THE GAZA GHETTO UPRISING

TO THE HEART OF IT: Gaza has been a free kill zone, a “death world,” long before October 7. The most radical position comes directly from the simplest question: Are Palestinians human beings? If your answer is emphatically yes, unambiguously and without reservations, then you are a lost cause to Zionism. Gaza, this place created by colonial policy, this black box, this holding pen, or concentration camp for refugees from the 1948 ethnic cleansing of Palestine – can we think of its people as we think about ourselves, imagining being enclosed, imprisoned, in a small stretch of land forever, for no reason other than being born into a specific ethnicity? A place that has been cut off from the world to varying degrees since 1948. And a place that since at least 2003 has experienced multiple devastating large scale military operations. Gazans had survived twelve of these since 2003, with a death toll of over 8,000 people, before October 7. Since then, that number has grown by over 40,000. And every minute there's a new update of more deaths from Gaza, from Israeli bombing, but now also from starvation. No fuel, no food, no water, no medicine. Whatever is coming in is like “a drop in the sea,” to quote UN officials, in a place that these officials had already declared “unlivable,” unfit for human life, in 2018, and that has been experiencing what Ilan Pappe called “an incremental genocide” already in 2006.

This is the context that we need to have in mind when thinking about the attack on Oct 7. And then ask ourselves, what would we do in that situation? Do you acquiesce and die? Or do you fight?

And if you fight, then how? George Orwell wrote about Gandhi being asked this question about the Jews in Europe in 1938, before the Holocaust. Gandhi said that the Jews should stage a kind of collective mass suicide to show the world the brutality of the Nazis,

and then the world would have to intervene. [1] Orwell thought this was unhinged. But the Palestinians, in fact, kind of did this in 2018- 19, during the period of the Great March of Return, the Palestinian equivalent to the salt march in India. On the first day, about thirty thousand Palestinians marched towards the fence, and this unarmed protest was gunned down by Israeli snipers. Thousands of people were injured and over 60 people were killed, just on the first day. And the world did nothing. Liberal politicians extended some vague condemnations, often against violence on both sides. Imagine looking at that and condemning violence on both sides.

So what would you do? Former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak – the architect of the 2007 siege, considered a liberal Zionist – answered this question himself in 1998, saying he would have joined armed Palestinian resistance had he been born on the other side.

We think of Gaza, we Israelis, think of Gaza as a place that warehouses violence. It contains the refugees who must hate us so badly for what we did to them. This is also how Americans think of prisons, as this place that warehouses violence, contains it so that we don't have to think about it. But actually, the prison produces violence, and it flows out of the prison and into our seemingly removed lives.

That's why moralistic questions of violence are beside the point. As for what happened on October 7, I'll try as much as possible to stick to verifiable observations based on fact. It's very easy to fall into moralistic analysis, and we obviously can't avoid it, right? I've already done some of that, but we should try to understand what physically, historically, actually occurred. And what happened, as far as we're able to gather within the sea of misinformation and disinformation and whatever kind of psychological operations are

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[1] George Orwell, "Reflections on Gandhi," Partisan Review, 1949.

happening. . . What happened, gathering from GoPros, surveillance footage, first person accounts on both sides of the fence, as well as me reading obsessively everything I could put my hands on: military analysts, testimonies, media from both sides of the fence. What happened was that armed resistance factions in Gaza – not only Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiyah, the Islamic resistance movement, Hamas, most prominently, but also the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), which is a revolutionary socialist organization, and other factions – they launched a meticulously executed guerrilla operation, as well as popular insurrection, against military bases and settlements surrounding the Gaza Strip.

Around 6 a.m. local time, the resistance [2] deployed a wide array of forces – totaling about 3,000 fighters – on sea, land, and air and underground. They started with what Israelis call a "diversion," by launching an unusually extensive missile strike, targeting the so-called Gaza Envelope and the coast, up to Gush Dan (the Tel Aviv metropolitan area). Simultaneously, they attacked Israel's panoptic surveillance systems and their cameras above and around Gaza, with what appears to be relatively cheap commercial drones with DIY explosive capacities. And then they approached and breached the fence with multiple guerrilla army units, blowing up the fences around Gaza at many points with specialized explosives for fences, and laying down metal railings over which armed motorcyclists in groups of two could ride rapidly. Then heavy construction equipment like bulldozers and front-end loaders would move in to expand the breaches such that pickup trucks and sedans could drive through, carrying more armed fighters. With these forces they completely overwhelmed Israeli defenses across many locations simultaneously, taking over the Erez Crossing – which is the main

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[2] By "the resistance" I mean the plurality of factions and unaffiliated individuals opposing Israeli siege, apartheid, and colonization in Palestine and outside of it.

checkpoint separating Gaza from the world (alongside Rafah, which separates Gaza to the south, with Egypt) – catching soldiers in their underwear in the bases, taking over entire settlements, killing many hundreds of Israeli soldiers and civilians – the death toll currently stands at 1,1563 – killing and capturing high-ranking army officials, killing one mayor, too, the head of the municipal authority of the Gaza envelope, and kidnapping over 200 people into Gaza.

To qualify this: These figures come largely from Israeli government sources. Without a fully independent investigation, we will probably never know what exactly happened in those first few hours. While there is video evidence of a few instances of Palestinians killing unarmed Israelis and foreign nationals who were hiding or fleeing, we do not know the full extent of the phenomenon. Israel claims that all the hundreds of civilians killed on Oct 7 were "murdered by Hamas," but Israeli publications have confirmed that dozens of them were killed by Israeli fire. Again, with Israel aggressively rejecting an independent investigation, the full extent of its killing of its own civilians remains unclear. It is evident, too, that unaffiliated Gaza residents joined the attack and also kidnapped some Israelis. What happened after the fences were breached, after the gates were opened, was that then thousands of Gaza residents, or inmates, joined the assault in what became a

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[3] Due to the complicated process of identifying hundreds of corpses disfigured by indiscriminate IDF fire in the Gaza envelope that day, Israeli officials have slowly revised the number down from 1,400, and Haaretz military journalist Amos Harel now says "almost 1,100." Amos Harel, "Israel's Army Makes Headway in Gaza, but Hamas' Surrender Is Far from Imminent," Haaretz, November 14, 2023, sec. Israel News, https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2023- 11-14/ty-article/.premium/israels-military-is-making-headway-in- gaza-but-hamas-surrender-is-far-from-imminent/0000018b-ca6f-d8c7-a59b-df6f80560000.

prison break and an uprising. And you can see some of the footage where people from Gaza walk out, kiss the ground, and turn around to go back inside. And then others on bicycles and crutches, or however they could, there's one man you see on crutches, kept going. They looted military bases and settlements – expropriating military vehicles and even a horse – and some participated directly in the attack, with children throwing stones on IDF outposts next to fighters attacking the posts with light arms.

In my binge-reading, I came across one account where this Israeli Haaretz journalist went to one of the hotels to which residents of the Envelope were relocated by the Dead Sea, and spoke to people, asked them what they saw. One person talked about seeing teenagers with stones and machetes next to well-equipped uniformed Hamas fighters. I'm not sure if this is true, I've never seen a machete in Palestine. Another thing we saw was fake news coming in from other places around the world, including Latin America. I specifically remember one terrible 2013 video of a woman burned. So it's possible that this person too was confusing this with a video from Latin America with machetes. But we do know that there was this element as well of a popular insurrection once the gates were opened. This reminds me of other rebellions, slave rebellions, really, where there's an organized vanguard or an organized underground that leads the attack with the intention of opening the gates, taking over an armory, arming the populace, and letting the spontaneity of the masses take over. Fanon talks about this, in the second chapter of Wretched of the Earth, about launching the spontaneity of the masses, which is uncontrollable. [4] Once the rage of the dispossessed is unleashed, you don't know what's going to happen, and some of it might be horrendous, right? It might. And it's something we have to grapple with, without falling into a knee-jerk panic reaction that justifies genocide.

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4 Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963).

We can think of Nat Turner. We can think of John Brown, where the idea was to take over the armory at Harper's Ferry, and then free slaves, kill slave owners, arm the slaves, and start a rebellion that would bring down slavery in the South. Some people saw this as a kind of general rehearsal for the Civil War. But it failed, and John Brown was executed, and a lot of brutal killing happened. Still, the way we remember it now is certainly not how people talked about it back then. I just want to challenge readers to think about their own knee jerk reaction to seeing news from Oct 7, and how these reactions would be seen historically.

Another case that is especially important to me as a Jewish person, having studied our history of persecution and rebellion, is the Sobibor Uprising. The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising is of course the most famous Jewish revolt of that era, and many people made the analogy, including Refaat Alareer, a Gazan poet who generated controversy for drawing this comparison on BBC, and who was murdered by Israel as a possible consequence. The Sobibor revolt, while much less known, is more of a success story. It was a concentration camp where, in 1943, realizing they were all going to get killed, a small group of maybe 20 people, some of them prisoners of war, organized in secrecy, came up with a sophisticated plan to kill high-ranking SS officers, sabotage the electricity and communications infrastructure, take the guards' weapons, loot the armory, arm the other inmates, open the gates and let people escape and join the partisans. Launched on Oct 14, 2023, it worked, to an extent. Approximately half of the camp escaped. But only about 50 rebels survived the war. Still, it's a much higher percentage than would've survived otherwise. And of course, infinite differences between these cases, but to me, I instantly thought about it when I saw the news from my sister, who lived in one of the settlements of the Envelope until Oct 7, in the family Whatsapp group, saying that their power went out, that there was some kind of sabotage of the electricity infrastructure in the Oct 7 operation.

There was also this element of short-circuiting Israel's surveillance capacities, creating the mirage that Hamas was deterred from confrontation with Israel, and that it had no plans to attack. According to Israeli and American sources, there were multiple gatherings of forces in the lead-up that were framed by Hamas as harmless training exercises. There were phone call conversations among Hamas officials, supposedly – again, according to Israeli sources – saying that they had no interest in any confrontation with Israeli forces. Apparently, Egyptian and American intel was delivered to the IDF, but they waived it away as something familiar and unconcerning. This short-circuiting of surveillance was also long term: in the previous few months, Israel moved entire divisions from Gaza to the West Bank, assuming that Hamas was contained, banking on technological surveillance and enclosure systems, like smart fences and robotic sentries, to keep Gaza pacified.

THE ISRAELI RESPONSE: A MASS HANNIBAL

The Israeli response to all this hadn't materialized until later in the morning. It took the IDF a few long hours to understand what at all was going on. And when they finally responded, they basically implemented the Hannibal Directive, as attested by Israeli Air Force Colonel Nof Erez who said on the Haaretz podcast on November 9, that October 7 "was a mass Hannibal."

The Hannibal Directive is a kind of scorched earth response to kidnapping attempts. Mondoweiss ran an important piece about this early on. Kidnappings have been an extremely effective way for Palestinians to generate leverage against Israel for decades, culminating in the Gilad Shalit deal in 2011, when Israel exchanged 1,027 Palestinian political prisoners, including Hamas head in Gaza

Yahya Sinwar, for one soldier. The Hannibal Directive is this army procedure where the idea is to prevent something like that by all means necessary, even at risk of killing the kidnapped soldier or soldiers, which almost always winds up happening, as with Israeli soldier Hadar Goldin and others in 2014.

So, on and since October 7, this was Israel's logic. The Israeli Air Force was utilized to bomb Israeli military bases and settlements, as well as dozens of cars moving in the Envelope (the leading Israeli newspaper Yediot said "70 vehicles" were bombarded without confirming who was inside, in an article by Ronen Bergman, who is a staff writer for the New York Times, which apparently decided that this story didn't warrant an anglophone audience). There's a witness account where an Israeli citizen, while locked in his safe room, describes getting a phone call from an IDF helicopter operator who asks, "Are there terrorists in your home? If so, I'm blowing up the house."

In Sderot, which is a working class town, not a gated, fenced-in kibbutz like most of those settlements, Palestinian fighters were able to take over the police station and barricade themselves inside with hostages. The IDF did not negotiate with them; they systematically destroyed the whole reinforced building and killed everyone inside
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Haaretz journalist Amos Harel, who is seen as perhaps the most moderate and collected Israeli military analyst, though he too has been spreading fallacies concocted by the IDF Spokesperson's unit about beheadings and sexual violence, reported honestly that the south district division was "compelled to request an aerial strike against the base itself in order to repulse the terrorists."

In one interview on Israeli radio, a survivor of the attack describes being treated "humanely" by her Palestinian captors, and recounts how over fifty people were killed in "heavy, heavy crossfire," and

by tank shells, not by Gaza fighters, all while the Israeli radio host tries to goad her otherwise.

In footage published by the biggest Israeli news site Ynet (Yediot) as well as by Israeli Channel 12, you can see Israeli helicopter operators opening fire on what they estimate as “300 targets” that day, including on people fleeing from the dance party, while they admit being unable to differentiate partygoers from Palestinian militants, saying Hamas operatives were instructed “to walk, in order to confuse” the Israeli Air Force, and that they were “in a dilemma, not knowing who to shoot, because there were so many.”

The same logic has been applied in Gaza itself: catastrophic shelling, an unending slew of war crimes enacted unapologetically, and utter disregard for human life, abducted Israeli citizens included.

Most mainstream media have been complicit with the erasure of this reality, silencing the Israeli hostages themselves, as with Yocheved Lifshitz, an 85-year-old woman who was released from captivity, who insisted on telling people at a press conference in an Israeli hospital, surrounded by journalists and Israeli officials, that she was treated very kindly while in captivity. And still CNN, BBC, New York Times, almost every one of these respected, so- called dependable news sources omitted her words and quoted her out of context to imply otherwise.

From the very beginning, Israel has been unable to achieve its military goals, so it responded by attacking and massacring civilians, murdering over 12,000 children and counting. The fighters themselves, meanwhile, are underground when the bombing occurs, and emerge as close to the enemy as possible for attack. Similar tactically to Chuikov’s “hugging of the enemy” in Stalingrad. And Israel knows this very well – when there's bombing, the insurgents go underground, same as in Vietnam and

elsewhere in the Middle East, into a very intricate network of tunnels. Israel is aware of this happening, but it still bombs the civilian population to smithereens, in what is, truly, “a textbook case of genocide,” [5] as claimed already early on by Israeli historian Raz Segal. Clear intent to commit genocide, complete with blood libel

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Blood libel is a term I'm taking, again, from my study of my own ancestral history. It’s a term that specifically hearkens to the genocidal lie that Jews use the blood of Christian children to make their matzah for Passover as a justification for pogroms and worse. So similarly, we’re seeing lies about the beheading of children, the tossing of babies into ovens, necrophilia, reiterated made-up stories on sexual violence, the circulation of horrendous older photos of sexually violated Kurdish fighters as if they’re Israeli women, and so on and so forth. All of this appeared starting the very first day and has been gradually debunked, [6] but it keeps resurfacing periodically. [7] The White House walked back on Biden’s outright lie

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[5] Raz Segal, “A Textbook Case of Genocide,” Jewish Currents, 2023, https://jewishcurrents.org/a-textbook-case-of-genocide.

[6] And here’s a partial list of the debunking: https://www.yesmagazine.org/social-justice/2024/03/05/israel-hamas-oct7-report-gaza

https://theintercept.com/2024/02/28/new-york-times-anat-schwartz-october-7/

https://mondoweiss.net/2023/12/cnn-report-claiming-sexual-violence-on-october- 7-relied-on-non-credible-witnesses-some-with-undisclosed-ties-to-israeli-govt/

https://mondoweiss.net/2023/12/despite-lack-of-evidence-allegations-of-hamas- mass-rape-are-fueling-israeli-genocide-in-gaza/ https://mondoweiss.net/2023/12/zaka-is-not-a-trustworthy-source-for-allegations- of-sexual-violence-on-october-7/

https://mondoweiss.net/2024/01/family-of-key-case-in-new-york-times-october- 7-sexual-violence-report-renounces-story-says-reporters-manipulated-them/

https://mondoweiss.net/2023/12/how-human-rights-organizations-are-aiding-the- israeli-assault-on-gaza/

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pMqRK5LpGy4

https://twitter.com/zei_squirrel/status/1751812309557670384

[7] “CNN Report Claiming Sexual Violence on October 7 Relied on Non-Credible Witnesses, Some with Undisclosed Ties to Israeli Govt,” Mondoweiss, December

that he's seen photographic evidence of children being beheaded, the LA Times pulled out an unsubstantiated quote on sexual violence, the New York Times has had an internal firestorm over its own publication of atrocity propaganda, but mainstream media remains fully complicit, continuing to pump out unsubstantiated claims by Israeli spokespeople. It's almost like the IDF spokesperson sits with a button that they can press to get another bogus NY Times story whenever they need an extra push of legitimacy for their genocide. This atrocity propaganda has been the narrative engine of this genocide. As shown by Frank Luntz – who wrote the confidential 2009 Hasbara manual – and his comprehensive polling, audiences respond to claims of "Hamas rape and massacre" more than anything else. This while Israeli soldiers clearly showcase not only their genocidal intent but also their intent to commit rape in Gaza. Internationally, at least in the anglophone world, I'm getting the sense that the Israeli atrocity narrative is falling apart. The damage it has inflicted, however, both on the struggle against sexual violence writ large with its overshadowing of actual cases of rape of Palestinian women by the IDF, and by giving the West a reason to greenlight the genocide, cannot be overstated.

At this point, we're still seeing liberal Zionists, people who think of themselves as progressives, reiterating these stories. For me it's particularly tragic, because it's also my family, even Israeli activists or lefty writers who I had looked up to when I started getting disillusioned with Zionism. In 2018-19, with the Great March of Return protests on the fence, the liberals were uncomfortable with the massacre of unarmed protesters. But now we're not seeing any discomfort. The Israeli public is totally prepared for this, across political lines.

2, 2023, https://mondoweiss.net/2023/12/cnn-report-claiming-sexual-violence- on-october-7-relied-on-non-credible-witnesses-some-with-undisclosed-ties-to- israeli-govt/.

The dehumanization of the entire population of Gaza continues. Minister of Defense Yoav Galant now-infamously said they're beasts, “human animals.” In Hebrew, it's hayot adam, which actually is like saying they’re beasts, animals, monsters. That would be the idiomatic translation. So they’ve created this zero-sum game, like it's either us or them, which is genocidal thinking. All the way throughout history, in very different conflicts, we see the creation of this false narrative that people of different identities cannot coexist. It's either us or them, and they need to be annihilated.

RIVAL TENDENCIES: THE DIFFERENT FLAVORS OF GENOCIDE

Haaretz, the liberal Zionist newspaper considered “the Israeli newspaper-of-record,” just continues spreading blood libel, no problem. But it's still behind a different idea of statesmanship than the majority of the Israeli public. Tareq Baconi talks about this, and, by the way, everyone should just stop listening to me and go read Tareq Baconi. He wrote an excellent book called Hamas Contained, which doesn't romanticize Hamas, doesn't glorify it in any way at all, it's critical of Hamas, but at least sees it for what it is and discusses it openly. [8] There's an excellent interview with him on Unsettled podcast that people should listen to from 2021. Since Oct 7 he’s been courted by mainstream English platforms, including the New Yorker, where he mentions how Netanyahu basically had no strategy. I think it was a strategy, but one that was doomed to fail the moment that the status quo got disrupted. And it has failed the

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[8] Tareq Baconi, Hamas Contained: The Rise and Pacification of Palestinian Resistance, Stanford Studies in Middle Eastern and Islamic Societies and Cultures (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2018).

moment that Al Aqsa Flood was launched successfully on October 7th. Elsewhere I talked about Sun Tzu's hierarchy of warfare: First, you attack the enemy on the level of strategy. [9] Hamas did that right away. And that strategy was Netanyahu's “manageable conflict” approach, this idea that every couple of years you could go into Gaza and “mow the lawn” with relatively few losses on the Israeli side. This is a term they used, “mow the grass.” Any kind of military capabilities that the Palestinian resistance built up, you just mow it down periodically. Kill a few hundreds, maybe thousands – in 2014, it was thousands – and just sort of continue living like this indefinitely while building up your technological capacities. This is how Netanyahu sought to create “a durable peace,” which is the title of his book, which, his aides say, he still leafs through for his speeches. [10]

This strategy has failed. And who knows what will happen with Netanyahu now? He's still very popular. But, with his approach failing so spectacularly, there are competing visions for an Israeli future. One of them is just total genocide, full-fledged, not even pretending to only go for Hamas, just eliminate Gaza off the map. Also very popular. It's shared by major military and political leaders currently in office. Smotrich, who is the finance minister, is considered one of the key figures of this tendency simply because over the past decade he laid out a more or less comprehensive plan called “the decisive plan” that is essentially a genocidal transfer idea. And against this genocidal view, there's a kind of “two states”-ism, which maybe isn't called “two states” in Israeli society anymore as it has no popular base whatsoever, but it comes out of that tradition. This is more aligned with counterinsurgency, more sophisticated. And this is a view that is much less popular, but is

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[9] Sun Tzu, Sun Tzu On The Art Of War, trans. Lionel Giles (Routledge, 2013).

[10] Binyamin Netanyahu, A Durable Peace: Israel and Its Place among the Nations (New York: Warner Books, 2000).

very, very strongly pushed by the US, which is extremely involved, a lot more than in the Ukraine, sending aircraft carriers and top- level military and political leaders almost daily. The US is pushing for counterinsurgency, learning from its military failures in the Middle East over the past couple of decades. Counterinsurgency is contingent upon dividing populations, isolating insurgents, controlling space, and, perhaps most importantly, appointing a government that would be working for “USG interests,” US government, and here I'm quoting from the US Army's counterinsurgency field manual, FM 3-24. [11] The counterinsurgents are not concerned about the well-being of Palestinians, but they're trying to think in a more sophisticated way about how to achieve the state’s goals effectively, and the brute force approach, they argue, might, in the long-run, generate more resistance than it would crush. Counterinsurgency might be even more genocidal, in terms of the loss to human life and the inability to resolve the conflict and meet people's needs as if everyone is actually a human being. But the counterinsurgents are thinking of how to be effective. At first, Israel was able to recruit a little over 300,000 soldiers from reserves, shutting down various sectors of its economy to add to its 150,000 conscript army, while Hamas had an estimated 40,000 fighters. PIJ had at least 10,000. Thousands more have been fighting back in the West Bank. Hezbollah, who’s been constantly shelling Israel from the north since Oct 7, has an estimated 100,000. So Israel’s meagre manpower has been stretched thin. By now, all reservists have gone back home. The Americans know that Israel’s forces are not nearly enough forces to win in urban warfare in as complex a terrain as Gaza. You need a ratio of one to 10 or even one to 20 attackers for defenders, following John Robb and his book *Brave New War*, and John Spencer as well, in a maxim that goes back to Clausewitz with his assertion that defense is the strongest form of warfare. [12] So they're

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[11] Joint Publication FM 3-24: Counterinsurgency, 2018.

[12] Carl von Clausewitz, On War (CreateSpace Independent)

saying, okay, how can you realistically do this? What are your achievable goals? You can't just act intuitively and try to wipe out 2.3 million people and think you're going to win when your adversaries are fighting back and appear to know what they're doing.

Accordingly, about every other day since the ground invasion started, the Palestinian resistance has put out unbelievable videos of guerrilla footage, targeting the IDF with snipers, mines, IEDs, mortars, thermobaric explosives, and countless RPG strikes, frequently with the Yassin 105, which is a made-in-Gaza double- headed munition that disables the tanks' reactive armor (Jon Elmer's Twitter profile is currently a good archive for this footage).

The Israeli casualty rate has risen accordingly, with the army releasing the names of two to five dead soldiers a day on average over the first couple of months and dozens of wounded soldiers every day. And these are just their figures, knowing the Israeli army is a pathological liar. Citizens report a constant flow of rescue helicopters from Gaza to the hospitals. According to Israeli hospital registrations, the actual number of wounded soldiers is about ten times higher than what the IDF has been releasing, [13] with thousands of newly disabled soldiers in what an Israeli Defense Ministry official says is quote "unprecedented, not something we've ever

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Publishing Platform, 2012); John Robb, Brave New War: The Next Stage of Terrorism and the End of Globalization (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc, 2008); John Spencer, "Mini-Manual for the Urban Defender," John Spencer Online, 2022, https://www.johnspenceronline.com/mini-manual-urbandefender.

[13] Yaniv Kubovich and Ido Efrati, "Discrepancies Arise between IDF and Hospital Reports on Numbers of Wounded Soldiers," Haaretz, December 10, 2023, sec. Israel News, https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2023-12-10/ty- article/.premium/1-593-israeli-soldiers-wounded-since-october-7-idf- reveals/0000018c-5416-df2f-adac-fe3fbe6d0000.

dealt with." [14]

Unable to sustain the mass ground invasion militarily and economically, Israel has by now (late March) released all of its reserves brigades, still refusing a down-climb ceasefire and hostage exchange deal, even at the risk of violating a recent UN Security Council resolution.

Within Israel, we've seen the rise of this guy called Yitzhak Brik. He's a major general in reserves, who predicted this utter collapse of Israeli defenses, having extensively surveyed dozens of Israeli units back in 2018. He he met Netanyahu and Gallant, Prime Minister and Minister of Defense, a few times in October, as one of many people who are advising them, but as one who's been vindicated popularly and militarily, he cautioned against land invasion too, calling it "a trap," and recommending aerial bombardment, continued tightened siege, and "surgical raids" coming in from the sea with use of elite units like the "Ghost Unit." [15] This unit, the brain child of Aviv Kohavi, hasn't been used in large-scale combat yet, by the way; their head, Colonel Asaf Hamami, was killed on October 7.

HOSTAGES AS LEVERAGE: A HISTORY

As of this writing, the Palestinian wild card remains: hostages.

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[14] חן ארצי סרור, "יותר מ- 2,000 נכי צה"ל חדשים מתחילת המלחמה: 'לא עברנו משהו דומה לזה,'" **Ynet, December 7, 2023**, **https://www.ynet.co.il/health/article/yokra13707397.**

[15] " יצחק בריק: התפיסה של צבא קטן וחכם כשלה. כרגע האזרחים צריכים להגן על עצמם," הארץ, ליאור קודנר, **October 10, 2023**, **htt ps:// www.haaretz.co.i l/ digit al /podcast/ weekl y/2023 -10-10/t y-article-podcast/0000018b-18f7-dcc0-a3df-9cf7140e0000.**

Israel has been in what I would call a strategic vacuum, reacting out of genocidal rage and humiliation and continuously shattering to dust its own social contract by bombing, shooting, and even gassing its own citizens held hostage in Gaza. With the collapse of this paradigm, different strategic approaches are vying to fill the void: namely, counterinsurgency (COIN), which is pushed by the primary genocidal accomplice, the US, and full-fledged messianic genocide, which is very popular in the extremely fascistic and racist Israeli society. The COIN vision would basically see a revamped Palestinian Authority try to take control of the Gaza Strip in some kind of process towards statehood, but the problem is that any Israeli leader who would outspokenly agree to roll with this scenario is unlikely to win among Israeli voters, who have been conditioned for years to see Arabs as subhuman terrorists who could never be trusted with a state.

Taking soldiers hostage has been a way for the Palestinian resistance to generate leverage against Israel for decades. The first deal that broke the status quo of 1:1 prisoner for prisoner was, according to Israeli negotiator Ariel Merari, [16] a 1978 agreement with the PFLP-General Command (a militant group that splintered from the PFLP) to exchange 76 Palestinian political prisoners for one Israeli soldier. Since then the resistance was able to raise the floor of Israeli negotiations with every deal, with the Jibril Agreement being particularly contentious in the Israeli national memory, where the PFLP-GC was able, in exchange for three Israeli soldiers captured during the First Lebanon War, to bargain for the release of 1,151 Palestinian political prisoners, including the Palestine solidarity militant Kōzō Okamoto of the Japanese Red Army.
Gilad Shalit, kidnapped in 2006, marked another watershed deal. Shalit was captured (and two other soldiers in the tank were killed)

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[16] Lior Kodner, "Professor Ariel Merari: Ein Li Safek" ,Haaretz Podcast ,הארץ ", November 12, 2023, https://www.haaretz.co.il/digital/podcast/weekly/2023-11- 12/ty-article-podcast/0000018b-c36d-dc2b-a3fb-e7fd61560000.

during Olmert's government, an Israeli Prime Minister, who, in an Al Jazeera documentary interviewing him, expressed disrespect for Shalit himself, for not fighting back like the others who were killed, basically revealing that Israeli leaders prefer soldiers dead rather than captured.

Shalit's family, with his dad Noam in the forefront, was able to galvanize a social movement to pressure for his release through a "no matter the cost" prisoner exchange. This social movement was picked up and endorsed by Olmert's rivals across Zionist political lines, from the right wing to liberal Zionists.
Olmert was still gonna broker a deal—of about 350 Palestinians prisoners for Shalit—but, according to him in this AJ interview, his rival and former PM Ehud Barak visited Shalit's family a night before the deal would be signed, signaling to Hamas that Israel would bend further yet.

When Netanyahu took power in 2009, with Ehud Barak as Minister of Defense, it was with a promise to his base to bring Gilad Shalit home. And in 2011 an unbelievable deal was brokered (1,027 Palestinians for 1 soldier, including head of Hamas in GazaYahya Sinwar. This agreement is largely seen by both sides as a huge failure for Israel and an amazing victory for the resistance.
David Graeber, in his piece on Palestine after his visit, had one of his quintessentially simple yet profound anthropological observations where he said that hospitality is "the entire point of life" ("hospitality is everything") in Palestinian culture, and that one of the tragic ironies is that Israel is the worst possible guest. And it's true, you know, anyone who's experienced Palestinian hospitality will tell you that: in many ways the meaning, the core of social life in Palestine, is to be generous to guests and strangers. And we're seeing it in the treatment of the hostages, in how they recount their experience in the rare occasions that they're actually allowed to speak freely, as was the case with Yocheved Lifshitz.

We've also seen this with Gilad Shalit – he has never spoken in detail, apparently not even to his family, about his five-year experience in captivity – but Hamas released footage of him basically hanging out with his captures, Hamas's "Shadow Unit," chatting, drinking a ton of tea, receiving letters from his family, doing a barbeque outside, and so on. Now I'm sure it wasn't a pleasant situation for him, but compare that with the experience of Palestinian prisoners – who, since Oct 7, have been experiencing retributive torture, beatings, being put in stress postures, sleep deprivation by blasting Israel's national anthem in the cell, and murder. And in international media, we see this absolutely racist double standard, no word about more than 7500 Palestinian political prisoners held without fair trial, many of whom don't even know what the justifications are for capturing them under administrative detention, not to mention thousands more, who were abducted since Oct 7.
Up until now, every deal has been the new floor in Israel's hostage negotiations with the resistance. The question going forward is whether the Shalit deal and Oct 7 created enough of a rift in Israel's sense of self that this will now change, and that Israel will be able to withstand the pressure to concede. The cost of not conceding might be too high, paving the way for mass migration.

Eschewing a prediction that might be proven wrong, I would say we might want to wait for the Five-Year Mark before making any conclusions one way or the other. Historically, Israel takes five years to concede after a military defeat, and it is only force and violence that forces its hand. Five years after the Yom Kippur War in 1973, it finally made a commitment to return the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt. Five years after the beginning of the First Intifada, it allowed thousands of former Palestinian fighters and refugees, including Yasser Arafat, to return to Palestine and start the so- called peace process. Five years after the start of the Second Intifada, it withdrew its settlements from Gaza. And five years after Gilad Shalit was captured, his release deal was finally brokered in 2011.

The true gains from the current leverage that Palestinians hold with their hostages from Oct 7, will only materialize as Israel's shaky political terrain crumbles internally under the Netanyahu administration. As with Netanyahu against Olmert, the opposition parties – headed by the genocidal Zionist centrist Yair Lapid – are claiming to be the rescuers of the hostages now. Sooner or later they might find themselves brokering Israel's concession.

THE PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY: A TOOL OF ISRAELI COUNTERINSURGENCY

The Israeli wildcard is the Palestinian Authority (PA). The Netanyahu administration is politically incapable of recognizing the PA as its most vital military asset, but, again, a successor might be able to do so and try to rebrand, revamp, and reappoint the PA as a governing body in both the West Bank and Gaza. Unless something unexpected happens, which is by no means impossible, Netanyahu will stay at least until elections in October 2026. Meanwhile, the PA continues to crumble. By now, the resistance – from the armed factions (including Fatah's armed wing, the Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade) to the youth rioting in the streets – fully recognizes the PA as an arm of the Israeli state, and true political wizardry would have to be done to recover its legitimacy. However, the success of Israeli-American counterinsurgency depends on this.

Starting in December 1987, the First Intifada was a massive popular uprising against Israeli apartheid. This uprising saw the use of the tools of mass struggle to a great effect – strikes, civil disobedience, mass rallies, riots, tax resistance – all working together in confluence. And despite the fact that the uprising was largely unarmed, it was met with unspeakable brutality, the killing of many hundreds of protesters, the arrests of tens of thousands, and injuries to over a hundred thousand Palestinians by Israeli soldiers who

were specifically instructed by Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin to "break their bones." [17] Still, it's remembered with incredible fondness by that generation of rebels, and the way that this uprising was pacified was not by "breaking their bones," but by bringing in the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), which was in exile in Tunis, and appointing it as a legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. As specified in the US Army's Field Manual, successful, long-lasting counterinsurgency "requires development of viable local leaders and institutions." [18] If there are no leaders, if the resistance is decentralized, COIN requires the creation of a centralized leadership. The PLO, which had been created by Arab states in 1964 as what Baconi calls "a tool to control the insurgent [Palestinian] factions," [19] was now appointed by the US and Israel as the leadership of the uprising. This allowed Israel and the US to marginalize and ignore the decentralized popular committees that were, to use Fanon's terminology, "guiding" the insurrection away from recuperable "traditional politics." [20] Then, through the Oslo

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[17] Between 1988 and 1993, 60,706 Palestinians suffered injuries from shootings, beatings or tear gas in the Gaza Strip alone. Joel Peters and David Newman, eds., The Routledge Handbook on the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, Routledge Handbooks (London and New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2015), 56. In an article in the London Review of Books, John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt assert that IDF soldiers were given truncheons and encouraged to break the bones of Palestinian protesters, citing, in addition, the Swedish branch of Save the Children's estimate that "23,600 to 29,900 children required medical treatment for their beating injuries in the first two years of the Intifada," one third of whom were children under the age of ten years. John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt, "The Israel Lobby," London Review of Books 28, no. 6 (2006): 3– 12. Additionally, it is estimated that Israel arrested between 57,000 and 120,000 Palestinians during the six years of the First Intifada. Audrey Kurth Cronin, "Endless Wars and No Surrender," in How Fighting Ends: A History of Surrender, ed. Holger Afflerbach and Hew Strachan (Oxford University Press, 2012), 26.

[18] Joint Publication FM 3-24: Counterinsurgency, 2018, 1–22.

[19] Tareq Baconi, Hamas Contained: The Rise and Pacification of Palestinian Resistance, Stanford Studies in Middle Eastern and Islamic Societies and Cultures (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2018), 14.

[20] "Les dirigeants de l'insurrection, qui voient le peuple enthousiaste et ardent

Accords between 1993-95, the PLO, Israel, and the US formed the PA as an auxiliary arm of the Israeli occupation, with a limited security apparatus that would be dedicated to policing and repressing insurgents within Palestinian population clusters in select areas of the West Bank and Gaza. I can't describe how successful this move was.
Well-meaning people still see the Oslo Accords as a genuine peace process rather than a sophisticated COIN operation that enabled Israel to continue entrenching its settlement project with relative calm. After the so-called "peace process" collapsed with the conclusion of the five years allotted for its duration, the PA remained. The Second Intifada broke in October 2000, and for a brief moment PLO Head Yasser Arafat did act up by releasing 350 political prisoners including Hamas and PIJ members, but then the US and Israel effectively fired him, and a new collaborator-in-chief was appointed, Mahmoud Abbas AKA Abu Mazen. The PA was ousted from Gaza in 2007 when Abu Mazen attempted what Baconi calls a "US-planned coup," [21] after Hamas won the elections in 2006. [22] But Abu Mazen was able to complete the coup in the West Bank and greatly help in stabilizing Israel's control there. [23]
The PA creates the appearance of Palestinian autonomy, but in fact, much like the governments of the Bantustans of Apartheid South Africa, it is simply an extension of the colonial state, a tool of counterinsurgency that is highly effective for the repression of local rebellions, because it makes the native population police itself. Fatah, which was a revolutionary movement, the Palestinian resistance movement in the early days of the armed struggle, is now

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porter des coups décisifs à la machine colonialiste, renforcent leur méfiance à l'égard de la politique traditionnelle." Frantz Fanon, Les damnés de la terre (La Découverte / Poche, 2016), 127.

[21] Baconi, Hamas Contained, 331.

[22] David Rose, "The Gaza Bombshell," Vanity Fair, March 3, 2008, https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2008/04/gaza200804.

[23] Baconi, Hamas Contained, 123.

mostly contained by the PA. Would-be rebels are now government employees, fighting to keep their collaborationist jobs. Community organizers are now working for NGO's, exemplifying Colin Powell's infamous categorization of nonprofits as "force multipliers" for Empire. [24] The money funneled by NATO countries into the nonprofit and government sector is the main reason for the relative pacification of the West Bank following the militarization of the Palestinian resistance in the Second Intifada. This echoes General Petraeus's COIN guideline of employing "money as a weapons system." [25] These are the winning COIN principles: move in with overwhelming force to control space, isolate the insurgents from the general population, appoint your own government (but, importantly, make it of the same identity as the general population), and supply the population with services so they don't become insurgents to meet their basic needs (this ties with General Peter Chiarelli's SWET concept, [26] standing for sewage, water, electricity, and trash-collection, and I recommend Greg Stoker's short video on SWEAT-MSO for his own explainer of this). In short: "divide-and- conquer" and money – this is how empires win wars.

But somehow, even though the world supplied the Palestinian Authority with the neoliberal institutions that would lead it into the choking counterinsurgent stability of a neocolonial regime, Israel keeps shooting itself in the foot. Interestingly, Israeli army literature generally fails to recognize the effectiveness of the PA in furthering its own interests. The term counterinsurgency hasn't been comprehensively translated into Hebrew, and when Israeli strategists do talk about it in English they generally conflate COIN

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[24] Sarah Kenyon Lischer, "Military Intervention and the Humanitarian 'Force Multiplier,'" Global Governance 13, no. 1 (2007): 99–118.

[25] David H. Petraeus, "Multi-National Force-Iraq Commander's COUNTERINSURGENCY GUIDANCE" (Military Review, 2008), 211.

[26] Fred M. Kaplan, The Insurgents: David Petraeus and the Plot to Change the American Way of War, 1st Simon & Schuster hardcover ed (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2013), 185.

with “counterterrorism.” [27] You can see this scrolling through Insurgencies and Counterinsurgencies, a 2016 Cambridge publication edited by Israeli authors: in their timeline of Israel’s purported “counterinsurgency experience,” they simply skip the important years following the Oslo Accords, [28] revealing to us that they only understand COIN as the application of force, and not as “stability operations,” which is at the heart of COIN. [29] How can they misunderstand this? It might have something to do with the nature of Israel being a settler-colony, where the foundational idea is to ethnically cleanse and replace the native population rather than simply contain and control it. But I think the true reason is actually incompetence and, on a broader level, greed. The Israeli army, as argued by Israeli historian Uri Milstein, is a deeply anti-intellectual institution, [30] and with its increased reliance on the army as a generator of GDP, it incentivizes a suicidal military strategy. I suppose you could see this as a symptom of capitalism as a whole, where the market inexorably continues its suicidal drive despite the grave consequences for the perpetuation of itself. The Palestinian resistance, which, by contrast, focuses on sumoud (perseverance) and on the long-term sustainability of its capacity to fight, might

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[27] Efraim Inbar and Eitan Shamir, “Israel’s Counterinsurgency Experience,” in Insurgencies and Counterinsurgencies, ed. Beatrice Heuser and Eitan Shamir (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 168–90.

[28] Inbar and Shamir, 178.

[29] Joint Publication FM 3-24: Counterinsurgency, 7-3 (89).

צבא הוא מטבעו ארגון אנטי-אינטלקטואלי, המתרכז בביצוע ודוחק חשיבה לשוליים. בישראל לא 30 התפתחה תרבות ביטחון שתאזן את האופי האמפיריסטי של הצבא: בשום מסגרת אין לומדים ברמה גבוהה מהניסיון הצבאי, התובנות והלקחיהם של עמים אחרים, בעבר ובהווה. ממילא אין מתקיים בישראל שיח ביטחוני המבוסס על מידע אמין ועל תיאוריות ביטחוניות פוריות. התוצאה היא, שיש בישראל הרבה פעילות ביטחונית ויש לישראלים הרבה ניסיון ביטחוני, אך ... אין להם תפישה אינטגרטיבית של בעיות הביטחון, ואין הם מבינים את הדינמיקה הביטחונית, המתפתחת במהירות ובמורכבות הולכת וגדלה. לפיכך, מינוי של אנשי צבא בכירים לתפקידים במטה לביטחון לאומי לא יתקן את **Uri Milstein**, “ הפגמים, גם משום שהם עצמם אינם "חושבים ביטחון" ברמה גבוהה וגם משום שלראשי תסמונת המדינה וצה"ל אין כלים להבין את הצעותיהם, גם אם הן היו ראויות.

.April 3, 2012, sec ,הארץ ,"]The Continuous Failure Syndrome[הכשל המתמשך **-https://www.haaretz.co.il/opinions/2012-04-03/ty-article ,דעות opinion/0000017f-ef34-d4cd-af7f-ef7c79660000.**

find this somewhat encouraging.

LOOKING AHEAD

"Many of us like to ask ourselves, 'What would I do if I was alive during slavery? Or the Jim Crow South? Or apartheid? What would I do if my country was committing genocide?' The answer is, you're doing it. Right now." (— Aaron Bushnell.)

Six months in, the question remains: when will the world intervene? The resistance within Gaza continues unabated to inflict IDF casualties and impede the machinery of genocide. Resistance continues also, importantly, in Lebanon, Yemen, and Iraq. In the US, there has been some targeting of Israeli shipping company ZIM, of arms manufacturer Elbit, and other logistical operations and weapons manufacturers. However, the impression has been that whatever popular energy had appeared in the first several weeks following Oct 7 has been mostly contained by liberals and identity politicians. Anti-Zionist Arab, Jewish, and student organizations – some of whom, such as Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP), have expressly denounced October 7 – have been able to channel popular rage towards marches and rallies, and are now gearing up to continue this de-facto counterinsurgency operation by platforming electoral campaigns. Their MO is simple: as soon as someone proposes more decisive action, they defang it by claiming that the action would pose a risk to people of a marginalized identity. Of course, as Idris Robinson says, their ability to hold civil protest is "predicated on genocide in Palestine." Meanwhile, the insurrectionary tendencies that would be able to call out and circumvent the counterinsurgent modality of the liberal and identity organizations has not yet intervened meaningfully for Palestine. These tendencies participated in the 2020 George Floyd Uprising and have apparently reappeared as a completely decentralized network powering the Stop Cop City movement. They successfully

temporarily dismantled the Cop City construction site on March 5, 2023 and pressured multiple construction companies to drop their contracts with the project, including one company that held on tenaciously before finally dropping out after dozens of clandestine sabotage attacks all over the country. A similar campaign could conceivably isolate, drive out, or compel local arms manufacturers to stop supplying Israel. It remains to be seen whether these tendencies will be willing or able to connect themselves materially or in deed to the popular forces that have still not been fully coopted by what Idris calls "the progressive wing of the counterinsurgency."

In February, anarchist Aaron Bushnell did the extraordinary act of killing a US Air Force soldier by committing a live-streamed self-immolation – an act of solidarity felt deeply by various Palestinian resistance groups. While his death is tragic and horrifying, it charged what he had to say with meaning. This seemed to have helped in giving protest in the US another boost, challenging people here and everywhere, again, to have a fraction of his courage and do everything in their power to stop the genocide. His sacrifice calls on us all to step up.

I find some hope in the increasing popularity of the writings of Basil Al-Aʿraj in Palestinian resistance discourse. Himself a martyred resistance fighter killed by Israeli soldiers in a shootout in 2017, Basil was heavily influenced by Fanon and adopted his radically inclusive, anti-identity politics outlook. In his "Eight Rules and Insights on the Nature of War" Basil said: "every Palestinian (in the broad sense, meaning anyone who sees Palestine as a part of their struggle, regardless of their secondary identities), every Palestinian is on the front lines of the battle for Palestine, so be careful not to fail in your duty."31 In a lesser known piece that has yet to fully appear in English, he wrote:

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31 Basil Al-Aʿraj, "Eight Rules and Insights on the Nature of War," Resistance News Network, 2017 2023, https://t.me/PalestineResist/25227.

"I no longer see this as a conflict between Arabs and Jews, between Israeli and Palestinian. I have abandoned this duality, this naïve oversimplification of the conflict. I have become convinced of Ali Shariati and Frantz Fanon's divisions of the world [into a colonial camp and a liberation camp].
"In each of the two camps, you will find people of all religions, languages, races, ethnicities, colors, and classes. In this conflict, for example, you will find people of our own skin standing rudely in the other camp, and at the same time you will find Jews standing in our camp." [32]

He goes on to criticize Israeli journalist Amira Hass's editorials as insidious examples of "the progressive wing of the counterinsurgency," counterposing Israelis such as Yoav Bar and Jonathan Pollak as examples of Jews who, as Fanon would say, "change sides, go 'native,' and volunteer to undergo suffering, torture, and death" as members of the camp of liberation. [33] If, as per Basil and Fanon, the broad resistance would be able to distinguish friends and enemies based on "the choices they make," [34] on their actions and commitments, rather than their identity and "race," then counterinsurgent psychological operations that pit people against each other and diffuse collective action might be halted at the point of implementation, enabling a more formidable movement trajectory in the heart of Empire.

— Adi Callai, April 2024

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[32] Basil Al-Aʿraj, Wajadtu Ajwibatī: Hākadhā Takallama al-Shahīd Bāsil al- Aʿraj, al-Ṭabʿah al-ūlá (Bayrūt: Bīsān lil-Nashr wa-al-Tawzīʿ, 2018), 146. My translation.

[33] Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 94.

[34] James Yaki Sayles, Meditations on Frantz Fanon's Wretched of the Earth: New Afrikan Revolutionary Writings (Chicago, Ill.: Spear and Shield, 2010), 181.

> The violence which has ruled over the ordering of the colonial world, which has ceaselessly drummed the rhythm for the destruction of native social forms and broken up without reserve the systems of reference of the economy, the customs of dress and external life, that same violence will be claimed and taken over by the native at the moment when, deciding to embody history in [their] own person, [they] surge into the forbidden quarters.
>
> **– Frantz Fanon**
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