup>2</sup>

Since the ultra-conservative state legislature has shown nothing but disdain for reproductive freedoms, a citizen-driven, direct vote on the issue was the only chance to protect those in need of safe, legal, and accessible abortion care.

Average Ohioans fanned out across the state to collect the required number of signatures from registered voters to be able to get the initiative, which would become Issue 1, on the ballot in November 2023. My daughter

and I were among the canvassers.

We joined others at our county's Democratic Party headquarters to pick up and deliver petitions. Many canvassers went door-to-door in neighborhoods, solicited signatures in high traffic shopping areas, and set up tents at festivals.

These strategies were not as apparent in our very conservative Warren County, which shares characteristics with the nearby Bible Belt. We therefore devised an action plan that took us to progressive, artsy venues in Cincinnati in neighboring Hamilton County, and we hit up friends and family members in five southeast Ohio counties.

### Horrible Consequences of the Law

The six-week abortion ban was in force for only three months before a Hamilton County court blocked it, but the fallout from this extremist legislation was already producing shockwaves. After only a few days of the law being in effect, a story of a 10-year-old Ohio rape victim forced to go to Indiana for abortion care made the national news.

This was followed by Ohio Republican leaders publicly calling the case a hoax, a "garbage lie" according to Alex Triantafyllou, who now serves as chairman of the Ohio Republican Party.<sup>3</sup>

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GOP leaders later shifted focus to the fact that the girl's rapist was an undocumented immigrant, rather than examine the horrific flaws in their own legislation that would force a child to bear her rapist's baby or flee the state for an abortion.

The six-week ban led to a multitude of other traumatic consequences. At least two other child rape victims left Ohio to have abortions during that time. Pregnant women with cancer could not receive the treatment they needed while pregnant, nor could they terminate their pregnancies in Ohio. (Dewitt, David, 2023)

Women whose pregnancies faced severe complications, even those who had given partial birth far too early in their pregnancies, were forced to wait for fetal demise before the fetuses could be removed. Women devastated by the news that their babies lacked vital organs for survival were told that they had to carry the pregnancies to the end, just to give birth to a stillborn baby or one who would quickly die. (Dewitt, David, 2023)

Doctors were now facing the potential loss of their medical licenses and felony criminal charges to render the care their patients needed. Pregnant women who wanted babies were traumatized by loss and re-traumatized by the legal constraints that denied them the medical care their conditions required. (Dewitt, David, 2023)

Under the six-week ban, many women and girls who sought abortions for unwanted pregnancies were inconsolable, with some threatening suicide or self-imposed abortions. (Dewitt, David, 2023)

The result of the lower court injunction in September 2022 was to permit abortions in Ohio through the first 21 weeks of pregnancy. This certainly spared many others similar grief. However, the Republican-controlled Ohio Supreme Court was poised to consider whether to lift the injunction as we led up to the Issue 1 vote to protect abortion rights through a state constitutional amendment in November 2023.

A rejection of Issue 1 would likely have brought back Ohio's Heartbeat Law and the nightmare scenarios that accompanied it. (Dewitt, David, 2023)

### Navigating Dirty Tricks

While average Ohioans were toiling to get Issue 1 on the November ballot, the General Assembly was devising new ways to live up to its reputation as the most corrupt state legislature in the country, a designation given to it by the FBI.<sup>4</sup>

Republicans have created super-majorities in the Ohio House and Senate by drawing election district maps in their favor. This ger-

rymandering has been struck down as unconstitutional multiple times in recent years by the Ohio Supreme Court. One of the results is a legislature that is far more extreme on abortion than the voters.<sup>5</sup>

Recognizing that the citizen-led initiative



to amend the Ohio constitution would make it onto the November ballot and would likely pass, the Republicans in the legislature sought to change the rules of the game.

After passing a law earlier in the year abolishing August special elections due to high costs and low voter turnout, the GOP lawmakers scheduled a special election in August 2023 to raise the threshold for passing a constitutional amendment from a simple majority (50% plus one) to a 60% threshold.

This referendum, confusingly, was also Issue 1, as Ohio initiatives and referenda are labeled by number as they appear on the ballot. August Issue 1 was a blatant attempt to block the abortion rights amendment. Republicans who publicly linked August Issue 1 to the abortion issue included Ohio Senate President Matt Huffman and Ohio Secretary of State Frank LaRose.

Comments made by LaRose at a Lincoln Day event in Seneca County in May demonstrate the intent: "This is 100% about keeping a radical, pro-abortion amendment out of our constitution. The left wants to jam it in there this coming November. ... The left has some really dangerous plans, and this is one of the ways that we can make sure they're not successful."<sup>6</sup>

In response, voters turned out in higher-than-usual numbers for a special election and resoundingly rejected the measure to increase the threshold, with a vote of 57.11% against to 42.89% in favor of August Issue 1.<sup>7</sup>

This was not the end of the dirty tricks, however. Like me, many Ohioans learned about the work of the Ohio Ballot Board for the first time through this process only because of the controversy it created.

Ohio law gives a state Ballot Board the power to determine the final language that will appear on the ballot and oversee efforts to inform voters. The secretary of state chairs the five-member board. For the November election, the board was appointed by Republicans and chaired by Republican Secretary of State Frank LaRose — yes, the same politician working openly to block the abortion rights measure.

The Board approved ballot language for Issue 1 over strong objections by Democrats, using language like "unborn child" instead of "fetus" and mischaracterized the prohibition on abortion after fetal viability.

Although the language in the state consti-

tution would remain the same as the original proposal, the text on the ballot was altered in what can only be understood as a last-ditch effort to sway some voters. The conservative Ohio Supreme Court affirmed the Ballot Board's language when Ohioans United for Reproductive Rights filed a complaint.<sup>8</sup>

Despite the deliberate obstacles, which left many of us frustrated and indignant, the campaign to pass the amendment gained momentum. In fact, the underhanded tactics had backfired.

The August special election outcome demonstrated the support for abortion rights and probably dissuaded anti-abortion donors from giving more.<sup>9</sup> Following the defeat of the August Issue 1, the proponents for reproductive rights were able to raise three times as much money as the opposition.

Ohioans donated funds, some through state and local affiliates of the Planned Parenthood Action Fund and the American Civil Liberties Union. And we were grateful for others from out of state, like the Sixteen Thirty Fund and the Open Society Policy Fund, which contributed to this fight against the egregious reversal of basic rights.

Money poured in to support the Ohioans United for Reproductive Rights, the coalition of statewide reproductive health, rights, and justice organizations.<sup>10</sup>

### Faith, Politics, and Reproductive Rights

Catholic organizations were among the major financial donors to the campaign against reproductive rights, ironically called Protect Women Ohio. Throughout the Greater Cincinnati area, the work of the Church against this issue was very visible.

I happened to be present as a guest at a Sunday mass in the weeks before the November election to hear a recorded message by Cincinnati Archbishop Dennis Schnurr urging the faithful to vote against the amendment.

The message was broadcast in churches throughout the Cincinnati Archdiocese that day. As we left the sanctuary, they were handing out "Vote No on Issue 1" yard signs for parishioners to post in their yards.

Some people of faith, including myself, are disturbed by the attack on religious freedoms inherent in opposition to reproductive rights. There are a variety of stances on abortion across and even within faith groups, and among Americans who do not identify as religious.

Some Ohio faith leaders addressed their congregations in support of Issue 1. Many worked within Faith Choice Ohio, a coalition of religious leaders and faith communities that supports reproductive rights.

Faith Choice Ohio has its roots in the movement of clergy opposed to the 2019 Heartbeat Bill as it was being pushed through the Ohio General Assembly. United Church of Christ Rev. Terry Williams was an outsp-

ken advocate of Issue 1 in his Appalachian community of Chillicothe, Ohio “because of [his] faith — not in spite of it.”<sup>11</sup>

One Columbus pastor was featured in a statewide television ad characterizing abortion as “a private family decision.” His message was that Issue 1 gave “families the freedom to make their own decisions, without judgment and without the government getting involved.”<sup>12</sup>

In my own community, most of my encounters with anti-abortion activists were with Evangelical Christians. Among the arguments I heard from those going door-to-door in my neighborhood was their misrepresentation of the proposed amendment as a radical anti-parent issue.

The amendment did not target parental rights in any way. Yet some opponents, including those within the Catholic Church, argued that it would allow children to get abortions, or even cross-sex hormone treatments, without the knowledge or consent of their parents.<sup>13</sup>

Ironically, many of these same people were in favor of the Ohio General Assembly’s drive to severely curtail parental decision-making by legislating a ban on gender-affirming care for minors. Not dissuaded by the public pleas of hundreds of Ohio parents on behalf of their transgender children, the Republican supermajority in the legislature passed the ban in January 2024.

Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine, a Catholic himself, who had signed the extreme Heartbeat Bill into law that proved so devastating to Ohio women and girls, also did everything in his power to defeat the proposed constitutional amendment.

In the weeks leading up to the vote, he appeared with his wife Fran in a TV ad to appeal to more moderate voters by saying, “Whether you’re pro-life or pro-choice, Issue 1 is just not right for Ohio.” Fran DeWine chimes in, “Issue 1 just goes too far.”<sup>14</sup>

Autonomy over our bodies and reproductive choices is NOT RIGHT FOR OHIO? These basic rights that we had for half a century after Roe and now want for our children go TOO FAR?

The majority of Ohio voters did not share the DeWines’ sentiment. On November 7, 2023, Ohioans overwhelmingly passed Issue 1 to enshrine abortion and reproductive rights in the state constitution with a vote of 56.78% in favor to 43.22% opposed.<sup>15</sup>

### Continuing the Fight

This election victory is just the beginning of the work necessary to ensure the continuation of legal and safe abortion care and other reproductive rights for Ohioans.

Mike Gonidakis, the president of Ohio

Right to Life, has made clear that opponents of reproductive choice “are not going anywhere,” and their goal is a reduction in the number of abortions “to zero regardless of what the state constitution says.”<sup>16</sup> And Ohio Senate President Matt Huffman has warned that the passage of Issue 1 is just “the prelude to an ongoing repeal effort.”<sup>17</sup>

Some Republican state legislators and their extremist allies are already looking for ways to defy Ohio voters’ support for reproductive choice. State Rep. Jennifer Gross of West Chester is among those who want to empower the Ohio legislature alone to interpret what the new constitutional amendment means for existing laws.

She is pursuing a measure that would “deny court jurisdiction over Issue 1 and



*Determined to hold the government accountable in the face of the Roe v. Wade decision.*

make it an impeachable offense for any judge that defied the law.” Ohio Value Voters and Faith2Action issued a joint statement in favor of this far-fetched idea, arguing that the *Dobbs* decision put “elected representatives” in charge. They reason that this gives lawmakers the authority to withhold jurisdiction from the courts.<sup>18</sup>

How can we remain complacent when those in our Ohio government have the track record they do on the issue of reproductive rights? I will not

stand by and watch others make second-class citizens of my daughters by imposing on them moral codes that rob them of the autonomy over their bodies and lives and deny them the right to privacy and religious freedoms.

Left to their own devices, Ohio legislators and their partners in the rightwing religious communities would have us return to the six-week abortion ban at best. These self-proclaimed “guardians of women’s health and morals” have worked to deprive women of the safe and secure reproductive health care they need, imposing on them forced births under even the most adverse conditions.

Republican leaders pushing for the criminalization of women seeking abortion care and their medical providers are the same who use corrupt and illegal means to stay in power and attempt to quash opposition to

their extremist policies.

We have learned the hard way that reproductive freedom is not free. We must continue our collective efforts to ensure legal and safe abortion access for Ohioans. We must offer support to those seeking abortion care from neighboring states like West Virginia, Kentucky and now Indiana, where almost total bans are in place.

We must find ways to support pro-choice campaigns in Arizona, Florida and Nevada, where similar referenda will be on those state ballots in 2024. And we must not lose sight of the goal of restoring these fundamental rights for women across America. ■

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## Sanba: Chinese Feminists in Struggle The Maoist Past, the Coercive Present

By Jiling Duan

SANBA (三八), LITERALLY TRANSLATING to “Three Eight” or March 8th, has long been a discriminatory term for women (*funü*, 妇女) in Chinese, as this date marks International Women’s Day and thus has become associated with women, and particularly, working-class married women. “*Sanba*” is part of a lexicon, associated with women, that has acquired derogatory meanings and reveal attitudes about gender roles, age and social class.

In her reflection on *funü* (woman) as an undesirable identity, Wang Zheng, a feminist scholar and activist who lived through the Mao era, recalls how, as early as 1978 when she was in her twenties, she and her female peers in college felt a deep aversion towards the term “*funü*” and explored why:<sup>1</sup>

“For us, the contemporary Chinese term for women, *funü*, invoked the image of a married woman surrounded with pots and pans, diapers and bottles, sewing and knitting needles, and who hung around the neighborhood gossiping. Her world was filled with such ‘trivial’ things and her mind was necessarily narrow and backward. We were certainly not women.” (Wang 2001: 27)

Instead they gladly embraced the identity of *qingnian* (youth, 青年), a social label laden with Maoist connotations and revolutionary fervor (Wang 2001). However, *qingnian* was soon supplanted by *nüxing*, a more fashionable identity, amidst the market economy driven waves since the 1980s.

Unlike *funü* and *qingnian*, *nüxing* is not a product of the party-state propaganda but rather a market-driven identity. It emerged from the proliferation of commercialized, objectified and sexualized portrayals of women’s bodies in mass media, coupled with a narrative of “desirable femininity (*nürenwei*, 女人味)” which was promoted by male liberal intellectuals advocating for the recognition of female sexuality suppressed during the Mao era. This shift aligned with the mass layoffs of factory workers, disproportionately impacting women.

The inclination of rejecting the *funü*

identity, due to its association with undesirable femininity and the attempt to distance oneself from it, remained widespread among young women in the 2010s.

In higher education, especially among those born after the 1980s and in urban areas, even the *nüxing* identity has become undesirable. A more favored label is *nüsheng* (female students, 女生). In comparison to the implication of being an adult woman grappling with gendered social norms and obligations, *nüsheng* not only emphasizes their age — or sexual capital — advantage but also underscores their educational privilege, thereby distinguishing female students from women in other age and class groups.

This identity, exclusive to female college students even if only claimed during the brief period of college life, can still be leveraged as a legitimate tool to mobilize advantageous social resources.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, despite being acutely aware of the gender inequalities in areas such as employment and education, some female students hesitate to embrace the *funü* identity, as it places them at further disadvantages related to age, class, marriage and the workplace.

Moreover, the *funü* identity is attached to a de-sexualized, working-class, revolutionary image from the collectivist era, sharply contrasting with the contemporary image sought by modern female college students who aspire to individuality, independence and self-fulfillment.

### “Girls’ Day,” Sexual Harassment Day

Though its exact origin is difficult to trace, a so-called “Female Students’ Day (*nüsheng jie*, 女生节),” or “Girls’ Day,” gradually gained popularity in higher education since the early 2010s. Scheduled for March 7 (*sangji*), the day before International Women’s Day to highlight the age difference between a *nüsheng* and a *funü*, “Girls’ Day” was quickly hyped by large commercial companies as a shopping and revelry festival just like Women’s Day or Mothers’ Day.

Similarly, some male college students — voluntarily or organized by their female peers — adopted the party-state’s Women’s Day custom of distributing small gifts such as laundry detergent to women. Better, male college students added certain romantic gestures by presenting flowers and preparing breakfast —

and displaying banners.

To publicly express their “admiration” for female students, male students would cover campuses’ most prominent locations with banners. Once this action gained attention on social media, it turned into a competition among universities, resulting in even more banners each year.

Eventually, it transformed into a self-proclaimed territory for male students to openly harass their female peers, showcasing an akin-to-fraternity masculinity. While many banners were harmless, merely boasting in a self-congratulatory manner that is cringe-worthy, some were not.

“On Girls’ Day, [we] just want to give you a set of [our] inherited ancient chromosomes” — An advertisement for free sperm from male students majoring in International Business, Class of 2015. Apparently, what remains ancient are not just their chromosomes.

“Forensic Goddesses have great skills, studying, dissecting, and raising babies” — Male students majoring in Forensic Science, Class of 2013, offering their sincere admiration for their female peers. Perhaps thinking that the term “female student” is not sufficient to express their admiration, they replaced it with another increasingly popular label ‘goddess (*nüshen*, 女神),’ adopted by many young women who desired empowerment.

“Girl, you are the only daughter-in-law designated by my mom” — Unilaterally declared marriage arrangement by male students majoring in Pharmacy, Class of 2014, seemingly hoping to turn March 7th, Girls’ Day, into an engagement day.

“Hey, girl, just sit tight at the front of the boat, and let [me] fight for socialism on shore.” Well, it seems like male students from the Marxist College have higher aspirations after all.

In a country where any public protest with banners might lead to imprisonment, these male students not only freely express a form of sexual harassment but also receive encouragement from both school authorities and society at large.

As Girls’ Day became a popular campus culture, the celebration activities on March 7th marked a rare exception — a large-scale, public, student-organized event not only approved but explicitly sanctioned or even encouraged by both universities and govern-

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ment authorities.

As one of the primary promoters of Girls' Day and reportedly one of the earliest universities to have celebrated it, Shandong University takes pride in its role. The official university accounts even proudly showcase sexist banners on social media, cheerleading its male students.

Given the Chinese Communist Party's tight control over college students since the 1989 Tiananmen Square Massacre, what collective actions students can or cannot undertake have always been tightly regulated. After all, the open expression of "affection" from male students to their female counterparts, met with seeming enthusiasm from the female students — with a few killjoy feminists being the exception — raise neither questions nor criticisms regarding the widening gender gap in employment among college students and prevailing gender discrimination. Everyone is pleased — everyone but feminist troublemakers.

### "No To March 7, Celebrate March 8"

Since the early 2010s, a succession of feminist advocacies has been consistently surfacing in public spaces in China. These initiatives often involve strategic street performances, followed by online mobilization and petitions. The campaigns aim to promote cultural and institutional change while demanding accountability from the government.

As part of their activism strategies, they usually schedule their campaigns on special occasions, such as Women's Day. This not only helps grab more attention from the public but, more importantly, provides a platform for them to articulate their demands more effectively.

On the eve of International Women's Day in 2014, nine female university students from nine different major cities, including Guilin, Lanzhou, Guangzhou, Zhengzhou, Kunming, Shenzhen, Nanjing and Zhuhai, sent a gift box to Yuan Guiren, the then Minister of Education in China. The box contained bread, roses, and a letter suggesting improvements to address gender discrimination in textbooks.<sup>3</sup>

In 2016, a group of Chinese feminist activists launched the "#fansanqiguosanba (#SayNoToMarch7CelebrateMarch8, #反三七过三八)" campaign during International Women's Day. Feminists across various social platforms added the term *funü* to their IDs, adopted a uniform profile picture, and used the hashtag to speak out on social media, openly claiming the *funü* identity. Simultaneously, they gathered banners suspected of overt sexism and exposed them online, sparking intense discussions. In the end, the hashtag garnered over 110 million views.

In *The Anxiety of Desire*, a documentary directed by Wan Qing capturing the #SayNoToMarch7CelebrateMarch8 campaign,

feminist activists are shown raising banners during a promotional event for Girls' Day, where young women's bodies are exploited to attract customers.

Their banner reads, "We want not only sanitary pads, face masks, and laundry detergent but also a gender-friendly campus environment." They climbed onto the stage set up by the businesses, singing a song adapted by the feminist theatre group B-Come<sup>4</sup> titled "Do You Hear the Women Sing?"<sup>5</sup> The lyrics go:

*I want to go out [in public space] without  
fear  
[I] Want to be beautiful without being  
harassed  
[...]  
I sing for myself  
Not to be your object of judgement  
[...]  
I have sparkling dreams  
I also have rich desires [...]  
Break the heavy chains  
Reclaim the power of women!*

On a bulletin board adorned with stickers of "Girls' Day Wishes" — female students expressing their holiday wishes, usually a small favor or gift, and then their male peers fulfill them — feminist activists added their voice: "Our wish is for a campus job fair without gender discrimination [against female students], can you fulfil it?"

This discordant sticker was swiftly removed by the event organizers, with a group of male students shouting, "Tear it off!" In response, feminist activists promptly posted a more proactive sticker: "We want lubricant, foreplay and true orgasms, dare you provide that?"

In an interview with feminists, a couple of female janitors working at a university dining hall in Guangzhou were asked about their opinions regarding Girls' Day and its celebration activities on campus. One responded candidly:

*"I don't even care about the Spring Festival,<sup>6</sup> not to mention Women's Day or Girls' Day. We don't get a day off for the Spring Festival or any gifts; nor on Women's Day. If someone tells you that meat tastes good, but you have never had meat in your whole life, [then you would] not know what meat tastes like. [...] I just find Girls' Day very ridiculous and pretentious. I don't feel jealous at all. Actually, I feel quite disgusted."*

Her remarks highlight the bourgeois nature of the protests, and how they marginalize issues related to working women, such as the need for time off and inadequate pay that does not allow them to purchase meat.

In March 2019, an enraged female student at Shandong University set fire to the Girls' Day banners on campus. Despite receiving overwhelming support online, she faced a disciplinary penalty from the university. She then posted her "apology" on Weibo, "Setting fire

indeed lacked safety considerations, and I apologize to the university. I should have used scissors."

### Reclaiming Sanba Identity

In the documentary, an interesting scene unfolds when feminist activists visit a college campus in Guangzhou. A university "Women's Committee," comprised of and organized by male students, is inviting female students to participate in a game they've designed to win Girls' Day prizes. One activist approaches and asks,

*"If a female student experiences gender discrimination or has grievances, can she come to you?"*

Negative.

*"Is there a platform for female students to express their concerns?"*

There is no such platform.

*"Have you made any attempts in this regard?"*

They claim to be trying, as always.

In a sense, this dialogue, like many Girl's Day celebrations, showcases a simulated reality within a university campus environment, as feminists achieved direct and relatively honest communication with a representative from the "authorities," and even received evasive but prompt responses. This alone is hard to imagine in the real interactions between feminist activists and governmental officials, not to mention security police.

### Activism and Repression

In 2013 Xiao Meili, a feminist artist and activist, walked thousands of miles from Beijing to Guangzhou, sending petitions to local governments and education departments along her way, only to receive minimal responses.

Even worse, she then became the target of persistent police harassment. In 2017 alone, she was evicted five times<sup>7</sup> and her Taobao store, crucial for her livelihood, was temporarily shut down with the removal of many of her feminist designs.

In March 2021 she again found herself targeted by state-sanctioned smear campaigns and online violence initiated by nationalist misogynists. Simultaneously, a significant number of feminist activists' social media accounts, including Xiao's, were banned.<sup>8</sup>

On March 7, 2015 a group of feminist activists planned to distribute anti-sexual harassment stickers on public transportation across major cities on International Women's Day. They were arrested the day before the event, and five of them were detained for 37 days. Even after being released on bail, they lived as criminal suspects for a year, enduring ongoing police harassment and surveillance up to the present day.

On March 6, 2017 a dozen feminist activists dressed in attire reminiscent of the May Fourth era (the historic student protest movement of May 4, 1919 —ed.) took to the

streets in Guangzhou.

To minimize risks and ensure online dissemination on Women's Day, the action was implemented two days before March 8, following a strategy often employed by feminist activists to evade state repression. Their goal was to retrace the route of China's first public commemoration of International Women's Day nearly a century ago.<sup>9</sup>

In 1924, initiated by He Xiangning (何香凝), a prominent female revolutionary and pioneer in the Chinese feminist movement, a gathering and demonstration were organized to commemorate Women's Day. Over a thousand participants, consisting of female students, factory workers, and various women's groups, first convened in a park in Guangzhou, and then chanted slogans, marching through the streets of Guangzhou, delivering pamphlets and speeches along the way.

When He proposed commemorating slogans at the nationalist party KMT's first National Congress two months earlier, including "Equality between men and women," "Allow women to [work at governmental] institutions," and "Marriage freedom," she met with a great deal of criticism. But the opposing voices did not stop the then-raging tide of women's revolution.

Almost a century later, Chinese feminists retracing this historic march faced effective obstruction by authorities. Anticipating challenges, they concealed slogans as scrolls in their sleeves, unfurling them only during photo sessions. Messages on banners read: "The feminist road does not end," "The feminist fire does not extinguish," "A hundred years ago, they woke up, and a hundred years later, you are still asleep."

Despite disguised attire and excuses such as they were taking "artistic photos" or "graduation commemoration photos" when questioned by security guards, they were forced to leave the park where women had successfully gathered in 1924. Even taking photos with banners at historical landmarks or sculptures required a strategic battle with the security guards.<sup>10</sup> Eventually, they completed the entire route under constant surveillance.



Feminist activists standing in front of the statue of Qiu Jin (秋瑾), a Chinese revolutionary and feminist who was beheaded at 31 for attempting to overthrow the Qing imperial government.

As the CCP promotes a nominal "Marxist women's perspective" as a substitute for feminism to control the women's movement, the official representative of Chinese women, the All-China Women's Federation, increasingly functions as a mouthpiece and puppet implementing the party's will.

Marxist feminist activists such as Yue Xin and Zheng Churan, who vigorously advocate for social justice and defend workers' rights, had either gone missing or been arrested.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, NGOs serving female migrant workers, exemplified by Sunflower (向日葵), a feminist labor NGO based in Guangzhou and featured in the documentary, faced continuous suppression. This led many to shut down.

In 2021, Pepper Tribe (尖椒部落), the only feminist alternative media platform in mainland China serving migrant female workers, ceased operations amid numerous obstacles.

The current situation for Chinese feminists is far from optimistic. Nevertheless, I would like to conclude with the title of an album from one of my favorite bands, "Live fish swim against the current, dead fish drift with the flow (活鱼逆流而上, 死鱼随波逐流)." In 2024, may we all be live fish. ■

#### Notes

1. Wang, Zheng. 2001. "Call Me 'qingnian' But Not 'funü': A Maoist Youth in Retrospect," in Zhong, Xueping, Wang Zheng, and Bai Di, eds. *Some of us: Chinese women growing up in the Mao era*. Rutgers University

Press, 27-52.

2. To further understand the complications of *nüsheng* identity, see Song Shaopeng. 2016. "Identity and Campus Festivals: A Discussion of Girls' Day in Higher Education." *Journal of Chinese Women's Studies* (2): 88-101.
3. The phrase "Bread and Roses" originated from the slogan of a march by 15,000 New York women advocating for gender equality rights on March 8, 1908. In this context, bread symbolizes survival, while roses symbolize dignity.
4. B-Come was a feminist theatre group based in Beijing. It adapted the feminist play, *Vagina Monologues* into a localized version, *Our Vaginas, Ourselves* (阴道之道). This play was later adopted and performed by many Chinese feminist groups worldwide.
5. The melody of this song is from the theme song, "Do You Hear the People Sing" in 2012 movie *Les Misérables*, and Chinese feminists changed the lyrics to make it a "Song of Women."
6. The Lunar New Year holiday, the most important tradition holiday for family gathering in China.
7. The Guangzhou police pressured her landlords to evict her.
8. More on this story, please read the *New York Times* report, "Women Are Battling China's Angry Trolls. The Trolls Are Winning," <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/24/world/asia/china-feminism-weibo.html>
9. More about this campaign, see this report on the *New York Times*, "Postcard From China: Secret Video of a Women's Rights Demonstration," <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/27/insider/postcard-from-china-secret-video-of-a-womens-rights-demonstration.html>
10. In China, while security guards do not possess the same law enforcement authority as the police, they act as an extension of state violence and are typically the vanguard in suppressing protests and assisting in "maintaining social stability."
11. More about their stories, see report at CNN by Ben Westcott and Yong Xiong, "Young Marxists Going Missing in China after Workers' Protest," <https://www.cnn.com/2018/11/13/asia/china-student-marxist-missing-intl/index.html>



## A Brief Overview: Women's Activism in Romania

By Maria Bucur

ROMANIA, TODAY THE largest Balkan country, has undergone profound changes in gender norms and relations since its founding as a state in 1864. Until 1932 most women were second-class citizens, and suffrage for the entire female population came with the communist takeover after 1944.

Gender emancipation was a goal of the communist regime, but women remained relegated to the double work day, even as they gained more opportunities for education and economic power.

As a member of the European Union since 2007, Romania has grudgingly acceded to EU principles of gender mainstreaming in public policy and gender parity on electoral lists. Women remain a disproportionately economically and socially vulnerable population both in cities and rural areas.

### The Pre-Communist Period

Women in what is today Romania began organizing through a variety of interest groups at least since the 19th century, initially around religious denominations and eventually into educational and political groupings.

An overview of this complex and shifting landscape is beyond the scope of this brief narrative, which will focus on the attempts of groups to represent the interests and needs of various categories of women after 1864, when Romania became a state.

From the start, women's movements were split along class, religious and ethnic/racial lines. Women from elite families who wanted to encourage their daughters to engage in educational activities beyond traditional ideas of wifehood and motherhood led the way in organizations that advocated for better educational opportunities for girls.

While the state mandated education for all children, officials consistently failed to enforce it and to budget sufficient resources to bring girls into the classroom. Women's literacy rate, especially in rural areas, contin-

ued to lag until the Communist shift in state investment in and enforcement of literacy policy.

Roma women suffered further debilitating indignities over the 550 years of enslavement that ended officially in 1864. Ioana Rudareasa (mid-19th century), who sued her owners successfully for the liberation of herself and her children, is a prominent example of their struggle for personhood and dignity.

Feminist organizations focused on better access to teacher training for women, although along ethnic and religious lines. Ethnic Romanians who were Christian Orthodox were favored over all other ethno-racial and religious groups.

Two prominent examples are those of Alexandrina Cantacuzino (1876-1944) and Elena Meissner (1867-1940).

Both women, one in Bucharest and the other in Iasi (Romania's second largest city and its capital between 1916 and 1918), led non-governmental organizations that trained young women to become future teachers.

The National Orthodox Society of Romanian Women, headed by Cantacuzino, provided support specifically for ethnically Romanian and Christian Orthodox women, who were then placed into both private and eventually state educational institutions.

Women with an interest in social justice and gender equality gravitated towards the socialist movement, with Sofia Nadejde (1856-1946) as the most prominent example. Nadejde was a writer and activist in the Socialist Democratic party and a staunch suffragist. She was consistently marginalized by other feminists, like Cantacuzino and Meissner.

Yet Nadejde was the one feminist who took on the challenge to criticize one of the most prominent public intellectuals and politicians of the time, Titu Maiorescu (1840-1917), on the question of women's purported inferior intellectual potentialities in relation to their brain size.

Nadejde provided tremendous publicity and excellent intellectual support for the feminist cause, but those who might have been allies refused to support her personally and individually, or patronizingly praised her while excluding her from conferences, organizations, and feminist alliances.

One telling example comes from Izabela

Sadoveanu (1870-1941), an interwar feminist with eugenicist leanings, who described Nadejde as "always simple like a child, full of common sense like a peasant healthy in body and mind, personal, passionate, and excessive like a true feminine type in all its manifestations."

The quote says more about Sadoveanu's understanding of what it meant to be female and peasant — a perspective indebted as much to the biopolitics of Romanian eugenics as to her feminist ideals.

Women from minoritized groups, such as the Roma, never found an open door. After 1918, when Romania doubled in size but the proportion of ethnic Romanians who were Orthodox Christians declined from 90%+ to around 70%, Cantacuzino made it very clear to German, Serbian, Hungarian and Jewish women's groups that they had the duty to "fall in line" in terms of what the Romanian state was willing to do for minorities.

While she claimed to represent all women's interests through her feminist organization and in transnational spaces, like the Little Entente of Women, Cantacuzino never invited non-Orthodox women in her organization as anything but followers. She never opened a space for minoritized women to make a case for specific ideas regarding education, employment, healthcare, or any other public policy that affected women.

Cantacuzino was not unusual for her time; but she was also someone who presented her work as progressive and inclusive, misrepresenting both her own ideas and the problems women experienced in Romania.

Transylvanians voted to join Romania on December 1st, 1918. Full legal equality for men and women was a condition for that union. When the state reneged, Cantacuzino and other feminists called this out and continued to work for reforming the Civil Code, only succeeding in 1932. But they did so hitching their wagon to exclusionary ethno-racial nationalism.

### The Communist Period

This legacy of division continued after 1945, although it remained largely invisible until 1989. The state socialist regime proclaimed its commitment to gender equality in the constitution, Family Code and other legislation. As an atheist state, communist Romania

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permitted some religious organizations and communities to continue to function, while criminalizing others, such as the Greek Orthodox denomination.

In the first generation, the communist regime succeeded in eliminating illiteracy and growing paid employment opportunities for women to an unprecedented level.

By the late 1960s the state socialist regime became more concerned with controlling the productive and reproductive forces that it had sought to mobilize in the previous two decades. While women's organizations continued to exist, their ability to speak critically about crucial issues, such as reproductive choice, was curtailed.

The Communist Party, even knowing that it had a huge gender deficit in terms of support (fewer than 25% of the membership was female), passed a brutal anti-abortion law in 1967 that led to more than 10,000 dying from backstreet abortions and thousands of children being abandoned in state institutions with inhumane conditions. A large number of those children later died of malnutrition and other forms of physical and psychological abuse while in the custody of the state.

The decriminalization of abortion and access to safe forms of contraception became a unifying force for Romanian women, as well as many men. The legalization of abortion was the second law passed in January 1990, after the bloody end of the communist regime in December 1989.

### From Communism to EU Membership

Access to abortion continues to have near universal support across all other divisions in Romanian society, even as women's movements have become more diverse and divided since 1990. Many women have sought to become involved in the multi-party system, though few have been embraced and promoted by their own parties. Legislation around gender mainstreaming, imposed with pressure from the European Union, has led to more women candidates appearing on electoral lists, but more often than not as "throw away" candidates that would enable the party to comply with legislation.

The proportion of women elected in parliament is 17%, with some growth since 1990, but nowhere near gender parity. Other post-communist countries have seen less growth (e.g. Czechia, Hungary), while others resemble the Romanian trend more closely (e.g. Bulgaria). Even as women elected have occasionally come together to publicly criticize gross misogyny among their colleagues, no women's caucus or alliances across party lines have emerged to raise issues such as protection against domestic violence.

A few issues have fragmented women's movements. LGBTQI+ rights in Romania remain poorly addressed and few politicians or thinkers (of any gender) have spoken publicly



*Filia demonstration.*

and consistently in support of full equality for all people and opposition to gender-based discrimination and outright violence.

A constitutional amendment to define marriage to be exclusively between a man and a woman was defeated in 2018. But same sex couples gained equal rights only after the European Court of Human Rights ruled in favor of a gay Romanian couple.

The treatment of trans persons in Romania has not been an issue of much interest for most women's movements. With the exception of informal anarchist groups and a few other small feminist groups, women's organizations have either been quiet, transphobic in their statements, or at most stating their support for trans rights without much effort to publicly align themselves with these issues.

The wedge between the trans communities in Romania and cis-women's groups has been only growing since the EU has tied continued funding for some projects to addressing trans-exclusionary policies. These policies include having a third gender on official identification and granting the right of trans persons to change their legal name and gender on documents.

Romani women have also remained rather isolated from many women's groups, often marginalized on the basis of racist presumptions. Some affirmative action programs focusing on education and economic empowerment have helped advance the presence and ideas of Romani feminists. But at this point many are finding themselves still marginalized on the basis of either race (in relation to Romanian women) or gender (in relation to Romani men), not unlike U.S. Black feminists until the early 1990s.

Roma women continue to have a significantly lower rate of literacy than ethnic Romanian ones (72% vs. 100%), below that of Roma women's counterparts in all other post-communist countries in Europe. This difference correlates strongly with lower rates of participation in paid employment: 28% for Roma women, in contrast to 52% of ethnic Romanian women. These differentials translate into economic and social vulnerability that is far greater for Roma women.

Intersectional alliances across these lines are starting to emerge only now. Organizations such as E-Romnja are working to establish alliances through a queer of color

critique.

By the same token, radical right-wing movements are making women some of their most prominent spokespersons. This may be a strategic response to similar trends in the United States and in Western Europe, but it is also a legacy of Romanian women's movements from the interwar period, when eugenics found enthusiastic supporters among educated ethnic Romanian women.

In the past two decades some activism brought women together. The defeat of the 2018 referendum on the definition of the family happened in part because of women's grassroots mobilization.

Environmental activism, especially around deforestation and mining, grew to a significant extent because of women's activism and feminist networks that took to the streets.

Filia, a feminist NGO established in 2000, has helped draw attention to domestic violence and other forms of gender discrimination, working as an ally with other NGOs that focus their attention on eliminating discrimination against vulnerable populations. Among others, they have worked with ACEPT, the largest and most active LGBTQIA advocacy NGO in Romania.

Alongside these efforts, anarcho-feminism became an active underground movement in Timisoara starting in 1991. Their radical critique of liberal feminism has helped shape a more diverse language around questions of gender norms and has opened up spaces for alternative expressions of gender.

Sexual violence and especially domestic violence have seen growing attention in the media and policy makers. Pressure from below by women's groups succeeded in Romania ratifying the Istanbul Convention in 2016.

Women's groups have been essential since then for the implementation and critiques of government (in)action. The rape and murder of a 15-year-old girl four years ago led to repeated protests and further pressure to address sexual violence with greater seriousness. However no long-term institutions or networks have developed to leverage these different voices.

What these various strands of women's activism will bring into the future remains unclear. Compared to the huge losses suffered by U.S. women after the SCOTUS *Dobbs* decision in June 2022, one might view Romania's situation as better than in the United States.

Huge disparities among women in Romania continue to exist across religious, sexual, class, and racial lines. However, this also means that there are also great opportunities for addressing gender violence and discrimination. Listening carefully, understanding common interests, and using one's privilege to address these systemic problems is the challenge for the future. ■

# Promised Land: Dimensions of the Agrarian Issue

By Hobeth Martínez Carrillo



Colombian President Gustavo Petro signs the land purchase agreement.

AFTER A LONG period, land reform has returned to public debate in Colombia. This resurgence is primarily a direct outcome of the Final Peace Agreement signed between the Colombian state and the agrarian and communist *Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia* — *People's Army (FARC-EP)*, in November 2016.

The first chapter of the agreement was entirely devoted to addressing structural problems in the countryside through what was called a *Comprehensive Rural Reform (CRR)*. It also gained renewed momentum thanks to a revitalized impetus brought about by the first-ever elected leftist national government under President Gustavo Petro Urrego and Vice President Francia Márquez Mina in 2022.

Before this, the previous attempt at carrying out agrarian or land reform in Colombia began in the early 1960s under the auspices of the U.S. Alliance for Progress and ended abruptly in 1974. At that point, a coalition of landowners and national politicians signed an agreement (Chicoral's Pact) to halt its most distributive policies, perceived as a direct threat to their properties, power and privileges.

The following decades witnessed the increasing intensification of the internal armed conflict, economic "opening" as part of the

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neoliberal agenda, a market-led land reform with very limited redistributive effects, and the near abandonment and wilting of the agricultural sector.

The compounding effects of these factors have been catastrophic. According to the Truth Commission, between 1985 and 2015 more than seven million people were internally displaced by violence. They were mostly peasants, Indigenous people and Afro-Colombians who left their lands behind.<sup>1</sup>

Drawing on data from the last agricultural census carried out in 2014, Oxfam's researchers calculated that Colombia has the highest land inequality in the subcontinent, with one percent of the owners controlling about 80% of the arable land.<sup>2</sup> Most of that land is in the hands of both agro-industrialists and less productive cattle-ranchers, who have traditionally taken sides with conservative and right-wing political forces.

Academics have found that the country lost its food sovereignty by the late 1980s. Over the last decades Colombia imports between 30% of its food and 50% agricultural goods.<sup>3</sup> This grim reality was what the Peace Agreement's CRR aimed to transform, and which the Petro-Márquez administration is attempting to address through their land reform policy.

## Petro, Márquez and Their Challenge

Although from different backgrounds, both Petro and Márquez are recognized for their trajectories and leadership on the left.

Petro joined the urban M-19 guerrilla in the 1980s and, after the guerrillas demo-

bilized, continued his political activism by becoming a congressman. During his time in congress, he stood out for exposing the links between state officials and politicians with the paramilitaries, as well as for his opposition to then-President Álvaro Uribe Vélez.

Leading the *Progresistas* political movement, he successfully won the position of Mayor of Bogotá, the capital of Colombia. He was later dismissed in a disputed court decision, which the Inter-American Court for Human Rights overturned. The dismissal, perceived by his supporters as illegitimate and a result of right-wing political persecution, paved the way for him to consolidate his popularity and, arguably, pursue the presidency.

For her part, Márquez Mina is an Afro-colombian woman, a social leader, and environmental activist from a small rural community in western Colombia. She came to international prominence in 2018 when she was awarded the Goldman Environmental Prize for her activism against illegal gold mining and for the protection of rivers.

Márquez founded a political movement — "*Soy porque somos*" — in which she championed the causes of feminism, anti-racism, opposition to patriarchy, and the defense of the excluded. Márquez joined Petro's campaign and became the first black woman ever elected to hold such a high political position in a country profoundly racist.

I will explore here some of the obstacles that Colombia's present leftist government faces in implementing land reform, focusing on two specific mechanisms — land sales



and rural development. First and foremost, the market-friendly path chosen to persuade large landowners to relinquish their land carries political and financial challenges that may significantly limit the reform's impact.

Additional inherited issues related to rural development, as well as the government's poor budget execution of local development plans, raise questions about its capacity to fulfill promises of bringing progress and well-being to the economically excluded rural regions. This is particularly significant as these rural areas constitute a substantial electoral base for the government.

The weight and relevance of these obstacles vary significantly, but what is certain is that unless the national government addresses them within the next two years — the remaining period of its term — land reform will be postponed... once again.

### Limits of Non-Confiscatory Land Reform

From the government's perspective, signing an agreement with the largest and most important business association of cattle ranchers makes absolute sense. Members of this economic sector have not only been involved in the past in the creation, maintenance and operations of paramilitaries groups but have also endorsed one of the most active right-wing oppositions to the Peace Agreement signed with the FARC-EP.

Additionally, they have voiced their disagreement with the current leftist government, viewing president Petro as a kind of Marxist and communist nemesis ready to expropriate their private properties.

For these reasons, although Petro's decision could be seen as too compliant with his opponents, it seems to fit logically within his larger strategy of achieving "total peace." This encompasses criminal gangs and guerrillas still operating in the country, economic agents, as well as antagonistic political actors inside and outside the national congress.

The primary reason for such an agreement was to avoid, by all means, the exacerbation of contradictions with far-right wing forces so ready to defend, also by all means, their own interests. This is a considerable aim in a country attempting to break the vicious cycle of violence in which it has been trapped over the past six decades.

For the cattle ranchers represented by Fedegan, the agreement seems to be at once a pragmatic move and one that may well help them address some of the challenges facing the livestock industry.

José Félix Lafaurie, Fedegan's president and one of the most prominent members of the right-wing political party Democratic Center, has repeatedly declared that the government would carry out the agrarian reform "with or without, or against them." This implies that cooperation would be a convenient path to follow given the circumstances.<sup>4</sup>



*Afro-colombians, Indigenous peoples and peasant communities expect inclusive rural development.*

That's precisely what has been happening. Since the signing of the agreement, Fedegan has offered about 500,000 hectares of land to the government's land agency. According to the agreement, the state would also provide technical assistance so that cattle ranchers can transform their current extensive cattle model into the Intensive Silvopastoral Systems (ISPS).

Thus, Fedegan seems to be taking advantage of the situation and tackle some of the criticism the industry faces globally for its negative environmental impact. Ranchers seem to be cooperating with their antagonist out of necessity.

Among the most pressing challenges the ranchers have identified as threatening their economic interests are changes in consumption patterns, leading to sustainable diets that reduce meat consumption, and the close scrutiny of the industry's carbon footprint.

Problems abound, however, with this path. To start with, the intentions of ranchers should be taken with a grain of salt. One of the most effective means that traditional landed elites have found to hamper redistributive land reforms has been, precisely, to formally abide by the democratic rules while weaponizing institutions and processes at the level of state administration. This is where their power and influence might be more effective.<sup>5</sup>

It is indicative in this regard that until today the ranchers still object to the Final Peace Agreement, which they denounce as spurious and illegitimate. The land sale deals between the government and the cattle ranchers might be restricted to those results convenient to the latter, while the broader political goal of the government, such as fully implementing the Comprehensive Rural Reform of the Peace Agreement, might be

more contested.

Although land redistribution can still be reached through voluntary land sales, the redistributive effect has been less significant compared to classic land reform.<sup>6</sup> This is partly due to the high cost of the land, which tends to increase as speculation is triggered by the prospect of a buyer with a huge pool of resources (the state) and a seller with greater bargaining power.<sup>7</sup>

Additionally, if the lands put on the market are not only expensive but of poor quality, the business deal could not better for the seller. And this has been the case: most of the lands Fedegan offered (about 67%) are located in areas of the Colombian eastern plains, which need high capital investment to become productive.<sup>8</sup>

The fiscal pressure on the state can be massive. Buying three million hectares of land was estimated at about 60 billion COP (US\$15 billion), an amount so substantial that the government decided to re-set its land reform goal to avoid a negative impact on public finances. It cut its goal in half, pledging to redistribute 1.5 million hectares over the four-year period.

The last available report on its progress states that the government has acquired 118,645 hectares in 2023, fulfilling its commitment for the year.<sup>10</sup> The land agency increased its budget to about five billion COP (\$1.2 billion) in 2024 in order to buy an additional 500,000 hectares.<sup>11</sup>

*Will the government accomplish this goal?* This is a crucial year for the "government of change" to deliver on its promises. Given that land reform is multi-faceted, it is not the easiest to accomplish.

### Rural Development in Question

Among the components of the 2016 peace agreement, the Comprehensive Rural

# Mechanics of Colombia's Land Reform

## LAND AND TERRITORIALITY in

Colombia are quite complex because of the various layers of constitutional and legal regulations, the concrete juxtaposition of different types of lands (i.e. conservation and indigenous reserves), and the interests involved.

The 2016 Final Peace Agreement, while attempting to tackle structural problems facing rural Colombia, mirrors such complexity. Its Comprehensive Rural Reform encompasses three main programs, organized around the primary goal of developing vast rural regions inhabited by peasants, Afro-Colombian and Indigenous communities that have remained economically and politically excluded from the rest of the country. This is what, in the agreement, was called the "territorial approach."<sup>1</sup>

The Colombian state committed to gathering three million hectares of land in a land fund for redistribution among landless peasants. The *Access and Use of Land Program* also involves legalizing seven million hectares of land for those without legal titles for the parcels they have been working, even for decades.

Between the process of access and legalization, the agreement set the goal of acquiring 10 million hectares of land within a 12-year period. Additional important policies included the state's commitment to updating the national land registry (known as *cadaster*), the creation of new peasant reserve areas,<sup>2</sup> and the establishment of an agrarian jurisdiction.

The *Development Plans with a Territorial Approach*, known as PDET by the Spanish acronym, consist of 16 documents designed to plan the development of an equal number of rural regions across the country. These regions were chosen based on criteria such as the high impact of the armed conflict, the presence of illegal crops, economic backwardness, and impoverishment of their inhabitants.

Peasants, Indigenous, and Afro-Colombian communities drafted the plans in a participatory manner through a methodology envisaged by the state. The main objective of these plans was to allow the concerned communities, whose lives the policy would directly impact, to decide on the kind of rural development they wanted for their territories.

Finally, *National Plans for the Comprehen-*

*sive Rural Reform*, consisting of 16 public policies of national outreach designed and implemented by the central government.

These plans were supposed to complement the other two actions by providing public goods, services and infrastructure lacking in most rural areas. These include building roads, providing internet and electricity, and offering rural education and health, among others.

In essence, these three kinds of policy interventions make up the Comprehensive Rural Reform of the 2016 Peace Agreement and have been implemented since early 2017, although with some obstacles posed by the stark opposition of some political opponents to the agreement (like former right-wing president Ivan Duque).

The Petro-Márquez administration has committed to strengthening the implementation of those policies through their Rural Reform. There are, however, some nuances worth noticing.

## The Government's Vision

The national government has placed Rural Reform at the center of its agenda. For the self-labeled "government of change" (*el gobierno del cambio*), the broader economic development of the country demands a radical transformation in the unequal structure of land distribution.

A reindustrialization policy, with the state adopting a more active role in redirecting the economy, also demands a parallel policy of revitalizing the rural sector that has been significantly impacted by the armed conflict, lack of public investment in the last decades, and prioritization of the export-led agriculture via big agro-industry.

Having this goal as its starting point, the government has put much of its effort in acquiring the three million hectares of land for the land fund.

To achieve this, Petro's administration attempts to have its cake and eat it too. The government carries out the core of the rural reform, acquiring the three million hectares of land for the land fund, without stepping too harshly on the interest of one of the most powerful political and economic agents in Colombia, the large landowners.



It seeks to do this by choosing to buy lands at market prices, instead of employing other more contested policies such as land confiscation, for which there is a legal framework and an institutional path available.

Thus early on, the government initiated dialogues with members of the right-wing Centre Democratic political party and representatives of the most important ranchers' association (Fedegan), which ultimately led to the signing of an agreement in October 2022.<sup>3</sup> By the terms of this agreement, the ranchers committed to offering lands to the national government, which would purchase and redistribute them among landless peasants.

Rural reform discussed in today's Colombia therefore encompasses various policies, but at its core is the concern for redistributing land that is not being adequately used for food production.

This policy's aim stems from the peace agreement, but is also grounded in the progressive vision of the present leftist government, which views land redistribution as a prerequisite for the larger economic development of the country. ■

## Notes

1. Sergio Jaramillo Caro, "The Possibility of Peace," in *The Colombian Peace Agreement: A Multidisciplinary Assessment*, ed. Jorge Luis Fabra Zamora, Andrés Molina-Ochoa, and Nancy Doubleday, Routledge Studies in Peace and Conflict Resolution (Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, 2021), 25-44.
2. The *Zonas de Reserva Campesina*, by their Spanish name, are areas of the country granted to peasant organizations, which manage them collectively and according to their own economic purposes. They were a legal victory for the peasant movement in the early 1990s, but until very recently, they have remained scarcely implemented. Under Petro-Márquez's administration, these zones are receiving attention again. Five out of 12 of these areas have been created in the last two years.
3. *Gobierno Nacional de Colombia — FEDEGAN, "Acuerdo Para La Materialización de La Paz Territorial. Compra Directa de Tierras Para La Construcción de La Reforma Rural Integral"* (Gobierno Nacional de Colombia, 10 June 2022), <https://www.minagricultura.gov.co/noticias/PublicingImages/ACUERDO%20CON%20GANADEROS.pdf>.

## NOTE ON ABOVE MAP:

This shows Colombia's 16 PDET zones. The original graphic is color coded to indicate each specific area of the country. CC BY SA4.0

Reform was the most delayed, with only about 4% of its commitments fully implemented by the end of 2022.<sup>12</sup> Besides the land fund focused on the redistribution of land to landless peasants, the *development plans with a territorial approach* (PDET's) were essential to transforming rural zones that were economically relegated, socially impoverished, and politically marginalized.

These regions mostly coincide with territories of the country inhabited by peasants, Indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities. The 16 *development plans* were meant to attract massive public investment to implement the ideas that the local communities proposed to foster their inclusive development.

These *development plans* comprise a few projects (also called "initiatives") that local communities drafted in a participatory process between 2017 and 2018. By the end of 2022 about 41% (13,458 out of 33,808 projects) were underway.<sup>13</sup>

While there has been some progress, this process has been heavily criticised by the same communities that were supposed to be the beneficiaries. The final decision in terms of resource allocation (what projects would be funded), and in what order (planning), excluded the representatives of the local communities. Instead, it seemed to be in the hands of a bunch of technocrats in Bogotá or even hired from foreign consulting firms like Deloitte.

What was supposed to be a participatory process from beginning to end, where community representatives were key to any decision, ended up in a centralized decision-making process. Beneficiaries feel alienated, disempowered and frustrated.

As a result, communities are skeptical about the *development plans'* capacity to improve their living conditions. Meanwhile the state rapidly wastes the scarce social legitimization the process was to provide.

For example, Afro-Colombian, Indigenous and peasant women from Alto Patía — Norte del Cauca (southwestern Colombia) — have been speaking out about their frustration. In their view, the scattered projects that got funded did not lead to the structural transformation they thought essential. They sought to prioritize infrastructure to counteract gender violence against women and LGBTI communities in rural areas.

This included creating "care houses" for protecting victims of gender and political violence. For these women, the gender approach of the peace agreement paid lip service to ending historical gender discrimination and exclusion but then undercut it by placing unqualified officials in charge.<sup>14</sup>

Although most of this criticism cannot be targeted exclusively at the current government, there has not been much improvement since the Petro-Márquez administration came

to power. During most of the period, between August 2022 and December 2023, the chief of the *Agency for the renovation of the territory*, in charge of implementing the plans, has been busy attempting to understand the problems the policy faces.

The diagnosis is discouraging: the plans are underfunded, their full implementation would take longer than the 15 years initially anticipated, and there is widespread noncompliance in the contracted infrastructure.<sup>15</sup>

Worse still, although the plans were drafted seven years ago, there has been no transformation in the living conditions of the inhabitants of these regions.<sup>16</sup> The complaints are grounded in successive years of frustration with no change in sight.

Early this year the government announced a large public investment with the intention of recalibrating the local development plans. This is clearly an attempt to rebuild trust and recover some of the legitimacy lost by calling on communities to take hold of the process.<sup>17</sup> Hopefully the government initiative will result in improving the lives of the rural populations.

### Difficult Way Ahead

So far the balance remains ambiguous. While the "government of change" has significantly reinvigorated the implementation of the peace agreement through its program of non-confiscatory land reform, its ability to execute the needed reform remains weak.

There are doubts about how many hectares of productive and accessible land it can obtain from landowners to redistribute to landless peasants. Similarly, it is unclear what the government's contribution will be to the development of rural areas, as only this year seems to show a serious commitment to implementing local development plans.

Such a lack of implementation of promises and budget execution have been taken advantage of by business groups, liberal sectors, and the opposition to discredit the capacity of the government to deliver, blaming it for the deceleration of the economy.

Thus, 2024 is a critical year for the Colombian government. If it fails to deliver on its promises of land reform and the necessary accompanying infrastructure, it will most likely be remembered as a government of good ideas, but poor realization: Too much talk about change, too little actual change. ■

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# REVIEW

## Leader in a Time of Change By Malik Miah

### King:

A Life

By Jonathan Eig

Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 669 pages, \$35 cloth.

*"A SINGLE SHOT rang out.*

*"The bullet struck King in the face, ripped through his neck, and knocked him backward onto the balcony floor....He died there [St. Joseph's Hospital] at 7:05 p.m. on April 4, 1968." (Chapter 45: "Please Come to Memphis")*

The alleged killer, James Earl Ray, was across the street from the Lorraine Motel. He later claimed he acted alone. But no serious person believed that.

Ray was a lifetime petty criminal who had escaped from a Missouri prison in 1967. The gun used was bought in Alabama. The owner of a nearby restaurant later said there was a conspiracy to kill King, and Ray didn't do it.

Ray eventually recanted his confession and said he was framed. Ray flew out of the country and later was arrested in the United Kingdom.

Biographer Johnathan Eig does not seek an answer to why Ray assassinated King. He does say that Coretta Scott King never believed that Ray acted alone.

J. Edgar Hoover, director of the FBI, considered King "the most dangerous Negro" in the country. He had his agents spy on King, had secret tapes of him at the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) offices, his home, and hotels when he traveled. This surveillance surely included the Lorraine Motel in Memphis.

Cities and towns around the country erupted after King's assassination. Black people blamed the police, the city, and federal officials for their leader's death.

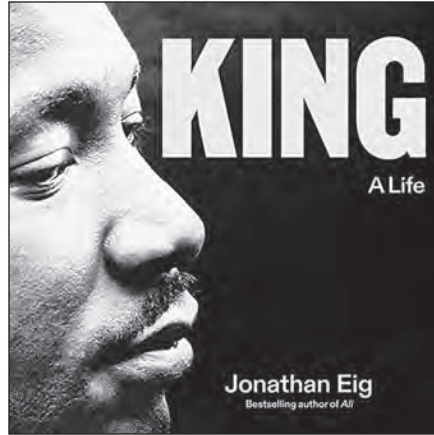
A few days later Coretta Scott King led a march in Memphis in support of the Black community and the sanitation workers whose strike King had come to support.

### New Research

For his new biography of Martin Luther King, former *Wall Street Journal* reporter Jonathan Eig conducted more than 200 interviews, including with scores of people old enough to have known or observed King.

He pieced together numerous accounts gathered by other journalists and scholars, some of them never published before. It includes FBI secret tape recordings, although

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full FBI surveillance documents will not be available until 2027.

While much can be said of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s life, it is worth noting that he lived and acted for the movement first and last. He never believed the struggle was about himself.

The money King earned from giving speeches or from prizes all went back to the movement. By choice, he never owned a house. His family rented a modest home.

African Americans had little political or economic power — and not only in the Deep South, where whites denied Black people even basic dignity, but in the entire country. King understood that only mass struggle could convince the white powers to accept fundamental change.

### Historic Laws and King Holiday

Among the many transformational firsts in King's lifetime, the legal changes that mattered happened in a span of four years.

Two days after King's funeral, President Lyndon Johnson signed the Fair Housing Act enacted by Congress. It capped the historic laws — the 1964 Civil Rights Act, 1965 Voting Rights Act — that marked the legal end of Jim Crow segregation.

In November 1983 the right-wing president, Ronald Reagan, signed the Martin Luther King holiday into federal law, after 15 years of organizing efforts.

King became the first and only African American to receive that honor. The bill was first introduced in Congress, four days after King's death, by Black Detroit Congressman John Conyers.

Asked by a reporter about King's alleged connections to "Communist influence," the staunch anti-communist Reagan replied that we'd see in 35 years when all the FBI files are

released.

So why then did Reagan sign? By then, in fact, Republicans and Democrats had sanitized King's views to make them more palatable to mainstream white Americans.

They presented King's goal of a nonracial society as what the country has always stood for. The truth about U.S. history was dismissed (or as Nikki Haley just reaffirmed, the United States "was never a racist country" and the Civil War maybe wasn't, or maybe was, about slavery).

The conventional narrative made King a "moderate" in contrast to militant figures like "un-American" Malcolm X. Yet King always tied the issue of ending Jim Crow legal racism to jobs and economic equality.

The famous "I Have A Dream" speech at the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom in 1963 was about more than ending segregation. It was part of a plan of action, aiming to pressure the government to pass new legislation and to fight poverty.

King supported reparations and affirmative action programs to make up for unpaid wages never paid to enslaved people.

As Eig and other biographers and journalists have written, King always anticipated dying young in the struggle to end racism and oppression. He counted on being protected by his people and friends. He foretold his own death in his speech "I Have Been to the Mountaintop," the night before he was murdered.

King was arrested 29 times for his civil rights activities; his home was bombed in January 1956 in Montgomery.

### Changing the Country

King was a central leader of the civil rights revolution in the 1950s and 1960s. He didn't choose to be that leader. Once put there, however he did so in a disciplined manner.

Eig notes that Martin Luther was not his original name. It was "Michael" like his father's first name. Then his father went to Germany in 1934, saw where the original Martin Luther started the Protestant Reformation, and came back to Atlanta and legally changed his and his young son's name to "Martin Luther."

King Jr. attended Morehouse College at age 15, planning to be an academic and a Baptist minister like his father. He completed graduate studies at Boston University and received his doctorate in systemic theology in 1955.

Events changed his life. He joined the fight by accident in Alabama, in 1955, just having

received his first posting as head preacher in Montgomery. He joined his friend and fellow preacher there, Ralph Abernathy.

Although King grew up in a Black middle-class family in Atlanta and had always said he would lead a life to end Jim Crow segregation (today it would be called an apartheid system), he didn't know leadership would happen so soon.

Montgomery's local leaders — E.D. Nixon, union organizer and president of the local NAACP; Rosa Parks, seamstress and NAACP local secretary, and Jo Ann Robinson, head of the Women's Political Council and professor of English at the Alabama State College — had planned actions to protest segregation on city buses. That's the background story of Rosa Parks' refusal to give up her seat on the front of the bus to a white man.

The leaders and community selected the well-educated and articulate King to be the public face of the movement. They set up a new group, the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA). King took charge from that day on, spearheading the historic bus boycott that changed history.

### **A Christian Fight for Justice**

The SCLC (Southern Christian Leadership Council) was subsequently organized to help local organizations fighting segregation.

King's vision, as Eig writes, was based on the Black Christian church ideology (later described by some as liberation theology) of "love your enemy" but fight racial injustice.

The white Baptist Christian view, in contrast, said segregation was not a religious issue but a reflection of the "Southern way of life."

In the segregated community where King grew up and his father was head minister at Ebenezer Baptist Church, the middle class was primarily of those educated people in the Black churches, colleges, and other all-Black institutions. The majority of Black people worked subservient jobs in white-owned businesses or white family homes.

Although King interacted with northern whites in integrated settings in his graduate studies in Pennsylvania and Massachusetts, he knew his life was in the South even though he briefly dated a white woman and had job opportunities in the North.

### **New Material**

For a better understanding of King's role and centrality, this new biography is an important resource.

Eig references previous authors' works and, more importantly, unpublished FBI secret tapes and documents, as well as unpublished memoirs from his father "Daddy" King and others.

The tapes made by J. Edgar Hoover's agents were aimed to prove King was a tool of "communists" and bring to light King's

sexual affairs. For the FBI Director, these files proved King was a "notorious liar" and immoral.

After the successful 1963 march, the FBI declared King as "The Most Dangerous Negro" in the future for the nation. (Chapter 28: "The Most Dangerous Negro")

Of course, the FBI targeted other Black leaders as the COINTELPRO files showed in the 1970s. African Americans have been seen as dangerous, or less than human, or both, since the country was founded.

Even though a 68-page internal report by Hoover's own FBI task force said King was not under the influence of the Communist Party or socialists, he rejected it.

He pointed to Stanly Levison, a Jewish New York City attorney and businessman and active supporter of Black rights, who became a close adviser to King, as proof of this connection. (Levinson had been labeled a secret communist, which he denied.)

King also had a close adviser in Bayard Rustin, a well-known Black organizer and openly Gay man at a time when it was not safe to do so. (See Joel Geier's review of the "Rustin" in our previous issue, *ATC* 228 —ed.)

### **Racist Violence and Nonviolent Struggle**

Racial terror was pervasive in the South, where community leaders were targeted by white supremacists. Rarely were white terrorists arrested and if they were, all-white juries acquitted them.

Many FBI agents themselves were supporters of the KKK and White Citizen Councils. King did not trust them. He said the FBI agents were collaborators of those who attacked and killed Black people.

The book covers the FBI's activities as well as the historic marches and protests of that period. It describes the Montgomery campaign in 1955-56 and how King advanced his philosophy of nonviolent mass direct action and civil disobedience.

Protesters were told not to resist police violence, but to get arrested and "fill the jail." King himself did not see this philosophy just as a strategy or tactic because Black people were a minority. Others in the movement, however, saw it as tactical, and some believed in armed self-defense. (Chapter 17: "Alabama's Moses")

He had studied India's Mahatma Gandhi's nonviolent campaign to end British colonial rule where the oppressed were a majority. King and Coretta went to India in February 1959 with other Montgomery Improvement Association leaders.

King later moved back to Atlanta where the head office of the SCLC was set up. He traveled the country giving speeches and raising money for the struggle. He also joined marches and protests, not only in the South but in northern cities like Los Angeles and

Chicago where *de facto* segregation prevailed.

### **1967: Vietnam War Must End**

While King's focus was on the South, he also spoke out on other political issues. He spoke against the Vietnam War, first in 1965, even though friends like Levinson and Rustin thought it was a bad idea.

Yet it was Coretta Scott who spoke out first against the Vietnam War. She spoke at a rally organized in Chicago by the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. She was the only woman speaker.

Two years later, King gave a sharply worded speech at the Riverside Church in New York. He called on President Johnson to end the war and called the United States "my country, the greatest purveyor of violence in the world."

King did so at a time when most opinion polls said support for the U.S. war was still quite high. SCLC's entire Board opposed him giving the 1967 speech, saying it would harm his relationships with Johnson and other white supporters of civil rights. (Chapter 37: "A Shining Moment")

But there were other young leaders from the lunch counter sit-ins and Freedom Ride campaigns who faced the draft and saw the Vietnam War as wrong. They believed that resources being wasted on the war should be spent in impoverished Black communities.

Leaders of SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee) were impatient with slow change. At the 1963 March John Lewis, then chairman, gave a militant speech (even though partly censored) telling the world that Black people had lost patience with the government and society for not ending racism.

King's influence on up-and-coming young leaders was important. He listened to them, even though he didn't always agree, and never talked down to them.

It included leaders like John Lewis, and later the second chair of SNCC, Stokely Carmichael (later known as Kwame Toure). Carmichael was the first to shout the slogan "Black Power" during a march (which King never criticized as others attacked the demand as "Black separatism").

### **Women in Leadership**

Women's role as leaders in the movement was more complex. Women had always played powerful roles, but rarely given the main leadership position. With the influence of the women's movement in the 1960s, Black women's leading role in the civil rights movement became visible but not really understood or supported by most men.

King, as Eig explains, did not accept women as frontline leaders even if they were strong organizers. For example, Ella Baker was a co-founder of the SCLC and central to its development. But King never saw her as Executive Director, even as she did the work.

There were no scheduled women speakers at the 1963 March, even though a few would be acknowledged from the platform.

After King's assassination, Coretta Scott King was able to step forward and become more of a public leader. She had always told family, friends and journalists that she regarded herself as co-partner in the movement alongside her husband.

### 1964 Nobel Peace Prize

In December 1963 King was the first Black person named as "Man of the Year" by *Time* magazine. The year began with the Birmingham campaign and its victory, followed by President Kennedy's assassination and President Johnson's decision to advance the Civil Rights Act that Kennedy had pushed.

A year later in 1964 King won the Nobel Peace Prize, the second African American to do so. He won it for his dynamic leader-

ship of the civil rights movement. Jim Crow still had not been slain but was weakened. (Chapter 31: "The Prize")

Eig doesn't engage in speculation about what King might say or do if he were still alive today. But that question isn't merely academic. Like the parables he preached on Sundays, King's words and legacy don't exist in a historical vacuum.

The ongoing battles against police violence, the prison industrial complex, war and structural racism makes a study of King's life and role especially useful for today's political activists and fighters for change.

Politicians like Florida's governor Ron DeSantis spout white nationalist ideology while pretending to be followers of King's view on a nonracial country. He says teaching the truth about racism is "wokeism." Books are banned that mention the history of racial discrimination.

While I would urge activists and students of Black history to read this book to appreciate the true legacy of a 20th century revolutionary, its overall value is making clear that no matter how much change takes place, so long as the capitalist system exists, there will be counter attempts by the white establishment to roll back the gains.

To go beyond democratic reforms and move toward anti-capitalist revolution requires mass political struggle.

Martin Luther King, Jr. changed the country forever. The new biography tells a story that others have told but does so in a way that today's activists and those wanting to learn "woke" history need to read.

Dedicating his life to the movement for fundamental change sets an example to be followed. I expect that this book will be banned in Florida.

*King presente!* ■

## King's Real View of Malcolm X

AN IMPORTANT REVELATION in *King: A Life* is the author's discovery of King's real view of Malcolm X. Eig's research exposes a false narrative circulated in political and academic circles. As Eig reveals, King and Malcolm were more similar in outlook than most people believed.

Malcolm X had been a target of the FBI and CIA. Since he was assassinated in Harlem in 1965, it's become clear that the New York City police and other agencies were involved.

Malcolm had always explained that racism and racial national oppression were not at the hands of whites only. In his final years where he traveled abroad, he said that racism was rooted in the capitalist system.

Ending Jim Crow would not fundamentally change the oppression and super-exploitation of Black people. Malcolm pointed to the planned ghettos in the North, where oppression prevailed with no need for "Blacks Only" segregation signs.

In his final year King began moving toward that same view, after experiencing racist violence in Chicago and other Northern cities. He also spoke of the suffering of Africans and Asians because of colonialism, which is why he was so outraged by the Vietnam war.

In an article in the May 23, 2022 *Smithsonian Magazine*, Christopher Parker writes about Eig's revelation:

*"In 1965, journalist Alex Haley who wrote The Autobiography of Malcolm X after his assassination published an interview with King — the longest he ever gave — in Playboy magazine. The piece famously includes quotes from King that are critical of Malcolm X:*

*"I totally disagree with many of his political and philosophical views — at least insofar as I understand where he now stands. ... I have often wished that he would talk less of violence, because violence is not going to*

*solve our problem. And in his litany of articulating the despair of the Negro without offering any positive, creative alternative, I feel that Malcolm has done himself and our people a great disservice. Fiery, demagogic oratory in the Black ghettos, urging Negroes to arm themselves and prepare to engage in violence, as he has done, can reap nothing but grief."*

But as Parker explains, Eig's research suggests that these widely repeated comments were partly fabricated:

*"In Haley's archives at Duke University, Eig found what appears to be an unedited transcript of the interview. Reading it, he realized that Haley moved certain phrases around — and even added in language that King never uttered."*

Here's what the transcript of King's response actually said:

*"I totally disagree with many of his political and philosophical views, as I understand them. ... I wished that he would talk less about violence, because I don't think that violence can solve our problem. And in his litany of expressing the despair of the Negro, without offering a positive, creative approach, I think that he falls into a rut sometimes."*

So King never said, "Malcolm has done himself and our people a great disservice;" he said that "he falls into a rut sometimes." King also didn't say anything about "reaping nothing but grief."

The comment about "fiery, demagogic oratory" appears earlier in the interview and is not related to Malcolm X.

King actually said, "Fiery, demagogic oratory in the Black ghettos urging Negroes to arm themselves and prepare to engage in violence can achieve nothing but negative results." The phrase "as he has done" does not appear. Eig tells NPR's Bill Chappell that the

fabrications were "journalistic malpractice."

"There's more to it," he says, "but what King actually said was that he disagreed with some of Malcolm's views, maybe with many of them — but that he was aware that his way wasn't the only way. And it sounded like he was much more open to exploring that relationship than the *Playboy* interview made it out to be."

Eig adds that King and Malcolm X "were engaged in an awkward dance, but they were listening to the same music."

According to Parker:

*"Many historians, journalists and educators were also struck by the find. As the Boston Globe's Renée Graham writes, 'With Eig's discovery, we must recast our views on how King perceived Malcolm. It's also worth interrogating who most benefited from this manufactured feud and what impact, if any, it had in undermining the civil rights movement.'*

*"Even before the news broke, scholars have been looking more critically at the relationship between the two leaders in recent years. Perhaps King and Malcolm X were 'revolutionary sides of the same coin,' as Peniel Joseph, a historian specializing in the Black power movement, told NPR's Terry Gross in 2020."*

Eig writes in his book:

*"In a telegram to Malcolm's wife [three days after his assassination], Betty Shabazz, King wrote: 'I was certainly saddened by the shocking and tragic assassination of your husband. While we did not always did not see eye to eye on methods to solve the race problem, I always had deep affection for Malcolm and felt that he had the great ability to put his finger on the existence and root of the problem ... Always consider me a friend and if I can do anything to ease the heavy load that you are forced to carry at this time, please feel free to call me.'*" (Chapter 34: "Crowbar") ■



# REVIEW

## Chandler Davis: Dissent & Solidarity By David Palumbo-Liu

**The Prosecution of Professor Chandler Davis: McCarthyism, Communism, and the Myth of Academic Freedom**  
By Steve Batterson  
Monthly Review Press, 2023, 200 pages,  
\$16 paperback.

I FIND IT find it both rewarding and difficult to write this review. Rewarding, because Batterson's study of this remarkable individual tells us much about how radical activists, so often out of step with their times, can come to be vindicated and their causes recognized as worthy and just.

The difficulty I find myself in is that times have changed again, and whatever victories we may be witnessed coming out of the Red Scare have been replaced by a fresh set of challenges.

This reflux of reactionary politics is easily glimpsed in this juxtaposition, in his preface, Batterson notes:

*"In his winter [2015] commencement, University of Michigan President Mark Schlissel urged graduates to consider the parallel [of then-current Islamophobic attacks] to the actions taken in 1954 against Davis and his colleagues: 'I hope you can apply the lessons learned from the mistakes made by both our nation and our university during the McCarthy era.'"*

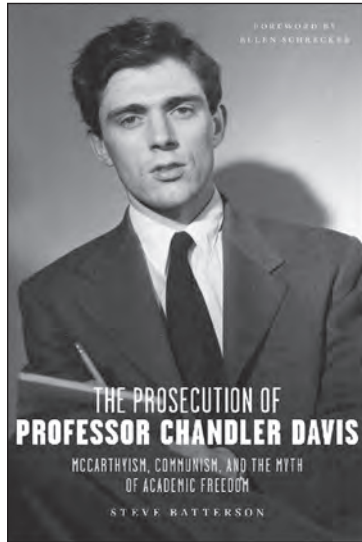
It's useful here to provide a fuller sample of then-president Schlissel's speech:

*"As a nation, we are struggling mightily with the tensions in trying to balance our constitutional rights and shared values with our sense of safety, in our communities, on our campuses, all the way to the level of national security.... History teaches us moments such as these — these right now — are when we are most likely to bow to fear, to sacrifice our freedoms and rights in return for a perceived increase in safety and security... But history tells us another story too — that we can learn from our mistakes."*

Any dialectician will tell you that any lesson learned does not stand on its own, but must be buttressed with the necessary historical circumstances and a political will not to forget. Yet how quickly this particular lesson has been forgotten, with a vengeance, and at the University of Michigan no less.

In 2023, not all that distant from 2015, an-

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other president of the University of Michigan, Santa J. Ono, had this to say on the occasion of Hamas' October 7th attacks on Israel:

*"This violence has caused profound pain within the internationally and culturally diverse University of Michigan community. It is almost certain that more innocent civilians will*

*lose their lives as the fighting escalates.*

*"Earlier today I began reaching out to the leaders of the major universities in Israel Hebrew University, Tel Aviv University, Technion, Weizmann, and Ben Gurion — to express my deep concern for the students, faculty and staff at these world-class institutions, with all of which the University of Michigan has well-established joint research relationships. I also reaffirmed our steadfast commitment to our work with these universities."*

It would take too much space in this review to explain fully how morally appalling this statement is. President Ono bemoans the loss of innocent civilian life, yet is silent on the fact that the vast majority of lost lives are Palestinian, at the hands of the very Israeli state to which he declares allegiance.

Ono knows full well that those universities are deeply enmeshed in the Israeli state, and that their research is instrumental in providing both the technologies and ideological discourses that as of this writing have killed more than 30,000 Palestinians, the vast majority innocent civilians, and 70 percent of whom are women and children.

In trumpeting UM's "well-established joint research relationships" with these institutions, and its "steadfast commitment to our work with these universities," Ono is not only falling in line with other U.S. university presidents in support of Israel, he goes one step further, vowing to be undeterred by calls to boycott Israeli universities.

More recently, and directly connected to the issues of freedom of speech which are central to this review, Ono prohibited

students from even voting on two resolutions regarding the war in Gaza. Despite the fact that each resolution received over a thousand signatures asking for a vote, Ono squelched even a vote on their merits on the grounds that the measures are "divisive."

It seems to escape him that his prohibition could be applied essentially against any vote in any democracy. Dawud Walid, Executive Director of the Michigan chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations remarked, "Unfortunately, the university which is supposed to be an environment for debating competing ideas, is undermining freedom of speech and conscience of its own student body."

### A Forceful Presence

While I am sure that Chandler Davis would wince at this turn of events, I doubt he would be surprised. For as this book shows, in his lifetime he had seen countless instances of principles betrayed.

In this manner as well as others, Batterson's book performs a double service: its historical account teaches us about the past, but also about our contemporary struggles. And, remarkably, Chandler Davis was an equally forceful presence in both.

In 1954, Davis and two of his colleagues at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, were fired after they refused to cooperate in hearings conducted by the House Committee on Un-American Activities.

Batterson gives a comprehensive report as to not only these cases, but also the political climate of the times, the exact role played by the FBI, the courts, and the University of Michigan. Indeed, the author shows precisely how they colluded.

In studying the repressive measures of politicians and federal agencies working in tandem with universities used to squelch any sign of Communism or Communist "sympathies," or just plain dissent, one can learn much about today's repression of free speech and academic freedom.

Those critical of Israeli policies face censorship, silencing, and university tribunals aided and abetted by forces outside the university, including rich donors, politicians, Zionist pressure groups and Israeli governmental operatives. All this falls into one or another brand of McCarthyism — whether the original or its latter-day incarnation.

As much as it would be fitting to center on Chandler Davis's story, I want to offer a

particular appreciation of Batterson's book and a deeper appreciation of the life and spirit of Chandler Davis, casting both in the context of dissent and solidarity.

I feel this is more than legitimate, because at nearly every moment in *The Prosecution of Professor Chandler Davis* we find Davis (referred to lovingly as Chan throughout the book) working with others — his parents, his comrades, his students, his attorneys, or most especially his life partner and wife Natalie Zemon Davis, herself a noted cultural and social historian of modern Europe, particularly of France, who sadly has also recently died.

His very refusal to answer HUAC's questions, an act of dissent that earned him a six-month stint in a federal penitentiary and unemployability in the American academy forever, was an act of solidarity — he would not give up names, nor would he inform on any of the activities of any groups that were critical of the United States.

Chandler Davis was one of four members of the faculty subpoenaed by House Un-American Activities Committee [HUAC] in 1953.

Economist Lawrence Klein responded to all questions and agreed with committee counsel Frank Tavenner that "the objectives that the Communist Party is aiming toward are wrong in principle, theory, and practice." Klein asserted that he had been "used" by the CP. He was then dismissed from the hearing.

Two others, Clement Markert and Mark Nickerson, did not fare as well. Markert had long been the subject of FBI interest. He had considered himself a communist starting in 1935 and through much of the 1940s had been a member of the Party. His apartment had been searched and yielded a wide range of communist materials.

Another source of suspicion against Markert was his combat in the Spanish Civil War on behalf of the Republican forces. Although it was clear the committee had all this information, Markert took the Fifth Amendment, as did professor of pharmacology Mark Nickerson. Like Davis, both Markert and Nickerson had left the Communist Party by the time of the hearings, yet all three were fired by the University.

### Standing on Principle

Davis had initially joined the Communist Party in 1943 while a student at Harvard ("it was just what I had been expecting to do all my life"), but by the end of that year he had enlisted in the V-12 Navy training program at Harvard to fight Hitler, as was standard practice for CPUSA members, and resigned from the Party.

On top of that, he had also become disillusioned with CPUSA. Chandler was beginning to have serious doubts — specifically the CP's unwavering support of the Soviet

Union, whose brutal treatment of dissidents was well known.

While he on principle was willing to retain party membership and critique it from within, Chandler wrote, "What had changed between 1952 and 1953 is that my Party membership had become totally useless to my actual political agitation, which was done through organizations like ASP, student groups, etc., ...the CP... was simply out of steam."

Despite his growing doubts about the Party, he still refused to give up his principles. As early as 1950, when he had received an appointment at the University of California, Los Angeles, he refused to sign the university-mandated loyalty oath, that required that all employees attest to the fact that they were not members of the Communist Party.

Davis wrote, "in this situation even if I had left the Party I would not have been willing to sign the oath, because it would have been a breach of solidarity with the courageous resistance to it." Chandler resigned his appointment. He then landed a mathematics instructorship at the University of Michigan.

Early that same year, physicist Klaus Fuchs confessed to spying on the Manhattan Project for the Soviet Union and Senator Joseph McCarthy alleged that members of the CPUSA had infiltrated the State Department. Investigations were made into any organization that might serve as a front for Communism.

By then Chandler and Natalie Zemon Davis had joined a local group called the "Council of Arts, Sciences, and Professions." Many faculty and graduate students were members. Both HUAC and the FBI considered it to be harboring Communists.

Learning that HUAC might be investigating the Council, Natalie and a psychology instructor named Elizabeth Douvan wrote an essay critical of HUAC, which became a 12-page, anonymously-authored pamphlet entitled "Operation Mind."

Section titles included, "A Decade of 'Smear' Tactics," "What are 'Un-American' Ideas," "The Committee's Contribution to American Life: Thought Purge and Inquisition," and "Here is What You Can Do to Prevent Thought Control in America."

The FBI and HUAC both believed Chandler was the author. Along with this belief, and the evidence of his open actions in favor of free speech and academic freedom on campus, the FBI also had an informant inside the Council. The informant told the FBI that Davis was involved in research into Quantum Mechanics Theory, which was believed to be used in atomic energy research. This led to the Davises having their passports seized.

Though he had withdrawn from all participation with the CPUSA when he was visited by an HUAC agent in 1953, his principles again remained intact and vital. The agent reported, "He refused, when advised that the

Committee had evidence with respect to his Communist Party affiliations, to discuss the subject. As a matter of fact, he ordered me from his office."

Unlike those who took the Fifth Amendment, Davis decided to rely on the First Amendment's protection of free speech and association, rather than follow most others who evoked the Fifth Amendment protection against self-incrimination. He did so in order to directly get to the heart of the matter rather than evade it.

As Ellen Schrecker writes in her Introduction to the book, "[Davis] viewed his confrontation with HUAC and the following inquisition at the University of Michigan as an opportunity. He willingly risked both his freedom and his career to expose and perhaps even put an end to the mainstream establishment's willingness to quash left-wing political dissent."

At that point, Chandler Davis was 27 years old.

### University-Government Complicity

For a number of both simple and complex reasons that Batterson ably details, Chandler Davis's gambit failed and he ended up serving six-month sentence in Danbury Federal Penitentiary.

When Michigan president Harlan Hatcher learned of HUAC's interest in Chandler, Hatcher reached out to the Committee to offer his cooperation. Thus began a long partnership between the government and the University. In fact, most shocking about Batterson's account is just how in sync the two investigations were, issues of free speech and academic freedom notwithstanding.

This kind of cooperation was not restricted to individual campuses. Batterson offers a devastating account of how the Association of American Universities (AAU), a prestigious organization of 37 leading universities, issued a guidance whose language includes this passage: "a scholar must have integrity and independence. This renders impossible adherence to such a regime as Russia and its satellites. No one who accepts or advocates such principles and methods has any place in a university."

The AAU urged professors to inform on those it suspected of Communist sympathies.

The case against Davis was particularly marked by egregious improprieties and unethical behavior. Davis himself viewed the University as an "appendage" of HUAC.

There were no fewer than three faculty committees convened to hear different aspects of his case. One committee wrote that "in the absence of proof Davis is a member of the party we must assume in all justice that he is not." It went on to say, "We conclude that we do not find his conduct before the Clardy Committee or as a member of the University any ground on which he can

be justly dismissed.”

Finding this not the desired conclusion, President Hatch appointed an ad hoc committee, which conducted secret, off-the-record interviews, and ultimately decided that Davis should be fired, thus delivering to Hatch the result he wanted. They accused Davis of “failing to be candid.”

Hatch wrote to Davis, “This conduct is inexcusable in a member of our profession who seeks at the same time the protection of and continued membership in the University whose policies he disdains and whose responsibilities he ignores.”

What then were the policies that Davis “disdained”? They were, in sum, policies purposefully bent to conform to the AAU directive to dismiss those who had at any time sympathized with Communism. Batterson points out that the academic organization comprised of members of the professoriate, the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), issued a report — in direct contrast to the association of administrators — finding that mere membership in the CP was an insufficient ground for dismissal.

### Climate of the Times

Batterson provides a detailed account of the various cases of several scholars across the country who were brought before HUAC to illustrate the climate of the times, the nature of both the prosecutions and defenses, to give us a vivid sense of the options before Davis, and an appreciation of the risk he took in not taking the Fifth as others had done, but rather to mount a First Amendment defense.

Again, Batterson explains in detail how and why, given the vicissitudes of the times, Davis failed. The book shows the ebb and flow of conservative and liberal jurists, and different prevailing notions of the role of the courts. One of main points of book is how much “justice” depended on political intrigues and power, and sheer chance.

In 1959, the U.S. Supreme Court declined to hear Chandler Davis’s case. Five years after receiving his indictment, Davis was forced to serve his six-month sentence. He also was fired by the University of Michigan and blacklisted by nearly 150 U.S. mathematics departments.

After finishing his sentence in 1960, Davis remained blacklisted in the United States but his brilliance as a mathematician resulted in his being offered an appointment at the University of Toronto and Natalie was given an appointment in History.

Chandler Davis became a major figure in the fields of linear algebra and operator theory: he supervised 15 doctoral theses; he was elected to vice-president of the American Mathematical Society; and he served on numerous editorial boards, including a long stint as editor-in-chief of *The Mathematical Intelligencer*. Not only a brilliant mathematician and teacher, Davis was also a renowned sci-

ence fiction author and continued his activism across many causes, right up to his death.

Natalie Zemon Davis became recognized as one of the foremost historians of her generation. She was given an appointment in History at the University of California, Berkeley, and later at Princeton as Henry Charles Lea Professor of History. She was awarded the Ludwig Holberg International Prize and the United States’ National Humanities Medal. She held honorary degrees from over 50 universities, including Harvard, Princeton, Yale, Chicago, Oxford and Cambridge.

### “Operation Mind” Vindicated

As I followed the twists and turns of this case and finished the reading the book, one thing struck me and remains as one of its most significant and indeed moving elements. One of the primary documents used to attack Chandler was in fact something that in retrospect seems benign — the 12-page pamphlet “Operation Mind,” a text he hadn’t even authored.

This sticks in my mind for two reasons. First, even though “Operation Mind” seems a flimsy document to hang such an important case on, in fact it was substantial in a way only history would prove — the analysis and critique of its 12 pages has over time been vindicated, and its insights actually normalized in our historical memory of the age.

We are indeed fortunate that “Operation Mind” was reissued in 2022 by Disobedience Press with an introduction by University of Michigan Professor Silke-Maria Wieneck ([https://rebekahmodrak.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Thoreau\\_Davis\\_book\\_Jan27.pdf](https://rebekahmodrak.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Thoreau_Davis_book_Jan27.pdf)).

Second, I was deeply impressed that Davis would use his loyalty to his comrades and the cause to serve a larger purpose still — to expose the wrongness of the federal investigation and the university case against him, all to his peril, and put this faith in the First Amendment having any meaning, is astounding. What he exposed for the world to see about its frailty came at a tremendous cost to him and his family.

Allow me to end on a personal note, to show just how consistent Chandler Davis was.

I first met Chandler and Natalie Davis in December 2014, in Toronto. We had corresponded before with regard to activism for Palestinian liberation. At our lunch Chandler casually asked how long I was going to be in town. I said for about 10 days.

He said, well if you’re not busy, on Thursday we have a demonstration in front of the Israeli embassy. He added, “we actually do this every Thursday.” Then Natalie added, “and have done so every Thursday for the last 13 years.” Mind you, this was December.

I went, of course, and was struck by the fact that at age 63, I was probably one of the youngest people there. Chandler would have

been 88. Chandler and Natalie Davis were active activists to the end — emails only stopped in the last months. Throughout all that time, they were consistent, humane, and filled with good humor and moral outrage.

To end, I will quote from one of the pieces Chandler shared with me, one which resonates with the topic of this book. It’s an essay from 1960 called “From an Exile.” In it he articulates the second element of the twin stream of solidarity/dissent I have used to comment on Batterson’s wonderful book:

*“I am not a professor. Maybe I never will be one.*

*“My apprenticeship was honorable, as a teaching fellow at Harvard, where I got my Ph.D. in mathematics, and as an instructor at the University of Michigan. I loved the university life. Not that it occurred to me at the time to compare it to any other; I had never seriously considered leaving it.*

*“However, it happened that one summer ten distinguished members of my faculty convened (five at a time) and unanimously declared me guilty of ‘deviousness, artfulness, and indirection hardly to be expected of a University colleague.’ I had refused, first before the House Committee on Un-American Activities and then before these juries of professors, to answer yes or no to the question, was I a Communist. . . .*

*“More than you need the exiles in particular, you need dissent in general, a profusion of ideas richer than you have seen before. You must welcome dissent; you must welcome serious, systematic, proselytizing dissent — not only the playful, the fitful, or the eclectic; you must value it enough, not merely to refrain from expelling it yourselves, but to refuse to have it torn from you by outsiders. You must welcome dissent, not in a whisper when alone, but publicly so potential dissenters can hear you.”*

Chandler Davis will always be that figure, and we have to all make sure he will never be alone. ■

### U.S. Labor for Ceasefire

IN AN UNPRECEDENTED move, seven national unions formed the National Labor Network for Ceasefire. They include the American Postal Workers Union, the Association of Flight Attendants, the International Union of Painters and Allied Trades, the National Education Association, the National Nurses United, the United Auto Workers and the United Electrical Workers, along with 200 local unions and labor organizations.

They call on President Biden to support a permanent ceasefire in Gaza and demand restoration of basic human rights, full access to humanitarian aid and the release of the hostages.

For more information, go to <https://www.laborforceasefire.org/>



# REVIEW

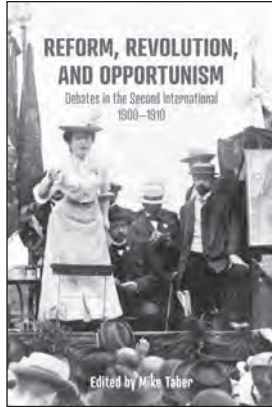
## Socialism Past, Socialism Present By William Smaldone

### Reform, Revolution, and Opportunism

Debates in the Second International, 1900-1910

Mike Taber, editor

Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2023, 272 pages, \$21.95 paperback.



ONE OF THE positive results of the multi-faceted and deepening crises of capitalism in recent years has been renewed interest in “socialism” as an alternative to the system. Although this has not resulted in the growth of the traditional socialist parties in most of the western world — indeed, it is the parties of the far-right that have flourished in Europe, often at the expense of the socialists — in the United States the traditionally miniscule socialist movement has grown markedly following the economic collapse of 2008, the rise of the Occupy Movement, and, as a counter-pole to the Tea Party and Trumpism, the candidacy of Bernie Sanders in 2016.

The growth of the Democratic Socialists of America, which expanded from a tiny group of about 5000 members a decade ago into the country’s largest socialist organization with about 90,000 comrades in 2021, reflects this new interest in socialism.

Although membership in DSA has since ebbed, the critique of capitalism that fueled its growth continues unabated as the intensifying environmental crisis alters even the language of mainstream discourse and forces it to question fundamental elements of the system, such as need for continued growth and ever-expanding consumption.

In a context in which deeply embedded axioms related to the nature of the economy, to class, race and gender relations, and to the meaning of freedom itself are openly challenged, the need for education about alternatives, including socialist ones, is critical. That is where the work of Mike Taber comes in. *Reform, Revolution, and Opportunism: De-*

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*William Smaldone is the E. J. Whipple Professor of History at Willamette University. He is the author of several books in German and socialist history including Rudolf Hilferding: The Tragedy of a German Social Democrat (1998) and European Socialism: A Concise History with Documents (2019). His most recent work is “Freedom is Indivisible”: Rudolf Hilferding’s Correspondence with Karl Kautsky, Leon Trotsky, and Paul Hertz, 1902-1938 (2023).*

*bates in the Second International, 1900-1910*, is one of a series of document collections that Taber has produced on the history of the Socialist and Communist Internationals over the past several years.

With succinct introductions that effectively provide context to the documents, this collection provides a solid foundation for those interested in the history of the international socialist movement in the pre-1914 period.

### A Mass-based International

Founded in 1889, the Socialist or “Second” International was the successor to the International Workingmen’s Association in which Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels played important roles and which lasted from 1864-1876. The revived International united a burgeoning labor movement at a time when new socialist mass parties were emerging in virtually all the industrializing states of Europe, North America, and elsewhere.

Dominated by the German Social Democratic Party (SPD), which in 1912 was by far the world’s largest socialist party with over one million dues-paying members and the support of a third of the country’s 12 million voters, the International terrified the ruling classes and gave hope and confidence to millions of workers who felt like they were marching in step with history. The coming of socialism seemed to be just a matter of time.

Taber’s collection shows, however, a very broad range of opinion within the International about how socialists should deal with key issues under capitalism and about how socialism would be achieved.

As the labor movement became an increasingly significant force, some of its exponents, led by such figures as Edward Bernstein in Germany and Jean Jaurés in France, argued that in alliance with liberal forces, it could use the institutions of parliamentary democracy to introduce incremental social and political reforms that would ultimately lead to the creation of a socialist society.

Others, such as the Polish-German radical Rosa Luxemburg, held that the party and unions should adopt tactics, such as the general strike, that would push for more radical reforms and prepare workers for revolutionary action.

Between these poles was a broad spec-

trum of “centrist” opinion, expressed most clearly by Karl Kautsky, Europe’s preeminent Marxist thinker after the death of Engels in 1895, and August Bebel, co-founder and long-time leader of the German party. They advocated policies that retained the socialist movement’s revolutionary vision but did not actually alter its electoral strategy.

Working in societies in which socialists still faced substantial state repression, they aimed to avoid risk. For them, building and protecting the movement’s economic, cultural, social and political organizations trumped radical action, and they had the support of the majority of the party rank and file.

### Key Issues in Debate

Taber aims to use his collection to portray the International “not just as an object worthy of historical study, but as a living movement (emphasis in the original).” He does this in several ways.

First, on the practical level, he has judiciously chosen to focus on just five of the many major issues taken up by the International during the four congresses that occurred between 1900 and 1910.

These include debates on Socialist participation in government (Millerandism), on colonialism, immigration, women’s suffrage, and militarism and war. In Taber’s view, the International’s efforts to grapple with these issues remain instructive for socialists today, who are often dealing with similar questions albeit under very different circumstances.

Taber has organized his book into five sections, each treating one of these themes. Providing excerpted texts from the actual debates on these issues, the collection sheds light on the nature of the discourse that unfolded among the contending forces.

Instead of merely providing the dry language of the various resolutions, he includes enough of the debates to reveal the ways in which the representatives of the different parties comported themselves with one another, showed respect and contempt for particular ideas and personages, and illustrated how nationalist and internationalist feelings permeated the leaders’ discussions.

For each of the book’s main sections, Taber provides background and interpretive material to make the debates accessible for readers with little knowledge of socialist history.

For Americans today, party congresses are fully scripted, staged affairs in which virtually all decisions regarding candidates and party

programs have been taken well ahead of time. The “conventions” of the Republican and Democratic Parties are really about the pageantry designed to mobilize and unite the faithful around their respective candidates in upcoming elections and have nothing to do with debating policies.

It was much different in the early 20th century in the United States and in Europe. While Socialist party congresses were also carefully choreographed, they were often raucous affairs where issues were heatedly debated, and factional and personal divisions were very clear.

This environment also characterized the meetings of the International. Each of its congresses aimed to show the world that the workers’ movement was a united force moving toward the goal of socialism, but was also meant to showcase workers’ leaders engaged in democratic decision-making based on majority votes. How these debates unfolded, the nuances that separated different proposed resolutions, and the complexity of satisfying the contending factions are clearly reflected in each chapter.

The debate on whether socialists should participate in coalition governments with bourgeois parties, for example, illustrates well the challenges facing the delegates. The issue had long been simmering but came to a head in France in 1899, when the republic was threatened by a major political crisis precipitated by the Dreyfus Affair (a frameup trial motivated by antisemitism—ed.) and Alexandre Millerand, an Independent Socialist parliamentary delegate, accepted an invitation to become Commerce Minister in a bourgeois coalition government.

For socialists who asserted, as Millerand did, that the movement should use parliamentary institutions to defend the republic against the forces of reaction, or as others believed, to promote working-class interests, such an action made sense. But for the majority of the delegates at the International’s congresses of 1900 and 1904 it represented the slippery slope toward “opportunism” and the surrender of socialist principles.

The issue was made even more complicated by the question of whether or not the decision to participate in bourgeois coalition governments should be left up to the respective national parties, all of which were operating under substantially different circumstances, or to the International.

In an attempt to resolve these dilemmas, at the Paris Congress of 1900 Kautsky put forward a resolution condemning participation in bourgeois governments under “normal circumstances” but allowing for exceptions.

This effort won the support of a large majority but met with substantial opposition back in Germany. When the SPD’s Dresden Congress of 1903 passed a resolution, formulated by Kautsky and Bebel, condemn-

ing participation in bourgeois cabinets under any circumstances, the issue landed on the agenda of the International’s Amsterdam Congress of 1904.

There, a heated debate ensued between Jaurés, who, along with Emile Vandervelde (Belgium) and Victor Adler (Austria), argued that the purpose of elections was to actually use the political power thus gained and that local circumstances should determine whether or not to enter a government, against Bebel, who defended the SPD’s record and insisted that it was essential for socialists to make clear their fundamental opposition to the capitalist state.

Bebel’s resolution ultimately won the day but only after a close vote.

### Debating Colonialism

The debates on colonialism were equally intense. It was the era of “high imperialism,” during which economic, political, and cultural rivalries led the great powers to seize much of the world for themselves. The British and French Empires controlled one third and one quarter of the world’s territory, respectively, with Germany, Italy, Belgium, The Netherlands, Spain, Portugal, and the United States also boasting large overseas holdings.

With the exception of Ethiopia, all of Africa, much of South and East Asia, and all Pacific islands were under direct colonial rule, and the conquest, administration and pillage of the subdued territories was always a bloody business. Events such as the brutal American suppression of the Philippine independence movement (1898-1902), the Boer War in South Africa (1899-1902) and the German genocide against the Herero people in Southwest Africa (1904-1907) fueled intense international controversies about the moral and practical bases of imperialism.

Drawing on a long history of socialist solidarity for people of oppressed nations, the member parties of the International generally condemned imperialism and called for either the “full autonomy” or independence of territories under colonial yoke. However, a significant minority within the movement argued that it was more important to correct colonial “abuses” of the subject peoples than to end colonialism itself.

Indeed, in 1896 Bernstein asserted that socialists “will not condemn the idea that savages must be subjugated and made to conform to the rules of higher civilization.” (54) His position won the support of many others, such as Henrik van Kol (Holland) and the Eduard David (Germany), who argued that colonies were necessary for the prosperity of the metropolis and called for a “socialist colonialism” that would limit capitalist development’s exploitation of the natives, while lifting the “savages” out of their “barbarous” condition. (71-72)

These views were vigorously opposed by such figures as the German leader, George

Ledebour, who rejected “the tutelage of one people over another” and Julian Marchlewski of Poland, who noted that “we Poles know the real meaning of this tutelage, since both the Russian Tsar and the Prussian government have exercised tutelage over us.” (72)

After a decade of increasingly contentious debate, during which the racist attitudes of many participants on both sides of the issue were clearly articulated, the Stuttgart Congress of 1907 rejected the call for “socialist colonialism,” but the close vote of 127-108 (with 10 abstentions) reflected the strength of the opportunist current in the movement.

### Rifts Revealed

Additional chapters on immigration and women’s suffrage also make the divisions among Europe’s socialists quite clear. While all Socialist parties put forward demands to protect the rights of immigrants and to grant women the franchise, substantial minorities proposed alternative policies to limit immigration and deny women equal rights.

These minority efforts were defeated, but the rifts they revealed were substantial. In the book’s closing section, on the struggle against militarism and war, readers get the clearest sense of how difficult it was to oppose war in principle and to prevent it in practice.

Did nations have the right to defend themselves against attack? If so, under what circumstances? If not, then what should workers do to stop the conflict?

The International debated these issues repeatedly, culminating in a resolution of the Stuttgart Congress which asserted that, in event of war, all parties were “bound to intervene for its speedy termination and to employ all their forces [. . .] to rouse the masses of the people and thereby hasten the downfall of capitalist rule.” (171)

As the events of 1914 would show, few of the participants were prepared to live up to this pledge.

For socialists in 2024, many issues at the core of this book will be familiar. Battles over the causes and impacts of mass migration, over the efficacy of parliamentary politics, over the nature of imperialism and war, and over gender equality, continue to be among the most important issues facing society.

Socialists remain divided over how to deal with them, as the messy politics of “big tent” organizations such as the DSA make clear. Taber’s collection is instructive because it shows how, despite very substantial divisions, the international socialist movement was able to provide a political home for millions of socialist workers.

At the same time, it reveals how the cleavages in the organization eventually undermined that unity and prepared the ground for its collapse. In that sense, for those who wish to avoid such a disaster, it should be essential reading. ■

# REVIEW

## An Eco-Suspense Thriller By Frann Michel

### How to Blow Up a Pipeline

Film by Ariela Barer, Daniel Garber, Daniel Goldhaber, Jordan Sjol  
Neon, 2023

IT'S NOT AN instruction manual; it's a heist flick and a discussion prompt. *How to Blow Up a Pipeline* offers thrilling suspense and engages compelling questions; it avoids pitfalls common to mainstream films about left movements, although its mainstream genre conventions sometimes jar against its claims to authenticity and its political aspirations.

The film may also be, like the book (by Andreas Malm, Verso Books 2021) that inspired it, a kind of cultural radical flanking maneuver.

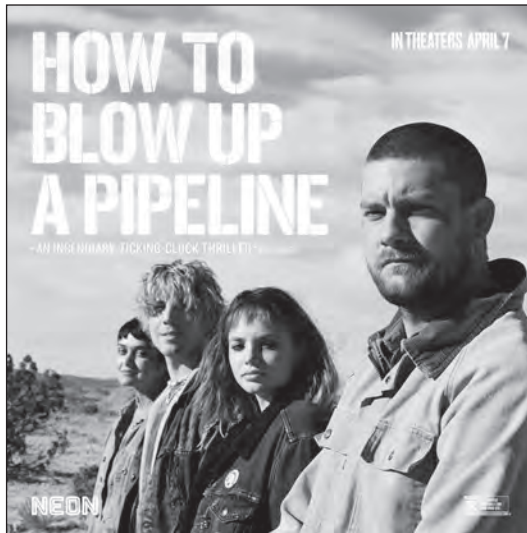
Before discussing this film about climate activists, or the book from which the film takes its title, or the other issues that these works raise, it's worth stressing that blowing up pipelines has in fact not been the work of climate activists, who are more likely to shut down than to blow up pipelines.

Intentional explosions of pipelines have more likely been the work of nation-states or their agents (e.g. Nordstream). But most of the many, many pipeline explosions in the United States result from corporate negligence about maintenance. The website for the film includes a map of U.S. oil and gas pipelines showing major spills since 1986 — almost the entire map is covered by red indications of spills — and a link to the Department of Transportation's Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA).

At the PHMSA site the diligent can learn that, even according to incomplete data provided by industry self-reporting, between 2010 and 2019 for instance there were 329 pipeline explosions in the USA.

That's just a small number of the 1.7 pipeline "incidents" each day, not including incidents that were under thresholds for injury, cost, or amount of material released. (The less diligent, like me, can also find this information on [Fractracker.org](https://www.fractracker.org/).)

These events are far more damaging to



people and to the environment than are the entirely safe shutdowns that climate activists in North America have accomplished using the safety valves installed by pipeline companies themselves.

The valve turners profiled in the documentaries *The Reluctant Radical* (2018, dir. Lindsay Grayzel) and *Necessity: Oil, Water, and Climate Resistance* (2019, dir. Jan Haaken and Samantha Praus, and for which — disclosure — I was a producer) planned their actions to be not only less dangerous than an explosion, but also less dangerous than business as usual (which, again, involves fairly frequent explosions, along with its chronic contributions to the escalating catastrophe of climate chaos).

### Confronting Planetary Emergency

The valve-turners' carefully planned actions involved extensive support teams engaged in contacting the pipeline companies to give them the chance to shut the valves remotely; media teams to inform the public of what they had done and why; and legal teams prepared to mount a defense of the shutdowns as responding to necessity.

Those who enter a stranger's burning home to rescue a child can be found not guilty of breaking and entering, because their actions have averted a greater harm in the only way available. On our flaming planet, shutting down a source of the conflagration is likewise an act of rescue.

Since the first meeting in 1995 of the Conference of Parties (COP) responsible for monitoring and reviewing the implementation of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, millions of activists

have marched and rallied, lobbied and petitioned, testified and divested.

Yet not only has the planet continued increasingly to warm and the climate to destabilize, but also the very causes of these horrors — extraction and combustion of greenhouse gasses for the profit of oil and gas corporations and the luxury of the wealthy — have themselves escalated.

Oil companies keep posting record profits, global and U.S. *oil production reached an all-time high in 2023*, and the latest United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP28) actually endorsed the continued exploitation of liquefied natural gas, which releases methane, an even more potent greenhouse gas than the carbon dioxide released by burning oil or coal.

Looking at such a frustrating pattern, Andreas Malm opens his 2021 book *How to Blow Up a Pipeline: Learning to Fight in a World on Fire* by asking why we have not yet seen mass incendiary action from climate activists.

Despite its provocative title, Malm's book is neither an instruction manual, nor a call to such incendiary acts, though it is a call for greater militancy in the mass climate movement, including greater willingness to engage in property destruction.

Addressed chiefly to those climate activists dedicated to using only peaceful methods, the first chapter argues against overinvestment in strategic pacifism, challenging the idea that nonviolent movements are always more successful. The second argues for the usefulness of a radical flank effect, whereby the presence of a more militant wing can help persuade political leaders to give ground to the less frightening representatives of a movement.

The last chapter argues against despair and for continued action to mitigate the on-rushing catastrophe. Malm's text rejects the binary alternatives of, on the one hand, the purportedly antipolitical mass nonviolence of early Extinction Rebellion groups in the UK, and on the other hand the "no masses, only the armed vanguard" approach he sees advocated by Deep Green Resistance.

His preferred model is "climate camps: tent cities serving as festivals of prefigurative living and learning and bases for mass action against some nearby point source of emissions."

Acknowledging the difficulty of pressing a mass movement toward greater militancy without losing mass support, he cautions

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against fetishizing property destruction as well as pacifism. Instead, Malm advocates less explosive and more massive direct interventions — like blockades (as in the work of Ende Gelaende in Germany) and occupations (as at Standing Rock and in Welaunee Forest).

Even these actions, of course, are painted as terrorism in the arguments of fossil-funded legislators and in the mainstream capitalist press. So we might understand the book as itself offering a kind of radical flank maneuver: the incendiary title outflanks the kind of mass actions Malm endorses, which in turn might become more palatable to the reader insofar as they do not involve blowing anything up.

### Dramatizing Property Sabotage

Malm's book generated much discussion, including a collection of essays responding to Malm's arguments, available as a free e-book from Verso: *Property Will Cost Us the Earth: Direct Action and the Future of the Global Climate Movement* (2022, ed. Jessie Kindig). But a mainstream popular film is likely to reach even more people — especially if that film has an eye-catching title with some built-in name recognition — and thus bring to a wider audience a debate about property destruction, sabotage and self-defense.

The 2022 fictional film by Barer, Garber, Goldhaber and Sjol borrows little more from Malm's book than its title, and the general idea that property destruction can be morally justified in the face of the climate crisis.

The film's website invites viewers to host a screening and provides a link to obtain a free e-copy of Malm's book. The film itself offers a dramatic narrative in which a small, ragtag group comes together to pull off one big action. Shot on 16mm, the film has a grainy vitality, suited to its dusty and desolate landscapes of pipelines, refineries and oil derricks.

If Malm's book offers a rhetorical radical flank, so perhaps does the film. Unlike in some cinematic portrayals of left activists — spoilers ahead! — the characters in *Pipeline* turn out to be motivated not by malevolence or greed, but by genuine and justified concerns and, unlike the ecowarriors in films like *Night Moves* (2013), they manage not to kill anyone.

But although the caper succeeds in its titular sabotage, and all of the protagonists survive, the act is not without costs to them. Indeed, the film would make a dangerous blueprint for action, despite — even because of — its gestures toward authenticity. Yet the sympathetic portrayal of these young activists might help move viewers toward direct actions less incendiary than those on screen.

### Leftist Heist Characters

The filmmakers have attempted an avowedly leftist approach to a mainstream film, giving equal billing to director, screenwriters and editor as the filmmakers, and

choosing a genre — the heist or caper film — that foregrounds group action.

In interviews, Goldhaber has pointed out that heist films are typically ensemble pieces, addressing inequality — a group of outsiders come together to rob a bank, for instance. Thus they tend to run counter to the sacralization of private property which, as Malm writes, “will cost us the earth.”

Like other heist films, *Pipeline* offers viewers the pleasure of watching people working, and working together, exercising — or, here, developing — specialized skills and expertise. Viewers might recognize and reflect on the frustrating limits of conventional political frameworks for action, and the challenges of building trust and solidarity across social differences.

The eight central characters have a representative quality, standing in for some of the demographic groups in North America most harmed by the fossil fuel industry and the climate crisis.

Ringleader Xochitl (Ariela Barer, also one of the screenwriters) is frustrated with her college divestment campaign and grieving her mother's death in a “freak” heat event. Her childhood friend Theo (Sasha Lane) is suffering from cancer caused by growing up near an oil refinery. Native American Michael (Forest Goodluck) is furious about the oil companies exploiting his North Dakota homeland. Texan Dwayne (Jacob Weary) has lost his family's land under eminent domain. And so on.

Most of the characters are people of color; some of them are queer; all of them are poor, mostly not by choice. We learn that Logan (Lukas Gage) could call on “the family lawyer” if he chose, but the signs of precarity are more common throughout the film: the GoFundMe for cancer treatment, the family that can't offer a glass of water because they've run out (and, we can assume, what comes out of the tap is too toxic to drink), the jobs replaced by faulty automation, the soup kitchen that has to close for the rest of the week because they've run out of food.

Although the dialogue refers to American empire and unjust terrorism charges, and recaps some of the debates in Malm's book, no one in the film mentions capitalism, and no one seems connected to any wider networks of militant activists. The film includes verbal or visual references to Malm's book, to Che Guevara, to Audre Lorde, but not to the long history of sabotage.

As Mike Davis discusses in “The Stopwatch and the Wooden Shoe: Scientific Management and the Industrial Workers of the World,” the term “sabotage” originally encompassed a range of tactics for workers to organize for power at the point of production — a sense both more broadly collective and less inherently explosive than indicated in the film.

The film also omits most of the steps that might take each character from tragic backstory to militant saboteur. In interviews, director Daniel Goldhaber has defended this omission by pointing out that so, too, does mainstream military propaganda like *Top Gun: Maverick* take shortcuts with character motivation.

Given the relative rarity in the mainstream of sympathetic portraits of the outlaw saboteur, audiences might still find the brevity of backstory unsettling, but the point about the seeming transparency of the mainstream soldier is worth reflection.

In choosing to make a mainstream genre film in order to reach a wider audience, the filmmakers inevitably invoke mainstream expectations. But the conventional tropes that work well for conventional stories may be less successful for dissident tales.

More generally — as noted by Jasper Bernes in “Deeds and Propaganda,” a review of the film for *The Brooklyn Rail* — the disconnect of mainstream narrative's dramatic focus on individual characters (even in an ensemble) from the scale of needed collective actions on climate presents structural obstacles, which this film is not alone in not having overcome.

### Bad Security

As a number of reviewers have noted, the security practices of this small group might read better as cautionary tale than as inspiration. Their lack of deeper and wider community connections leads to some security missteps.

To obtain the materials for bomb-making, for instance, they would probably do better to connect with someone who could arrange for materials to fall off a truck, rather than buying them with an employee discount at the hardware store, as Michael apparently does.

These people do not all know each other well or seem particularly concerned about that, and indeed one of them turns out to be an FBI informant — although, in the tradition of *The Sting* (1973), that plotline too turns out to involve a further layer of confidence game. A more realistic or less optimistic film might take fuller account of the dangers of entrapment, given the history of law enforcement infiltrations of radical groups.

One might also note points at which the film slights other problems. Prison health care looks implausibly good, for instance, and except when assembling explosives, no one in the film wears a respirator mask or worries about the mass disabling event of the continuing pandemic (images from the film set show crew in respirator masks, but no one on screen mentions the risks).

Where Malm's book recognizes the privilege entailed in being able to choose to risk or seek arrest, the film's ensemble of repre-

sentatives of frontline groups means they are precisely not those with such privilege.

### Don't Try This At Home

To object that the film does not provide a reliable guide to the project of its title would seem akin to objecting that *Oceans 11* does not teach us how to conduct robberies, or that Malm has not updated *The Anarchist Cookbook*. Yet the filmmakers consulted a government counterterrorism expert in an effort to assure authenticity in the portrayal of the bomb-making, and so one needs to say: do not try this at home.

At least one IRA veteran has observed that the practices shown on screen are extremely dangerous, and that the anonymous consultant might be guessed to have an interest in undermining any usefulness the film might have had as an actual How-To. [See "Is this Movie a PsyOp? | Dangerous Misinformation in 'How to Bl\*ow Up a Pipeline' (2022)" from *Marxism Today* on YouTube.]

It would certainly be unwise to see the pipeline map on the film's website as offering a set of bomb targets. The FBI issued a warning about "heightened threat activity" in response to the release of the film, repeating that bureau's typical flattening of political differences by including possible dangers to the electrical grid.

In fact, attacks on distribution points like power stations have been a favorite with right-wing groups rather than climate activists.

There are legal as well as moral arguments to support the use of property destruction in defense of the climate, but they are unlikely anytime soon to extend to use of explosives.

Director Daniel Goldhaber has said in interviews that we need legal recognition of the climate necessity defense — the legal provision that justifies breaking a law to pre-

vent a greater harm — and that he expects more such cases to lead to its wider acceptance. But although Xochitl calls the group's action one of self-defense, the film does not present activists seeking such legal recognition. We do not see them obtaining legal representation or discussing the possibility.

Nor would the group in the film seem to have a particularly strong legal case. Although the legal requirements for such cases vary by jurisdiction, they generally require demonstrating that (a) the threat is imminent (an opportunity to raise awareness about the state of the climate crisis and the dangers of any particular infrastructure location); (b) the threats of the action are lesser than the threats being averted (an easier bar to reach with an action like valve turning, which uses the safety shutoff mechanism installed by pipeline companies themselves); and (c) all other methods to seek redress are unavailable or have been tried (although some of the film's characters are shown engaging in a divestment campaign, others involved seem to have little or no background in the legally acceptable approaches of letter-writing, testifying in environmental hearings, filing lawsuits, marching in permitted protests, and the like).

Malm's arguments also do not address the use of the necessity defense, but it seems counter to his arguments that arrest should be avoided because it is not scalable, given the disproportionate impact of policing on already oppressed communities.

He approves the actions of Jessica Reznicek and Ruby Montoya, who sabotaged parts of the Dakota Access Pipeline while it was under construction, thus delaying its completion for some months, but does not praise their decision to confess publicly, noting that "Sabotage can proceed in the dark."

The "terrorism enhancements" that compounded Reznicek and Montoya's felony

sentences might add to Malm's arguments against trying to work within or through the legal system.

### Sabotage or Mass Resistance

Characters in the *Pipeline* film repeat Malm's argument that damaging fossil infrastructure can put pressure on oil markets and corporate profit — like divestment campaigns, only faster. But Malm also argues that "The question is not if sabotage from a militant wing of the climate movement will solve the crisis on its own — clearly a pipe dream — but if the disruptive commotion necessary for shaking business-as-usual out of the ruts can come about without it."

While of course it is true that blowing up one pipeline will neither stop climate change nor undermine the corporate arsonists, practical mass resistance can contribute to pressure on the oil and gas industry and its government allies.

Shell Oil gave up drilling in the Arctic in 2015, after a series of problems that included technical obstacles and meager finds, but also after activists blockaded an icebreaker support ship, the *Fenneca*, to delay its arrival past the arctic drilling season.

Similarly, Malm points to the "small win" of a blockade of Gothenburg Harbor persuading the Swedish government to deny a permit for *Swedegas*. The real gains of such actions, however, may lie less in any small local wins than in the possible building of organized community and thus the momentum toward more frequent and massive action.

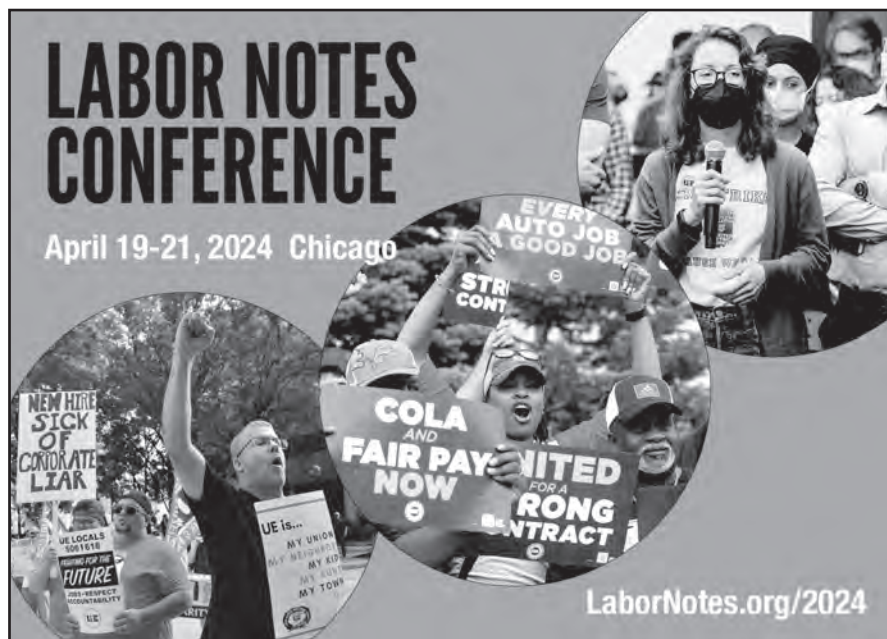
Indeed, the pipeline bomb is not the only form of sabotage in the film. It opens with slashing SUV tires (perhaps a more visible approach than the pebble-in-the-valve method Malm describes), includes sugar in the tanks of construction equipment, and ends with another group — let's call them *Orcas* — sabotaging a yacht, another potential target mentioned by Malm.

The flyer that the *Orcas* leave at the end looks much like the one left on the SUV in the opening scene, hinting that there are wider networks than we actually see, as well as that such interventions are continuing and spreading.

Malm acknowledges that an underlying reason for the lack of more radical action is a dearth of radical organizing and an infelicitous configuration of class forces, hampering the pursuit of such action. We need revolutionary change, which means we need revolutionary politics, and we are still far from the mass organizing, education and training of people that will provide the needed leverage.

But if viewers of *How To Blow Up A Pipeline* come away from it more open to shutting things down, that would be a step in the right direction.

So, see it with your comrades. ■



# REVIEW

## A World of Collateral Damage

### War Made Invisible

How America Hides the Human Toll of Its Military Machine

By Norman Solomon

The New Press, 2023, 197 pages + notes and index, \$27.99 hardcover.

VETERAN PEACE ACTIVIST and author or co-author of a dozen previous books, Norman Solomon's most recent book documents the many ways that the United States' endless wars of the 21st century are kept hidden from the American public. First and foremost are the many U.S. military operations of which the public is unaware. (Until just recently, who knew about our expanded bombing operations in Yemen?)

The conduct of wars by so-called "precisions weapons" and drones, rather than "boots on the ground," allows political elite to minimize the true costs. The toll of U.S. wars, especially on civilians, are significantly minimized if not virtually ignored. Solomon contrasts this with the victims of wars conducted by U.S. adversaries, especially where the victims are people who "look like us," whose tragedies are rightfully highlighted.

Where the government is forced to admit the costs of war, it minimizes the continuing effects on the victims and its own veterans. Solomon details the U.S. government's criminalization of whistleblowers who try to shed light on the government's war secrets.

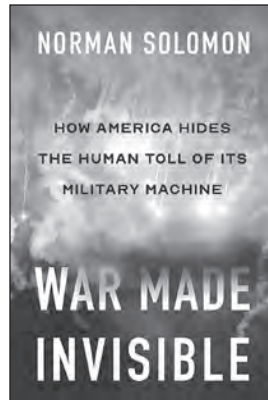
Finally, he discusses the role the mainstream media plays in cheerleading for wars and attempting to silence brave reporters who try to voice dissent.

*"The frequencies of certain assumptions blend into a kind of white noise, with little chance for contrary sounds to be heard or considered. (T)he dominant media discourse and standard political rhetoric about the country's military role in the world are like that."* (17)

### Forever Wars at Faraway Places

Solomon begins his Introduction with the aftermath of 9-11. Although the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan resulted in the rapid fall of the Taliban regime in November 2001, the "global war on terrorism" was just getting started. Little interest was paid to U.S. Army general William Odom who was quoted on C-SPAN:

*"Terrorism is not an enemy. It cannot be*



Syria and other places — 22 countries on four continents.

Many of these wars were out of public sight and mind from the American public. The human costs of war had shifted as Solomon cites *New York Times Magazine* contributing writer Azmat Khan:

*"U.S. soldiers, service members are dying at some of the lowest rates that they have traditionally in history. And the human costs of war are primarily being shifted to both foreign civilians and partner forces. And so this shift to airpower has really taken away some of the political costs of the past, for example, during the era of Vietnam, have served to curtail war or to mount pressure to end it. So we're really looking at an era of warfare in which the political costs are diminished significantly and those result in far less attention and focus than there would be on wars in the years past."* (13)

President Biden's United Nations speech in the fall of 2021 proclaimed: "I stand here today, for the first time in twenty years, with the United States not at war. We've turned the page."

That same month, the false claim that the U.S. had finally "turned at page" was disputed by the Costs of War Project at Brown University, which showed that the "war on terror" was still underway on several continents. It estimated the deaths from the U.S. post-9-11 wars at between 897,000 and 929,000. (14)

Biden's false claim was also refuted by outlandish U.S. military expenditures on "defense," more than the next ten countries combined. In the first two decades of this century, five megafirms, Lockheed Martin, Boeing, General Dynamics, Raytheon, Northrop Grumman have been paid \$2.1 trillion in military contracts. The mainstream media rarely cover this war profiteering and

*defeated. It's a tactic. It's about as sensible to say we declare war on night attacks and expect we're going to win that war. We are not going to win that war on terrorism."* (3)

After 9-11 the U.S. bombing campaigns would extended way beyond Iraq and Afghanistan to also include Pakistan, Libya, Somalia, Yemen,

By Donald Greenspon

these financial costs.

### Unintended Deaths and Racism of War

Phyllis Bennis from the Institute for Policy Studies offered the following assessment in 2022:

*"The so-called 'global war on terror' has, from its origins, been characterized by attacks by U.S. Special Forces, by airstrikes, by armed drones, and more, that routinely kill far more civilians than the targets identified on the 'kill lists' prepared by presidents and top White House officials."* (51-2)

Solomon rightfully believes that a single standard of humanity should infuse media coverage of war and the lives of all victims of war should have equal value. Unfortunately, he documents the many ways that this is not the case. While it is not wrong to spotlight the horrors of Ukrainian war victims, this light is dimmed for victims in Yemen, Syria, Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Somalia and Palestine.

The tenor and volume of U.S. media coverage hinges on two factors: who is doing the killing (the United States or the designated enemy) and who is being killed (white or people of color). As Solomon points out, there is no starker example of this double standard than in the Russian invasion of Ukraine and Israel's multiple wars on Palestine and its Middle East neighbors.

James Zogby, president of the Arab American Institute makes Solomon's point:

*"It passed without comment in the U.S. press when an Israeli government official denounces the Russian invasion as a 'grave violation of the international order,' while another expressed his support for Ukraine's 'territorial integrity and sovereignty' — as if Israel has ever respected these concepts. They have invaded and occupied Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, and Egypt, justifying their actions using the same 'security' argument claimed by the Russians."*

Senator Bernie Sanders' foreign policy adviser Matt Duss echoes similar thoughts:

*"As a Ukrainian-American I am immensely proud of the bravery of Ukrainians and of the support being shown by Americans. As a Middle East analyst, I am floored by the blatant double standard on resisting occupation and repression."* (139)

### How Wars Don't End

Solomon's chapters 5 and 8, "Humane Wars" and "The Costs of War," cover the terrible reality that rarely are wars over when the government claims they are. America left Vietnam in 1975, leaving that country

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with three million dead and much greater devastation. After the war, reputable studies found that “unexploded bombs and cluster munitions contaminated over 23,670 square miles.” These amounted to 19 percent of Vietnam’s total land area.” (104)

Vietnam and Laos were also left to cope with the long-term effects of the U.S. military’s use of the defoliant Agent Orange including birth defects.

“While bracing itself for the invasion that came in early 2003, Iraq was still coping with the U.S. military’s use of DU (depleted uranium) in 1991 during the Gulf War.” Despite warnings how the use of DU had given rise to significant rise in childhood cancers and other malignancies from 1990-2000, the U.S. military proceeded to fire about 180,000 rounds of DU during its 2003 invasion. (105)

The longterm effects not only devastated the countries it bombed and occupied, but also the lives of U.S. combat veterans. After Vietnam, they and their families also suffered from Agent Orange’s severe health effects.

As a result of exposure to a host of chemicals, U.S. veterans of the 1991 Iraq war experienced “Gulf War Syndrome.” In the later wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, U.S. soldiers were exposed to toxins from burn pits. Many developed unexplained cancers, and adding insult to injury, veterans and their families who suffered from these exposures had to fight the Veterans Administration’s strong resistance to honor their valid claims. (105)

Effects on veterans also include severe psychological and mental health challenges, and big spikes in domestic abuse and intimate partner violence. (169-70)

### Silencing Critics of the War Machine

Solomon’s chapter 6 discusses “Lives that Really Matter, Lives that Don’t.” The U.S. public’s support and enthusiasm for its wars understandably seem inversely proportional to the number of American casualties. Flag-draped coffins arriving on conveyor belts at military bases in the U.S. make for “bad optics.” That’s why over time the government has tightened restrictions of news coverage of dead soldiers arriving at military bases.

What also makes for “bad optics” is the disclosure of U.S. war crimes. “Former U.S. Army intelligence analyst Chelsea Manning spent seven years in a military prison — including long, tortuous stretches in solitary confinement — for making possible the public disclosure of such evidence as the infamous ‘Collateral Murder’ video that showed the cavalier killing of eleven Iraqi civilians from the air.” (122)

WikiLeaks publisher Julian Assange brought the Manning video into the open and also released huge troves of documents that exposed deception, coverups, and U.S. military massacres of civilians. Assange underwent seven years of asylum in Ecuador’s small London embassy, and has been held in

London’s harsh Belmarsh prison ever since.

Although not a U.S. citizen, Assange has been charged under its espionage law and the American government has gone to great lengths to extradite him to the U.S. to face certain mandatory lifetime imprisonment.

Highly acclaimed TV personality Phil Donohue had a leading MSNBC prime time program when his show was cancelled three weeks before the Iraq invasion began in 2003. A leaked internal memo explained the reason the concerns of MSNBC executives that his program presented a “difficult public face for NBC in time of war.”

“The document warned that the show could become “a home for the liberal anti-war agenda at the same time that our competitors are waving the flag at every opportunity.” (184)

Another typical case is that of news-woman, Ashleigh Banfield. By her early 30s she had won numerous awards including an Emmy, was anchoring a prime time show for MSNBC in 2000, and then was becoming a high-profile NBC News correspondent.

However, in the midst of the triumphalism about “victory” in Iraq, in April 2003 Banfield gave a speech in which she deplored the horrors of that war which other mainstream journalists had ignored. NBC executives immediately dissociated themselves from Banfield, warehoused her until her contract expired which resulted in her complete fall from grace within mainstream U.S. media. (71-74)

True to form, in the midst of Israel’s genocidal destruction of Gaza, the liberal MSNBC cancelled the commentary program of Mehdi Hasan, after he challenged statements by Israeli government spokesman Mark Regev in an on-air interview.

### In Conclusion

Many of America’s perpetual wars over the past two decades, and their effects, have been kept off the radar of average Americans because the increased use of high technology, air power and remote drones have replaced “boots on the ground.”

Compliant journalists and editors add to the deception and the minimizing of the true costs. Those brave enough to buck this trend are attacked and relegated to the margins.

The value of Solomon’s book is not only how it accurately depicts the past, but how its themes are applicable to present and future events. It was published in June of 2023, well before the events in Israel/Gaza unfolded in October of 2023. Yet much of what Solomon describes in prior wars has played out in this catastrophe.

The October 7 Hamas war crimes in Israel have been given significant coverage, and the victims’ deaths and hostages are given the humanity they are due. Yet the overwhelming Israeli bombing of so-called protected targets — hospitals, schools, refugee shelters, etc. — are minimized and excused.

President Biden has claimed, with no evidence, that the Gaza Health Ministry was not “telling the truth” about how many people have been killed. Israel is not considered a victimizer even though it has dropped the lethal bombs, while Hamas is routinely accused of using civilians as “human shields” — even though investigations into Israel’s prior attacks on Gaza in 2008-2009 and 2014 by reputable human rights groups failed to find any case of civilian deaths caused by Hamas using human shields.

Israel’s “indiscriminate military attacks” on Gaza have been described by United Nations and human experts as “collective punishment” and a war crime as in its use of white phosphorus against civilian targets.

As the cases of Phil Donohue, Ashley Banfield and others show, mainstream media have attempted to silence critics of the Israeli attack on Gaza within its ranks. The cancellation of Mehdi Hasan’s popular MSNBC show is the most prominent example.

It has been said that “the first casualty when war comes is truth.” *War Made Invisible* powerfully documents this reality. This book offers a resounding call for change and an important resource for all people who long to live in a peaceful world. ■

IN HER MEMOIR, *The Red and the Blacklist: The Intimate Memoir of a Hollywood Expatriate* (2003), Norma Barzman maintained that the community of the Left, wherever she found herself within it, was a source of strength and understanding.

Born to a wealthy New York City family in 1920, just two years after a sister died of the Spanish flu, she had a sister, Muriel, a decade older. Norma went to school in New York and France, then attended Radcliffe College where she met and married Claude Shannon (later known as “the father of information theory”). The romance quickly ended in divorce.

Moving to Los Angeles in 1941, she worked as a journalist for the *Los Angeles Examiner*. By 1943 she had married writer Ben Barzman, and joined the Communist Party. When the witchhunt hit they moved to France, where they collaborated on various film and book projects and raised seven children. Disillusioned with the Communist Party, they left but remained politically active. They eventually returned to Hollywood where she worked to restore credits for blacklisted writers including her screenplay for *The Locket*, a psychological thriller known for its use of flashbacks. In 1999 she participated in the protests against the Academy awarding Elia Kazan an honorary lifetime achievement Oscar. She pointed out that his collaboration with HUAC during the witch hunt broke many lives. She helped to organize an exhibit on the Hollywood Blacklist at the Academy two years later. ■

## Last of the Hollywood Blacklistees: Norma Barzman, 1920-2003

By Paul Buhle

A LARGE STORY in American culture has now drawn to a chronological end with the death of sometime screenwriter Norma Barzman, age 103.

Her actual screen credits were few, in part because she left Hollywood for Paris with her better-known husband, Ben Barzman, as McCarthyism made further film work impossible. In part, she wrote later, few women had ever been taken seriously as screenwriters until much later. The writing that she did after the couple returned to Hollywood in the late 1950s never got produced.

Yet Norma played a vital role in the little-understood community of creative screenwriters struggling to find a place for themselves, mostly in Europe during the worst of the Blacklist, but also earlier and later, in Hollywood itself.

It is impossible to describe let alone analyze the Left role in Hollywood's so-called Golden Era briefly, in part because the deeply contradictory relation of cultural activists with the Communist Party. It connected them with unionization efforts and wartime antifascist mobilization, but also bound them to an unwieldy and mostly unfriendly bureaucracy. CP leaders and its cultural commissars never appreciated film art, and allowed for considerable autonomy only because Hollywoodites made large financial contributions. Famously a visiting William Z. Foster, hoping to raise money or perhaps play upon guilt in a 1930s visit, wanted to meet Cowboy stars who were his idea of leading film actors.

A handful of leftwing writers were very successful, indeed among the highest paid writers in Hollywood. Sometimes enough of their work survived into genuinely brilliant films, or at least films with brilliant moments.

The majority scraped along, often writing for B pictures including detective dramas, children's films or even Westerns. Every writer could say that the best writing remained unproduced. Norma and Ben Barzman occupied the second tier, but both showed promise, until 1947 came around, with the



Ben and Norma Barzman.

“the Americans” socially.

Norma co-wrote a screenplay about a young woman urgently seeking an abortion. Ben, who had scripted a great film in 1949 based upon the Italian-American working-class novel *Christ in Concrete*, by Pietro Di Donato, had mixed success in his career afterward. Joseph Losey, Jules Dassin and a few others found great success, while most had to go behind “Fronts” for U.S. television work or await the reopening of opportunities at home.

My own small world, as belated scholar of the Blacklist, included aging survivors like Walter Bernstein, Abraham Polonsky (known familiarly as the “last Marxist of Hollywood”), Paul Jarrico (who had produced *Salt of the Earth* before departing abroad), sitcom master Frank Tarloff and former Abbott and Costello writer Bobby Lees, among others.

It may be important to say, for the readers of *Against the Current*, that for most of them, faith in the Soviet Union faded early, and that their understanding of how Marxist ideas could be applied to screenwriting never got much beyond the instinctive.

They despised capitalism and the film colony capitalists, they dreamed of a film world guided by working people in every sector of the industry, technicians as much as writers. Some of them, including the Barzmans, grasped at *film noir* in their bitter disillusionment with the collapse of wartime, antifascist hopes, and with the rightward-moving Democratic Party.

Television series *You Are There* and *The Adventures of Robin Hood*, scripted under pseudonyms, reached many more millions than almost any of their films, a point worth pondering. *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* and some of Norman Lear's ventures like *Maude*, not to mention the humane kids' programs

like *Lassie* and *Flipper*, owed a lot to their creative efforts.

The writers — rarely allowed to use their own names until near the end of their careers — perhaps touched the consciousness of 1960s-'80s political generations deepest with *Never On Sunday*, *MASH*, *Midnight Cowboy* or *Serpico*, to name a few that survived the studio system and its fragmented successors. Walter Bernstein got *The Front* made only because Woody Allen would star in it.

The “blacklist film,” about the history of their persecution, invariably featured someone “innocent” but mistaken for a Red. Perhaps *The Majestic*, starring Jim Carrey, really is the end of the line, appropriately in 2001, fifty years since the Blacklist came slamming down.

But this would be the wrong way of looking at a cultural story of great complexity and value. Some socially critical writers, directors and even (or most likely) stars today get important films made and will continue to do so. “The Left” as a community has never coalesced again in Hollywood or New York, and is unlikely to do, even when political positions are taken at award ceremonies or in acts of real or symbolic solidarity. And yet recent strike action by the “talent guilds” depended upon traditions of solidarity that owed their origins to hard work and sacrifice long ago.

Norma Barzman repeatedly emphasized, in writings and in her memoir, that the community of the Left, wherever she found herself within it, was itself the source of strength and understanding.

They could be wrong about the USSR (as nearly all of them would later admit) but right about capitalism and right about the struggle for creativity and commitment within the commercial cultural of capitalism ongoing. It was, so to speak, their credo.

Nothing less than a deep look at their work that actually achieved a worthy production can bring a sense of their accomplishment, and even that falls short of what, under different circumstances, they might have done. I am happy to have spent a little time with Norma Barzman, more with Abraham Polonsky, Bobby Lees, Walter Bernstein and most of all Ring Lardner, Jr., among others less well known. And to have been, with a handful of colleagues, the historians of their lives and work. ■

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*Paul Buhle is author or co-author of five books on the Hollywood Blacklist, including the best-known: Tender Comrades, oral histories coedited with Patrick McGilligan.*

## Letter from the Editors — continued from the inside front cover

in 2005, after it became too expensive to protect them, didn't remove Israel's control of Gaza's economy, which it systematically underdeveloped and looted, and its control over what could come in and go out.

Since 2007 when Hamas took power in Gaza (following a failed U.S.-backed anti-Hamas coup), the Detroit-size strip of territory with 2.3 million people has been subject to a 16-year siege with food supplies allowed at just subsistence levels, punctuated by repeated episodes of Israeli bombing and infrastructure destruction.

There are established rules governing occupied territory taken in wartime (Fourth Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, August 1949: Section III, "Occupied Territories," Articles 47-78). These specify in detail that the occupying power bears responsibility for the well-being of the occupied population — which means that Israel's right of self-defense is constrained by the fact that it has no more right to bomb Gaza and its people than it has to bomb its own citizens.

Even apart from the monstrous disproportionality of the mass killing and destruction that Israel has inflicted, and its blatant lies about "minimizing civilian casualties" — when the opposite is obviously true — it simply *had no right* to launch such a military operation in the first place.

### Consequences of a Genocidal War

In reviewing the bare facts of the destruction as of the beginning of February, we're entirely aware that the statistics will be hugely outdated by the time we're in print. Even right now, the stated death toll of 27,000 in Gaza must be grossly understated.

With thousands of unrecovered bodies under destroyed buildings, the real number must be over 30,000, and that's before the almost inevitable rapid spread of epidemic disease from the collapse of health services, the bombing of almost all the hospitals, the absence of clean water, overcrowding and hunger verging on famine.

Well over half the structures in Gaza are rubble, to the extent that it's hard to see how it can be made habitable again. In addition to this is deliberate cultural demolition — the Israeli army's destruction of universities and museums with priceless records and artifacts, rivaling what the Islamic State was doing in Syria and Iraq.

Leading Palestinian intellectuals have been targeted, along with more than 100 journalists, and over 300 medical workers. The Israeli army has killed 94 university professors, along with hundreds of teachers and thousands of students, as part of its ongoing assault on Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, according to the Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor.

Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor stressed that "Israel's actions fall within the framework of its public policies of making the Gaza Strip uninhabitable and expelling its Palestinian residents...by establishing a coercive atmosphere devoid of basic services and necessities for survival, i.e. by destroying people's physical safety and psychological stability, which may ultimately force the Strip's inhabitants to evacuate."

The Geneva-based human rights organization stated that Israel "has targeted academic, scientific, and intellectual

figures in the Strip in deliberate and specific air raids on their homes without prior notice." These horrific figures will be outdated within weeks, but they foreshadow further ugly consequences.

1) On the popular level in the Middle East and Muslim world, Israel will never be forgiven for what it has done to impose a second *Nakba* on Palestine — even though Saudi Arabia and other oil kingdoms happily intend to resume "normalization" of relations at the earliest opportunity.

2) In U.S. and global politics, the slaughter in Gaza has produced a hemorrhaging of Joe Biden's support base among Arab Americans as well as progressive and young Jewish voters. Meanwhile both Benjamin Netanyahu and Vladimir Putin are awaiting the U.S. election, in expectation of the return of Donald Trump — with all its implications for the United States, the world, and the global environmental catastrophe.

3) Even with incomplete reporting, it's clear that the Israeli military in Gaza and the West Bank is committing acts of sadistic savagery including executions of unarmed prisoners — recalling Russian army atrocities in Bucha and other Ukrainian towns — as well as blasting ambulances with tank shells, and random shootings on the street, about which we know mainly from the case where the victims turned out to be three escaped Israeli hostages.

This indicates a significant presence of the extremely racist far right within the Israeli Defense Force, which is going to feed back into Israel's volatile political crisis as it resurfaces. The obscene celebratory "Settlement Brings Security and Victory" conference for the depopulation and Israeli recolonization of Gaza shows that the fascist forces in the Israeli government no longer need to hide their intentions. With the Netanyahu coalition in increasing peril from both the far right and the general disillusionment of the populace, the struggle inside Israel threatens to see more violence both against Palestinian communities and between Israeli-Jewish political forces.

4) The danger of a much wider regional war, whether in Lebanon with Hezbollah or potentially with direct U.S. and Iranian involvement, is growing as the Gaza massacre continues, although it is difficult to assess the level of the threat.

5) We don't know at this writing what's happening in the semi-secret talks over an extended two-month "pause" and hostage/prisoner exchange. Nor will we know, if such a deal materializes, what the secret clauses might be. What's clear for the pro-Palestinian and peace movement is that if such a pause comes about, it will be imperative to intensify the struggle for an *immediate and permanent ceasefire* to a point where it becomes politically impossible for the U.S. government to allow Israel to resume the massacre.

As we go to press, the Israeli military says its full-scale assault on Rafah will proceed unless all hostages are released by the start of Ramadan. Meanwhile, even though U.S. mainstream media are showing much less than what most of the world sees, the daily livestream of the destruction of Gaza and Palestine continues. So in the year 2024, we can now say that "this is what genocide looks like" — and that we will be living with the consequences for decades. ■



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*After being sentenced to five years in prison, Boris Kagarlitsky was immediately taken away. He commented, "We just need to get through this dark period for the country."*

**THE MURDER OF Alexei Navalny points to the extreme danger facing political prisoners in Vladimir Putin's Russia. The leftwing critical sociologist Boris Kagarlitsky was shipped to a penal colony to serve five years immediately after "conviction" for opposing the invasion of Ukraine. Follow his case and action appeals at <https://againstthecurrent.org>, [www.facebook.com/AgainstTheCurrentmag](https://www.facebook.com/AgainstTheCurrentmag), and <https://solidarity-us.org>.**