

Article

# Against Exceptionalism

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**Abstract:** In this article, I question the logic informing paradigms of trauma that ontologize and essentialize events, such as the Holocaust and chattel slavery, making them unique, incomparable exceptions that encapsulate or inaugurate the violence of Western modernity, while standing outside and above the order they found. In an effort to avoid the urge to rank that follows almost effortlessly from such ontologization, I mobilize the appeal to the universal undergirding the works of Slavoj Žižek and that of Frantz Fanon. Both Fanon and Žižek read racial trauma and racist violence in light of the eviscerating ontological effects of an imperialist capitalism that divides the world and segregates its peoples. Rather than opting for identity politics, however, these thinkers argue against ontologizing and exceptionalizing victims, in favor of elaborating a politics based on their concrete universality.

**Keywords:** Shoah; Maafa; Nakba; trauma; libidinal economy; Palestine; Israel; anti-colonial reason; humanitarian reason

## 1. Introduction

The rhetoric of exceptionalism pervades our cultural imaginary. Exceptionalism is at work whenever an entity (an individual, an idea) is marked as unusually different. This marking itself is in a sense value neutral. But the exceptional has, in some fields, come to occupy a privileged epistemic and moral position. The field of trauma studies is a case in point. Exceptionalism, here, is linked to questions of suffering and our ability to respond ethically and politically to it. Exceptionalism, as it is wielded, can be said to be paradigm shaping. For many anti-racist scholars and activists, the Holocaust, or Shoah, the Hebrew word for “catastrophe”, has functioned this way. The Shoah comes to serve as “the” model for understanding trauma and human suffering, even as it stands outside and above the other examples that it helps explicate. And yet, this paradigm’s universal appeal has been contested, or better yet, provincialized, in recent years. Afropessimist Frank Wilderson directly challenges the perceived authority of the Shoah, turning instead to the Maafa, a Swahili term meaning “great disaster”, “calamity”, or “terrible occurrence”. Reacting against the paradigm of the Shoah, Wilderson proceeds to prioritize anti-Blackness in his genealogy of trauma. In doing so, Wilderson leans for support on Frantz Fanon, who, in a passage in *Black Skin, White Masks*, relativizes the Holocaust through a passing comparison with the Middle Passage: “[Jews] have been hunted, exterminated, and cremated, but these are just minor episodes in the family history. The Jew is not liked as soon as he has been detected. But with me things take on a *new* face. I’m not given a second chance. I am overdetermined from the outside. I am a slave not to the ‘idea’ others have of me, but to my appearance” (Fanon p. 95). Unlike the Shoah, which is presented as a “family drama” among humans, the Maafa involves a metaphysical cut in the human; the “new face” is a faceless face. For the Afropessimist, chattel slavery surpasses all other catastrophes insofar as its devastation of Africans is irreducible to a historical event. Africans lose their historical attributes as they are de-worlded by their capture, and so the Maafa’s ramifications are ontological, through and through.

In this article, I question the logic informing paradigms of trauma that ontologize and essentialize events, such as the Shoah and the Maafa, making them unique, incomparable



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exceptions that encapsulate or inaugurate the violence of Western modernity, while standing outside and above the order they found. Such paradigms are prone to identity politics and block multidirectional, comparative approaches to history; moreover, they invalidate the solidarity movements required to dismantle the racial colonialist and capitalist structures that continue to destroy lives today. Models of the Shoah and Maafa that ontologize anti-Semitism and anti-Blackness work against one another by de-historicizing these differing forms of violence, transforming them into quasi-eternal foundations that shape political possibilities. Thus ontologized, the Shoah becomes an ever-present danger, whose potential reoccurrence must be given priority over other political concerns and claims. Reading politics through this lens drives organizations like the Anti-Defamation League, for example, to equate all criticism of political Zionism or the state of Israel with a dangerous anti-Semitism. Likewise, Afropessimist critics, who take enslavement to be a singular ontological holocaust like no other, often condemn the impulse to compare anti-Blackness to other forms of violence, ruling out, in turn, the possibility of cross-racial solidarities based on a shared condition of exclusion. In an effort to avoid the urge to rank that follows almost effortlessly from such ontologization, with competing charges of “relativizing” when critics dare to compare and contextualize, I mobilize the appeal to the universal undergirding the labor of Slavoj Žižek and that of Fanon. Unlike partisans invested in the exceptionality of the Shoah or the Maafa, Fanon and Žižek have no truck with the substantialization–reification of suffering, which locks injured bodies into their victimhood. In their anti-racist politics, they fiercely write against “the taboo of comparison” (Rothberg and Zimmerer 2021), opting to de-ontologize the “pure” victim: there are no timeless victims, no victims to fetishize or shield from comparison (Moses 2021). We might say that their hermeneutico-political motto is to de-exceptionalize, and to multiply examples of empty or substanceless universals.

Both Fanon and Žižek read racial trauma and racist violence in light of the eviscerating ontological effects of an imperialist capitalism that divides the world and segregates its people. The colonized and internally colonized, or those racialized as disposable, worthless, or unemployable, in other words, the world’s surplus humanity, cannot and should not, for Fanon and Žižek, be made exceptional, for to do so is to reduce them to their static being, rather than attending instead to the necropolitical processes geared toward these beings’ ontological undoing. I argue that we should examine this difference between an abject body and the processes invested in the body’s destruction through Fanon’s notion of the “zone of nonbeing” (Fanon 2008, p. xii). Anybody, in principle, can be relegated to this zone of ontological deprivation, but some are more vulnerable to this violence than others. For those who are rendered wretched, the zone of nonbeing takes on a quasi-ontological permanence, denying the subject the ability to redefine itself (to be opened up by this destitution of the social ego), to emerge as a new kind of subject. Rather than fixing or essentializing the being of the victimized or enslaved (as a precondition for their elevation or exceptionalization), however, attending carefully to the zone of nonbeing invites comparison, and compels us to ask, what are the collective and historical necropolitical conditions that pushed, and continue to push, targeted bodies into the zone of nonbeing (the realm of nonhumanity/not-quite-humanity)? How do these conditions systematically strip them of their symbolic veneer and imaginary familiarity? How does the entry of one group into the zone of nonbeing converge and diverge with that of another? And, what possibilities for shared action emerge when we adopt this framework?

## 2. The Shoah and Israel

Zionists committed to the establishment and maintenance of a Jewish nation-state in the land of Palestine, whether for religious or political reasons, have been deeply invested in tying Israel’s future to the Shoah, particularly in recent decades. For many partisans of the state, if Israel is eclipsed, so too will be the hard-fought lessons of the Holocaust. If Palestinian suffering displaces Jewish suffering (in its capacity to mobilize global attention and support), what happens to the status of the Shoah as unprecedented

and precedent-setting? If the Israeli state loses credibility, will it not energize Holocaust deniers and facilitate the circulation of their appalling and perverse narratives? Israel's loss of support among younger American Jews and among the broader public in the Global North (as witnessed in the growing protests against Israel's military actions in Gaza, following the attacks on 7 October 2023) produces anxiety among Zionists. As a response to intensified critiques of Israeli state violence among the anti-racist, pro-Palestinian Left, partisans of the state have doubled down on the ideological link between Israel and the Shoah, arguing that such critiques are tantamount to anti-Semitism, or even genocidal intent. Calling a person, a group, or a university anti-Semitic is often devastating, expelling the accused from the realm of the credible, while exposing them to potential economic and physical harm. Such charges often harness the force of "cancel culture", bypassing the labor of critique and dialogue in favor of asserting Zionism as an identity in need of protection from harm, rather than a political position open to scrutiny and debate. As Judith Butler pointedly observes, staunch defenders of Israel "cheapen, inflate, and instrumentalize" (Butler 2023) the charge of anti-Semitism for expedient political benefits.

Evocations of the Shoah frequently function to shield Israel from legitimate scrutiny. Because it is so historically loaded, the charge of anti-Semitism casts critique as murderous, and distracts from the Israeli state's dispossession and displacement of Indigenous Palestinians and its well-documented apartheid practices (Amnesty International 2022; Human Rights Watch 2021; B'Tselem 2021). In times of crisis, the cry of "Never Again", mediated by an ultra-nationalist Zionist governing coalition in Israel, by European governments cautious about repeating the fascist crimes of the past, and also by Christian Zionists in the US spanning the ideological spectrum, from President Biden, who embraces both Zionism and democratic liberalism, to Evangelical messianists, to far-right, xenophobic, white Christian nationalists, resonates with a range of Western publics, who hear in this call a dire warning of threat to the differing world orders in which they are invested. Contributing to this horizon is the fact that anti-Semitism in the West, spurred by the political gains and normalization of white supremacy and xenophobia, is very real, very dangerous, and rising, from verbal abuse to vandalism to physical attacks. Yet, responses to such current events, which are read through the lens of the Shoah, frequently conflate Zionism with Jewishness. This can be seen most visibly in Germany, where debates over Holocaust historiography have been particularly contentious. Historian Dirk Moses compares attitudes toward the Shoah to a civil religion, observing that "we are witnessing... nothing less than a public exorcism performed by the self-appointed high priests of the *Katechismus der Deutschen*" (Moses 2021). He adds that this German "catechism" is made up of the following five elements:

1. The Holocaust is unique because it was the unlimited *Vernichtung der Juden um der Vernichtung willen* (exterminating the Jews for the sake of extermination itself), distinguished from the limited and pragmatic aims of other genocides. It is the first time in history that a state had set out to destroy a people solely on ideological grounds.
2. It was, thus, a *Zivilisationsbruch* (civilizational rupture) and the moral foundation of the nation.
3. Germany has a special responsibility to Jews in Germany, and a special loyalty to Israel: "*Die Sicherheit Israels ist Teil der Staatsraison unseres Landes*" (Israel's security is part of Germany's reason of state).
4. Anti-Semitism is a distinct prejudice, and was a distinctly German one. It should not be confused with racism.
5. Antizionism is anti-Semitism (Moses 2021).

This catechism promotes a redemptive story for Germany; namely the sacrifice of Jews in the Holocaust by the Nazis plays an intrinsic role in securing Germany's "geopolitical legitimacy" (Moses 2007, 2021). The Shoah is more than an "important historical event"; it functions as a "sacred trauma", a founding trauma of sorts, making the suffering of Jews constitutive of German identity and, thus, incredibly difficult to shake or overcome (Moses 2021).

All of the elements of this German catechism are at work in a statement released by Nicole Deitelhoff, Rainer Forst, Klaus Günther, and Jürgen Habermas, representing the German intelligentsia with stated ties to the Frankfurt tradition of critical theory, who purport to correct the hermeneutico-political scene through an appeal to philosophical reason (Deitelhoff et al. 2023). In response to charges that Israel is committing “genocide” (Segal 2023; Bartov 2023) in its campaign in the Gaza Strip, the authors begin by authoritatively outlining “some principles that should not be disputed” (Deitelhoff et al. 2023), principles that form “the basis of a rightly understood solidarity with Israel and Jews in Germany” (Deitelhoff et al. 2023). The letter expresses concern for the Gazan population, noting that “principles of proportionality, the prevention of civilian casualties and the waging of a war with the prospect of future peace must be the guiding principles” informing Israeli actions (Ibid. 2023). But the authors then go on to uphold a curious contradiction, in which Jewish life is deemed both separate, yet indistinguishable, from Israeli statehood. “Israel’s actions”, they write, “in no way justify anti-Semitic reactions, especially not in Germany. It is intolerable that Jews in Germany are once again exposed to threats to life and limb and have to fear physical violence on the streets” (Ibid. 2023); German Jews, in other words, should not be conflated with the state of Israel. At the same time, the authors assert, “the democratic ethos of the Federal Republic of Germany, which is orientated towards the obligation to respect human dignity, is linked to a political culture for which Jewish life and Israel’s right to exist are central elements worthy of special protection in light of the mass crimes of the Nazi era” (Ibid. 2023). Israel’s right to exist flows from the crime of the Shoah, by this logic, and is worthy of the same protections as Jewish life more generally; indeed, the state itself is endowed with rights akin to those of an individual. Once established as indisputable, this principle blocks any analysis that questions Israel’s right to exist in the form of an exclusionary ethno-state.

Objections to the catechism unleash ire. Achille Mbembe has been accused of “relativizing” the Shoah and of being anti-Israel because he, like anti-colonial thinkers Fanon and Aimé Césaire before him, turns to European colonialism and racial slavery to reframe human suffering from a non-European perspective.<sup>1</sup> In doing so, Mbembe highlights how settler colonialism is defined by its necropolitical project. Necropolitics in the colony seeks “*the generalized instrumentalization of human existence and the material destruction of human bodies and populations*” (Mbembe 2019, p. 68). And Mbembe considers the Israeli occupation of Palestine “the most accomplished form of necropower” (Mbembe 2019, p. 80). The settler state does not manage death for the sake of life; rather, settler sovereignty is constitutively necropolitical, subjecting Palestinian life to “the power of death” (Mbembe 2019, p. 92). Mbembe’s commitment to Palestine, to bringing attention to the Palestinian people transgresses the catechism.<sup>2</sup> As an anonymous author (who sought to hide their identity due to fear of a backlash) put it, “those who are critical of Israel’s treatment of Palestinians [like Mbembe] are portrayed as antisemitic and unfit for public debate. Their ‘civil death’ is thereby declared, allowing for ‘character assassination,’ with the deliberate and sustained effort to damage the reputation or credibility of an individual and with the aim to erase the debate about structural, colonial violence” (Anonymous 2021, p. 376).

German memory politics cannot accommodate Palestinian concerns. It casts any political resistance to Israeli occupation as, by definition, illegitimate violence akin to the harm or murder of an individual. The Israeli state’s right to exist is taken as the starting point or precondition for analysis; the state’s actions, including its mass bombardment of Gaza, are read as purely defensive reactions to anti-colonial resistance that, in turn, can only be read as genocidal. According to this hermeneutics, either you stand with Israel and Jewish life, or you stand with Hamas and the extermination of the Jewish people. The global outbursts of Palestinian support in response to the blatantly unjust and illegal actions of the Israeli state in the wake of 7 October can only be interpreted through this lens as “hate marches”, as indeed British home secretary Suella Braverman described them (Syal et al. 2023). Israel’s foreign minister, Eli Cohen, has gone so far as to align the United Nations leadership itself with Hamas, stating that his government “will stop working with those who cooperate with the propaganda of the terrorist organization Hamas” (Primack 2023).

The protection of Jewish life, of a life that has been subjected to historical and ongoing racism, must be unquestionably affirmed, but the protection of a racist settler state should not. No state should be granted such a right, particularly a racist state. On the contrary, Germany and all other Western nations must reckon with their own historical and ongoing complicity with both anti-Semitism and Israel's racist campaign against Palestinians.<sup>3</sup> When Deitelhoff, Forst, Günther, and Habermas argue that "the elementary rights to freedom and physical integrity as well as to protection from racist defamation are indivisible and apply equally to all" (Deitelhoff et al. 2023), we should, I argue, understand "equally to all" to include Palestinians and their supporters, as well.

Critiques of the eliminatory logic of Israeli settler colonialism have, time and time again, been rebuffed by allegations that they are "relativizing" the Holocaust, as if attention to the genocide of Palestinians (speaking, writing, and marching against Israel's genocidal war on Gaza) can only come at the expense of Jews, as if recognition that Palestinian lives matter (that civilian lives are legally protected by international law and that collective punishment is legally and ethically prohibited by any system bound by universalist principles) must invalidate the lives of Jews (Gessen 2023; Rothberg 2022). What Zionists, fearful of the global examples of solidarity movements with Palestine, see in them is tragically and ironically a projection of their own logic onto Palestinians and those who actively stand with them. For this muscular Zionism, the mattering of Jewish life, the public and psychological "wage" of Jewishness, as we might call it, to adopt and adapt Du Bois's (1998, pp. 700–1) formulation, is predicated on the un-mattering of Palestinian lives. For Jewish lives to count, Palestinian lives must not. For Jewish lives to be mourned, Palestinian lives must not be. The "derealization" of their killing, as Butler puts it, contributes to the systematic undoing of a framework that would enable us to read or label Palestinian civilian deaths as Palestinian human deaths (Butler 2023). Zionist ideology Orientalizes and rewrites the being of Palestinians, turning them into bloodthirsty terrorists.

A liberal counter to Zionist discourse might be to humanize Palestinians, to reverse the settler's logic of dehumanization, and see Palestinians as victims and Israelis as victimizers. To be sure, there are concrete and pragmatic benefits to this approach: people who are moved by Palestinian suffering can take up the cause of Palestinian liberation or, at least, march for a cease fire. Empathy can play a generative role in the Palestinian struggle, in that it helps proponents of a cause meet people where they are. It can paint the Palestinians in this case as oppressed and cast the IDF as their oppressors. As outsiders have been confronted with images of civilian death in Gaza, particularly deaths of women and children, Palestinians have begun to be perceived by some as "the victims of the victims", as Said puts it in *The Question of Palestine* (Said 1979, p. xxi). And to be clear, this has been a positive change in that it has become possible for a growing number of Westerners to view Palestinians as capable of being wronged, as suffering an injustice at the hands of Israel (in contrast to blaming Palestinians for their own misery). But here too, we run into an impasse. Victimhood is a pharmakon that should give us pause. It helps Palestinians by giving them recognition, but it harms them by reifying them, reducing them to a state of abjection. Western support is, more often than not, conditional on perceiving Palestinians as abject creatures. Liberal humanitarian reason imposes an interpretive framework, an identificatory field, guiding outrage at Israel's massacre of Palestinians in particular ways. Palestinians literally live or die based on the success or failure of empathic identification. But as Saidiya Hartman has shown in *Scenes of Subjection*, empathic identification brings humanization at a cost, namely the evacuation of the other's alterity ("it's as though in order to come to any recognition of common humanity, the other must be assimilated, ... utterly displaced and effaced" (Hartman and Wilderson 2003, p. 189; Hartman 1997)). Why is it that most people can stand with Palestinians only when they are dead or dying? The pathos of suffering is powerful. And yet, that same pathos can also foreclose other possibilities. An anti-racist Left cannot rely on the powers or whims of empathy. It must break with the prevailing ideological coordinates secured by liberalism's humanitarian reason. Such a reason is interested in the management of global politics, not in its radical transformation.

By means of a contrast with another ongoing war, the war in Ukraine, we can observe that Westerners readily empathize with the suffering of Ukrainian civilians, while simultaneously, without tension or contradiction, embracing their armed struggle for liberation. In the West, we seem to have no trouble viewing Ukrainians as victims *and* freedom fighters struggling against an imperialist Russia. What prevents an analogous approach to the Palestinian struggle? Many factors undoubtedly play a role, but the one that I would like to emphasize here is the settler colonial context and its occlusion in public debates. This framing of the antagonism is still foreign to Western liberal discourse, which tends to interpret what is happening in Palestine/Israel as a fundamentally deracialized, unbalanced “conflict” among two parties over territory, with Israel perhaps using more force than needed to protect itself and secure its borders. Liberals in the US, in particular (where elected officials and Cabinet secretaries routinely reference a two-state solution), still believe in a moderate Israel, an Israel minus its ethno-nationalist fascists, that is, an Israel without Netanyahu, Ben-Gvir, and Smotrich. A return to the Israeli status quo, however, is *not* a return to a democratic Israel. From its creation, Israeli leaders, regardless of their party, have never wanted to make “just peace” with the Palestinians (Levy 2014; Goodman 2014; see also Hass 2013; Halper 2018; Butler 2011).

On the failure of the peace process and the two-state solution, Edward Said lamented that Israel “conceded nothing” other than recognizing the PLO as the representative of the Palestinian people. Liberal Zionists, that is, Zionists who believe the state of Israel can be both Jewish and democratic and can exist peacefully alongside its Palestinian neighbors, welcomed the skewed terms of the Oslo Accords. Said singles out Amos Oz, “the Israeli ‘dove’ [who] reportedly put it in the course of a BBC interview, ‘this is the second biggest victory in the history of Zionism’” (Said 1993). It is not a matter of quarreling over who secured a better deal for their people, but rather that there is something unsettling in seeing the Oslo Accords as the biggest victory for Zionism second only, presumably, to the creation of Israel itself. Zionism, from the standpoint of its victims, as Said reminds us, aligns victory with land expropriation and ethnic cleansing. Said in many ways was prescient. Thirty years after the Oslo Accords, illegal settlements have multiplied, Gaza is in ruins, and settler violence against Palestinians in the West Bank is at an all-time high. This critical assessment of the peace process is the bitter pill that liberal Zionists and liberals, more generally, have a hard time swallowing. The problem with Israel does not simply lie with its prime ministers, but with the settler colonialism that is constitutive of its national identity. Identifying the Palestinian cause with the struggle against settler-colonial logic signals a shift by putting front and center the struggle for liberation, which itself is tied to sovereignty over land.

While liberals psychically resist and postpone reckoning with their libidinal economy, in which Brown or Arab bodies plus violence unconsciously equals terrorism and produces anxiety in any context, recasting Palestinians as freedom fighters helps recenter the settler colonial situation. It troubles the Orientalist answer (an approach imported by Zionists fleeing, yet shaped by European norms, and still prevalent throughout Israel and the West today), which lays the blame on the being of Palestinians, on their inherent savagery and hate. The liberal attachment to humanitarian reason enables *some* distance from this tenacious and deeply ingrained Zionist framework, which contributes to the unpopularity of the War on Gaza, but it can only go so far in its adjustment of the Palestinian image and, thus, falls short in confronting the colonial situation. Anti-colonial reason returns us to the Palestinian cause and a Zionist libidinal economy that does its best to invisibilize the cause, or castigate it as anti-Semitic, in the echo chamber of the West’s political imaginary.

### 3. An Anti-Zionist Hermeneutic and the Settler Colonial Situation

An anti-racist critique must emerge through an “anti-Zionist hermeneutic” (Puar 2017, p. 153), in which an anti-colonial reason is operative. Rather than casting Palestinians exclusively as victims, such a hermeneutic foregrounds the settler colonial context in its interpretation of Israel’s war and racism. When we see Israeli cabinet members talk about

the state's right to self-defense and how their war campaign conforms to international law, we must adopt a skeptical attitude and recognize these leaders as settlers who are doing what all modern-day imperialist settler states do, deny their (ongoing) crimes, namely the elimination of the Indigenous population and the dispossession of their land, under cover of democratic and humanitarian norms. There is a crushing continuity between the Palestinian dispossession in 1948 and Israel's 2023–2024 genocidal war in Gaza and the ongoing ethnic cleansing taking place in the occupied West Bank. Yet Israeli defense minister Yoav Gallant, standing next to his American counterpart Lloyd Austin at a news conference, can express that "unlike our enemies, we are defending our values and we operate according to international law" (U.S. Department of Defense 2023).<sup>4</sup> Really? Has Israel not accumulated a long list of documented war crimes and crimes against humanity, including, as follows:

- The indiscriminate and disproportionate bombing of the Gaza Strip;
- The targeting of schools, hospitals, and places of worship;
- The targeting of journalists;
- The starvation of Gazans;
- The weaponization of water;
- The prevention of medical care;
- The forced displacement of nearly two million Palestinians;
- The destruction of civilian housing and infrastructure;
- The use of white phosphorus bombs on civilians;
- The making of Gaza uninhabitable;
- The complete siege of Gaza, which constitutes an instance of collective punishment clearly forbidden under international law.

Mainstream print and television media in the US, having already given a pass to Israel's state terror and manufactured consent for the genocide, tend to rehearse Israeli government talking points, often citing evidence produced by the IDF without sufficiently questioning its provenance or reliability (Khader 2023; Grim 2024; Scahill 2024). Time and time again, mainstream journalists betray their mission to hold those in power accountable. There is certainly no *J'accuse* emerging from this camp, though independent outlets have taken up this charge. When journalists fail to dispute the veracity of Gallant's claims, they end up amplifying misleading claims, and sometimes outright lies, coming from Israeli and US state authorities. Here, we might revisit Gallant's words, and ask exactly what is meant by "our" values. An anti-Zionist hermeneutic exposes that these values are indeed our Western values, namely the racist values of Western imperialism, of the sovereign settler, of the brutal and sadistic colonizer, who regards and treats the Native as a "human animal", an irritant, a subhuman, requiring containment by whatever means necessary, even ethnic cleansing and genocide, either in slow (West Bank) or accelerated (Gaza) mode.

The US is complicit in more than the historical, discursive underpinnings of Israeli state violence; the Gaza War is, as Jeremy Scahill argues, a "joint U.S.–Israeli operation" (Scahill 2023). Yet, both powers must give the *appearance* that Israel is a liberal democratic state, waging a war for its survival. Gallant must perform Israel's democratic *pose* and claim that it is abiding by international law, that it will do its best to minimize Palestinian fatalities, but "we [Austin and Gallant] both know the complexities of war. We both fought brutal terror organizations, we know that it takes time" (meaning that we will play along and say that we are not going after civilian targets, shooting journalists, and bombing hospitals, but, of course, we will continue to do so). This is an orchestrated dance: the US publicly reminds Israel to look out for the welfare of Palestinian civilians, to limit the collateral damage, while greenlighting and feeding Israel's operation. The Biden administration expresses its disappointment at the number of Palestinian deaths (describing it as "over the top" (Baker 2024)), but it does not take any action to stop Israel's scorched-earth mission. Rather than immediately halting any military support, let alone sanctioning the occupying force for its criminal acts, the US has actually sped up its provision of arms to Israel, circumventing normal congressional approval (Berger 2023).

So, when Palestinian deaths happen, Israel and the US return to a well-trodden playbook, which lays the blame firmly on Hamas, either for infecting or radicalizing all Gazans with their hateful ideology (the “there are no innocent civilians in Gaza” justification), or for its irresponsible treatment of its own people as human shields, immunizing, in turn, the IDF, the self-proclaimed exception that sets the standard, as the “most moral army in the world”, protecting the state, as much as it can, from any moral or legal responsibility. Accusations of Israeli war crimes and crimes against humanity are aggressively countered on two distinct, but interrelated, levels. First, Israeli officials would have us believe that the state is acting as any Western liberal state would, it is merely defending its borders from the non-European barbarians in Gaza. Israel flexes its sovereignty through its overwhelming use of military force. It acknowledges that it is disproportionate, but it rhetorically asks, what else do you expect when your Indigenous foe is a “human animal” (Speri 2023)? Pronounced at the height of global sympathies for Israel after the October 7th attack, the label of “human animal”, wielded to demonize the Palestinian enemy, is losing its rhetorical force in the face of extreme carnage in Gaza. This is where the turn to abstraction appears, announcing the second line of argumentation. If you are uncomfortable with or critical of Israel’s official position (that “human animals” can only be met with annihilation), then you are complicit with terrorist actions that harm Jewish lives, or worse, you condone such violence. You must answer/confess (your failure to protect Jewish lives): Do you condemn Hamas? Do you condemn the genocidal chants “Free, Free Palestine”, “Intifada”, and “From the River to Sea: Palestine will be Free”? Any hesitation, any attempt to question the terms of the question (*Are you asking me to condemn the killing of civilians, armed resistance, or resistance as such? Are you asking me to give up on Palestinian unity and equality and accept indefinite Palestinian subjugation?*) invites scrutiny and further speech surveillance, opening yourself (or your group) to the world-canceling charge of anti-Semitism.

Israeli state propaganda (or hasbara) appeals to Western desires and worries. On one hand, Israel asserts its phantasmatic sovereignty, typically experienced as state violence when nothing is really happening, the default mode of the Occupation. Under conditions of war, Israeli sovereignty is enacted in the Dahiya Doctrine, a disproportionate use of force, making collective punishment a feature rather than a bug of the military campaign (Khalidi 2014). Western leaders are not immune to the appeal that the unrestrained exercise of sovereign power holds, reminiscent as it is of older colonial days where *might made right*. On the other hand, Zionists exceptionalize the Shoah to foreground Jewish vulnerability, upholding the figure of the Jew as the timeless Victim, the object of eternal hate (of which Hamas and the pro-Palestinian Left are only the most recent examples), in the Western cultural imaginary. Hamas fighters are transformed into Nazis (their hatred is naturalized, removed from the historical and contingent situation of the Occupation). Embracing non-violent resistance via actions such as the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement, or the 2018 Great March of Return, does not shield Israel’s critics from retaliation. Even Jews and Jewish organizations (such as Jewish Voice for Peace and IfNotNow) protesting against the Occupation and the military campaign in Gaza have been labeled anti-Semitic and accused of being traitors (Jarmakani 2023; Lorber 2023; Barghouti 2017; Zirin 2023; Lerman 2009). Any opposition to Israel’s colonial violence can, in principle, transform you into a “new Nazi”.

Omer Bartov offers some explanation for this impulse to overread the Holocaust in everything pertaining to Israeli security. Describing the ways in which his generation, those who were born after the Shoah, lived with the imminent threat of another catastrophe, Bartov writes:

for many of my generation there was something embarrassing, even detestable about the entire thing: those terrifying figures with the numbers tattooed on their forearms, those vacant gazes of broken men and women on the bus, those endless, solemn commemorations in the sun-drenched school yard, those vacuous speeches by politicians and the never-ending bluster about never again going like sheep to the slaughter, and our own mute and inarticulate terror that any moment

a horde of Nazis could suddenly show up on our street and kill everyone as they did then. (Bartov 2023, p. 164)

Hamas's attack was brutal and, no doubt, has been viscerally experienced as akin to a Nazi attack. But transforming this description of experience into an ahistorical claim of identity, that Hamas *are* Nazis, mystifies the situation. It transforms all who stand between Israel and the elimination of Palestinians into anti-Semites. Bartov warns against such a misuse of Holocaust memory to legitimize a horrific campaign (Bartov et al. 2023). "Never again, now" as a categorical imperative is infinitely more expansive; it makes a universalist plea for the Global North to reckon with its colonial history and support of Israel's domination of the Indigenous Palestinian population. It is an injunction against the reduction of *any* living beings to bare life, to horizonless futures. One can acknowledge that Hamas's attack understandably triggered for many Israeli Jews and Jews in the diaspora unbearable memories of the Shoah *and*, at the same time, denounce the Israeli government's exploitation of this suffering to realize their expansionist plans.

An anti-Zionist hermeneutic historicizes and contextualizes Palestinian rage, prompting us to ask whether the problem is not 7 October, but the relentless dispossession and murder of Palestinians, which began 75 years ago in 1948. It sheds light on Israel's imperialist desires and ultimate colonial plan, namely the eradication of the Indigenous Palestinians. An anti-Zionist hermeneutic pays serious attention to Gallant's "human animals" charge, questioning the impulse to see in it a mere rhetorical flourish, or simply an expression of Israel's desire for vengeance after Hamas's attack. This animalizing characterization goes beyond that, and speaks to a certain ontologization of Palestinians, authorized by a Zionist settler colonial reality, where a human matrix racializes and expels the Indigenous Palestinian from the privileges of the human, namely the type of being who enjoys her human rights, who is (and is expected to be) afforded care and grievability. Or to put it more pointedly, Palestinians are not simply dehumanized and expelled from the human(ist) paradigm; in the Zionist settler's Eurocentric "overrepresentation" (Wynter 2003) of the Human, the Palestinian functions as the Israeli Jew's constitutive outside, the "human animal", the Orientalized savage, the pure object, the immobile exterior against which it defines itself. Settler Orientalism, here, is both an epistemicide and ontocide; it is an ontological machine that discursively defines the Palestinian in order to dominate her being. With this ontological crime, which underpins the physical violence endlessly visited on the Indigenous population, the Palestinian becomes utterly emptied of agency and subjectivity. Israel's terrifying answer to the Palestinian question is elimination from the river to the sea, by whatever means necessary. An anti-Zionist hermeneutic rejects wholesale the Western/Zionist framework and proceeds to translate otherwise; it constantly and stubbornly returns us to the Occupation and the settler colonial context.

#### 4. Sovereignty and/as Anti-Blackness

What exactly follows from such an anti-racist orientation? How does anti-Zionist critique invite or compel us to imagine Palestinian futures? Is the ultimate end of the anti-racist Indigenous struggle (the recognition of) Palestinian sovereignty in a future state? Does Palestinian sovereignty guarantee Palestinian humanity? If so, what are the implications? In seeking their self-determination, are Palestinians unwittingly subscribing to a murderous ontology, whose history is constitutively marked by anti-Blackness? Answering these last questions necessitates an encounter with Afropessimism and its challenges.

Afropessimism is a critical wing within Black Studies that has cast light on global anti-racist discourses that ground themselves in or plead for the recognition of the excluded, of her humanity and sovereignty. Why? Because the appeal to humanity and sovereignty feeds an anti-Black world. To be sovereign is an aspiration of all *human* beings. To be fully human is to be sovereign, to be in possession of oneself. To be human is *not* to be a slave, the paradigmatic example of the nonhuman, the unsovereign.

Frank Wilderson enters the scene by challenging the paradigmatic status of the Shoah, which conditions Western reason. As we have seen, the shadow of the Shoah overdetermines the defense of the state of Israel, absolving its leaders of genocidal intent, as if the suffering of European Jewry, culminating in the redemptive state of Israel, guarantees their moral integrity. Wilderson insists that the Shoah and the Maafa are two incomparable traumas, stating starkly: “Jews went into Auschwitz and came out as Jews, Africans went into the ships and came out as Blacks. The former is a Human holocaust; the latter is a Human *and* a metaphysical holocaust. That is why it makes little sense to attempt analogy: the Jews have the Dead (the *Muselmann*) among them; the Dead have the Blacks among them” (Wilderson 2010, p. 38). The parallel drawn here is striking. If the *Muselmann* (who stands for bare life, the real or unfathomable neighbor, life under conditions of systemic destruction, as in Auschwitz) exceeds the category of the Jews in its abjection and persecution, Blacks exceed the category of the dead in their zero level of being. They are not only symbolically dead, their nonhumanity is paradoxically beyond death’s purview and register.

“Chattel slavery, as a condition of ontology and not just as an event of experience, stuck to the African like Velcro”, adds Wilderson (2010, p. 18). He does not stop here. In one of his paradigmatic scenes of the ontological difference between anti-Blackness and Indigenous suffering, which completely neglects the wage of Jewishness, the Zionist settler colonial context, Wilderson recalls his Palestinian friend’s story about his encounter with an Ethiopian IDF soldier. His friend had just lost his cousin during the First Intifada. Standing in solidarity with the Palestinian cause, Wilderson listens to his friend’s process of working through his grief:

At one point Sameer spoke of being stopped and searched at Israeli checkpoints. He spoke in a manner that seemed not to require my presence. I hadn’t seen this level of concentration and detachment in him before. That was fine. He was grieving.

“The shameful and humiliating way the soldiers run their hands up and down your body”, he said. Then he added, “But the shame and humiliation runs even deeper if the Israeli soldier is an Ethiopian Jew”. The earth gave way. The thought that my place in the unconscious of Palestinians fighting for their freedom was the same *dishonorable* place I occupied in the minds of Whites in America and Israel chilled me. I gathered enough wits about me to tell him that his feelings were odd, seeing how Palestinians were at war with Israelis, and White Israelis at that. How was it that the people who stole his land and slaughtered his relatives were somehow *less* of a threat in his imagination than Black Jews, often implements of Israeli madness, who sometimes do their dirty work? What, I wondered silently, was it about Black people (about *me*) that made us so fungible we could be tossed like a salad in the minds of oppressors and the oppressed? (Wilderson 2020, p. 11)

Wilderson responds to his Palestinian friend’s anti-Blackness in a strikingly myopic fashion. Though he rightly exposes a latent anti-Blackness in the Palestinian collective unconsciousness, confirming Afropessimism’s insistence on the global status of anti-Blackness, Wilderson fails to register the full impact of the settler colonial context, namely how the wage of Jewishness breeds contempt for Palestinians. He underreads the situation, conveniently registering a straight line from the Arab Slave Trade in Eastern Africa, which began in 600 CE, to the present. There is only Arab/Palestinian *negrophobia* (Wilderson 2010, p. 182). There is never a consideration of the wage of Jewishness and the ontological protections that it affords those who can claim it. Wilderson does not ask nor ponder what might be provoking his friend’s outrage. Might it be the Ethiopian Jew’s status as a newcomer, an outsider, who, as a settler, is in a position of absolute control vis-à-vis the Native, denigrating, humiliating, and policing with impunity of the land’s Indigenous population? By bracketing the settler colonial situation, along with Israel’s anti-Palestinian libidinal economy, Wilderson neglects the ways in which the wage both elevates Ethiopian Jews over Palestinians and is premised on both the devaluation of the Native and the fulfillment of the eliminative project of settler colonialism, namely the eliminationist dream

of a land without Palestinians. Whereas Wilderson divides the scene neatly with the Palestinian friend representing “degraded humanity” (with the possibility of redemption) and the Ethiopian soldier exemplifying “abject inhumanity” (with no hope of redemption), an eye for the operation of the wage of Jewishness troubles the grounds and political usefulness of this abstract or ontological distinction (Wilderson 2015). Again, it is little consolation to his Palestinian friend that in theory he holds some abstract ontological priority (degraded humanity is better than nonhumanity) over the Black IDF soldier. What Afropessimist reason evacuates is history, the dynamic but asymmetrical power relation between Palestinians and Jews, which is, implicitly, dismissed as merely ontical, not touching “anti-Black formation”, the unifying ontological scene of anti-Blackness.

Is this a fatal limitation of Afropessimism? Is it always an instance of “exceptionalist Americanism” (Thomas 2018, p. 291)? Or is the issue more peculiar to Wilderson’s Afropessimist musings? Christina Sharpe is an author who is often described as being shaped by Afropessimist thought, while also making nuanced contributions to it. In her impactful 2016 work, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*, Sharpe revisits the dualling racisms of anti-Blackness and anti-Semitism, though the topic is staged for the reader, at least initially, in far less antagonistic terms than we find in Wilderson’s text. In a subsection of chapter one, titled “On Existence in the Wake/Teaching in the Wake”, Sharpe shares her experience of teaching a year-long course on chattel slavery and the Shoah named “Memory for Forgetting”, which tackles the histories and aesthetic interventions surrounding the two traumas. Meditating on the challenges of teaching this course, Sharpe discusses her puzzlement at the ways her undergraduate students were far more responsive to the material dealing with the Holocaust. Students demonstrated far more empathy for works dealing with the Shoah than the North American holocaust of enslavement.

In light of this experience, she flipped the sequence of the materials when she retaught the course. There was no noticeable difference. Slavery and its afterlives still did not resonate with her students in ways analogous to the Shoah. Sharpe ponders why and how to break up the received knowledge of North America slavery. In their attitudes toward the formerly enslaved, students tended not only to downplay the horror of slavery, but they also imagined Africans as always already lost to the world without their European enslavers: “students would say things about the formerly enslaved like, ‘Well, they were given food and clothing; there was a kind of care there. And what would the enslaved have done otherwise?’” (Sharpe 2016, p. 11). Sharpe unpacks the cruel indifference of “otherwise”: “The ‘otherwise’ here means: What lives would Black people have had outside of slavery? How would they have survived independent of those who enslaved them?” (Sharpe 2016, p. 11). Sharpe’s response to her students’ identificatory deficiencies is brilliant. She returns to a scene from Claude Lanzmann’s *Shoah* that introduces the viewer to Chelmno massacre survivor, Simon Srebnik, as he returns to Poland after living in Israel. “In this scene”, Sharpe writes,

Srebnik is surrounded by the townspeople who remember him as the young boy with the beautiful voice who was forced by the Germans to sing on the river every morning. At first the townspeople are glad to see him, glad to know that he is alive. Soon, though, and with ease, their relief and astonishment turn into something else, and they begin to speak about how they helped the Jewish residents of Chelmno, and then they begin to blame the Jews of Chelmno for their own murder. The camera stays on Srebnik’s face, as it becomes more and more frozen into a kind of smile as these people surround him. Some of these people who are brought out of their homes by his singing on the river—as if he is a revenant—are the very people who by apathy or more directly abetted the murder of thousands of the town’s Jewish residents. (Sharpe 2016, p. 12)

The scene produces a predictable response, “the students are appalled by all of this. They feel for him” (Sharpe 2016, p. 12), and this empathy for Srebnik can then be used as a springboard for envisioning the position of the formerly enslaved, who not only re-encounter, but are forced to live among, people who remain indifferent to their lives, or

even desirous of their death. “I ask them if they can imagine if, after the war’s end, Simon Srebnik had no place to go other than to return to this country and this town; to these people who would have also seen him dead; who had, in fact, tried to kill him and every other Jewish person in Chelmno” (Sharpe 2016, p. 112). This figure, who cannot return home, describes “the condition in the post-Civil War United States of the formerly enslaved and their descendants; still on the plantation, still surrounded by those who claimed ownership over them and who fought, and fight still, to extend that state of capture and subjection in as many legal and extralegal ways as possible, into the present. The means and modes of Black subjection may have changed, but the fact and structure of that subjection remain” (Sharpe 2016, p. 12).

Sharpe allows us to formulate the relation between anti-Semitism and anti-Blackness as a question: How does a certain understanding of trauma, which conforms to the paradigmatic role of the Shoah, perpetuate, or cover over, an anti-Black perspective? There is no prohibition against comparison, but still there is a prioritization of a Black experience of suffering that is entangled with the reality of gratuitous violence. Her approach seems to echo Michael Rothberg’s idea of “multidirectional memory”: “Against the framework that understands collective memory as competitive memory—as a zero-sum struggle over scarce resources—I suggest that we consider memory as multidirectional: as subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing; as productive and not private” (Rothberg 2009, p. 3). The importance of my trauma is not premised on trivializing yours. On one hand, Sharpe’s course welcomes a “multidirectional” approach to trauma.<sup>5</sup> In Sharpe’s text, there is clear pedagogical value in teaching both traumas together. A necessary provincializing of the Shoah is conducted for the purposes of learning about the enslaved and “Black life in the aftermath of slavery” (Sharpe 2016, p. 16). On the other hand, in pressing the relevance of thinking about the Middle Passage with the Shoah, Sharpe makes an Afropessimist move by exceptionalizing the condition of the formerly enslaved. The condition in post-Civil War United States exceeds the condition of Holocaust survivors in the post-World War II era. After the Shoah, the comparison implies, survivors can make a home elsewhere, only returning to the site of historical violence if they choose to, while the descendants of the enslaved have no other choice than to remain in the place of their capture. The afterlife of slavery insists on the perverse reality of slavery that remains after it has been rendered illegal. Ontical changes in the law do not automatically change the law of anti-Blackness that circulates freely in white civil society’s collective unconscious. Anti-Blackness persists today. “Blackness cannot be separated from slavery”, Wilderson insists (Wilderson 2020, p. 217). Today’s Black individual remains ontologically a slave. Gratuitous violence follows Black folks wherever they go. Unlike contingent violence, which occurs when there is a trespass or transgression, gratuitous violence does not need any reason for its devastating eruption; “the Slave’s relationship to violence is open-ended, gratuitous, without reason or constraint”, whereas “the human’s relationship to violence is always contingent” (Wilderson 2020, p. 216). “Living in the wake”, as Sharpe calls it, “means living the history and present of terror, from slavery to the present, as the ground of our everyday Black existence; living the historically and geographically dis/continuous but always present and endlessly reinvigorated brutality in, and on, our bodies while even as that terror is visited on our bodies the realities of that terror are erased” (Sharpe 2016, p. 15). For the Afropessimist, the fact of gratuitous violence pertains exclusively to Black bodies. The fault of Blacks lies in their Blackness.

Is a multidirectional approach still salvageable from Sharpe’s account? I think so, but it requires pursuing a couple of moments of absence. What is only implied at this point in the narrative is where Srebnik is able to go after the war; it is Israel, where he currently resides. Israel is the land of the Jews, which any Jewish person can claim as their home. Srebnik can flee anti-Semitism (which he is painfully reminded of in his return to Chelmno) in Israel, but there is no place where Black people can escape the ubiquitous anti-Blackness of the world. What is missed, here, is the structure of dispossession on which such an escape from anti-Semitism is premised, namely, the dispossession of Palestinians, beginning with

the Nakba, the Arabic word for catastrophe, through which the modern state of Israel is constituted as a nation-state for Jewish citizens above all (the only citizens that count as full subjects). The point of Sharpe's example is not of course to devalue Palestine, but rather to demonstrate how empathy does and does not circulate and what attachments are, or can be, made in an anti-Black world. Yet Palestine plays an unsettling role in this example, for Sharpe hints at the question of the Nakba at the very beginning of her story, when she gives a brief account of the origins of her title for the trauma course: "I teach a course called Memory for Forgetting. The title came from my misremembering the title of a book that Judith Butler mentioned in an MLA talk on activism and the academy in San Diego in 2004. The book was Mahmoud Darwish's *Memory for Forgetfulness*" (Sharpe 2016, p. 11). A Palestinian poet indirectly inspires the idea for the course and the displacement of Palestinians renders possible an Israel that can create (or at least pretend that it does) a space free of violence for Jews like Srebrenica, a space which is unavailable for Blacks, and which, I would add, is also unavailable for Palestinians insofar as they "live" under the interminable Zionist gaze in both the Occupied Territories and Israel proper.

In Sharpe's text, then, there are three traumas at play: the Shoah, the Maafa, and the Nakba. The exceptionalization of any trauma invariably serves an ideological aim, namely monopolizing and policing the claims of victimhood. Refusing the taboo of comparison (Though Shalt Not Compare the Shoah, the Maafa, and so on) does not mean relativizing the force of world-ending traumas, or at least it does not have to. Thinking about trauma comparatively counters the urge to exceptionalize and reify the image of the wretched, the subject of ontological upheaval. Put differently, a global anti-racism worthy of its name should not be in the business of anointing the next exemplary Victim, as per the assimilative formulas "the new Jew is..." or "the new slave is...". Such a global anti-racism would decline both the liberal position (elevating only those whose suffering we can empathize with) and the separatist invitation to the Oppression Olympics (elevating a single form of suffering as distinct and unique).

De-exceptionalizing the victim is Fanon's categorical imperative. Edward Said praised Fanon's generative predilection for de-exceptionalizing. Understanding and pleading for a cause never translated into fetishizing any given wretched, elevated above others and for others to follow. Fanon's commitment to the Algerian cause was unimpeachable, but it never came at the expense of hermeneutic expansiveness. A generous multidirectional sensibility informed Fanon's anti-colonial critique. As Said testifies:

It is inadequate only to affirm that a people was dispossessed, oppressed or slaughtered, denied its rights and its political existence, without at the same time doing what Fanon did during the Algerian war, affiliating those horrors with the similar afflictions of other people. This does not at all mean a loss in historical specificity, but rather it guards against the possibility that a lesson learnt about oppression in one place will be forgotten or violated in another place or time. (Said 1996, p. 44)

The contrast between Fanon and Afropessimism is startling. Whereas Afropessimist reason dictates that the Maafa is "without analog" (Wilderson 2010, p. 38), a Fanonian gesture refuses to interpret "things in isolation" (Said 1996, p. 60) and creates connections between horrific realities. The same applies to the gatekeepers of the Shoah. The specificity of the Holocaust is not diluted by comparison, by evocations of the suffering of Palestinians (whether the Nakba of 1948 or the one unfolding in plain sight today, in front of our eyes).

## 5. A Plea for De-Exceptionalizing the Wretched

In this final part of the essay, I want to look at a different way of framing the questions of trauma, suffering, and victimhood, beyond exceptionalism. In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon conceptualizes racial violence in ontological terms, positing the zone of nonbeing as the unbearable condition of wretched existence, with which Black bodies are particularly familiar. Fanon introduces his concept almost immediately:

There is a zone of nonbeing, an extraordinarily sterile and arid region, an incline stripped bare of every essential[,] from which a genuine new departure can emerge. In most cases, the black man cannot take advantage of this descent into a veritable hell. (Fanon 2008, p. xii).<sup>6</sup>

The wretched dwell in the paradoxical site of the zone of nonbeing. Here, Fanon conceptualizes the wretched as Black bodies who experience only the zone's worst features. If the zone of nonbeing is potentially emancipatory, insofar as it gestures toward a state where the individual's attachment to her social ego has been compromised (an existential crisis, *who am I?*), the life-affirming existentialist potential underpinning this zone is itself quickly compromised since, as Fanon intimates, Black folks generally fail to grasp this freedom. The zone gains a quasi-permanent reality in an anti-Black world. Born in the zone of nonbeing, most Blacks remain caught in this mire of nothingness, arrested in their descent, with no way out in sight.

Commenting on the zone of nonbeing, Slavoj Žižek surprisingly quotes a mistranslation of Fanon's passage:

Recall Fanon's claim that "the Negro is a zone of non-being, an extraordinarily sterile and arid region, an utterly declining declivity": is the experience that grounds today's "afro-pessimism" not a similar one? Is the insistence of afro-pessimists that Black subordination is much more radical than that of other underprivileged groups (Asians, LGBT+, women. . .), i.e., that Blacks should not be put into the series with other forms of "colonization", not grounded in the act of assuming that one belongs to such a "zone of non-being"? (Žižek 2023b, 81).<sup>7</sup>

Now, (creative) mistranslations of Fanon are not new. Perhaps the most famous instance is Charles Lam Markmann's translation of chapter 5 of *Black Skin, White Masks*, "L'expérience vécue du noir" ("The Lived Experience of the Black Man") as "The Fact of Blackness". In Markmann's rendering, Fanon's phenomenological subject drops out in favor of a structural optic that highlights the crushing reality of anti-Blackness (Markmann's translation is understandably favored by the Afropessimists, who are less interested in Fanon's phenomenological adventures). Žižek's quoted translation, "the Negro is a zone of non-being, an extraordinarily sterile and arid region, an utterly declining declivity", deviates considerably from the French. We can compare the French to Žižek's quotation and to the two standard English translations of Fanon's text, those of Richard Philcox and Charles Lam Markmann:

Il y a une zone de non-être, une région extraordinairement stérile et aride, une rampe essentiellement dépouillée, d'où un authentique surgissement peut prendre naissance. (Fanon 1952, p. 6)

The Negro is a zone of non-being, an extraordinarily sterile and arid region, an utterly declining declivity [ . . . ]. [Žižek]

There is a zone of nonbeing, an extraordinarily sterile and arid region, an incline stripped bare of every essential[,] from which a genuine new departure can emerge. [Philcox]

There is a zone of nonbeing, an extraordinarily sterile and arid region, an utterly naked declivity[,] where an authentic upheaval can be born. (Fanon 1967, p. 8) [Markmann]

The first thing to notice is the problematic ontologization of the zone of nonbeing by assigning it to the "Negro", the Black man, when it is clear from Fanon's text that he wants to avoid starting with an identitarian dilemma. The "Il y a une zone de non-être" characterizes the condition of the destitute, the wretched, for whom their being is a wasteland, for whom social identity is eviscerated. Now, Žižek seems to have retroactively filled this empty space from the following sentence where Fanon concretizes the zone of nonbeing by naming Blacks as the "victim" of this hellish condition. He says that "In most cases, the black man cannot take advantage of this descent into a veritable hell [*Dans la majorité des cas, le Noir n'a pas le bénéfice de réaliser cette descente aux véritables Enfers*]"'. This is the pessimism

embodied in the Afropessimists' Fanon, which Žižek appears to endorse. While there are strong points of resonance between the Afropessimists and Žižek, their general orientations are anti-reformist in nature and both embrace a certain "courage of hopelessness" (Žižek 2017; Skinner 2014), I think that Žižek, like the Afropessimists, misreads Fanon's zone of nonbeing. And this is connected to the second element of significance in Žižek's quotation of the first sentence. It is a partial translation that cuts off "from which a genuine new departure can emerge". Fanon's zone of nonbeing accounts for, but is not reducible to, the effects of *negrophobia*. Fanon is adopting and adapting a Sartrean existentialist insight. Transcendence for Sartre is synonymous with radical human freedom; it introduces a gap between consciousness and my social ego. Ironically, this is the part of Fanon's sentence that holds a revolutionary potential, echoing Žižek's own reflections on what he calls the "proletarian positions". Perhaps we can reduce the gap between Fanon and Žižek by reinterpreting the figure of the Black subject in the United States as a concrete universality, namely this Black subject incarnates the reality of social violence and the constitutively excluded. "In today's concrete constellation", Žižek writes, "the violence to which blacks are exposed is not just a neutral case of social violence but its privileged, exemplary case—to reduce it to a particular case of violence means to ignore the true nature of violence in our society" (Žižek 2020, p. xii). The abused Black body stands for those ostracized bodies caught up in the ontological inferno of the zone of nonbeing.

As the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement underscores, to be Black in America is to be marked for early termination. "The immanence of death" (Sharpe 2016, p. 15) haunts Black bodies. "The Black [is] the constitutive outside for those who would construct themselves as *the Human*" (Sharpe 2016, 141n.10). Access to this imaginary symbolic ideal, "*the human*", is predicated on the exclusion of the Black. "*The human*" stands for a false universalism. Žižek gives the constitutive outsideness of the Black body a universalist twist. The Black person, we might say, "sticks out of the existing Order, which, while internal to it, has no proper place within it" (Žižek 2008, p. 285). The surplus humanity of Blacks conveys, paradoxically, their universal humanity. In a crucial gesture, Žižek links this sense of universality to his conceptualization of the proletariat: "To take Marx's classic example, 'proletariat' stands for universal humanity not because it is the lowest, most exploited class, but because its very existence is a 'living contradiction'—that is, it gives body to the fundamental imbalance and inconsistency of the capitalist social Whole" (Žižek 1999, p. 225). Žižek also notes that Marx never simply collapsed the proletariat into the working class. The latter denotes an "'objective' social category, a topic of sociological study", while the former points to "a certain subjective position", the class 'for itself,' "social negativity" (Žižek 2002, 336n.208). Žižek reactivates the proletariat as a "category of truth, the revolutionary subject proper" (Žižek 2018, p. 62). Having said that, Žižek also cautions against a nostalgia for "a 'predestined' revolutionary subject" (Žižek 2008, p. 289), as in the days of Marx, or in its replacement by nomadic subjects (the refugees as the face of the Global South). If Marx's revolutionary subject is "indisposed" (Žižek 2019, p. 42), we should not exceptionalize a new one. Rather, Žižek opts to multiply the sites of resistance, dislocating the field of class struggle and recasting it to include "different *proletarian positions*", different positions of universality embodied in the wretched of the earth, substanceless subjects, the worst off in the world, "those people who are deprived of their substance, like ecological victims, psychological victims, and, especially, excluded victims of racism, and so on" (Žižek 2013, p. 102).

So, is Žižek contradicting himself, by exceptionalizing the Black subject of Fanon and the Afropessimists, by contrasting it to other marginalized identities? Not necessarily. What Žižek seems to appreciate in Fanon and the Afropessimists is the way they articulate exclusion outside the rhetoric of identity and identity politics. "Is the insistence of afro-pessimists that Black subordination is much more radical than that of other underprivileged groups (Asians, LGBT+, women. . .), i.e., that Blacks should not be put into the series with other forms of 'colonization,' not grounded in the act of assuming that one belongs to such a 'zone of non-being'" (Žižek 2023b, p. 81)? Asians, LGBT+,

and women may not be the privileged subjects in society, but they are still *of* this world. Their identity is legible by society, and they have an investment in the world and the world is, to some measure, invested in them. In stark contrast, the zone of nonbeing indexes ontological destitution, marking a break with identity politics and its reformist social remedies. The Black subject, the subject under erasure, emptied of its ontological reserves, embodies the proletarian position, provided she does not get co-opted by the liberal managers of anger, the champions of identity politics.

If the notions of the zone of nonbeing and the proletarian position name a certain modality of ontological fraughtness, the Afropessimists ontologize this condition as an inescapable anti-Blackness. But, whereas the Afropessimists exceptionalize the Black subject, Žižek's proletarian position multiplies the sites of resistance, including, in principle, the position of non-Blacks. Yes, the Black is in a zone of nonbeing, but so are the Jew and the Palestinian. No one has a monopoly over the zone of nonbeing. One's thrownness into the zone of nonbeing is not a divine punishment; it is not God, but a symbolic order that unjustly condemns you. The source of disenfranchisement is worldly, historical, taking place under varying necropolitical conditions that rip at the individual's being. The hooligan Jewish settlers terrorizing Palestinians in the West Bank frontier, often with the full backing of the IDF, are clearly not in the same position as the *Muselmann* in Auschwitz. Or to look back at Wilderson's example of his Palestinian friend and the IDF Ethiopian soldier, Ethiopian Jews are systematically racially discriminated against in Israel. So, as in the United States, Blacks in Israel are (in) the zone of nonbeing. At the same time, to be a Palestinian living in the Occupied Territories or in Israel proper also positions you *structurally* below any Jewish person, including Ethiopian Jews. The psychic wage of Jewishness does not factor in Wilderson's account. Why? For Wilderson, what is of significance is the shared anti-Blackness of Palestinians and non-Black Jews, alike. There is no room for multidirectional intervention. The fact that Israel's libidinal economy nourishes both anti-Palestinianness and anti-Blackness (though the latter is attenuated if you are Black and Jewish) in its citizens is set aside. Anti-Blackness must take precedence over anti-Palestinianness. That the violence of anti-Palestinianness in Palestine/Israel is as gratuitous for Israeli society as the violence of anti-Blackness is for white American society never gets a hearing. My retort to Wilderson is that acknowledging the full weight of anti-Palestinianness is not anti-Black (it does not minimize the structural role of anti-Blackness), but it is rather the means for better understanding the constitutive role of anti-Palestinianness and anti-Blackness in Israel's colonial matrix of the human, in its overrepresentation of the Human.

The zone of nonbeing, and the gratuitous violence that engulfs it, must always be historicized *and* "desedimentized". The zone of nonbeing is a social reality mediated by external forces (the white gaze in Fanon's key example); who or how one comes to occupy it necessitates a reckoning with the differential power relations at work in the caging of being, in the unmaking of life or the making of social death. The labor of racial desedimentation, as Nahum Chandler develops it, lies in the will "to make tremble" identificatory categories "by dislodging the layers of sedimentated premises that hold it in place" (Chandler 2013, p. 137). Desedimentation is a check on ontology's grammar, on its propensity to fix, confuse, or explain away the scene of ontocide. As with the zone of nonbeing, the proletarian positions name societies' symptoms, pointing to the lived, dynamic, and historical space that produced them, a space which, by definition, cannot be sedimented, ontologized, or abstracted from the worldly flux of human existence. When Zionists and Israel's staunch defenders exceptionalize the Holocaust, they ironically repeat what Žižek dubs "the rightist slogan 'to each his or her own place'" (Žižek 1999, p. 224), namely that Israeli Jews are always the victims and the Palestinians always the aggressors. In the Zionist order of things, differences are calcified, Jewishness is fetishized, Palestinianness demonized, pushed further and further into the zone of nonbeing.

To exceptionalize is, thus, both a protective and an accusatory gesture; it is both a defense and an attack. This is why there is some daylight between BLM activists and the Afropessimists. After the Hamas attack on 7 October, BLM Grassroots, for example, affirmed that they stand in solidarity with their “Palestinian family”:

As Black people continue the fight to end militarism and mass incarceration in our own communities, let us understand the resistance in Palestine as an attempt to tear down the gates of the world’s largest open air prison. As a radical Black organization grounded in abolitionist ideals, we see clear parallels between Black and Palestinian people. We, too, understand what it means to be surveilled, dehumanized, property seized, families separated, our people criminalized and slaughtered with impunity, locked up in droves, and when we resist, they call us terrorists. We, too, dream of a world where our people may live freely on decolonized land. May the borders, checkpoints, prisons, police and watchlists that terrorize our communities crumble and may the world we build from their ashes honor those who have fallen in struggle. (BLM Grassroots)

Indeed, many BLM activists do not exceptionalize their Black agenda, but see common cause with Palestinians and other Indigenous groups. What they share is not some identity, but the cruel and banal experience/structure of exclusion, the fact of being *in but not of* the world; the wretched are habitually policed, humiliated, subjugated, tortured, or exploited by a symbolic order, but have “no ‘proper place’ within it” (Žižek 1999, p. 224). The colonized and the internally colonized occupy a proletarian position, banished, as it were, to dwell endlessly in the zone of nonbeing. The Left cannot forfeit these proletarian positions to liberals who would immediately manage (meaning co-opt) the rage of the excluded and channel (meaning defang) it into identitarian outlets. The true opposite of exceptionalism, here, is solidarity. And, as for Fanon and Žižek, revolutionary solidarity or the solidarity of the wretched must pass through class struggle, taking form through an unwavering reckoning with racial capitalism.

It is telling that many critics who are invested in exceptionalizing anti-Semitism or anti-Blackness often define what is specific about their account of suffering and victimization in stark contrast to the proletarianization of workers, along with class struggle as the main driving force for political change and a new social order. In *Is Theory Good For Jews?*, Bruno Chaouat, for example, laments the expansion of the Shoah to speak about the commodification of workers, that the example of Jewish suffering and trauma gets diluted, loses its specificity, once it is generalized to apply to the condition of workers.<sup>8</sup> The “class-struggle framework” is blamed for evacuating “all nuances of oppression”(Chaouat 2016, p. 119).<sup>9</sup> absent any recognition of its “racial and metaphysical determinations” (Chaouat 2016, p. 119). With no distinctions between the camp and the factory you “drift into downright Holocaust denial” (Chaouat 2016, p. 119). For Chaouat and others, this is the same Left that cares for workers and the Palestinians at the expense of Jews and Israel, maligning/provincializing the latter in order to defend/elevate the former. In *Afropessimism*, Wilderson interrogates the “assumptive logic of Marxism”, its belief in “working-class redemption” (Wilderson 2020, pp. 14, 15), a class struggle that in opening up to communism would entail a restoration of the worker’s equilibrium, of his status as *homo faber*, a creative being, which under capitalism generated a state of disequilibrium (alienation from the self, labor, and fellow human beings). Anti-Blackness is better understood when one displaces the political economy in favor of an examination of white civil society’s libidinal economy.

But, when class struggle is expanded or “stretched” (to borrow a formulation from Fanon’s (2004) *The Wretched of the Earth*) to account for proletarian positions, such objections to the Marxist framework must be revisited. When read alongside the proletarian position, the zone of nonbeing gives us a more elastic vision of what a global anti-racist critique can look like. It further clarifies the differences between liberal and leftist interventions. Liberals are at home when defending the interests of marginalized and often racialized groups. What is excluded from their perspective is precisely the proletarian position. As Žižek avers:

Liberals who acknowledge the problems of those excluded from the socio-political process see their goal as the inclusion of those whose voices are not heard: all points of view should be listened to, all interests taken into account, the human rights of everyone guaranteed, all ways of life, cultures and practices respected. The obsession of this form of democracy is the protection of all kinds of minorities: cultural, religious, sexual, etc. The formula of democracy here is patient negotiation and compromise. What gets lost is the proletarian position, that of universality embodied in the excluded. (Žižek 2018, pp. 14–15)

And when the question of poverty or class comes up, liberals are quick to convert the working class into an identity, displacing “class struggle” in favor of “classism” (Žižek 2023a).

The idea of the proletarian position enables us to reconceptualize the fields of struggle. The worker, the permanently unemployed and unemployable, the Jew, the Black, and the Palestinian (among a multitude of candidates) are not to be hierarchized, crudely pitted against one another for the benefit of a liberal Oppression Olympics, which would determine which identity vying for attention deserves more recognition and accommodation within the existing world order. The wretched are societies’ symptoms, the order’s exploited, undesired, abject, or phobic beings, and they urge/hail us to identify with them as “*the only point of true universality*” (Žižek 1999, p. 224). What makes any marginalized figure a potential concrete universality is their ability to stage for the world the stakes of their existence and struggle. What do they mean for justice and democracy? Étienne Balibar captures this sentiment when he describes “the Palestinian cause [as] a *test* for the recognition of right, and the implementation of international law” (Balibar 2004). If the Israeli state behaves like the imperial and colonial powers of old in plain daylight, *how do we as people of conscience respond to their blatant injustice?* The scandal of Gaza lies in the devastation of Palestinian lives, while being told by Western powers and media outlets that Israel has a right to defend itself, meaning that it has the right to butcher women and children, has the *right to deny rights*, to deny the human rights of Palestinians, the right of health, the right to clean water, and so on. If the occupier has a right to defend itself (and such a right of the occupier is, in fact, not enshrined in international law), does the occupied not have such a right? Activists, academics, and everyday people are moved by the massacres that they are seeing and witnessing. But this is where we should recall Said’s admiration of Fanon’s multidirectional impulse to multiply his examples of affliction. The horrors visited on Palestinians are not self-enclosed. The world is on fire. What is happening in Palestine, the indiscriminate killing of civilians, the humiliation and torture of suspects, the caging of people, state violence masquerading as law, abandonment, and neglect, is also happening in Sudan, Syria, Burkina Faso, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, to name only a few examples.

The viciousness of Israel’s Occupation and US-funded genocidal campaign should concern us all. It is occurring in parallel with what Achille Mbembe describes as “*the Becoming Black of the world*” (Mbembe 2017, p. 6), where, under late capitalism, a generalized commodification of human life is taking place, noticeably visible in the Global South, but inching itself onto the shores of the Global North, already hitting hard the poor, the racialized, and the internally colonized. The gap separating the slave and the worker is evaporating. This is yet another iteration of the afterlife of slavery, a multidirectional supplement to Afropessimism, if you will. Or to put it slightly differently, the mayhem happening in Palestine must be seen as a direct feature of this *becoming Black/wretched of the world*, deeply imbricated with “the global status quo”, where, as Michael Marder puts it, we witness “the neoliberal policies of divesting public funding and condemning. . . the most vulnerable to perishing” (Marder 2023). Class struggle, against imperialisms of all shades, the tyranny of market value, the gentrification and displacement of poor communities, and communities of color, the risk-inducing neoliberal cannibalization of the commons, and the bloated military industrial complexes, and the Palestinian fight for justice (must) imply one and other.

Said is, here again, extremely pertinent: “And just because you represent the sufferings that your people lived through which you yourself might have lived through also, you are not relieved of the duty of revealing that your own people now may be visiting related crimes on *their* victims” (Said 1996, p. 44).<sup>10</sup> Unlike the Israeli state and its apologists, who weaponize Jewish suffering in order to shield Israel from censure and critique, Said refuses to exceptionalize Palestinian suffering. Whereas the “Israeli manifesto”, as Gilles Deleuze describes this national project in an exchange with Elias Sanbar, rests on the notion that “we are not a people like any other people”, on the demand that the world honor their “exceptional status”, acknowledging the singularity of their suffering, the “Palestinian manifesto” declares that Palestinians are “a people like any other people” (Deleuze and Sanbar 2006, p. 199). Waziyatawin draws attention to a similar narrative of exceptionalism underlining Israel’s and the US’s account of its origins: “the Zionist ideology that underpins Israeli colonial occupation is the same as the Manifest Destiny ideology that underpinned US colonial expansion, in that both are based on a belief in a divinely sanctioned right to occupy someone else’s land” (Waziyatawin 2012, p. 177). The claim “a people like any other people” makes no appeal to a theological framework to justify the Palestinian cause. The Palestinian claim to universality is grounded in a sharedness with other peoples. If Palestinians cynically played the pathos card to cover over Jewish suffering, they would undermine the cause for justice. It is a duty of Palestinians to scrutinize the actions of their own people. “Never solidarity before criticism” (Said 1996, p. 32) applies internally to the various Palestinian factions. The suffering of civilians should not become an occasion for celebration. If it does, Palestinians risk compromising their own cause. There is no justice in wielding the “rhetoric and politics of blame” (Said 1994, p. 18) to elevate your identity at the expense of others. The Palestinian fight for freedom and equality can never truly materialize unless you extend these same values to Israeli Jews. The universality of the Palestinian cause is premised on freedom and equality for all.

Freedom and equality are, thus, axiomatic. Freedom without equality can lead to cruel and unbearable situations, such as the condition of Black folks following the abolition of slavery, when their “freedom from bondage” came with a “freedom to starve” (Taylor 2022, p. xxi). There is no shared world, no democratic politics as such, unless freedom and equality are defended and made available to all. A neoliberal Palestine is not a free Palestine. An anti-Semitic Palestine is not a free Palestine. An anti-Black Palestine is not a free Palestine. Palestine hails us. Angela Davis describes Palestine as “a moral litmus test for the world” (UpFront 2023). Palestine is a test for what a settler colonial state and its Western sponsors can get away with, without paying a heavy price: *Will there be a reckoning with this miserable “era of impunity” (Chomsky 2021)? What kind of a world do we want?*

Exceptionalizing Palestine, synonymous with sedimentizing Palestinian identity, ironically forecloses this reckoning, transforming the abject Palestinian into the next empathic object for liberals to cathect or fetishize, and does more harm than good in the long run, since humanitarian reason operates by crowding out anti-colonial reason. Almost by necessity, through its pragmatic demands, humanitarian reason brackets decolonial futures, invisibilizes the Indigenous struggle for liberation, and, in turn, seals the Palestinians in their victimhood.<sup>11</sup> Though immensely needed, humanitarian aid cannot be the end goal. We cannot settle for a pre-October 7th Gaza and let humanitarian reason exhaust what must be done in Palestine/Israel. We cannot forget that the Occupation is a monster that creates monsters in abundance, a destroyer of lives *and* worlds.

The leftist approach, at its most trenchant, embraces anti-colonial reason and fully de-exceptionalizes Palestine by harnessing the Palestinian cause’s universalist appeal. Refusing the Occupation must also mean refusing the global status quo and/as the racist and neo-colonial carving of the world. Solidarity with Palestine compels us all to “universalize the crisis”, as Said envisaged the task of the intellectual (Said 1996, p. 44). Such solidarity decries all forms of exceptionalism that unjustly shrink our access to the commons, monopolize power, legitimize a permanent state of war, demonize the enemy, close us off to the suffering of others, nurture narcissistic predilections, and, in the end,

breed apartheid thinking, and murderous ontologies. Palestine, from the river to the sea, remains an antagonistic site of defiance and invention only if the global affective response to the pain and anger of the Palestinian people is matched and surpassed by an insurgent anti-imperialist call for justice in Palestine and beyond. Palestine is our past, present, and future.

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## Notes

- 1 In *Discourse on Colonialism*, Aimé Césaire rails against the humanist paradigm of suffering, denouncing Western modernity's investment in whiteness: "What he [the European] cannot forgive Hitler for is not the *crime* in itself, *the crime against man*, it is not *the humiliation of man as such*, it is the crime against the white man, the humiliation of the white man, and the fact that he applied to Europe colonialist procedures which until then had been reserved exclusively for the Arabs of Algeria, the coolies of India, and the blacks of Africa" (Césaire 2000, p. 36). Césaire's intervention is multidirectional, linking colonialism and chattel slavery to the Shoah in order to trouble the Holocaust's place in the European imaginary.
- 2 Achille Mbembe also claims that Israel's apartheid logic is "far more lethal" than the South African style and "looks like high-tech Jim Crow-cum-apartheid". Moreover, he insists that "the occupation of Palestine is the greatest moral scandal of our times, one of the most dehumanizing ordeals of the century we have just entered, and the biggest act of cowardice of the last half-century" (Mbembe 2015, p. viii; see also Mbembe 2019, p. 46). Such remarks put Germany on the defensive, to say the least.
- 3 A new generation of Germans is starting to disidentify with the catechism; they are aware that "Israelis keep electing rightwing governments that entrench the settlement project, thereby ending the illusion of the two-state solution that allows Germans (and Americans) to believe they can reconcile their Zionism with justice for Palestinians" (Moses 2021). A 2021 poll by the Jewish Electoral Institute shows that 25 percent of US Jews consider Israel an "apartheid state", 34 percent draw a parallel between its racism and that of the US, and 22 percent believe that it is committing genocide against Palestinians (Jewish Electoral Institute 2021). More generally, as Alexander Sammon notes, "Young voters are far from the president, who publicly remains hawkish and unstinting in a way that has not kept pace with their political attitudes (or even those, to a lesser degree, of the Democratic Party). Biden has continued to pledge unquestioning and total support for Israel, even as human rights groups sound the alarm about the threat of the Israeli military committing ethnic cleansing against Palestinians, humanitarian groups' inability to deliver anything resembling sufficient aid to Gaza, and comments from Israeli military leaders that indicate a willingness to target civilians" (Sammon 2023).
- 4 On the eve of the hearing at The Hague in the Netherlands, initiated by South Africa's lawsuit against Israel for the crime of genocide at the International Court of Justice, an anxious Netanyahu repeated, in a short video, the delusional claim that Israel is operating within the law, and that it is combating " Hamas terrorists, not the Palestinian population, and we are doing so in full compliance with international law" (Hauser Tov 2024).
- 5 Michael Rothberg's multidirectional approach problematizes the view that "the Holocaust was unique in world history and it cannot be described as a colonial crime" (Rothberg 2021; see also Rothberg 2022). Putting the Holocaust in dialogue with "memories of colonialism and slavery does not 'relativize' or minimize the Shoah or vice versa" (Rothberg 2021).
- 6 Philcox's translation leaves out a crucial comma after "an incline stripped bare of every essential". See (Maher 2022, p. 20).
- 7 Žižek might be relying on Saroj Giri's mistranslation. In *Surplus-Enjoyment*, Žižek quotes the same Fanon passage while discussing Giri's work (Žižek 2022, p. 286). Giri misattributes the lines to Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (Giri 2020, p. 20).
- 8 Bruno Chaouat is drawing here from Emmanuel Levinas's resistance to the parallels between "the condition of factory workers and the Holocaust", which allegedly minimizes and relativizes the Shoah (Chaouat 2016, p. 117).
- 9 Chaouat is here reiterating Alain Finkielkraut's argument against "left-wing Holocaust denial" in his *L'avenir d'une négation* (Finkielkraut 1982). The Left reduces the Holocaust to "social oppression and economic domination",
- 10 Said further adds: "It is always easy and popular for intellectuals to fall into modes of vindication and self-righteousness that blind them to the evil done in the name of their own ethnic or national community" (Said 1996, p. 45).
- 11 The linking of suffering and victimhood can also take a more aggressive form. Zionist reason weaponizes Jewish shame and injury, so that "when suffering becomes an identity", as Jacqueline Rose puts it, "it has to turn cruel" toward the Palestinian neighbor "in order to be able to bear, or live with, itself" (Rose 2007, p. 115).

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