

## Gaza: We need to talk!

Nuraan Davids<sup>a</sup> , Ronald Barnett<sup>b</sup> , Thaddeus Metz<sup>c</sup> , Zahi Zalloua<sup>d</sup>,  
Suriamurthee Maistry<sup>e</sup> , George Yancy<sup>f</sup>, Janet Orchard<sup>g</sup> ,  
Marianna Papastephanou<sup>h</sup> , Nelson Maldonado-Torres<sup>i</sup> , Steven Robins<sup>a</sup>,  
James Conroy<sup>j</sup> , Daniela J. Forster<sup>k</sup> , Lesley le Grange<sup>a</sup> ,  
Gert Biesta<sup>l,m\*</sup>  and Mordechai Gordon<sup>n\*</sup> 

<sup>a</sup>Stellenbosch University, Stellenbosch, South Africa; <sup>b</sup>University College London, London, UK; <sup>c</sup>University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa; <sup>d</sup>Whitman College, Walla Walla, WA, USA; <sup>e</sup>University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, South Africa; <sup>f</sup>Emory University, Atlanta, GA, USA; <sup>g</sup>School of Education, University of Bristol, Bristol, UK; <sup>h</sup>University of Cyprus, Nicosia, Cyprus; <sup>i</sup>University of Connecticut, Storrs, CT, USA; <sup>j</sup>University of Glasgow, Glasgow, Scotland; <sup>k</sup>School of Education, University of Newcastle, Callaghan, Australia; <sup>l</sup>Centre for Public Education and Pedagogy, Maynooth University, Maynooth, Ireland; <sup>m</sup>The Moray House School of Education and Sport, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, UK; <sup>n</sup>School of Education, Quinnipiac University, Hamden, CT, USA

### Gaza: We need to talk!

Nuraan Davids  
Stellenbosch University

I don't think we need to wait for history to tell us what we already know about Gaza. No amount of legal debates on the plausibility of its genocide status, can detract from the very real human dilemma of an ongoing decimation, or the very human question of what this means for us. *Us?* You might rightfully ask. And you might be right in thinking that there is no us; that when we confront the truth of how this world functions, and for whom this world is made, it becomes clear that some lives are worth living, protecting and valuing, while others are not. Indeed, it is impossible to argue against Maldonado-Torres's (2016, p. 19) contention that the world is divided into 'zones of being and not-being human' Maldonado-Torres (2016, p. 19); that some bodies—and for no other reason—can be trampled upon and discarded, undeserving of care and compassion.

It is from these same zones that we all bear witness to the atrocities in Gaza. The zones we occupy often shape and determine how we see and respond to the atrocities. But we cannot claim not to *see*; we *must* know what is happening, even if we have yet to comprehend or confront 'the ethical and political significance of the extermination', as Agamben (2012), proclaims in *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*. Central to Agamben's thesis, is the depiction of the *Muselmann*. To Agamben, the *Muselmann* is a 'bare naked man', in an 'unassigned and unwitnessable

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**CONTACT** Nuraan Davids  [nur@sun.ac.za](mailto:nur@sun.ac.za)

\*Open Reviewer.

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life,' reduced to an absolute nonbeing—'One hesitates to call them living: one hesitates to call their death death, in the face of which they have no fear, as they are too tired to understand'. He uses the term *Muselmann* to designate 'not so much a limit between life and death ... [but] the threshold between the human and the inhuman' (2012, p. 55).

We know that Agamben's text is entirely focused on the witnessing of Auschwitz, and yet the archive of Auschwitz is transferable to Gaza. Both are sites of unprecedented biopolitical experimentation and horrors, where 'the most absolute *conditio inhumana* ever to appear on earth was realized' (Agamben, 1999, p. 55). Both represent zones 'of the human where not only help but also dignity and self-respect have become useless' (ibid). It is because of the transferability of history into the present as well as the replication of degradation, humiliation, and shame, that we are compelled to respond to the 'Gaza situation'. As academics, and more importantly, as teachers, we cannot turn away, if not from a genocide, then from gross unethical and inhumane actions. Our students, and the courage they are showing against institutional pressures and threats, should be our cues for recognizing that we are not doing enough. And if the 'Gaza situation' is insufficient to sway you, then what about the university and its central purpose? And even that is of no significance to you, then what about our ethical responsibilities to those we claim to teach?

The intention of this article is to stimulate conversation and debate on a matter which, I believe, has not only redefined warfare, but has also stripped bare the depths of human depravity. Amid it all, are crucial questions about the responsibilities of universities, and indeed, our role in cultivating awareness and responsiveness to any injustice.

## **Intervention or by-stander? Gaza-prompted reflections for the university**

Ronald Barnett

The plight of Gaza and its inhabitants prompt a number of questions for universities. Here are three:

- i. With what legitimacy can the university make intervention in matters such as the situation in Gaza?
- ii. Is there something particular about the situation in Gaza such that universities have a duty to intervene?
- iii. What kind of intervention might be legitimate?

I take these questions in turn.

### ***Legitimacy in general***

With what legitimacy can the university make intervention in matters of extreme public concern such as the situation in Gaza?

A university is a site of inquiry and learning and it *is* legitimate for the university to include the situation of Gaza in its research and teaching efforts. But then arises

the thorny matter of values and norms: in what respects might values enter academic inquiry. Perhaps values can prompt inquiry in the first place but during the process and after it? The jury is currently out on both fronts.

Another intractable issue is that of academics speaking out. Would the latter do so as a matter of academic freedom (and, here, we should distinguish disciplines with resources to interpret a large public matter and those that do not) OR as a civil right (that is, having no special claims as academics)? And what of students and, there, does a distinction need to be made between having a voice on campus and in the public arena?

### ***Is there something particular about the situation in Gaza?***

Given all the many atrocities and situations of human degradation in the world—South Sudan, the plight of women in Afghanistan, Myanmar, Ukraine and so on—it is not clear as to why Gaza should be singled out as compared with other worldly atrocities.

One answer is a non-rational answer but which still may command legitimate force. It is that the situation in Gaza is manifestly evident in an extreme way in the publicly available media. The angst that it generates in some countries is an indication of the affective sensitivities that are commonly seen and felt in the academic world, especially in university settings in or that closely linked to the Western world. Feelings can constitute reasons for action. (It is not clear that these sensibilities are similarly acute in Chinese universities.)

However, there might be legitimate differences across universities. It could be said that universities in countries that are particularly implicated—whether for historical or contemporary reasons—in the situation in Gaza, such as the USA and the UK, have a *duty* to make interventions. But what kind of interventions might be legitimate? Compare students voluntarily collecting clothes and toiletries for inhabitants of Gaza with institutional leaders tacitly endorsing encampments outside the campus gates.

### ***Forms of legitimate intervention***

What kind of response might be legitimate? We should at once distinguish the stances of active intervention, commentator and by-stander. For the activists, is it that the university qua institution might speak out or is intervention better to be seen in the university's discrete activities—say in teaching or in research? On the first possibility, under what circumstances might a university leader opine on Gaza so as to carry the university with them? After all, universities are sites of dispute and there will be a host of counter opinions and viewpoints on Gaza. Here arises the difficult matter of the university as a corporate agent: under what circumstances can it be said that a university acts corporately?

On the second point, suppose it is suggested that Gaza can come legitimately into view in certain subjects. But to what end? To assist students' capabilities in critical thinking? To explore issues of ethics in war? To examine historical legacies and national responsibilities? To generate feelings of empathy for the dying, injured and

dispossessed? To condemn the actions of certain states? To balance opinions across contentious issues? To display the barbarities of military aggression? To reveal unintended consequences of state action in a multi-national situation? All these possibilities have *differing* legitimacy.

## Conclusion

Those who urge action on the part of universities in relation to Gaza—believing that universities should be more than a by-stander—have work to do in distinguishing key issues, not least that of *the* university as a corporate entity and its individuals on the one hand *and*, on the other hand, of its discrete activities especially in teaching and research. In all these domains, awkward issues arise and deserve to be disentangled and separately addressed.

## Why Gaza? What about Ukraine, Sudan, or Myanmar?

Thaddeus Metz

University of Pretoria

Consider an academic body such as a university Senate (or a professional journal such as this one) that could speak out against the way that war has been conducted in Gaza, but has not done so in respect to wars in, e.g., Ukraine, Sudan, or Myanmar. If it has not censured other military conflicts in the past, must it refrain from doing so (or otherwise providing a forum for reflection) on Gaza now? If it does indeed express support for victims in Gaza now, must it then do the same for the victims of all other apparently similar conflicts?

In this short section, I provide some reason to think that these questions can often be sensibly answered with a 'No'. I argue that it can be justifiable for a body representative of a university (or a journal) to express disapproval of a particular unjust war when it has not done and will not do the same for all other unjust wars.

A key reason to think that it can be morally permissible and even praiseworthy to address Gaza but not necessarily other wars is that we do not, by analogy, think that we must help all beggars if we help a handful. There is a broad duty to assist others in need, such that one has moral reason to give to beggars (particularly when they cannot help themselves). However, there is no intuitive requirement to give to all beggars, not even all the beggars one might encounter. It would be downright counterintuitive to suggest that, since one has not given and will not give to all beggars, one may not give to any of them. By the same token, I submit that there is a broad duty (for an agent with certain kinds of standing, influence, and power) to go out of one's way for the victims of a given unjust war that does not require one to act for the sake of the victims of all unjust wars.

One explanation of why it is permissible to give money to merely some beggars without giving to all is that one might have too little money left over if one gave to all. Similarly, when it comes to Senate members expressing support for the victims of a military conflict that has been conducted in systematically wrongful ways, there is no requirement to stand up for all the latter, lest doing so spend too much of the former's political capital.

In reply, one might point out that it would be morally problematic, say, not to give to beggars of a certain race or ethnicity, such that if a Senate were to speak out for some peoples who have been victims and not others, it would be similarly biased. I accept that it would be morally problematic if a Senate picked victims to champion based ultimately on racial/ethnic characteristics, but, then, it could simply avoid doing so. It might instead sensibly pick which unjust wars to censure on the basis of the following cluster of considerations:

- the likelihood of a statement having the effect of producing some concrete benefit to actual or potential victims;
- the war having flouted academic values in a particularly egregious way, say, with scholars having been systematically killed or imprisoned for their enquiries;
- alignment with prominent government policy, particularly in the case of public universities (which of course should retain the autonomy to disagree with that, when relevant); and
- historical ties of identity and solidarity between the academic institution or salient groups in it and the victims.

Of course, controversy remains about how to express the disapproval, e.g., which actors to target and whether it can be permissible to enforce a boycott on the part of individual academics. However, this brief reflection suggests that the mere fact that not all victims of apparently similar wars have been or will be addressed by Senate is not in itself good reason for it to avoid addressing some. As per the old story about a mass of starfish washed up on the shore, we cannot save them all, but we can save this one.

## **Gaza and the racial matrix of the human**

Zahi Zalloua  
Whitman College

It is clear to me that Gaza indexes a gash in the global social order, serving as a tragic reminder that cruelty or inhumanity is constitutive of the human. To say something is constitutive of one's being does not mean endorsing that thing—crudely naturalizing it and disculpating oneself in advance from its potential horrors—but it does mean maintaining vigilance over our worst tendencies. Benjamin Netanyahu unleashed such criminal tendencies when he weaponized the ethical imperative 'Never Again' to justify his genocidal campaign. Contra to Netanyahu, the refusal to allow Auschwitz to be repeated does not only pertain to the lives of Jews. Today 'Never Again' applies to Gaza's people or it applies to no one—just listen to 'Jewish Voice for Peace' and 'IfNotNow'.

And this is where we are. Never again is happening again. Israel's Operation Iron Swords will be remembered infamously as the first live-streamed genocide. Given the calamity of the situation, why are Western powers failing to stop Zionist cruelty? My answer is fetishist disavowal: *We (plug any spokesperson of the Biden-Harris or Trump-Vance administration in here) know very well that Israel is killing too many civilians, but*

*all the same we don't believe there is anything illegal in its military actions; yes, unfortunately, there is collateral damage, but this is certainly not cruelty.*

I want to linger a bit on cruelty, on this concept's phantasmatic and ideological deployment by Western politicians and corporate media. Cruelty and humanity are ruthlessly interconnected. The West has a long history of projecting its own cruelty onto distant others; the Orient is a case in point. Israel willingly inscribes itself in that Western imperialist tradition. Palestinians are barbarians, evil terrorists, new Nazis, inhumanity incarnated. Against the 'human animals' next door, Zionists define themselves as full-fledged humans, the gatekeepers of civilization. In keeping with this distorted and distorting Orientalist/racist narrative, Israel's sympathizers describe the Hamas attack of October 7 not as anti-colonial resistance to a brutal occupation, but as a 'breach of civilization,' greenlighting, as it were, the colonizers' response: genocide as a form of ethico-ontological repair.

Talking about Gaza provokes frustration and disbelief. But it also invites us to grapple with the existing paradigm ordering our world: the privilege of being human, of mattering. Liberals who are moved by Palestinian suffering (and it's not a given that they can be moved) want to democratize the privilege and thus recognize the humanity of Palestinians and other racialized peoples. Gaza brings me back to the realization that there is no recognition of Palestinians as beings worthy of dignity and care until we dismantle the racial matrix of the human—that divides us into those who matter and those who don't—with the added twist that for the West to matter, its other must un-matter. How do we as scholars and teachers grapple with Gaza in a way that moves us beyond a humanist paradigm that can only open to humanitarian reason, interpellating us as subjects-supposed-to aid? Why do we care about Palestinians only when they're dead or dying? If the language of human rights is to some extent unavoidable, then let's (*re*)*politicize* these rights. Anti-colonial reason here has much to say. When talking about Gaza let's tell it like it is and frame the discussion in terms of settler colonialism: Zionist Israelis are the invaders and occupiers of Indigenous Palestinian land. October 7 was an attack against invaders; it was an attack against the Israelis caging Gazans, against the subjugation, killing, humiliation, and dispossession of all Palestinians. Ask yourself and others, why did it take a horrific attack for the world at large to pay attention to the plight of Palestinians? It is telling how Indigenous and racialized communities across the world came to the defense of Palestinians, refusing to parrot the Israeli narrative, seeing the Zionist regime's argument about self-defense as profoundly dishonest.

When cruelty is the problem of/in others, when the West believes in its unquestioned good, the rest of the world suffers.

### **From incarceration to genocide: The case of Palestinians in a geopolitical game of power chess**

Suriamurthee Maistry  
University of Kwa-Zulu Natal

The systematic, indiscriminate and calculated slaughter by the Israeli Defence Force of thousands of Palestinians in the aftermath of the Hamas incursion into Israel in October 2023 is nothing short of audacious impertinence. The pace and extent of

civilian deaths are unprecedented in the history of any global conflict (Sultany, 2024) and are a clear indication of both genocidal intent and action. Yet, the UN and other world institutions have been reluctant to call this out as such. While Amnesty International made this declaration, it happened very late in the day! The world has developed a tolerance for apartheid racist-inspired hatred and murder and Western immorality that is unashamedly comfortable with the application of the Law of the Jungle (Friedman, 2023) to Palestinians—a condition in which objective violence, brutality, and impunity for human rights violations by Israel are unequivocally supported by United States (US) gangsterism.

US mob boss behavior is exercised through military, economic and institutional thuggery. The ability of the Israeli regime to sustain its current high-intensity military activity on multiple fronts for over 14 months is an indication of the unlimited US military support. By flexing its economic muscle in the Middle East, the US has successfully sown division and rivalry among the Arab brotherhood/league, many of whom have not moved beyond rhetorical condemnation of Israeli atrocities. The US's recurrent, irresponsible use of its veto powers in the UN Security Council reflects its abusive and dictatorial influence in the world's 'regulatory' institutions.

'Racial prejudice is unapologetic and, in plain sight, reflecting a dysconscious, tolerable and flagrant racism. Dysconsciousness is an uncritical habit of mind ... that justifies inequity by accepting the existing order of things as given' (King, 1991, p. 135), as is evident in general complaisance and receptiveness of Israeli apartheid. It is the outcome of the somewhat uncritical acceptance of the existing colonial world order and the partiality of International Law to the white Western world. Friedman asserts that Israelis have long been yearning for full White European status and recognition (Friedman, 2023).

The disproportional military response by the Israeli regime reflects a colonial power taking advantage of an opportune moment to reconfigure the Middle-Eastern order with provocative attacks extending to Lebanon, Iran and, more recently, Syria. The rationale for the overzealous onslaught on Gaza, in particular, is attributed to the need to retrieve hostages and eliminate the threat of Hamas at any expense. The concept of 'hostage', though, is selectively appropriated by Israelis as the random capture and imprisonment of thousands of Palestinians can also be argued as a hostage-taking. The more sinister agenda of the Israeli Defence Force is to *terminate on-site*, with no regard for the ensuing excessive human casualties, deliberative nutritional deprivation, the destruction of healthcare infrastructure and the obliteration of the educational infrastructure. There is little contention that the psychological trauma of the unrelenting Israeli onslaught will have generational effects.

The 'zone of being' and the 'zone of nonbeing' (Fanon, 1963), helps to explain why economically affluent non-white classes in the global north choose not to accord full human recognition to Palestinians (people in the zone of nonbeing). Even marginalized people of color in the US and UK advocate for Israel in the face of blatant Israeli segregationist policies. The zone of being offers a layer of protection that affluence can buy. In the US and UK, this represents an interesting, contradictory space—a milieu that is complexly layered with a (false) sense of nationalism and anti-Islamic sentiment- that of being British or American Black Christian first, yet racial prejudice remains deep-seated frailty in these countries.

It is somewhat irresponsible to speak of the resilience of the Palestinian people in any romantic fashion. However, the important question must be: Where and how can counter-narratives and spaces for resistance be imagined and actioned?

## Confronting the Zionist Gaze

George Yancy  
Emory University

*Thinking about* Gaza is too abstract. Engaging with ideal theory can obfuscate the realities of inhumane brutality and profound suffering experienced by Palestinian people. 'Thinking about' Gaza lacks the requisite rage and anger that come with bearing witness to massive forms of collective punishment, dehumanization, and the unconscionable reality of young Palestinian bodies hatefully blown to pieces. Since 7 October 2023, Israel has murdered at least 17,400 children in Gaza, which amounts to one child murdered every 30 min (Tehran Times, 2025). This doesn't include the more than '17,000 children [who] are believed to be unaccompanied and separated and approximately 4,000 children [who] are likely missing under the rubble' (Al Jazeera, 2024). That reality alone mocks the disinterested nature of abstract thought.

Having *sympathy for* Gaza might also fail us. Sympathy creates, according to Susan Sontag (2003), an 'imaginary proximity to the suffering inflicted on others [Palestinians]' (p. 102). Sontag reminds us that sympathy 'proclaims our innocence as well as our impotence' (p. 102). Sympathy communicates, 'Of course, I care!' However, it hides 'how our privileges are located on the same map as their [Palestinian] suffering, and may—in ways we might prefer not to imagine—be linked to their suffering' (Sontag, 2003, p. 102). As such, sympathy reinforces the illusion that the lives so many enjoy here in the US isn't complicit with Palestinian pain and sorrow. Some will claim in self-defense, 'I have seen the horrible images coming out of Gaza, and I am emotionally moved!' Hartmann (1997) refers to 'the uncertain line between witness and spectator' (p. 4). I fear that like 'thinking about' Gaza, many US citizens are obsessed with spectatorship, as are media agencies. It is one thing 'to see' the ruthless precarity of Palestinian life. It is another to provide a political and historical framework that *names* Israeli hegemonic and military bloodlust that is responsible for such vast and devastating forms of genocide. As one doctor on a medical mission in Gaza noted, 'there has been a real fixation on the most horrific injuries that we saw... and we describe those injuries... but the moment that we start to talk about the perpetrator of that violence... we seem to lose the media's interest' (Ahmed, 2023).

The implication here is that only a mangled Palestinian body is of value. On any other day, the imago of the 'Dirty Arab' or the 'Palestinian terrorist' is what takes visual precedence over the Arab/Palestinian as human, as possessing dignity and infinite value. Like the white gaze, which is hegemonic, violent, procrustean, solipsistic, dehumanizing, and violently othering, the 'Dirty Arab' or the 'Palestinian terrorist' is what *appears* vis-à-vis the Zionist gaze. The Zionist gaze is a species of the white gaze. Both are indicative of brutal racialized nation-building, violent hegemonic *worlding*, territorial occupation, usurpation, colonialism, and existential devastation and nullification. Both are guilty of *socially constructing* their 'enemies' and 'nemeses' out of fears, lies, and libidinal logics. Afterall, it was the totalizing imaginaries of European

imperialism, US barbarity vis-à-vis Indigenous peoples, and Zionism that deployed the doctrine of *terra nullius*, which is nothing but a mode of deep bad faith, an epistemology of ignorance.

The arrogance of the white gaze and the Zionist gaze dared to declare ‘empty land’ in places where there were clearly human beings. Within this context, *terra nullius* is a form of erasure, an appalling preconceived philosophical anthropology where Black bodies and Palestinian bodies are deemed as having *no being*; they are structurally-ontologically ‘absent.’ As Zahi Zalloua (2024) writes, ‘Palestinian being suffers the marks of Orientalism and Zionism, with the latter harnessing the epistemic powers of the former to legitimize Israel’s settler-colonial regime. Under Western/settler eyes, Palestinians exist as a problem insofar as their presence represents a demographic threat, an existential menace to a Zionist Israel.’ As Nurit Peled-Elhanan states, ‘Zionism was a European national movement. Like all European national movements, Zionism defined who is human and who is “other”’ (Yancy & Peled-Elhanan, 2024).

Racially embodied as Black, in the US, the white gaze epistemologically ‘knows,’ and ontologically positions, me as a ‘nigger.’ Structural anti-Black violence has always already positioned the Black body as a ‘nigger,’ as the constitutive outside of whiteness/the white gaze. So, I don’t merely ‘think about’ or express a perfunctory ‘sympathy’ for Gaza. Gaza’s pain and suffering, Palestinian cries, tears, and anguish make me want to *scream* until my lungs give out. Palestinian angst produces an upsurge of painful horror in the pit of my stomach and leaves me with a sense of panic and ethical outrage at the core of my being.

In moments of desperation, I have wished for either Yahweh or Allah to show mercy and bring justice to bear upon Gaza. I want to shout to the world: this massacre of Palestinians—by the State of Israel—is occurring on our watch. Every day, every hour, every minute that Palestinians are being murdered, we carry that responsibility! As Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel (2013) wrote, ‘*Some are guilty; all are responsible*’ (p. 85). I feel the heavy weight of the Palestinian call for me to use my ability to respond. After all, Palestinians and Black people in the US (without conflating our differences) share fungible elements of catastrophe, consisting of forms of dehumanization, vicious stereotyping, violent policing, forms of incarceration, control and surveillance, and gratuitous violence. And the white/Zionist gaze is always present, always there to make sure that we (collectively) don’t forget that we are the *Untermenschen*.

As I set out to write this short piece, to take up this (*my*) responsibility, I found myself not being able to formulate a single sentence. One can call it writer’s block, but I think that it was something more embodied and deeply affective. There was that familiar sense of hopelessness. Being Black in the US, I know this mood, this heavy atmosphere of dread, all too well. I know that the US empire doesn’t give a damn about Palestinian life. Since October 7, the US has given Israel at least \$17.9 billion in military aid (Knickmeyer, 2024) that has been used to slaughter innocent Palestinian babies, children, and adults. I couldn’t write as I faced this magnitude of evil. *But I must write!* And I must name reality. It is my philosophical and pedagogical responsibility. It is what love looks like.

As Paulo Freire (1970) writes, ‘Because love is an act of courage, not of fear, love is commitment to others’ (p. 70). As Toni Morrison’s friend said to her during a time

when she was consumed with depression and found it difficult to write, ‘No! No, no, no! This is precisely the time when artists go to work—not when everything is fine, but in times of dread. That’s our job!’ (Morrison, 2019). That advice is what I needed to get started. My own university and many others in the US have failed (or refused) to understand this kind of love, the duty of the artist, the radical meaning of education (*educare*, ‘to lead out’) or the passion of the student(s) who protested and continue to protest the Gaza/Palestinian genocide. So, I refuse silence and adjustment when it comes to collectively naming the horrors in Gaza. I write back to Gaza, because, as the late Refaat Alareer (2014) wrote, ‘Writing is...a duty to humanity, and a moral responsibility’ (p. 26).

### **‘Gaza: We need to listen’**

Janet Orchard

School of Education, University of Bristol

I am asked to contribute to a collective piece of writing on the current situation in Gaza/Palestine but wonder what I can add. In Facer’s words Facer, Facer, Facer, Facer, (2024), reflecting on climate emergency, ‘ignorance’ does not cause tragedies of this kind, when so many words have been written or spoken. Her plea is for listening, attentively, empathetically, compassionately, before perhaps finding something to say, sitting first through awkward and uncomfortable silence.

I trial this approach, listening to distinguished BBC journalist, Jeremy Bowen (2024) reflect on a year of violence, displacement, destruction and death. He observes that the last time restructuring the Middle East by force was contemplated seriously was after 9/11 and that the invasion of Iraq made matters worse. Having listened to both sides, he sees the only chance for a ceasefire is to cool matters and create a space for diplomacy. I reflect on the shrinking supply of quality journalists like Bowen, laying a path for that task, crafting their dispatches skillfully without fear or favor, attending respectfully to ordinary people caught up in extraordinary circumstances.

A colleague, a refugee with ‘leave to remain’, speaks in an academic meeting with anguish for Palestinian students, and the impact on them in the ongoing situation. She is angry. Surely, she feels brutalized too? Compassionate listening is called for, attending to the presence of others in ways which bring ‘a recognition of an unknown other to whom we are bound and about whom we feel care and concern’ (Lipari, 2014 p. 176).

In the moment, I do not do this, frustrated by how this item detracts from other business concerning the inclusion of students with disabilities. What about other conflicts? The ‘Global Peace Index’ (IEP, 2024) ranks Yemen the least peaceful country in the world, followed by Sudan, South Sudan and Afghanistan. I listen to a colleague with a different, more compassionate view than me and regret my feelings. As a British citizen, particularly an English one, I note a responsibility to ‘face my history’ and thus myself (Facing History & Ourselves).

At a conference in NY, I find myself ‘attending’ to perspectives that I do not encounter regularly inside my socio-cultural bubble. Previously, where I insisted on understanding my colleague on my terms only, I held fast to my own preconceived sense of what I already thought I knew. Now, I have a chance to redeem myself, attending

to the situated lives and challenges faced by Israeli hostages still missing or ‘murdered’ who are pictured on posters, lampposts and community noticeboards, in my hotel’s Orthodox Jewish neighborhood.

In verbal terms, Lipari refers to this type of encounter as ‘listening otherwise’, a process of defamiliarization in which we renounce the familiar and embrace the strange (Lipari, 2014, p. 185). Yet my attentiveness is non-verbal, as I am drawn, time and again, to look at victims faces. At another conference, this time in Hong Kong, I learn about ‘ting’ 听 a Chinese character meaning ‘to hear or to listen’, comprised of 5 ‘radicals’ (see illustration) including ‘eyes’, and heart, alongside ears. This new (to me) concept is illuminating.



Reflecting across sustained in-person encounters I have been privileged to experience in contrasting cultural settings over several months of travel, time and space has been dedicated to good dialogue, reaching deep consensus on some occasions, respectful dissensus on others. ‘Being present’ as an academic requires listening, not merely showing up to declaim. I am also mindful of ideological disagreements I have encountered recently in academic spaces where arguing the point has trumped duty of care to colleagues. I do not want to work in a toxic environment like this. ‘First world’ problems.

Buber (1996) asserted the significance of human life finding its meaning through relationships. In religiously vibrant settings like Gaza, (Lebanon, or Israel), perhaps his sense that such relationships bring us ultimately into relationship with God, the Eternal

Thou, might resonate. More widely, might we agree that even at an inter human level, a necessary peace will be reached only when both sides recognize the following: 'other' as 'I', an embodied entity, occupying time and space and exhibiting the distinctive characteristics they comprise; and 'Thou' to whom we attend with all senses, and *both* our whole beings.

### **Gaza: We need to change our idioms**

Marianna Papastephanou

Department of Education, University of Cyprus, [papastefanou.marianna@ucy.ac.cy](mailto:papastefanou.marianna@ucy.ac.cy)

We, philosophers of education, typically keep silent about geopolitical matters that invite cosmopolitan-territorial justice and involve foreign affairs and international relations. This failure is no accident. Our postmodern expertise, qualifications and complacencies have left us unprepared to engage with issues of a people's self-determination and democratic majority rights.

Perhaps this is because we rely heavily on philosophical figures, idioms and sources that reflect the sensibilities of the national spaces of powerful global players. Our 'we' is a mirror image of their 'we'. Their modern past and collective memory as colonizers did not comprise injustices of the kind that others have suffered in areas of geostrategic games of power. The philosophy of such powerful countries that we so eagerly import in our field has, especially in recent decades, been rather introvert, inward-looking, in being absorbed by challenges of social justice and by democratic deficits within borders. Not that social justice is unimportant; but too much emphasis on it, or inflation of it to cover problems beyond its province, obscures other aspects of justice and renders us aloof about our countries' handlings of foreign affairs.

Or perhaps our postmodern fantasies (also imported) of deterritorialization make us suspicious about territorial claims of peoples (stateless or not) who suffer ongoing crimes against humanity such as settler policies and illegal occupation of their land. We copy leading thinkers who deconstruct state sovereignty while they continue benefiting from it as citizens of sovereign states that bypass the rights to sovereignty of other people. We doubt that other people will handle sovereignty wisely if they obtain it; or we simply (also *qua* naively) fail to see how our legitimate worries nourish the injustice of denying to others what we enjoy and how this constitutes our subtle racism.

Whatever the reason, we have sleepwalked the way to Gaza. Even now, it is 'Gaza' that becomes the metonymy of our awakening, not Palestine. Our starting point is October 2023 rather than the injustices inflicted on the Palestinians from the British occupation in 1917 onwards and how these sealed the fate of both peoples, Palestinians and Israelis, ever since. We move to action (authorial, of course) only when we are moved by blood and death. We get mobilized when a world tension, one of international right, escalates to the point of producing glaring atrocities such as genocide. Gaza has been no exception to this educational-philosophical rule.

Gaza renders visible that for the West only some lives are worth living, protecting and valuing; alarmed by this visibility, we fail to see that, even if all lives were considered worth living, protecting and valuing, this would be no solution, let alone a fair one, to the problem of Palestine through a cosmopolitan prism that does not

treat human rights unevenly. Unsurprisingly, our mobilizations reductively continue to view social justice as *the* normative challenge, as if all would be ok if the Palestinians were treated as equals within the state of Israel. So, all becomes a matter of making the Palestinians a happily colonized people, a safe and prosperous majority under another peoples' rule. We lack the analytics that would do justice to cosmopolitan-territorial justice. We have left the key categories (e.g., majority self-determination principles of international right) underdeveloped or unused for far too long. We need to change our idioms, though I doubt that even this would contribute to any actual change of our field or of our contemporary world. But it would at least be some step toward cosmopolitan discursive justice to the Palestinian people.

## **Combative decoloniality against genocide**

Nelson Maldonado-Torres

The censure, in institutions of higher education in countries like Germany and the United States, of analyses that challenge reductionistic accounts of the genocide in Gaza and that expose the fascist dimensions of the current right-wing Israeli government and related ideologies that have normalized apartheid, land grabbing, a vicious and abusive control of water, and ethnic cleansing in Palestine for decades is only a highly visible and dramatic expression of the coloniality of knowledge today.

The coloniality of knowledge is at the core of institutionalized knowledge production in the globalized modern/colonial world and its liberal, and even multicultural at times, 'white academic field' (Maldonado-Torres, 2020). Perhaps nothing speaks to the 'success' of this system than the double standards that reproduce a human/non-human and a civilization vs. barbarism schema. This schema serves as an interpretive framework and as lenses through which the world is thought about and perceived (Maldonado-Torres, 2020; Maldonado-Torres, forthcoming). Since it has been globalized and made into part of the normative form of socialization across the Global North and South, it is not rare to find that the schema is often reproduced in the minds and actions of peoples whose annihilation and dehumanization have been justified on the basis of the same logic.

One of the clearest signs of the effects of the coloniality of knowledge is that a genocide against a people under siege or occupation is perceived as a 'conflict' between two enemies. From this perspective, one can only be pro-Israel or pro-Palestine, as if the heightened Palestinian Nakba did not demand a principled position against apartheid, ethnic cleansing, and genocide. It is not surprising that indifference dominates in this scenario, since a generalized lack of concern toward the Palestinian people, including by a good number of rulers and elites in Arab and Muslim majority countries, is part of the catastrophe. The Palestinian people is surely not to be confused by the recognized representatives of Palestinians in Gaza or the Occupied West Bank, or by Palestinian elites who dream with bringing Western style development to Palestine, who many Palestinians also consider responsible for the extension of the catastrophe (see Anemones, 2019; Husain, 2003).

Writing from the United States, like I am doing now, it makes sense to ask: if one does not recognize and respond with indignation and determination to the horror and continued relevance of the genocide of Indigenous peoples, racialized slavery,

sexual violence, and forced labor, and colonialism in the make-up and ongoing reality of one's nation, how capable is one to bear witness and respond to similar actions taking place elsewhere? Today, one must ask about the nexus between the catastrophe of modernity/coloniality and the Palestinian Nakba. In that context it is also important to consider the question of how extraordinary the Holocaust in the Second World War and the current genocide in Gaza are in a context of modern/colonial global catastrophe?

Decoloniality is not only, or even primarily, a 'theory' that leads one to ask these kinds of questions, but a combat, anchored in grassroots organizing, that counters the catastrophe/Nakba of modernity/coloniality. As decolonial and anti-genocidal movements in Palestine, New York City, and elsewhere have suggested, since coloniality has been globalized, this struggle cannot but take the form of a Global Uprising or Intifada (*Globalize the Intifada*, 2021). From this perspective, to centralize Palestine is also to de-exceptionalize it, and to say that 'Palestine is the center' is just another way of affirming that 'Palestine is everywhere' (Palestine Is Everywhere, 2024). Decoloniality is not an academic game, but the collective construction, from the ground up, of a decolonial and post-genocidal reality.

## Learning to unlearn the ethno-nationalist myths of Zionism

Steven Robins

Stellenbosch University

In the late 1960s, as a learner at Theodor Herzl Primary School in Gqeberha (formerly Port Elizabeth) I was taught how, following thousands of years of exile and anti-Semitism culminating in the Holocaust, Jews heroically fought to achieve their age-old, biblically ordained dream of a Jewish homeland. Israel was seen to be a sanctuary where Jews would be forever safe and in control of their destiny. To be a 'good Jew' meant unquestioning loyalty to this homeland. I can recall being proud of Israeli military superiority during the 1967 Six Day War. I had wished I was old enough to volunteer to fight to protect my Jewish homeland.

Growing up in apartheid South Africa, and learning about the violent legacies of racism and colonialism as a university student, led me to question Zionism's foundational myths. My early understandings of the violent underpinnings of Zionism came from reading Ilan Pappé's (2006) 'The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine.' Pappé describes how the Haganah—the Zionist militia that launched terror attacks in Palestine after World War Two—planned and executed a military operation that resulted in the expulsion of thousands of defenseless Haifa Palestinians. From Pappé I learnt that this was one event in the wider 'ethnic cleansing' of 750,000 Palestinians.

I later learnt that early twentieth century Zionist leaders such as Ze'ev Jabotinsky knew that the only way European Jewish settlers would be able to create a Jewish state in Palestine would be to use brute military force against indigenous Arabs. In his 1923 article entitled 'Iron Wall,' Jabotinsky noted that 'Every native population in the world resists colonists as long as it has the slightest hope of being able to rid itself of the danger of being colonized.' Zionist leaders such as Herzl, Jabotinsky and Ben-Yehuda consistently justified the violent imposition of settler colonial rule over the Palestinians by military power.

Many South African Jews, like Jews elsewhere in the world, seem to find it difficult to acknowledge Zionism's reliance on violence to enforce its particular version of settler colonialism. Many were shocked by the 11 January 2024 ruling of the International Court of Justice that the actions of the Israeli military in Gaza, in response to the Hamas attack of 7 October 2023, plausibly constituted genocide.

As the son of a father whose parents and siblings were murdered in during the Holocaust, I find it disturbing that Israeli descendants of victims of the Holocaust are now participating in genocide in Gaza. It would seem that trauma and suffering do not necessarily produce empathy for the suffering of others. Instead, it can lead to the kind of collective hardening and brutalization that has become the defining feature of Israel's toxic brand of hyper-militarized ethnonationalism. It would seem that Israelis have embraced a Euro-American-styled settler colonial project that has turned them into the willing foot soldiers of an ethno-nationalist killing machine.

In my book *Letters of Stone: From Nazi Germany to South Africa* (2016), a personal exploration of the fate of my father's family in Berlin who were murdered in Auschwitz and Riga, I stumbled across the uncanny convergences between histories of racial science and colonialism, the Nama and Herero genocide, the Holocaust and apartheid. Nowadays I see ever more clearly the connections between these histories of violence and the ongoing Nakba in Palestine. Drawing on experiences in Europe's colonies in Africa and Asia, Jabotinsky and other early Zionist leaders established the ideological legitimation for using military force and violence against indigenous Arabs: this is how the descendants of victims of the Shoah became perpetrators of genocidal violence in Gaza. To arrive at this understanding, I have had to unlearn the ethno-nationalist myths I was taught at Theodor Herzl Primary School. I have had to unlearn the blindspots of tribal belonging.

## **Gaza - We need to talk**

James Conroy  
University of Glasgow

In 2014, invited to deliver the Michael Prior Memorial Lecture at the University of Bethlehem (Conroy J., *The Toledo Guidelines and the Myth of the Andalusian Caliphate*, 2014), I suggested that rather than simply accepting the distorted myths of identity we should adopt the hermeneutic of suspicion with respect to the claims on us of such heavily freighted myths whereupon a significant number of the students walked out of the auditorium. An American Professor observed afterwards that, while the students needed to hear such lectures, they were generally not well disposed to the educational task of self-interrogation. None of what follows is intended to diminish the pain of those who lost loved ones in the Hamas attack at Re'im nor the inhuman war of vengeance. It is rather an attempt to make a modest contribution to our pedagogic thinking about the conditions for meaningful talk.

Michael Prior (a Vincentian Priest) taught me Biblical Studies, and was a fierce advocate of the Rights of Palestinians (Prior, 1997)—indeed, once in Tel Aviv, whilst being interrogated by the Security Police he proceeded to strip naked!. Like me he grew up in a divided Ireland, albeit that he was a native of Ireland and I was lived in what I considered, as a child, the 'North of Ireland', illegitimately fractured and

shorn from Ireland and occupied temporarily by Britain. Like most of the Catholic community I was a Nationalist, even if not advocating violence or insurrection. Nonetheless, even the more pacific forms of nationalism fed and bred a life fissured and striated with the language and attachments of the mythic culture of Ireland and the Irish (a land of saints and scholars, of warrior heroes; a victim of betrayal and abuse by a rapacious and religiously and culturally alien people. As Forster (Foster, 2015) so eloquently illustrates, the mythic culture was itself never just a setting or background against which the politics of nationalism played itself out but an actor in the political drama. Indeed, it was an actor energetically deployed by a de facto theocratic state predicated on the mythic purity of the heroic peasant. Its usage strategically ignored the complex, complicit and contradictory relations between the British and the Irish (Conroy J. C., *Betwixt and Between: the Liminal Imagination, Education and Democracy*, 2004). Of course, myths can be sustaining but they can also be distorting and distracting; a cacophony that serves no higher purpose than to underscore our exceptionalism.

While it might be considered inappropriate to compare the historic travails of sectarian Northern Ireland with the tragic and brutal conflict in Gaza, there are formal/structural similarities (Knox and Hughes, 1995). In both cases conflict emerges amidst asymmetries of power, failures to listen, competition between competing myths and fear of the other. Each practice is in a choreographed dance of death. Cultural myths are oft strategically deployed to offer some appearance of power equilibrium. Hence in Ireland's case we encounter the myth of 'perfidious Albion'<sup>1</sup>; that some of Ireland's great heroes were not defeated in open conflict but were the victims of treachery (see in particular, 'the Lament for the Death of Eoghan Ruadh O'Neill' (Davis, 2011)). The myth of heroic failure serves to simultaneously mitigate the ignominy of defeat, establish 'ontological' as well as cultural and historic difference and reinforce otherness. In such ways myth may too often serve to inhibit our capacity to reach across boundaries, to listen to the other and to look for accommodations and solutions. Such failures are intergenerational and education, not always reluctantly, becomes ensnared in the promulgation of the distorted myth. The shadow side of Oakeshott's claim to the import of education as a conversation between generations (Oakeshott, 1971) may be seen in its vulnerability to becoming a site and proxy for the distorted myths of identity.

The intergenerational cycle of reciprocal violence is a product of both a political failure—the impulse to shore up our ethico-political claims by way of our mythic identity and a pedagogical failure—the temptation to consider education as a site of redemption for our failures as adults. This misconstrues both the nature of political choice and the purpose of education (Conroy J. C., *Caught in the Middle: Arendt, Childhood and Responsibility*, 2019). It is not the task of education to ameliorate the failures of politics in furnishing a space to talk across the razor-wire entangled boundaries of our deformed myths. Nor should it be constituted so as to emulate the anguished screams and angry clamor that so often stains our politics. It is, however, its obligation to nurture in students a sturdy capacity to distinguish sustaining from deforming myths, to offer space for reflection and to learn to listen.

As educators we should resist the seductions of construing the other as the source of our pain and alienation simpliciter, opting instead for a pedagogy of *enstrangement*,

where, in conversation, we teach our students that we, none of us, possess privileged access to the contents of our own consciousness and that it is in recognizing the limits of our self-knowledge, we open ourselves to the other (Conroy J., *The estranged self: recovering some grounds for pluralism in education*, 2009). In other words, the openness to talking to the other begins, neither with seeking to accommodate them nor with converting them but with confronting the self. To have an authentic engagement with the other we must first have the conversation with ourselves. Such a conversation demands that the incessant noise of the contemporary classroom and its pedagogical practices are stilled to create space to listen to the self. Ironically, and as an echo of their monastic origins, the rhythms of schooling were orchestrated by the notes of silence, not merely as a disciplinary stratagem, as Foucauldians might have it but as a space of contemplation. There is much to be said about silence in education but here let it suffice to offer a (one) ground upon which meaningful talk can begin.

### **Education in times of war- against indifference**

Daniella J. Forster

School of Education, University of Newcastle Australia

I cannot offer an account of the intractable geo-political history of conflict in the Middle East region which gave rise to the current tragedies for those both in Gaza and broader Israel- one of the most wicked problems of world stability today.

There is no place on earth untouched by de-humanisation. There are over 110 armed conflicts taking place from the Middle East, Africa, Asia, Europe, to Latin America<sup>2</sup>. Israel's genocide in Gaza<sup>3</sup> looms alongside genocides recorded elsewhere- of the Holocaust, the Tamils, Maya, Bangladesh, Darfur, Burundi, East Timor, Somalia...— the list is horrifying and the numbers beyond reckoning. There is no 'hierarchy of suffering'<sup>4</sup> here.

Elie Wiesel, known for his testimony on the Holocaust, traveled worldwide to bear witness for victims of unimaginable horror. 'The witness calls out for remembrance, for a moral awakening, for justice, even while carefully recording the facts of violence' (Hansen, 2017, p. 31) When asked about his life's mission, he consistently answered: teaching (Burger, 2018). He taught in order to combat indifference.

*So much violence; so much indifference. What is indifference? ... A strange ... state in which the lines blur between light and darkness, ... for the person who is indifferent, his or her neighbour are of no consequence. And, therefore, their lives are meaningless. (Wiesel, 1999)*

Jewish groups revulsed by Israel's actions take lessons from Wiesel. The Jewish Council of Australia (JCA) along with friends at the Australia Palestine Advocacy Network and the Islamic Council of Victoria (n.d.) celebrated a turning point—that Australia changed its position to vote in support of a UN General Assembly resolution calling on Israel to end its 'unlawful presence in the Occupied Palestinian Territory as rapidly as possible'<sup>5</sup> However, stark political division amongst Australian Jews is enlarged by disagreement about criticism of Israel (Altman, 2024; Ryvchin, 2024).

One must abhor the barbarity of Israel's government, but reflect on the nation's existentially-threatened position in the region. We need a tonic against the dangerous

but ubiquitous ‘illusion of moral superiority’ (Tappin & McKay, 2017) and uncompromising belief in an ‘ideal so worthy as to exempt those who pursue it from the requirement of basic morality’ (Hand, 2024 citing Quassim Cassam’s *Extremism: A Philosophical Analysis*). However, taking a side on conflict must not be censored because the indifference which may co-habit with a sense of political powerlessness and apathy prevents vital, but often disruptive, engagement with democratic institutions (Sparrow, 2024).

Disagreement is also potentially educative, and yet Australian Departments of Education mandate political neutrality, resulting in shut down of discussion about the Gaza situation in class<sup>6</sup>. Teachers must avoid bringing their views into classrooms and schools must seek alternative learning foci to prevent triggering topics. The Controversial Issues policy in NSW is obtuse and teachers can’t be guaranteed support from the Department, especially if it creates noisy opposition from community (Mcperson et al., 2023). These mandates frame schools’ roles in responding to the conflict as primarily psychologically protective, for positive learning environments and preventing discomfort (NSW Department of Education, n.d.a, n.d.b).

For the younger generations, ‘Gaza has become... the essential condition of political and ethical consciousness in the twenty-first century—just as the first world war was for a generation in the West.’ (Gaita, 2024). Bringing an educational purpose to the fore, then, we have a duty to democratic education, even in times of war (Drerup, 2024). Education should prevent apathy, contribute to students’ political and ethical conscientization, but balance harm prevention in the face of vicarious or re-surfaced trauma and abstracted indifference. Philosophical insight about good dialogue is absolutely crucial to this endeavor (Guilherme & Morgan, 2018).

## Let us do what is right

Lesley le Grange  
Stellenbosch University

‘My final prayer: O my body, make of me always a man who questions’ (Fanon, 1967, p. 206)

The events of 7 October 2023 and their aftermath are rooted in decades of oppression by Israel against Palestinians. This system affects Palestinians in Israel, the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT), and displaced refugees. Since 1967, Israel has controlled Gaza and the West Bank’s population registry, denied Palestinians citizenship and left them stateless. Israel’s actions include land grabs, unlawful killings, displacement, movement restrictions, and denial of citizenship rights. Amnesty International’s 2022 report labels Israel an apartheid state, describing a ‘cruel system of domination.’ The killing and capture of Israelis by Hamas on 7 October 2023 were rightfully condemned, but Israel’s response—killing at least 45,000 Palestinians and destroying homes, hospitals, schools, roads, and croplands—is morally indefensible. This situation highlights ongoing racial injustices, and what Fanon (1967) notes as the ‘zone of nonbeing’.

I shall focus on the body—the physical body, the extended body, the psyche, and the body politic. The zone of nonbeing, where black and brown bodies do not matter, can be traced back to enlightenment humanism and its molar entity, which defines

(non)humanity. Enlightenment humanism, along with colonialism and colonality, relegates bodies to zones of nonbeing through patriarchy, racism, neoliberal capitalism, and Zionism. The effects of colonality include epistemicide, culturecide, linguicide, ecocide, genocide, and educide.

Two scholars who gave attention to the other, the body and the ethics of responsibility are Levinas and Fanon. Both Levinas and Fanon had an interest in phenomenology and existential phenomenology. Their lives overlapped in time and for a short period they had residency at the same time in France. This might tempt us to invigorate easy similarity between the two scholars, but their biographies give way to disparate thought and action. Though both French subjects, Levinas was a Jew and Fanon a colonized subject on the island of Martinique, and although both would be regarded as philosophers, Fanon was a psychiatrist and Levinas had no interest in psychoanalysis. Laubscher (2022) discusses how Fanon viewed the raced and colonized experience as one that undermines any notion of equality among 'men'. Levinas, on the other hand, saw the body as both a constraint and a possibility, intertwined with consciousness, which together create human freedom and the potential for transcendence. Levinas has been criticized for his universal view of the body, ignoring specific identities. Fanon (1967) argued that Black and Brown<sup>7</sup> people experience their bodies differently from white people, lacking the freedom to be. The Black/Brown body is burdened by definitions imposed by whiteness, leading to fear and repulsion in public spaces. The life chances of Black/Brown bodies are vastly different from those of white bodies. In our context, the life chances (the becoming of pedagogical lives) of Palestinian children are much more constrained than those of Israeli children.

However, Levinas' intertwining of body and consciousness is helpful. I argue that there exists a productive consciousness among colonized people that can be enhanced. Black South Africans were inspired by the black consciousness movement started by Steve Biko, a consciousness of resistance on the part of Palestinians provide hope even though it might be threadbare (when displaced, many Palestinians keep their keys, believing that they will return home, it conjures memories of happy times and a forceful reminder of another iteration of suffering at the hands of Israel). And a consciousness of always questioning injustices, as Fanon reminds us in his prayer that I quoted. Fanon's prayer shifts from abstract philosophical and political discourse to himself and to individual responsibility not to be led astray by forms of being that perpetuate violence, injustices and dehumanization. In the context of the suffering of Palestinian people may I, you, the body politic do the same.

### **Open response #1: Where is education?**

Gert Biesta

Maynooth University

The contributions to this collective writing initiative contain important observations about a complex issue. It is helpful, therefore, that the question 'Why Gaza?' is explicitly raised, because there are many more barbarisms going in the world right now. And while some end up in the media, also because of courageous work by journalists, others are less visible, and some are almost entirely hidden from sight. Although it is debatable whether 'the archive of Auschwitz is transferable to Gaza'

(Davids), Metz is right in pointing out that if we cannot help all beggars that doesn't mean that no beggars should be helped. And the contributions to this writing initiative give a range of reasons for why looking away is no option. As Yancy puts it, citing Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, whereas only 'some are guilty,' all are responsible.' 'Gaza,' as the contributions convincingly show, is not just 'elsewhere' or a problem just for 'other people.'

One issue that remains unresolved in the contributions, however, is the use of the word 'we.' In all writing 'we' is a tricky word to use, but in this case, it is perhaps even more difficult. The 'we' partly seems to refer to the authors addressing each other as a 'we,' albeit not a 'we' that automatically agrees about everything that is written. But the 'we' also seems to refer to an intended audience, and here it is difficult to gauge the scope of who are being addressed. Are the 'we' that are 'compelled to respond to the "Gaza situation"' (Davids) educational scholars, professional educators, teachers? Or is the circle even wider? But how wide? Because it would be quite odd to include those who are suffering and dying because of the atrocities in this 'we.' Or are they too? While some authors stay closer to themselves, writing more in the first person, the question of audience does matter, particularly, so it seems to me, because this collective writing initiative is situated within an educational context, to begin with a scholarly education journal. And in education the question of the 'audience,' the question of the ones teachers intend to address, always needs to be raised.

For me this raises the question where education is in this collective writing initiative. I had expected—or maybe hoped—that all authors would make this part of their considerations. There is, after all, much that can be said about 'Gaza,' but in an educational context I would have expected a more explicitly educational 'response' to 'Gaza.' Barnett is one of a small number of contributors who explicitly raises the question to what end Gaza can come legitimately into view in (higher) education. His list is worth repeating: 'To assist students' capabilities in critical thinking? To explore issues of ethics in war? To examine historical legacies and national responsibilities? To generate feelings of empathy for the dying, injured and dispossessed? To condemn the actions of certain states? To balance opinions across contentious issues? To display the barbarities of military aggression? To reveal unintended consequences of state action in a multi-national situation?' And he is also right in arguing that all these possibilities 'have differing legitimacy' and thus raise difficult, but not impossible questions for educators.

Conroy is one of the other contributors who seeks to engage with 'Gaza' in educational terms. His suggestion that education has the obligation 'to nurture in students a sturdy capacity to distinguish sustaining from deforming myths, to offer space for reflection and to learn to listen' may run the risk of articulating a desirable 'outcome' without providing educators with a way to work with students toward such an ambition—which could end up as a case of wishful thinking. Yet, his suggestion that 'the openness to talking to the other begins, neither with seeking to accommodate them nor with converting them but with confronting the self' entails a very concrete and, in my view, very significant educational proposal. And this is also because it acknowledges the importance of pedagogical practices that 'create space to listen to the self.' This is the opposite of the idea that any significant educational engagement with

'Gaza' would have to take the form of classrooms as sites of the exchange of opinions. That Conroy uses the word 'confrontation' chimes, in my view, with Forster's point about Elie Wiesel's mission as being that of 'teaching,' and, more importantly, of his understanding of teaching as the way to 'combat indifference.' Teaching is after all what teachers are for.

In addition to the question where education is in the contributions to this writing initiative, that is, where authors raise questions about what an educational response to 'Gaza' might look like, the question where education is in the contributions, also plays out at another 'level.' What I have in mind here are the educational 'gestures' that are 'performed' by the authors. With regard to this there are perhaps some tensions—or even contradictions—that may warrant further attention in the educational engagement with 'Gaza.' Although several authors are highly critical of Western, modern, colonial, Enlightenment and humanistic ways of thinking and doing which, for them, are closely connected to—and perhaps even a major cause of—the atrocities of 'Gaza,' I found it remarkable that the educational gestures that seem to be performed, are, in a sense, rather traditional and part of the traditions that are being opposed. There is therefore at the very least a dilemma—Can we really move forward educationally?—and perhaps even a paradox.

One educational gesture I see in several of the contributions is the strategy of Enlightenment, which relies on the assumption that better understanding (the extreme form of it would be: true understanding) will lead to better (or again in the extreme form: the right) action. I am not suggesting that this assumption is educationally meaningless. But I do think that if this is seen as a meaningful educational 'approach' then those advocating for it should be mindful that it has its roots in Enlightenment humanism. The second educational gesture I see in several of the contributions is the strategy of moralization and, in its extreme form, that of condemnation of certain attitudes, opinions, beliefs and behaviors that 'others' have. Of course, what is wrong should be called out as wrong. But as an educational strategy, just telling students that they are wrong, will do little in helping them to move on from that point—and could actually result in the opposite: resistance to perceived acts of teacherly power.

So while I do think that the contributions to this initiative raise many important issues, and do so with an entirely appropriate sense of urgency, I would like to encourage all who have contributed to this initiative—but also everyone who encounters this initiative as a reader—to make a sustained effort to get closer to the educational dilemma's and possibilities, in order to ask, perhaps, what new is being asked from education, educators and educational scholars and where and how this new might be found. While I do think, therefore, that the questions that need to be asked are educational more than that they are philosophical—and for me this is an important distinction—I found Papasthepanou's rather blunt critique of 'we, philosophers of education' rather unhelpful for the overarching ambition of this initiative. Rather than suggesting that 'we need to change our idioms' it could have been more helpful if she had given an indication of what such changed idioms might look like or, even better, acknowledge the existence of a much wider range of educational scholarship than what she seems to include in her delineation of the 'we' she is critical of.

## Open response #2: General comments on 'Gaza: We need to talk!'

Mordechai Gordon  
Quinnipiac University

My reading of this collective writing project is that although it deals with a timely and critical topic, what you collectively have provided here is a group of scholars from around the world sharing their *individual* feelings, thoughts, and analyses of the human tragedy that the Palestinians in Gaza have been undergoing primarily since 7 October 2023. So while each of the different contributions addresses the suffering inflicted on the Palestinians in Gaza by the Israeli army, there is no dialogue or conversation among the various papers included in this collective writing piece. Thus, in my view, the result is a missed educational opportunity for the readers of this project to potentially benefit from the insights that could come out of such a conversation or dialogue. Put somewhat differently, when I read this collective writing project I could feel the *pain*, *empathy* and the *outrage* of the different contributors, but I missed the engagement with each other (like the kind that happens at philosophy of education conferences) that could lead to new insights and raise thought-provoking questions.

A couple of authors raise a good question, namely, why discuss Gaza and not other conflicts around the world like the ones in Sudan Myanmar or Ukraine? However, none of those contributions adequately addresses this critical issue. In fact, one could argue that you have chosen to respond to an 'easy' target since it would have been significantly more difficult to address the conflict in Sudan for example. Perhaps one reason that scholars tend to gravitate toward the Gaza tragedy is that in that one it is easier to pick victims and perpetrators whereas in other conflicts around the globe it is not so easy.

Second, at least one author tried to suggest a parallel between what is taking place in Gaza and what the Nazis did to the Jews in Auschwitz in the 1930s and 40's. Yet, that parallel has not been adequately substantiated. More specifically, what are the common elements and what are the differences? If we are going to mention an event from the past that supposedly resembles what is happening today in another part of the world, then we need to be historically accurate.

Finally, only a couple of authors mention Hamas in passing in their analysis of the plight of the Palestinian people in Gaza. This is really problematic since it leads one to wonder if the authors are aware of the fact that we are talking about a terrorist group that has been in power in Gaza since 2006 and has oppressed its own people while being especially cruel to minority groups like homosexuals. Coincidentally, just last week there was a fairly large protest of Palestinians in Gaza against Hamas. Following this protest, several of the protestors were killed by Hamas militants while others were tortured and kidnapped. In short, the authors of this project have chosen to ignore the role of Hamas in this conflict.

### Disclaimers

The views expressed in this shared article are not necessarily shared by all the authors, in fact, it contains significant disagreement.

Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, the Philosophy of Education Society of Australasia, or Taylor & Francis.













## Notes

1. This is not to suggest that Britain (England) acted always in good faith with respect to Ireland, any more than it did so with respect to the post. In both instances, civil servants sat in offices in Whitehall.
2. Geneva Academy- Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights <https://geneva-academy.ch/galleries/today-s-armed-conflicts>
3. Amnesty International: *You Feel Like You Are Subhuman': Israel's Genocide Against Palestinians in Gaza* <https://www.amnesty.org.au/end-israels-genocide/>.
4. The Genocide Education Project.
5. This resolution was opposed by the majority of Jewish leaders in Australia: <https://www.abc.net.au/listen/programs/radionational-breakfast/australia-reversal-israel/104686672> and Executive Council of Australian Jewry – [www.ecaj.org.au](http://www.ecaj.org.au)
6. "Victorian Government warns school teachers against 'inflammatory' pro-Palestinian advocacy" which was endorsed by the Australian Education Union's Victorian branch - <https://www.theage.com.au/national/nsw/sydney-student-banned-from-year-12-for-mal-for-wearing-palestinian-scarf-20241122-p5ksrq.html> and the NSW Education Minister also slammed NSW teacher activism: <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/nsw/not-a-place-for-political-activism-education-minister-slams-teachers-for-pro-palestinian-activism-20231130-p5eo1j.html> whilst the NSW Teachers' Federation made a statement about the NSW Education Minister's lack of leadership to condemn Israel: <https://www.nswtf.org.au/news/2023/10/17/nsw-teachers-federation-executive-statement-on-middle-east-conflict/>. Advice on trigger avoidance sourced from STARTTS, NSW Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors (2023) 'Briefing Sheet for Educators in NSW: Supporting students impacted by the violence in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories.' Published 26 October, 2023 <https://www.hintsforhealing.startts.org.au/supporting-students-impacted-by-the-violence-in-israel-and-the-opt/>.
7. Fanon referred to the Black body. I have added Brown.

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## ORCID

Nuraan Davids  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-7588-5814>  
 Ronald Barnett  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6850-7639>  
 Thaddeus Metz  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-9861-2408>  
 Suriamurthee Maistry  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-9623-0078>  
 Janet Orchard  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-5537-7193>  
 Marianna Papastephanou  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-7304-9249>  
 Nelson Maldonado-Torres  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-7738-7029>  
 James Conroy  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-9311-8056>  
 Daniela J. Forster  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-5766-4153>  
 Lesley le Grange  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-7096-3609>  
 Gert Biesta  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-8530-7105>  
 Mordechai Gordon  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-6842-9071>

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