

Book Forum on Omer Bartov's *Israel: What Went Wrong?*

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ABSTRACT	This book forum discusses Omer Bartov's latest book on the roots of contemporary Israeli politics. In particular, it examines Zionism and its transformation – from what Bartov presents as an initially emancipatory ideology for some of its adherents into the ethnonationalist state ideology that, in his account, underpins Israel's genocidal policies today. The forum features three critical responses to the book, by Jakub Záhora, Pavel Barša, and Hanna Pfeifer, followed by a response from Bartov. Unlike many critical accounts of Israel, <i>Israel: What Went Wrong?</i> is not written from an explicitly anti-Zionist position. Bartov approaches contemporary Israeli politics against the backdrop of his own personal trajectory: he once believed in the promise of Zionism and served as an IDF soldier, but has since come to argue that Israel has taken a fundamentally misguided direction and is now pursuing a genocidal path. The three responses and Bartov's reply extend this polemical debate over Zionism and the ongoing Israeli military operation in Gaza, bringing together perspectives shaped by different intellectual traditions and regional contexts, including Central and Central-Eastern Europe. The forum addresses several interconnected questions: the emancipatory potential of Zionism; the question of genocidal intent in Israel's conduct in Gaza; the relationship between Israel's lack of a formal constitution and its democratic order; and the epistemic and scholarly value of personal experience and perspective. Taken together, the contributions critically examine both the historical trajectory of Zionism and the conceptual and political tensions underlying contemporary debates about Israel.
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EDITORIAL

Eva Svatoňová

Omer Bartov has written an important and timely book titled *Israel: What Went Wrong?* Its contribution lies in its potential to serve as an introduction to contemporary Israeli politics and the history of Zionism written from a distinctive insider-outsider perspective. In a reader-friendly manner, the author combines his personal story – as a descendant of people that he calls “staunch Zionists” and as a former IDF soldier who served for four years, including during the 1973 Yom Kippur War – with his research on the Holocaust and his analysis of Israel’s contemporary political trajectory, which he describes as an “unfortunate development of Zionist ideology.” Bartov writes the book as someone who saw members of his own and his friends’ families directly affected by the violence of the October 7 Hamas massacre, while at the same time remaining deeply critical of the State of Israel and, in particular, of its military campaign in Gaza, which he characterises as genocidal. Unlike many critics of Israel, however, he is not a resolute anti-Zionist. Rather, he argues that anti-Zionists’ “focus on [the] functional reality of settlement in Palestine largely misses the ideological and emotional motivations of the Zionist movement” (BARTOV, 2026, p. 4). Instead, he interprets Zionism as “a movement for Jewish self-emanicipation, individual transformation, self-determination and freedom from persecution and anti-Semitism” that transformed into a state ethno-nationalist ideology. This position places Bartov in a distinctive – and often uncomfortable – position that is subject to criticism from both the political right and left, while offering an uncommon perspective: that of an originally Zionist scholar who is now profoundly critical of the state that Zionism created.

The book, and particularly the events to which it responds, can also be read as marking a turning point in Bartov’s thinking about genocide and Israel/Palestine. This is significant given his earlier reluctance to apply the term “genocide” without sufficient evidence. In 2010, for example, in a critique of genocide scholarship associated particularly with Dirk Moses and Donald Bloxham, Bartov challenged the argument that there was a connection between assertions of the Holocaust’s centrality and uniqueness and the legitimisation of Israel as a colonial entity with its own history

of ethnic cleansing and genocidal potential. He argued that “statements by historians of genocide about Zionist ideology and Israeli policies are mostly rhetorical expressions of opinion, not scholarly analyses of the politics and practices of nation-building and ethnic displacement” (SHAW & BARTOV, 2010).

This caution remained evident at the beginning of the war in Gaza. In November 2023, Bartov stated that, although he feared that Israel was moving towards genocide, he did not believe there was sufficient evidence to conclude that genocide was then taking place. His position subsequently changed. In *Israel*, he writes: “It is also clearly indicated that the ultimate goal of this whole undertaking from the very beginning was to make the entire Gaza Strip uninhabitable, and to debilitate its population to such a degree that it would either die out or seek all possible options to flee the territory” (p. 54–55).

Now convinced that what is happening in Gaza constitutes genocide, he asks: *How is it possible that a state founded in the immediate aftermath of the Holocaust stands today credibly accused of perpetrating large-scale war crimes against humanity? And why is it that the ideals articulated in Israel’s 1948 Declaration of Independence have never been realised?*

All four participants in the book forum – Jakub Záhora, Pavel Barša, and Hanna Pfeifer, together with Omer Bartov himself, who responds to the three essays at the end – discuss the book’s merits and limitations. They engage in a polemical discussion of the book’s contributions, the legitimacy of Zionism, the possibility of reforming it, and possible ways to achieve a peaceful sharing of the land between the river and the sea by both Israelis and Palestinians. They also debate about when it is appropriate to use the label “genocide” in relation to the IDF’s operations in Gaza and what such a designation entails. Beyond these questions, the contributors consider how a book written by a historian can be read through the lenses of International Relations, and how its arguments resonate within a Central European, particularly German, context, where debates surrounding the war in Gaza, the charge of genocide, and its denial strongly recall some of the dynamics described by Bartov.

The result is a transdisciplinary forum that brings together perspectives from International Relations, political philosophy, political science

research on violence, and area studies to engage with one of the most pressing conflicts of our time. Finally, as a Prague-based journal, we believe that the insights offered by Bartov's book, as well as those developed in the accompanying essays, can contribute to the Czech public sphere, where the distinction between legitimate criticism of the State of Israel and anti-Semitism has often proved difficult to sustain in public debate. Both the book and the discussion that follows offer useful resources for thinking through this distinction with greater precision.

THE (AUTO)BIOGRAPHICAL POLITICS OF GENOCIDE RESEARCH: OMER BARTOV'S WORK AND THE LONG SHADOW OF ZIONISM

Jakub Záhora

INTRODUCTION

In the 1970s, Omer Bartov served as a soldier in the Israeli army, a stint that included the Yom Kippur War. Fifty years later, in summer 2024, in the midst of the Israeli war on Gaza launched in the wake of the October 7 attack by Hamas, he – now an established professor of history at Brown University in the US – visited Israel and met some young Israelis who, like he himself half a century earlier, served in the army, and with whom he engaged in a heated debate regarding the conduct of the Israeli army toward the Palestinians (BARTOV, 2024). Several months later, Bartov published an op-ed in *The New York Times* that concluded that Israel's actions in Gaza amount to genocide (BARTOV, 2025A).

Bartov's latest book – with the rather ambitious title *Israel: What Went Wrong* (BARTOV, 2026) – is a continuation of these exchanges and arguments. It seeks to answer the question of how it is possible that a state that was established in the wake of a mass murder, and which has derived moral credit from serving as a shelter against this kind of atrocity, has now engaged in a large-scale killing and maiming of another people. The book builds on Bartov's expertise as a historian of mass violence with a focus on the Holocaust and World War II (BARTOV, 1992; 2018) but it also moves beyond this research agenda by engaging the history of Israel/Palestine and outlining what factors made the destruction of Gaza possible both domestically and internationally. In this regard, Bartov's book is thus a contribution to the debates on what many scholars have posited to be Israel's genocide in Gaza, examining its different features, including its historical genealogies as well as the international community's failure to stop it (see, e.g., the recent "Roundtable: Gaza and Genocide Studies" in *Journal of Genocide Research* (SEGAL, 2026; MOSES, 2026)).

What, to my knowledge, sets *Israel: What Went Wrong* apart from this scholarship is the way Bartov foregrounds his own identity and personal and familial history, which are intertwined with the book's historical

account: in the book, Bartov frequently describes his own experiences of the events and dynamics that are the topics of the respective chapters, and weaves historical developments together with recountings of the fate of his family. Inadvertently, Bartov's book can thus be connected to what has become known as the autobiographical turn in IR (INAYATULLAH, 2010; INAYATULLAH & DAUPHINEE, 2016; LÖWENHEIM, 2010). The related works set out to explore how authors' backgrounds and life trajectories underpin and influence their academic work, in the process demonstrating how the personal is political is academic. Although Bartov is a historian, not an IR scholar, his latest book, which is reviewed in this forum, can be read alongside this literature: as he notes in the introduction, "In deliberating the issues discussed in this book, I cannot but draw on my personal and professional background" (BARTOV, 2026, PP. 7–8).

In this contribution, I follow the (broad) propositions of the autobiographical turn and push the autobiographical elements of Bartov's book to the forefront in order to ask what kinds of insights this perspective can offer in terms of both the process of scholarly knowledge production that the book is a product of and its content (that is, what "went wrong" with Israel). Departing from this perspective, I argue that one of the ways of reading the text is through his as well as the Israeli society's wrestling with the promises and allure of the Zionist movement and ideology, a struggle that manifests itself in two registers in the book. First, by employing the autobiographical elements, the book makes Bartov's positionality of a (former) member of the Zionist and Israeli elite explicit, a move that explains how he arrived at some of his conclusions. Second, by adopting a perspective that is rooted in intimate familiarity with the historical developments in Israel/Palestine, the book helps the reader to better comprehend why many Israelis remain invested in the (broadly understood) Zionist ethos and goals, including its highly violent manifestations.

AUTOBIOGRAPHY, POSITIONALITY AND ZIONISM

The autobiographical elements of Bartov's latest book are not new in his work. In his previous book, *Genocide, the Holocaust and Israel-Palestine: First-Person History in Times of Crisis* (BARTOV, 2023), he posited the personal as a perspective necessary to fully make sense of the mass atrocities in 20th century Europe. In the last chapter of that book, he applied this prism to his own case, mobilising his family's past to demonstrate how the histories

of the Holocaust and the Nakba are intertwined across continents and across the victim/perpetrator divide. These pages now read as a kind of precursor to *Israel: What Went Wrong*, which starts by outlining the key question that guides the book: how Zionism morphed into its current form, a process that culminated in the destruction of Gaza. Answering this question is interwoven with recounting life stories of Bartov's family and his own experiences, from tracing Bartov's father's participation in the 1948 War to Bartov's own moving to the US to his visits to Israel after October 7. Together, these narratives complement as well as flesh out the historical arc of Zionism's gradual descent from, as argued by Bartov, a legitimate quest by a persecuted minority for its own state to a system of institutionalised Jewish supremacy.

The (auto)biographical narratives are not – at least in my reading – self-indulgent detours but rather provide important insights into the shaping of Bartov's academic-cum-political positions, and the types of knowledge this positionality produces. Growing up in a prominent Zionist household in a left-wing kibbutz placed Bartov in the position of “a prince of the Zionist aristocracy”, as ironically stated by Gideon Levy (LEVY, 2026), a well-known Israeli left-wing journalist. However, Bartov's education and exposure to the history of crimes of the Nazi regime and its army enabled him to draw parallels between different crimes, including those committed by the armed forces of the Israeli state in which he served. This critical posture was further accelerated when he moved to the US to pursue an academic career. Bartov makes it clear that it was the resulting distance – physical but ultimately also political and ideological – from Israel that allowed him to arrive at his critical posture towards Israeli politics and its ongoing right-wing shift. These autobiographical trajectories thus show how Bartov came to his conclusions in terms of his intellectual background but also his gradual alienation from the mainstream of Israeli society.

However, Bartov is clearly still ambivalent about the legacy of Zionism, the legacy to which he is attached via personal and familial ties. Bartov's ongoing struggle with what he sees as the positive historical force of Zionism is apparent in his longing for the “missing constitution” of Israel, the subject of the book's penultimate chapter. As he recounts in detail, the Israeli state never adopted a full-fledged constitution but rather a series of so-called Basic Laws, which, while nominally carrying more weight than the ordinary ones, do not have the same status as a constitution in other

national contexts. According to Bartov, if, during the state's first years, the Israeli leaders had indeed adopted a full-fledged constitution, it would have fostered adherence to democratic values and the rule of law, empowering courts and other democratic mechanisms. He further proposes that the existence of such a constitution would have created conditions in which "the creeping racism of Israeli society might have been tempered, and the astonishing indifference to the genocide perpetrated in Gaza and the daily crimes and pogroms in the West Bank might have elicited a greater sense of scandal" (BARTOV, 2026, P. 181). Going even further, he argues that in an "idealized" scenario, the existence of a constitution since the first years of the state "would have enabled a flourishing of Jewish culture, free of fanaticism, messianism, fearmongering, and oppression of others, rooted in the humanistic, tolerant, and universalistic traditions that are just as much a part of its long history" (IBID., P. 182), and thus have allowed for the liberal streams of Zionism to prevail.

But it can be argued that the mere existence of a constitution would not necessarily rein in the Israeli-Jewish exclusionary forces and in itself would not guarantee a flourishing of a democratic culture – many authoritarian states do indeed have a constitution which claims to enshrine values of equality and representation. In the Israeli case specifically, one can question to what extent one document, even if one as important as the constitution, would be able to challenge the ascent of Jewish supremacy that, according to many authors who are more critical of Zionism than Bartov, has been embedded in the movement from the beginning and has always been its dominant component (KHALIDI, 2022; SABBAGH-KHOURY, 2024). However, in the context of this review, I want to argue that tackling these hypothetical questions is not as important here as what these discussions reveal about Bartov's allegiances: although he recognises the rampant racism in contemporary Israeli society, he is not fully prepared to abandon the promise of Zionism as a humanistic ideology.

The most contentious part of the book, and the one where the tension between Bartov's Zionist background and his critical stance is most apparent, is the one that addresses the genocide claims. Bartov clearly struggles with the assertions that Israel is committing genocide, and he has been accused of a "belated" recognition of this crime by his critics (SHAW, 2026).¹ Indeed, a number of scholars, including Israeli and Jewish ones, have come to this conclusion much earlier; most notably, already in October

2023, the Israeli historian Raz Segal penned the article “A Textbook Case of Genocide,” which was published in the American Jewish progressive magazine *Jewish Currents* (SEGAL, 2023). However, even if one criticises Bartov for this, the legacy of his upbringing and attachment to the Zionist idea explains his hesitation. It becomes even clearer when one scrutinises the broader trajectory of his scholarship.

In 2010, he engaged in an exchange with Martin Shaw, a prominent scholar of genocide, with regard to the question of whether the Nakba constituted a case of this grave crime (SHAW & BARTOV, 2010). There are obviously differences between the 1948 War and the Nakba on the one hand, and the October 7 attack and the Israeli destruction of Gaza on the other. But what I want to highlight here is that, in my reading, Bartov’s critique of labelling the Nakba as a case of genocide was not only analytical but also political: as he wrote in 2010, accusing Israel of a genocide that was supposedly committed during its foundation “is clearly meant to delegitimize the state and to say that it was born in the blood of innocents and should therefore also go down in blood” (IBID., P. 258). The same argument is now echoed by representatives of the Israeli government and their supporters who argue that accusing Israel of this “crime of crimes” in Gaza makes Israel a global pariah and aims at disputing its very right to exist (SEE, E.G., GODA 2025). I do not think that Bartov changed his view of the Nakba as not an act of genocide, as in the current book he talks about the events of the 1948 War without resorting to this language. But he is undoubtedly aware that categorising the war in Gaza as such will lead to further deterioration of Israel’s international and moral standing and will provide fuel to those calling for its abolishment – a realisation which, as the book makes clear, was challenging for him.²

Again, the reader can be, as many have been, critical of the time-frame and way of Bartov’s reckoning with the nature of the Israeli conduct in Gaza. But I want to propose that by foregrounding his own identity and investment in the Zionist project, Bartov makes his hesitation at least understandable and open to somewhat more sympathetic scrutiny. It is Bartov’s narrativisation of his upbringing and his family’s history that enables readers to comprehend why he has found these accusations so hard to accept. There are clear limits to Bartov’s posture towards the Israeli regime and the legacy of Zionism but the openness with which he discusses his background helps to make sense of these limitations. In this

regard, as I discuss in the next section, Bartov's personal trajectory also speaks to broader social and political developments.

MULTIPLE HISTORIES OF VIOLENCE AND HOW THEY ARE UNDERSTOOD

While primarily conceived as a critique, Bartov's book further helps the reader to appreciate the social and political processes that led a large portion of the Israeli Jewish public to embrace the wholesale destruction of Gaza, and demonstrates the growing gulf between the Israelis and international public opinion, including that of the Jewish diaspora. The book does not shy away from discussing the descent into open racism in Israel, but Bartov also devotes space to seemingly more benign narratives that in fact work to make the Palestinians' lives ever more expendable. Other scholars have recently critically discussed how even the liberal segments of the Israeli public came to embrace the genocidal violence in Gaza (WEIZMAN & ENGLERT, 2026). What (again) distinguishes Bartov's account is his own investment in and intimate familiarity with these dynamics.

Extensive parts of the book deal with the history of antisemitic violence, which culminated in the Holocaust, a topic that Bartov both researched and has a familial connection to as his mother came to Israel from Poland in the mid-1930s, while many of her family members were murdered during WWII. By extensively discussing the history of anti-Jewish hatred and its manifestations, Bartov sets up a narrative arc that makes it more understandable why many Israelis continue to embrace Zionism, whose promise lies in protecting the Jewish people by providing them with a sovereign state. The collective memory of oppression and industrialised genocide amongst Jewish Israelis then produces a particular rendering of their political accountability: as noted by Bartov, "precisely because of its self-image as a righteous response to the Holocaust, Israel cannot accept its responsibility for the injustice of the Nakba and the occupation; it perceives any substantive criticism of its policies, let alone of the manner of its creation, as undermining its very right to exist" (BARTOV, 2026, P. 79).

The story of righteous national redemption is thus extended to the notion of self-defence. Bartov tackles the narrative of the IDF as "the most moral army in the world," whose purpose is to prevent a repetition of the anti-Jewish violence in the Middle East (an ethos that he himself was

brought up in). The interplay of the alleged “purity of arms” and the “never again” plea culminated in the Israeli reaction to the October 7 massacre. Bartov shows how Israelis made a link between the Nazi killing machine and the Hamas operatives, in the process erasing crucial differences between the two but also providing justification for the destruction of Gaza, which was portrayed as necessary for squashing the 21st-century Nazis – in his words, this congruence granted the IDF a “license to do ‘all that it takes’ to wipe out the enemy” (IBID., P. 96). Although he is clearly critical of this abandonment of responsibility for the past and ongoing crimes on the part of the Israelis, Bartov’s extensive discussion of the role of antisemitism in Israeli public discourse enables the reader to better understand why the proposition of a genocide committed by Jews is so hard for Israelis to comprehend and admit to – as these are dynamics that accompany and further facilitate the dehumanisation of the Palestinians.

As discussed above, it was only Bartov’s moving abroad that allowed him to gain some distance from these narratives. Bartov’s biographical trajectory as captured in the book thus exemplifies not only the noticeable differences between world opinion and Jewish Israeli views (SILVER & CLANCY, 2026), but also the growing gulf between the latter and the views of the Jewish diaspora. Of course, one’s political inclinations and modes of analysis do not have to be congruent with one’s place of residence, or with one’s ethnicity – in Israel too, as Bartov himself mentions (BARTOV, 2026, PP. 197–201), there are individuals and groups that challenge and contest the Israeli state-sanctioned policies of genocidal violence and ethnic cleansing (SEE, E.G., BLATMAN & GOLDBERG 2025; LEVY 2025; LEDERMAN 2026), which highlights the contingency of the interplay between national, ethnic and religious identities and political inclinations. But the overall trend is undeniable: almost four in ten American Jews believe that Israel committed genocide in Gaza (BENDAVID ET AL., 2025), a proposition that, as Bartov shows in the book, is anathema to the way the vast majority of Jewish Israelis view the war in Gaza – amongst them, around 80 percent expressed support for the ethnic cleansing of Gaza (SCHEINDLIN, 2025).

Bartov’s life as captured in the book is illustrative of these larger sociological trends, and it demonstrates a struggle between and a negotiation of these different perspectives. Although he is critical of the narratives that work to legitimise the destruction of Gaza, Bartov does not reject them outright and shows why they resonate with Israelis. In this regard, his own

struggle to both fully condemn the Israeli war on Gaza as genocidal, and fully condemn the Israeli regime for its domination over the Palestinians at large gives a more personal glimpse into why many Israelis find these accusations inadmissible and unethical for their lifeworlds; in this sense, he works not only as a narrator but also as a(n) (past) embodiment of these dynamics. Interweaving the autobiographical narrative with the discussion of social developments then results in a more intimate portrait of the Israeli descent into full-fledged and open racism.

CONCLUSION: LEAVING ZIONISM

As already suggested, Bartov's book has received its fair share of criticism, both from the right-wing supporters of Israel (MORIS, 2026) and from the left, which labels Bartov as a defender of the indefensible Zionist ideology (LEVY, 2026). I tend to agree with some of it, and it is also easy to remark that Bartov's sweeping account – that speaks to the history of antisemitism and the Holocaust, its weaponisation, the Israeli conduct in Gaza and the international criticism of it, Israel's lack of a constitution, and other issues – necessarily results in simplifications and, at times, superficial analysis. But in this intervention, I sought to offer a different perspective: one that argues for reading Bartov's book as a personal and autobiographical reflection that provides insights into larger societal and political dynamics that shape how we research and understand large-scale violence in Israel/Palestine and even beyond by showing how certain narratives make it appear “necessary” and righteous.

In Bartov's book, it is the Zionist promise of a shelter for the persecuted Jewish people that works this way, and it is this historical role of Zionism that makes Bartov more sympathetic to its manifestations than many other critics of the Israeli state and its ideological foundations. As such, Bartov presents a case of a dying breed: a case of an old-cadre Zionist who hoped that the movement's emancipatory potential might overcome its ethnonationalist tendencies. But this potential has been, for many, definitely squashed by the events of the last three years; indeed, Bartov himself said in a recent interview that he does not believe “Zionism can be repaired or resurrected” (FEROZ, 2026). In this way, the book can be read alongside other recent works whose authors engage with questions of antisemitism, the quest for Jewish safety, and how to relate to such concerns in the shadow of Israel's destruction of Gaza

(SEE, E.G., BEINART, 2025). The book reviewed here is thus not only an attempt to probe various features of Israel's development into a state and a polity that engages in genocidal violence and ethnic cleansing. It is also a testament to an individual's personal struggle of coming to terms with abandoning the stories and narratives that had formed their familial history and identity in times of world-shattering events.

FROM EMANCIPATION TO GENOCIDE. BARTOV'S SAD RECKONING WITH ZIONISM

Pavel Barša

When in spring 2024, I asked one of my Jewish-American academic friends why she did not publicly call out Biden's shameful backing of Israel's brutal assault on the civilian population of Gaza when she was so outspoken about Putin's aggressive war against Ukraine, she replied: "Gaza, it is complicated; Ukraine, it's simple." What accounted for a "complication" was Israel's right to react forcefully to the horrors of October 7, 2023. I was already familiar with this argument, but from the opposite side. Some of my leftist friends, who were loudly blaming Israel for the genocide in Gaza, were much more shy with regard to Putin's invasion of Ukraine since they gave credit to his claim that he is waging a defensive war against an expanding NATO: "Ukraine, it is complicated," they would say, "Gaza, it is simple."

One of the achievements of Omar Bartov's book is that it defies this binary logic: the moral clarity of his judgment about Israel's conduct in Gaza is not undermined, but rather enhanced by a nuanced analysis of various factors that led to it and his refusal to reduce Zionism to settler-colonialism. Unlike the radical critics of Israel on the postcolonial Left, he acknowledges its emancipatory nature as a legitimate response to the rise of political anti-Semitism in Central and Western Europe and of anti-Jewish violence in Eastern Europe since the end of the 19th century.

The moral clarity of the post-colonial Left's condemnation of Israel, on the contrary, is reached at the cost of an analytical simplification that focuses exclusively on the functional aspect of the Zionist settlement of Palestine and the dispossession of its inhabitants under the tutelage of European powers and the USA, while leaving out the self-understanding of the first generations of Zionists who were looking for a way out of discrimination and anti-Jewish violence that would combine a self-affirmation (and a self-transformation) of their particular group with a realisation of universalist human ideals. They might have deluded themselves with regard to the possibility of overcoming the contradiction between those two values, but this should not be the reason to deny the genuine emancipatory intent of their project. To elude this original impetus

of Zionism amounts to missing the tragic nature of its history that is captured by Bartov: its transformation from a movement of liberation of an oppressed group into a project of the oppression and, ultimately, the destruction of another group.

HOW TO GET OUT OF AN ETHNIC TRAP, OR THE MISSING CONSTITUTION

There is a rough consensus among the authors who had asked the same question as the one spelled out by the title of Bartov's book before him (such as Bernard Avishai, Avraham Burg, Ian Lustick or Derek Penslar) that what moved Israel in the wrong direction was the brutalising effects of the domination of the occupied populations in the decades after 1967 in combination with the establishment of the Holocaust memory as the main part of the Israeli identity – and the major glue uniting the diverse segments of Israeli society – in the same period. Most of the authors also agree that the major condition that allowed Israel to go down the road of the ever more brutal dispossession of the conquered populations with its endpoint in the attempt to drive them out was the simultaneous rise of the memory of the Holocaust in the West, where it became a sort of “civil religion” (TRAVERSO, 2016; LUSTICK, 2019). This allowed Israel to gain Western backing by presenting its repressive policies crushing Palestinian populations as a legitimate response to the threat of a second Holocaust which supposedly emanated from them. An essential part of this propagandistic stratagem was the weaponising of an exterminatory Antisemitism: critics of the Israeli dispossession of Palestinians were depicted as helping and condoning the next genocide of the Jews. The readiness of Western opinion to let itself be blackmailed in this way was a significant part of “what went wrong”. Without the unconditional support of the West and particularly the USA, Israel would never have been able to maintain an apartheid regime on the occupied territories for several generations or obliterate Gaza after October 7.

To those more or less consensual points that pertain to the last fifty years or so of Israel's history, Bartov adds a point concerned with its birth and first two decades. If for radical critics of Israel, its original sin amounts to the expulsion and expropriation of 750.000 Palestinian Arabs in 1948–49, Bartov sees it in the failure of the Zionist establishment to fulfil the promise of the Declaration of Independence and endow the

new State with a constitution. To his mind, it could have *at least* limited the most dangerous tendencies of Zionist ethnonationalism; *at best*, it could have helped the Israelis to get over it by transforming the newly created State into a constitutional democracy centered on universal human rights.

Bartov is convincing when he links Ben-Gurion's unwillingness to fulfil the promise of a constitution to his refusal to include a reference to the State's borders and democracy in the Declaration: those omissions were meant to ensure more space for the ethnonationalist and expansionist agenda of the Zionist establishment. Still, as somebody who spent the first part of his life in the Communist East, whose states guaranteed all kinds of rights in their constitutions, but merely on paper, I am rather sceptical of Bartov's tendency to present the missing constitution as *the* reason for Israel's degeneration into a xenophobic ethnic State which systematically oppresses and, ultimately, tries to destroy another ethnic group. Moreover, even constitutional regimes have provisions that allow them to suspend their constitutional principles in the face of emergencies such as wars. Israel would have hardly represented an exception to this rule if it had endowed itself with a liberal constitution at its birth.

More generally, properly functioning constitutions presuppose internationally recognised borders and peaceful relations with neighbours, something which Israel has never had. The experience of other ethno-nationalist movements in Eastern Europe which established states for their peoples, has shown that only a stable domestic and international environment allowed some of them to progressively loosen the grip of the ethnic or ethno-religious definition of nationhood that was their starting point.

In this context it is strange that Bartov does not mention the law of return in this context. The revisionist politician Hillel Kook, who, as the only member of the first Knesset to do so, protested vehemently against the transformation of the constituent assembly into a parliament by calling it "a putsch", directly linked the replacement of the ethno-religious nationhood by the civic nationhood, which was to be ensured by a constitution, to the need to limit the validity of the law of return to a short period of time after the birth of the State. That would allow for a differentiation of a new nation constituted in Palestine from the Jewish people as its predecessor. Unlike the latter, the former would not have been defined by ethnicity or religion but rather by the institutions developed on the territory of the new

State and a shared culture which would have emerged among its citizens. Kook, however, with his Canaanite background, was a solitary maverick. The overwhelming majority of Zionists could think of the new State only as a nation-state of the Jewish people, wherever its members happened to live, rather than as a nation-state of all those who lived under its laws. In other words, the original Zionism followed the basic principle of any ethnic nationalism which no amount of constitutional engineering could have easily overcome.

For all its peculiarities (related to the religious definition of its national identity, the dispersal of would-be nationals in many countries and the non-European location of their imaginary ancestral homeland), Zionism was merely one of the last East European ethnic nationalisms. We can therefore assess the conditions and difficulties of the desired transition of Israel to territorial and civic nationhood by comparing its history to the histories of other ethnic States that emerged from the ruins of empires in the Balkans and Central and Eastern Europe during the 20th century. This comparison would show that such transitions never happened through a one-time constitutional decision, as imagined by Kook and Bartov, but rather as long processes whose main condition was domestic and international stability (sometimes, sadly, based on a previous forceful homogenisation of the national territory). The transition from an ethnic-religious to a civic-national collective self-understanding is never made by a simple fiat of an Enlightened political elite but it rather takes place on the level of political culture and across several generations. Moreover, as shown by the bloody collapse of Yugoslavia in the 1990s and, in a somewhat milder manner, by the rise of the AfD in today's Germany, the achievement of civic nationhood should never be taken as irreversible, particularly in countries with a long tradition of ethnic self-definition.

FROM THE PROMISE OF NORMALISATION TO A RE-AFFIRMATION OF THE JEWISH EXCEPTIONALITY

If I were to propose an alternative counter-factual point of bifurcation in Israeli history I would rather opt for Ian Lustick's suggestion that Israel's last opportunity to get out of the permanent war with its Arab neighbours and reconcile with the Palestinians presented itself in the early 1970s. By that time, there were only a few settlers in the territories and the Left in power had all the leverage to enact a negotiated exchange

of occupied lands for peace. The substantial increase in the settlers' numbers, the brutalisation of Israeli society by the occupation of another people and the security policies increasingly justified by an imaginary threat of the second Holocaust came only later on, in the decades that followed the electoral victory of the Right which brought Menachem Begin to power in 1977. Then a new kind of Zionism started emerging, one that reversed two interlinked presuppositions of the hegemonic currents – the liberal and the socialist one – of its original version: (1) that the establishment of the Jewish State will end Antisemitism by making the Jewish people similar to all other nations and (2) that this “normalisation” of the Jews would entail a clean break with the way of life, traditions and mentality of the diaspora: if the Jews became like the others, the traditional Judaic split of mankind into a people of God and all other nations – characterised by a mutual distrust if not a mutual hatred between the two sides – would wane. This dream of normalisation, however, never materialised. To the extent that the Israeli Jews were embroiled in repeated wars with their neighbours and an unresolved territorial conflict with the Palestinians, they have never overcome the state of exception. The promise that energised the original Zionism remained unfulfilled.

A new kind of Zionism drew a lesson from this failure and reversed the original presuppositions: the Jews will never be like others; they will remain exceptional. Even after the creation of their own state, they remained surrounded by hostile nations; that is, their situation resembled their previous diasporic experience. This re-affirmation of the Jewish people as “a people apart” that “dwells alone” even after it regained its statehood, implied also the possibility of a repetition of the Shoah. It was not only remembered as an event of the past, but since the Yom Kippur War in 1973 (if not since the Six-Day War of 1967), it has been feared as a possible future. The diasporic “ghetto mentality” based on the split between the Jews and the others, “us” and “them”, was not negated, as hoped by the first generations of Zionists, but prolonged and re-confirmed in a new era of statehood. It was as if a collective Jew – the State of Israel established in 1948 – was forever to face the same kinds of existential threats as those that were familiar to individual Jews and their stateless communities before 1948.

Bartov captures the main features of this metamorphosis. He nevertheless does not go so far as to explicitly differentiate a new form of

Zionism from its original version and continues to use the term “Zionism” in an indiscriminate manner. It is a pity. An undifferentiated “Zionism” lacks an analytical focus. Its object is easily made into an ahistorical entity ready to be essentialised – demonised by the enemies of Israel, idealised by its friends. Moreover, a reference to the new kind of Zionism is indispensable if one wants to correctly answer the question spelled out by the title of Bartov’s book. Its victorious rise to the position of the hegemonic State ideology in the 2000s and 2010s was the main factor of the slide to the ever more brutal treatment of Palestinians, which, after October 7, 2023, ended in the destruction of Gaza, which could – against this ideological backdrop – persuasively present itself to most Israelis as a legitimate answer to the threat of a Second Holocaust.

A brief and insufficient ideological counter-movement that tried to stem the rise of neo-Zionism and reach, at last, the originally promised but forever postponed normalisation, manifested itself in two basic laws of 1992 concerned with human rights (and discussed by Bartov in connection with Aharon Barak) on the one hand and the handshake between Yitzhak Rabin and Yasser Arafat on the White House Lawn in September of 1993 on the other. The post-Zionist fringe of this movement even revived Hillel Kook’s dream of the establishment of a de-ethnicised Hebrew Republic as the domestic complement of the finalised international borders (as the outcome of the negotiated peace with the Palestinians).

The hopes of the peace camp, however, were dashed by the failure of the Camp David negotiations in the summer of 2000 and the second Intifada, which broke out in its wake. Both events were interpreted falsely as proof that “there is no partner for peace.” Arafat allegedly rejected a “generous offer” from Barak and unleashed a wave of terror, thereby showing that he never stopped covertly preparing the destruction of Israel, which Hamas prepares overtly. The supposed lesson became clear twenty-three years after Camp David in the Israeli response to the October 7 attack by Hamas: if Israeli Jews were to prevent their own destruction, they would have to destroy Palestinians. One of the great achievements of Bartov’s book is that it clearly brings to light this perverse logic behind the Israeli obliteration of Gaza.

SELF-DIAGNOSIS OF A GENOCIDAL SOCIETY: IDEOLOGY, VIOLENCE AND DENIAL

Hanna Pfeifer

Omer Bartov's *Israel – What Went Wrong?* is a provocation to many. It breaks taboos for Israelis, Germans, and Americans who are still in denial about the genocide in Gaza, the ethnic cleansing in the West Bank, and the extraordinarily violent everyday reality of an occupation that has lasted for decades (BARTOV, 2025B; PFEIFER, 2026B). But as the various reviews of the book that were already published demonstrate, it also provokes debate among fellow critics of the Israeli state and its violence, and for some, it gives rise to vehement objection. Of course, these are all excellent reasons to read Bartov's book, in which he demonstrates not only his extraordinary historical knowledgeability and his ability to draw broad connections across different time periods and societies. It is also a courageous intervention in public discourse, written with great care and critical rigour.

The book addresses a broader public and is written in an accessible way – though unfortunately, without references, which prove so vital these days when one makes claims about Israel/Palestine. Lay readers may actually want to check some of the quotes and figures, and they might have been encouraged to deepen their knowledge further if the book had included direct references to other publications on the matter. But the academic debate, too, would have benefited, on the one hand, from access to the sources underpinning the considerable documentary effort Bartov makes in this book and, on the other, from a discussion of how its claims relate to the myriad publications on Israel/Palestine that have appeared over the last months. As others have noted (SHAW, 2026), it is particularly surprising that hardly any Palestinian scholars, political or intellectual voices, or first-hand accounts can be found in the book or in the recommended literature. But then this is a book dedicated to Israel as a Jewish state and probably addressed primarily to a Jewish and Israeli readership.

In this essay, I will first try to critically appraise Bartov's insider account of the Jewish-Israeli society as it became increasingly violent. I will then turn to what is, in my view, the core contribution of the book: showing us where history could have taken a different course. Asking how things could have gone better, as Omer Bartov does, is crucial for understanding

where agency emerges and how it can be mobilised to prevent an already unsettling and untenable state of affairs from getting worse – or, if I am being optimistic, to turn it into something better. In the final part, I will not examine Bartov's optimistic proposal for Israel/Palestine in detail – it has been critically discussed elsewhere (BOULOS & SEGAL, 2026; SHAW, 2026). Instead, I will focus more closely on Germany as the “*deux ex machina*” (SHAW, 2026) and somewhat disenchant the hopes that Bartov places in it.

A DELIBERATELY ONE-SIDED CLOSE-UP ON ZIONISM – FROM ITS INCEPTION TO ITS GENOCIDAL PRESENT

In *Israel: What Went Wrong?*, Bartov offers an insider's perspective on Jewish-Zionist-Israeli history. This allows him to see Zionism as both a “movement for Jewish self-emancipation, individual transformation, self-determination, and freedom from persecution and antisemitism” (p. 15) and an ethno-nationalist answer to antisemitism that “concluded that the Jews were not only a religion or an ethnic group, but a nation, one that deserved to eventually rule over itself in its own territory” (p. 72) and that quickly manifested as a “foreign colonial encroachment [in Palestine] under the protection of the greatest empire in the world” (p. 78). Zionism emerged in the context of raging antisemitism in Europe as a product of East Central European nationalisms as well as a response against them (p. 72). For Bartov, Israel turning Zionism “into the state ideology and in some ways into the state religion” (p. 182) is a decisive transformation: While some of Zionism's elements “were always there [...], the realities of the state constantly sharpened the edges of this state ideology in ways that *no one could have predicted in 1948*, making it more bloody-minded, more paranoid, more violent, and eventually ever more racist” (p. 182, my emphasis). Today's manifestation of Zionism “under such political leaders as Itamar Ben-Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich [...] epitomize[s] a frightening new version of Jewish supremacy, racism, and fascism” (p. 61). In this sense, the current Israeli leadership belongs to a rising global far right, feeding it with everything that is necessary for a “weaponization of antisemitism” (p. 62): “Defining criticism of Israel as antisemitic is [...] a convenient way for extremist, bigoted, racist, and, yes, also antisemitic American, European, and other authoritarian leaders around the world to look squeaky-clean” (p. 62).

In Israeli society, as well as in Germany and the US, what Bartov calls the “‘Never Again’ Syndrome” prevails. The pervasive “Holocaustism” (p. 107) in Israel led to a combination of “self-victimization and self-pity with self-righteousness, hubris, and the euphoria of power” (p. 106). As “the genocide of the Jews came to play a growing role in Israeli public life and rhetoric”, he explains, “it was no longer perceived merely as a past event but also as a future, indeed potentially imminent, threat” (p. 17). From there comes the view that Hamas is a Nazi organisation (p. 104) and that its “attack was akin to, or a continuation of the Holocaust” (p. 113) in Israel but also in some “Jewish and non-Jewish circles in Europe and the United States” (p. 113). In Germany, the uniqueness claim, which it shares with Israel, yielded a unidirectional memory culture. Germany developed “a national identity based on the Holocaust” (p. 94), which, in a post-migrant society (FOROUTAN, 2019), “may become a hinderance to social solidarity rather than an instrument for creating a post-Nazi nation” (p. 94). This identity is also the basis for the declaration that Israel’s security is German *Staatsräson* (*raison d’état*) (MARWECKI, 2024), from which follows an (almost) unconditional support of Israel – a foreign policy posture that Germany shares with the US.

Today, Israel is engaged in a “Forever War” (chapter 1), an “absolute war” (p. 44) that no longer pursues any political goals. Rather, it follows the “logic of endless violence, a logic that allows one to destroy entire populations and feel totally justified in doing so” (p. 42). Bartov presents a panorama of quotes from a genocidal society, leaving no doubt that Israel’s intention is to make “the entire area [Gaza] uninhabitable and [to deprive] the population of everything that makes for group identity and continuity” (p. 22). Israel commits genocide against the Palestinians, and most Israelis support it. This was preceded by a progressing dehumanisation of Palestinians in Israel more generally, and the military in particular (SION, 2026). The short chapter “On the Slaughter of Children” (chapter 4) makes this painfully evident. And it reads almost like a miniature of the book’s argument, representing its technique of weaving historical threats into a story line that connects catastrophes: the Holocaust with the Nakba, and both with the Hamas attacks of 7 October and the Gaza genocide. The pain of seeing children slaughtered leads to the will for unconditional protection – including the slaughter of the Other’s children, who are not even recognised, whose status as children or, indeed, as human beings is actively withdrawn (p. 126) (TOROS, 2026). An “obsessive focus on ‘our’ innocent

children not only serves to deny the innocence of the other side's children; it gives licence to kill them [...], having removed them from a shared moral universe where compassion or responsibility may apply" (p. 131).

While Bartov demonstrates his empathy with Palestinians and his horror vis-à-vis the Israeli conduct on various occasions, Palestinian perspectives are noticeably missing. We do not actually learn *from* Palestinians how they experience the loss of their children or their childhood, their lives, their home, or their future. While, for instance, the pain of Jews in the face of the most brutal violence, the hopes of Zionists, as well as the longing of Zionist and non-Zionist Jews for safety and a home in Israel are described in a very relatable way, Bartov barely touches upon the fears that the Zionist project instilled in Palestinians long before the foundation of the Israeli state (SHLAIM, 2026). As Rashid Khalidi shows, Palestinian intellectuals at the turn of the century had a very good grasp of Zionism as a colonial project and believed that it constituted a threat to the local population (KHALIDI, 2024, PP. 34–35; SEE ALSO BOULOS AND SEGAL, 2026) – not only in its revisionist versions but also in Theodor Herzl's promises that the Jewish immigration would only benefit the "non-Jewish population" (KHALIDI, 2024, P. 20). Bartov's and Khalidi's analyses actually bear some resemblances, not least in the form of weaving personal stories and family history into long-term historical accounts. But it is fruitful to read their texts side by side in order to get as close as possible to the experience of all those involved in the social situations and historical periods both authors describe.

Bartov's book is a Jewish-Israeli self-documentation project – of his own family history and how it is interwoven with the history of ideas as well as Bartov's own biography and his intellectual evolution (which is a bit similar to his first person history published some years ago) (SEE BARTOV, 2023) but also of the Jewish-Israeli *Zeitgeist* at different points in time and, in particular, in the Jewish-Israeli public sphere today. The book is therefore also a witness account of the cruelty of and estrangement from a society that the author used to consider home. Observing and writing on the transformation of one's own society into a collection of *génocidaires*, war criminals and their supporters must be very difficult. It requires a lot of emotional and intellectual distancing work, especially given the power of the apparatuses of denial established in Israel (MELAMED & GOLDMAN, 2024). Bartov has received considerable criticism for his late diagnosis of the genocide in Gaza and his refusal to call himself an anti-Zionist.

But his vehement public engagement against Israel's violence, both before and since May 2024, and his efforts to promote debate and policy change, deserve recognition. Bartov has also demonstrated that he possesses a core academic virtue: the ability to learn and to correct oneself. Thus, he changed his assessment of the violence in Israel/Palestine (p. 54). Such a move is rather rare in this context, but it is much needed to maintain high academic standards and reflect on, well, what went wrong.

IDEOLOGY AND ITS ROLE IN VIOLENCE

Beyond spanning a whole century and connecting conflicts across time and space, the book has one core merit: it shows that history could have gone differently. Bartov reminds us that there were opportunities to decide otherwise, to choose the less violent path, and to avoid the worst. I find this particularly valuable from a strategic point of view for today's political struggles, as it offers an impulse for thinking about how to prevent things from getting even worse – and yes, they can. It is hard to imagine how the situation could be worse for Palestinians in Gaza, but even there, we have not reached the end of the atrocities yet. And while the US has embarked on an autocratisation journey of breath-taking speed, marked by ever more numerous and increasingly tangible fascist elements, it is still a society with considerable progressive potential and spaces in which this potential can flourish – there is still something to lose and, therefore, something to defend. As I am finishing this essay, Germans in the state of Saxony-Anhalt have just made the far-right AfD (*Alternative für Deutschland*) by far the strongest party in regional elections – a party with fascist traits and undeniable affinities to Nazi ideology and tactics (HERZOG, 2025), whose regional branch is officially classified as right-wing extremist and thus considered hostile to the German constitution. For the first time since the darkest of times, fascists may actually assume government responsibility in Germany, albeit in one of the country's smaller states. This is frightening, but it may soon be eclipsed by a similar success for the party at the federal level.

As for Israel, Bartov asserts that “[t]here were many forks in the road where the country could have chosen to go one way and not the other” (p. 16) – and this means that there may have been an alternative trajectory to the decades of occupation, the progressing dehumanisation of Palestinians and the genocide in Gaza. Israeli history could have been

less violent – or differently violent. Avi Shlaim (2026) is right in stating that “history does not disclose its alternatives”. Bartov discusses at length what he considers a core failure in Israel’s history, the “Missing Constitution” (chapter 5). In his view, a constitution “would have served to constrain the worst impulses of Zionism and to open a path toward a liberal society for all its citizens” (p. 16). He even suggests that adopting a constitution in 1948 “would have made Zionism [...] superfluous. Zionism had accomplished what it set out to do [...]. It could have been consigned to the archives as a remarkable but no longer relevant historical moment” (pp. 181–182).

But would a democratic and rights-based Israeli state have made it right for the Palestinians, many of whom had lost their lives or homes due to the Zionist colonisation project and the ethnic cleansing that had begun before Israeli statehood was declared (KHALIDI, 2024, p. 91)? Martin Shaw (2026) expresses his doubts about this. He considers the Nakba genocidal. He does not insist on this conceptualisation so much as on acknowledging “the Zionist destruction of Palestinian society” and the “deep eliminationism of the whole state project, which a constitution and bill of rights could hardly have corrected” (IBID.).

Shaw also criticises Bartov’s notion that the Zionist “appeal to humanitarianism, tolerance, the rule of law, and protection of minorities that characterized the beginnings of Jewish self-emancipation *gradually acquired* all traits of the relentless, remorseless, and increasingly racist ethno-nationalisms from which Zionism sought or liberate European Jewry” (p. 4, my emphasis). To Shaw (2026), Zionism as an ideology was ethnonationalist from its inception and, as a practice, “from the moment it fixed its colonization project on Palestine, it was also a threat of elimination for Palestinians”. Emancipation and ethnonationalism “were always the two sides of Zionism”, he claims, “with the latter becoming dominant well before 1948” (Ibid.). From the remainder of his book as reconstructed above, and in slight contrast to the quoted formulation in the introduction which indeed emphasises transformation, I think that Bartov would actually agree with the view that Zionism always had the “impulses” (p. 16) that would later lead to a structurally violent state – even though he only briefly touches upon the pre-1948 atrocities in Palestine (e.g., pp. 77–78; the reflection on the speech by Moshe Dayan, pp. 47–49).

In a more fundamental criticism, Sonia Boulos and Raz Segal (2026) reject the notion of ‘becoming bad’ or ‘going wrong’. They argue that the Israeli state “emerged as foundationally wrong” and was born as “clearly exclusionary, racist, and violent” (IBID.). This may be so, but such an assessment does not suffice to assess its relative escalation and radicalisation over time, or to perceive processes of de-escalation and de-radicalisation at all. To be sure, there is a danger of losing sight of and underestimating structural and slow violence. These are forms of violence perpetrated by the state in invisible, unintelligible, or indirect ways, making them difficult to grasp, conceptualise, and condemn (PFEIFER, 2026A), such as the Gaza blockade; the toleration of, or tacit to open support for, settler violence; and the everyday violence of apartheid and occupation. And still, the Gaza genocide is a drastic escalation of violence corresponding to a transformation of Israel’s colonial gaze as it moved from colonisation, through separation, and finally to extermination (SION, 2026). Describing such relative changes matters for the reduction of violence and can make an absolute difference for the victimised Palestinians.

Certainly, there was no unavoidable pathway from Zionism to the ethnic cleansing of the Nakba, or from the foundation of the Israeli state to the genocide in Gaza. Ultimately, the question is what role ideology plays in the practice of violence and what path dependencies institutions founded on violence create for future violence. I do not find Bartov’s emphasis on the “ideological and emotional motivations” (p. 4) of Zionism as a movement convincing – the best motivations can lead to the most horrible deeds. Conversely, ascribing – rightfully – all kinds of problematic traits to Zionist ideology, whether exclusively or alongside a recognition of its emancipatory aspects, does not in itself explain the violence it inspired, or the variations in how that violence manifested over time. However violent an ideology may be, it requires resources, apparatuses, and historical conditions that enable violence to be inflicted. Ideology can contain an inherent potential for violence that may or may not be actualised. Realising this potential requires certain material and societal conditions, and depending on those conditions, it can manifest itself in varying intensities and forms of violence. The merit of Bartov’s book is in its pointing to the critical junctures that could have become turning points towards a less violent reality, as well as the dynamics that instead made a more violent reality possible.

THE ILL-PLACED HOPE IN GERMANY

What Bartov proposes as means of making history less violent is not always convincing. A constitution adopted in 1948 may indeed have tamed some of Zionism's violent potentials for the future, but it could not have remedied its past of ethnic cleansing. Bartov seems to hope that adopting a constitution with a bill of rights and principles of equality at an early stage would have created a strong judiciary, changed the way displaced Palestinians and refugees, as well as their property, were treated, and instilled Israel with a different political culture (pp. 180–181). But, as his analysis of the Basic Laws of 1992 shows, this would not have resolved the contradiction at the core of the Israeli state. Drawing on the thought of Aharon Barak, these laws defined Israel, for the first time, as a Jewish *and* democratic state (p. 162). As Bartov demonstrates, the “contradictions of this attempt to square the circle of ethno-nationalism and pluralism, or at least tolerance, are obvious” (p. 173), and they have effectively led to the continued denial of Palestinian rights and the reality of the occupation. Worse still, under Barak's leadership and on the basis of these laws, the Supreme Court “played a crucial role in establishing an apartheid system in the West Bank” (p. 163).

Bartov seems to think that these problems are the result of path dependencies created by wrong decisions made during the foundation of the Israeli state. Socialisation into a constitutional state would have made a difference. In his ideal version of history, Israel would not even have faced the Jewish–democratic contradiction because it would have abandoned Zionism, and Palestinians would have enjoyed equal rights. “Israel could have turned to peace, truth, and reconciliation with the Palestinians” (p. 182), including a recognition of the Nakba and restitution. But in a reversal of Aimé Césaire's (2021) notion that colonialism dehumanises not only the colonised but also the colonisers – which Bartov cites earlier in the book (p. 18) – he also suggests that a different kind of Jewish life in Israel would have been possible: “a flourishing of Jewish culture, free of fanaticism, messianism, fearmongering, and oppression of others, rooted in the humanistic, tolerant, and universalistic traditions that are just as much a part of its long history” (p. 182). A political ethos would have developed, one that Bartov describes as resembling the German *Verfassungspatriotismus* (constitutional patriotism).

But how is constitutional patriotism faring in Germany? On the federal level, a little less than 30% of Germans would vote for the anti-constitutional far right AfD today, with its blatant anti-Muslim racism and barely concealed antisemitism, including its Holocaust denial and the relativisation of the Nazi era as “bird shit” in German history by its former chairman, Alexander Gauland.³ As Ernst Böckenförde (1976, p. 60) famously put it, “the liberal, secularized state is nourished by presuppositions that it cannot itself guarantee. That is the great gamble it has made for liberty’s sake” (TRANSLATION FROM GORDON, 2013, P. 186). In Germany, as in other societies, the state may currently be losing this gamble. A constitution is not enough to create its own fan base capable of sustaining it, and this may also have been the case in Israel – even though it might have made the last decades less violent, which would already have been a lot.

The German constitution has not only lost its support among AfD cadres and those who vote for them. The recent escalation of violence in Israel/Palestine has actually shown that the majority of political leaders across all German parties – with the exception of the initially hesitant and now more assertive *Die Linke* – are ready to abandon its principles as well as norms of international law for the sake of the *Staatsräson*. Germany has supported the Israeli military effort through providing weapons and diplomatic and political support to Israel, as well as interventions on behalf of Israel before international courts (PFEIFER & GOLDMANN, 2025; PFEIFER, 2026A). As I am writing this essay, hearings are taking place in The Hague in the case against Germany for breaching its obligations under the Genocide Convention, which was brought before the International Court of Justice by Nicaragua. Germany’s role of aiding and abetting the Israeli genocide and the court case itself are hardly discussed in public, even though this is the third genocide in which Germany participated, the previous two being the Holocaust and the genocide against the Herero and Nama (pp. 185–188). The antisemitism allegation is often used in Germany to deflect from the genocide, as Bartov himself describes it; those who use it include the by now infamous “antisemitism czars” (p. 93), who play a crucial role in restrictions on academic freedom and freedom of opinion and assembly, cancellations of academic and cultural events, and attempts at criminalising anti-Zionist positions in Germany (ENGELCKE & SALIBA, 2026; ULLRICH, 2026). Courts have decided sometimes in favour, and sometimes against these freedoms. Many universities and cultural institutions have failed to stand up against the restrictions. And even politicians farther left than the AfD

have made use of the antisemitism allegation for stirring anti-Muslim racism (AHMED ET AL., 2026).

It is therefore impossible for Germany to take over, as Bartov proposes, the role of a broker between Jewish Israelis and Palestinians – in place of the US under its erratic president Donald Trump (p. 217). It is morally impossible for Palestinians to accept this, given Germany's support for the genocide. It is practically impossible because Germany is in a state of such profound denial about the reality in Israel/Palestine that it lacks the strategic capacity to devise promising plans. There are, however, some Germans in the diplomatic corps, academia, and the cultural sector who have spoken out against this denial. It will take time for them to break through the structures of the *Staatsräson*. One indicator of the state of the German debate is, ironically, that Bartov's book has so far not found a publisher willing to translate it for a German readership (WIEDEMANN, 2026). May it nevertheless find many readers among Germans, who still have so much to learn from Bartov.

RESPONSE

Omer Bartov

Let me begin by thanking the three scholars who read and commented on my book, and the journal for generously hosting this forum. I will respond to each of the commentators individually and then offer some closing remarks.

Jakub Záhora perceives *Israel: What Went Wrong?* as “inadvertently [...] connected to what has become known as the autobiographical turn” because, as he puts it, the author “foregrounds his own identity and personal and familial history.” There is surely nothing inadvertent in my choice to “draw on my personal and professional background” while writing about a country and a time I am intimately connected to. Indeed, as Záhora acknowledges, my choice to write what I call first-person history predates this book. This was exemplified not only in my previous book, *Genocide, the Holocaust, and Israel-Palestine: First-Person History in Times of Crisis* (2023), parts of which cover the same geographical and political territory as the current volume, but also in *Tales from the Borderland: Making and Unmaking the Galician Past* (2022), which mostly focuses on much earlier times in a region very distant from the Middle East (though admittedly, the last three chapters tell the story of my mother’s transition from Galicia to Palestine). Conversely, some long sections in *Israel* have nothing personal in them, dedicated as they are to legal and historical issues, including international law, the politics of memory, and debates over Israel’s judicial system.

Nonetheless, it is legitimate to ask whether my acknowledged and deliberate personal engagement clouds and prejudices my judgment or provides me with useful insights. Here, while Záhora concedes that my “(auto)biographical narratives are not... self-indulgent detours,” he does argue that thanks to my upbringing and family history I remain “ambivalent about the legacy of Zionism,” as expressed in my “longing” for the “missing constitution.” This is a somewhat odd assertion, not only because it is impossible to long for something that never happened, considering that Israel still has no constitution, but also because the chapter analyzing the reasons for and the price of the decision not to have a constitution is

neither personal nor nostalgic or sentimental. Rather, it is based on a close reading of legal debates.

The chapter does, of course, speculate on what might have been the consequences of endorsing a constitution containing a bill of rights, as the new state had promised to do when it proclaimed itself into being on May 14, 1948. Because this did not happen, there is every reason for scepticism about my speculations. But to say that it would “not necessarily [have] rein[ed] in the Israeli-Jewish exclusionary forces” or prevented “the ascent of Jewish supremacy” simply because “many authoritarian states” that had constitutions ignored them, or because the transformation of Zionism into what it is today was “embedded in the movement from the beginning and has always been its dominant component,” is, to my mind, just as speculative, not to say historically deterministic and in a certain sense quite cynical. Does Záhora imply that the whole business of human rights embedded in a state’s legal system is meaningless? Or that Zionism, unlike all other ethnonational movements (of which East-Central Europe had and has its fair share), was fated to end up as a genocidal ideology from the day it appeared on the scene?

As I see it, there is nothing ambivalent about my own views of Zionism, as elaborated in the book. It began as an ideology that promised a persecuted minority in Eastern Europe self-determination, self-assertion, liberty and dignity. It was as genocidal in those early days as German, Polish, Czech or Ukrainian ethnonationalisms were – that is, it had a violent potential but also promised a better future for masses of oppressed people. Insisting on the logic of historical determinism takes us back to the kind of historiography that presented Hitler as the direct and inevitable consequence of Bismarck or Luther, an ahistorical argument that has rightly been dismissed, although it resurfaced briefly in Daniel Jonah Goldhagen’s *Hitler’s Willing Executioners* (1996). Curiously, Záhora’s logic can also play into a Schmittian worldview whereby we might as well give up the hope of human rights and equality before the law since the state may always assert itself as the ultimate arbiter at a time of emergency and overturn all our naïve hopes and aspirations.

Záhora also relates my “belated” recognition of the genocide in Gaza to my “Zionist background,” suggesting that while Raz Segal, who has a similar background, did not suffer from the same “hesitation,” I was

motivated by my “attachment to the Zionist idea.” This speculation about my motives strangely ignores my detailed explanation in the book of why I did not “jump the gun” as early as, say, October 13, 2023, when Segal’s essay appeared – that is, less than a week after the Hamas attack and before Israeli ground forces even began moving into Gaza. As I explained in detail in my *New York Times* op-ed on November 10 of the same year, while there were by then – four weeks into the war – already sufficient indications of war crimes and crimes against humanity in Gaza, and despite statements expressing an apparent genocidal intent by Israeli political and military leaders, there was still not enough evidence to show that an intent to destroy the Palestinians as a group in Gaza was being implemented. What I articulated at the time was not ambivalence but a worry that because the word genocide had often been used as a term of outrage rather than being applied in accordance with its legal definition, using it before there was enough evidence would undermine its meaning and diminish its impact. I was also hoping that President Biden’s administration would act to stop Israel, and I still believe that had it done so in November or December 2023, we would have said that while the Israeli military had engaged in severe breaches of international humanitarian law, genocide had been averted.

I also explained clearly – not only in the *New York Times* in July 2025, but already in the *Guardian* in August 2024 – why, by that time, I had become convinced that the pattern of operations of the Israeli military indeed conformed to the expressions of genocidal intent expressed in October the previous year, and that consequently there was no other choice but to describe the Israeli actions as genocide — meaning there was no alternative explanation for those actions. I felt no joy or satisfaction in calling this out, but also no ambivalence. As I eventually wrote with what appeared to me and many readers as perfect clarity, as a genocide scholar, I knew it when I saw it. Attributing my insistence on making certain that this was indeed the goal of Israeli policy to some sort of Zionist sentimentality has no basis in fact. It is always heartbreaking to witness inhumanity, particularly when it is on such a scale and by one’s own people. But ambivalence and hesitance are not at issue here.

To be sure, asserting that Israel is guilty of genocide is a very serious accusation that must have consequences. Moreover, it should be recognised that what Israel tried to do in Gaza was a repeat of what occurred in 1948, namely, an attempt to ethnically cleanse the Strip. But unlike the Nakba,

during which the borders were open and Palestinians could flee, in 2023-2025 the borders were sealed, and ethnic cleansing became genocide, as has happened in many past genocides, ranging from the 1904 genocide of the Herero and Nama in German Southwest Africa, through the genocide of the Armenians in World War I, to the Holocaust. By justifying genocide, even as it denies it, Zionism as a political ideology has discredited itself and is no longer sustainable. As long as Israel's state ideology remains Zionism, it will bear the stain of genocide and should not maintain its place as an equal member of the international community. Only by discarding Zionism and finding a politically just and mutually agreed way to share the land between the river and the sea with its indigenous Palestinian population will the state be able to move forward.

I may, as Záhora elegantly puts it, belong to a “dying breed” in that I can recall Israel as a very different society from what it is today; but as I write in the closing pages of the book, I insist on thinking constructively about ways to provide a better future for both Jews and Palestinians in the country of my birth - not because of nostalgia, naiveté, or ambivalence, but because the fourteen million people who live there are not going anywhere and deserve a better future free from oppression and violence. The hope for liberation and justice should never grow old.

Pavel Barša, for his part, praises *Israel: What Went Wrong?* for its “refusal to reduce Zionism to settler-colonialism” and for acknowledging “its emancipatory nature as a legitimate response to the rise of political anti-Semitism in central and western Europe and of anti-Jewish violence in Eastern Europe since the end of the 19th century.” Indeed, Barša rejects “the post-colonial Left’s... analytical simplification that focuses exclusively on the functional aspect of Zionist settlement in Palestine,” while ignoring “the self-understanding of the first generations of Zionists who were looking for a way out of discrimination” that “would combine a self-affirmation (and self-transformation) [...] with the realisation of universalist ideals.” Eliding that aspect of Zionism, he writes, “amounts to missing the tragic nature of its history.” I could not put it better.

Conversely, Barša joins Záhora in expressing scepticism about the long-term impact of the State of Israel's decision not to enact

a constitution. According to Barša, I argue that the missing constitution was “*the* reason for Israel’s degeneration into a xenophobic ethnic State which systematically oppresses and, ultimately, tries to destroy another ethnic group.” In fact, I do not make such definitive claims but rather suggest that not having a constitution had a significant and ongoing effect on Israeli politics by leaving the new state without a specific commitment to equality for all its citizens, as did the related decision not to determine Israel’s borders. To doubt that such legal lacunae were significant seems to me absurd, even as we cannot say for sure what the precise effect of having a constitution might have been.

I am also baffled by Barša’s criticism that I do not discuss the Law of Return, since the book engages with it at some length (see pages 168–181) for the reasons that Barša rightly mentions. Just as surprising, to my mind, is the fact that Barša invokes Hillel Kook, who, along with Menachem Begin – a much more central figure in Israeli politics, of course, who is cited at length in the book – advocated the need for a constitution, which, had it been written in the spirit of the state proclamation’s draft of a bill of rights, would have indeed set limits to the Law of Return on account of its ethnonational bias. (This ethnonational bias regarding citizenship is, however, not unique, and can be found in the citizenship laws of such countries as Germany, Turkey, and Japan, for instance, which provide an easier path to citizenship when one applies for it on the basis of ancestry or blood).

Because Barša believes that I see the lack of a constitution in Israel as the only root and determining factor of all that happened since, he rightly refers to the gradual development of ethnonationalisms resulting from a variety of domestic and international factors. Curiously, that is precisely what I argue, namely that for a long time there was no point of no return, and that historical determinism provides a distorting lens on the past and robs it of all nuances. That is why I reject the notion that genocide was on Theodor Herzl’s mind in 1900 just as much as the idea that the genocide in Gaza was an inevitable result of the establishment of the state in 1948. In other words, while a constitution might have had an ameliorating effect on the ethnonationalistic turn of the state, and could have replaced Zionism as the state ideology, the fact that Israel failed to adopt one did not make everything that ensued inevitable, though it certainly made it more, and increasingly, likely. Yet there were always more forks in the road, and numerous wrong turns had to be taken to bring us from there to here.

The occupation that began in 1967, the growing Jewish settlement movement of Gush Emunim and its increasingly radical successors constitute, of course, one of those major forks in the road. As I write in the book, between 1948 and 1967, Israel was a Jewish-majority state and thus embodied the Zionist dream, which was accomplished through fire and sword in the Nakba. But because of Zionism's greed for land, for the last six decades, Israel has been a 50/50 state, and one in which only the Jewish half has full (albeit gradually diminishing) democratic and citizenship rights. That has certainly had a profound effect on the nature of its politics and society, as any colonial rule is bound to have, and has led to the creation of an apartheid regime in the West Bank, a brutal 16-year-long siege on Gaza, and, since 2023, genocide and ethnic cleansing. There is no doubt, as I state clearly in the book, that the unjust and illegal rule by Israel over millions of Palestinians is the root not only of an ongoing cycle of violence but also of the degeneration of democratic rights, the rule of law, ethics, and any semblance of humanitarianism in Israel proper.

Can we speak here of a new form of Zionism, as Barša proposes, or of the transformation and degeneration of the old one? If we opt for the former, we assume that we can somehow save the latter, resurrect it, cleanse it of its sins and misdemeanours, and keep using it as the moving spirit of the state. I do not believe that it is possible. Zionism, for all its past hopes, illusions, idealism, and universalistic aspirations, can no longer be cleansed from what it has allowed itself to become. I can still remember those left-wing idealists, whom I knew personally, such as the authors and poets Haim Gouri, Moshe Shamir, and Hillel Omer, who became supporters of Greater Israel after 1967. I recall Amos Oz proclaiming that half of him was with Peace Now and the other half with Gush Emunim, who appeared to have resurrected the pioneering spirit that secular Tel Aviv youths had abandoned. There was no predetermined history. But it also did not begin in 1967 or in 2023. The Zionism that my father believed in cannot be resurrected but must be discarded, and a new state and new politics must replace the old based on a constitution ensuring equality for all citizens and self-determination for the other half of the state's population.

Hanna Pfeifer begins her essay by sharing the surprise of other commentators "that hardly any Palestinian scholars, political or intellectual

voices, or first-hand accounts can be found in the book or in the recommended literature.” Strictly speaking, that is not quite true, as the very first title in the reading list is Atef Abu Saif’s devastating account *Don’t Look Left*, and several other Palestinian scholars, such as Gilbert Achcar, Rashid Khalidi, and Raef Zreik, are also mentioned. But in truth, the book is about Zionism and Israel, not Palestinians. As I write in the opening line: “This book explores the tragic transformation of Zionism, a movement that sought to emancipate European Jewry from oppression and persecution, into a state ideology of ethnonationalism increasingly focused on the exclusion and violent domination of Palestinians under Israeli rule.” In other words, I explore how Zionists and Israelis see themselves and how they understand what they do to others. And while Pfeifer is right to say that “this is a book dedicated to Israel as a Jewish state,” she is not quite correct to assert that it is “probably addressed primarily to a Jewish and Israeli readership.” In fact, the book has not yet been read by Hebrew readers (it will be published in Hebrew in the coming months) but has been read widely in its English version as well as in its editions in several European languages, including French, Italian, Polish and Portuguese (and soon also German and Spanish), and is about to become available in an Arabic translation as well. In other words, there is an interest in this question that far transcends Israeli readers, who, as one may expect, are especially resistant to what it has to say.

I should add here that my choice to write the book in this manner also had to do with my sense that it was not my place to speak for Palestinians, who have some eloquent voices of their own. Where I could say something that would resonate as both authentic and well-informed was, as already noted also by Záhora, in my role as both an insider and an outsider, an Israeli observing his society intimately yet with the benefit of looking at it from the outside. Conversely, I do recognise the need to examine all the issues raised in this book, and more generally all issues concerning Israeli Jews and Palestinians, from a Palestinian perspective. My own solution to this conundrum will be part of my forthcoming book *The Broken Promise: A Personal-Political History of Israel and Palestine*, which is based on intimate conversations with Jewish Israelis and Palestinian citizens of Israel about their connection to the place. Here, Palestinians, as well as Israeli Jews, speak in their own voice about themselves, and my only role is to provide them with a platform and orchestrate their voices.

For the moment, as Pfeifer suggests, “it is fruitful to read” my book “side by side” with Rashid Khalidi’s *The Hundred Years’ War on Palestine*, from which Jewish-Israeli perspectives are just as noticeably missing as “Palestinian perspectives are noticeably missing” from *Israel*. This, she argues, will enable readers “to get as close as possible to the experience of all involved in the social situations and historical periods both authors describe,” although it should be said that while, in Pfeifer’s opinion, my book “demonstrates... empathy with Palestinians,” Khalidi cannot be accused of the same vis-à-vis Jewish Israelis.

Unlike the authors of the previous two essays, Pfeifer agrees with me that “showing us where history could have taken a different course,” and “asking how things could have gone better... is crucial for understanding where agency emerges and how it can be mobilised to prevent an already unsettling and untenable state of affairs from getting worse,” or even how “to turn it into something better.” And, indeed, this was the goal that I set myself – not to simply condemn and dismiss, but to analyse and understand, because that is the only way to chart a path forward that is not marred by the same mistakes, rage and hatred that are sure to perpetuate and accelerate the current cycle of violence. At the core of this perception is the realisation, which too many people refuse to acknowledge, that the 14 million people living between the river and the sea are there to stay, for better or for worse, and that our goal in whatever capacity we function is not to scheme about how to delegitimise and remove the Palestinians or the Jews but to help them find a way to coexist equally with justice and dignity and better future prospects for all.

Like Záhora, Pfeifer describes my book as “a Jewish-Israeli self-documentation project,” and refers to the “considerable criticism” I received for my alleged “late diagnosis of the genocide in Gaza” as well as for my “refusal to call” myself “an anti-Zionist,” although she praises me for my “ability to learn and to correct” myself. I have already explained above how and why I reached the conclusion that Israel was conducting genocide when I did so, and why I believe that calling the Israeli actions in Gaza six days after the October 7 attack by Hamas a “textbook case of genocide” was both premature and wrong. But I have certainly learned and corrected myself as far as my views on Israel and Zionism are concerned, as can be gauged by comparing my current views to those I expressed in my debate with Tony Judt in the *New York Review of Books* in 2003. Yet on the question

of genocide, precisely because Israel had been accused of it not a few times in the past without sufficient evidence, and because of the false argument, to my mind, that Zionism was a genocidal ideology from its very inception, I feel justified in having waited until there was, as I saw it, incontrovertible evidence that the only possible explanation for the Israeli actions in Gaza was Israel's genocidal intent, which is the logic required by the International Court of Justice for it to recognise an act as genocide.

I have also responded already to the insinuation that my book is merely a personal/emotional text rather than an analytical one, an argument which, I believe, any close reader of the book will find false. But on my refusal to describe myself as an anti-Zionist, I would respond as I did to Gideon Levy, who is cited by Záhora. If anti-Zionism means a rejection of the right of Jewish national self-determination, then the question is whether this rejection is rooted in a wholesale opposition to national self-determination by any group, including the Palestinians, or is specific only to the Jews. Personally, I am no great fan of nationalism, least of all of ethnonationalism. But I believe in consistency and integrity. In a world of nations, as both Jews and Palestinians have discovered, being stateless is a precarious condition. In such a world, I believe Jews have the same right as all other groups to national self-determination. What they and the state they established do not have a right to do is to exercise that right by oppressing, ethnically cleansing, and perpetrating genocide against another group. Since Zionism did that, I have become vehemently opposed to it in its present incarnation and do not believe it can be repaired, even as I can understand and sympathise with its beginning and maintain that its transformation into what it is today was neither inevitable nor unpreventable.

Indeed, as Pfeifer writes, the book's "one core merit" is that "it shows that history could have gone differently." That history is the history of Zionism and the state it brought into being, a history which, as I assert quite clearly and as Pfeifer rightly notes, shows both the Zionist impulses toward violent colonisation and Zionism's capacity to save hundreds of thousands of Jews from mass murder in Europe. But unlike Barša, who, as we saw, rejects the tendency to ignore "the self-understanding of the first generations of Zionists, who were looking for a way out of discrimination" alongside "self-affirmation... self-transformation... [and] the realisation of universalist ideals," Pfeifer is unconvinced by my "emphasis on the 'ideological and emotional motivations' of Zionism as a movement."

Yet anyone who has studied any ideological movement, ranging from socialism and communism to fascism and Nazism, knows how important idealism, emotions, and belief are in energising people (or “the masses”) and driving intellectual and political elites. The path to hell is paved not only, or necessarily, with good intentions, but with great hopes combined with a sense of victimhood. This is crucial to understanding national movements, not least Zionism and Palestinian nationalism.

Finally, let me turn to Pfeifer’s criticism of my alleged “ill-placed hope in Germany.” Here, I would say, Pfeifer appears to reject the immense achievements of the Federal Republic of Germany following the horrors of the Third Reich and its catastrophic defeat. Ignoring the decades in which Germany gradually built a stable and flourishing democracy, as well as going through a remarkable though hardly flawless process of “coming to terms” with the past, and especially with the Holocaust, Pfeifer prefers to focus only on the present rise of the far right AfD party, as if that negates several generations of accomplishments. Germany, I would insist, created a model for how a state and a nation taken over by evil forces and wreaking devastation on its neighbours, can, following the crushing of its regime and military, rebuild itself. It is an optimistic lesson that Europeans have participated in and benefited from.

The return to fascism and racism in Europe today is far from inevitable, not least because too many people have a great deal to lose if that were to happen. For Israel and its allies and supporters, Germany’s fate should be a good lesson: namely, that under massive pressure, in this case rather the kind applied to apartheid South Africa than that applied to Nazi Germany, states and nations can change course, predicted catastrophes can be averted, ideological fanaticism can be defused, violent urges can be curbed, and a better future can be glimpsed. It must always be recalled that violence and extremism thrive on cynicism and hopelessness, despair and resentment, scepticism and resignation. Nazism rose from the ashes of World War I and the Great Depression. Zionism thrived on persecution and antisemitism. Hamas rose from oppression and hopelessness. The messianic, fanatic Jewish-supremacists are nourished by an existential fear and visions of extermination.

To conclude: Germany may well not “take over... the role of a broker between Jewish Israelis and Palestinians,” as Pfeifer writes, though I would not be as certain about that as she appears to be, just as I would remind us that despite the reality of American policies vis-à-vis Israel today, there is a sea change in public opinion regarding Israel in the United States and Europe that will eventually be reflected in those states’ policies. One positive sign of this development is that since Pfeifer wrote her essay, a German publisher has decided to take on my book. Judging by the interest the German public has shown in the issue, including in several public events in which I participated in Germany, there is still hope. Not only does Germany provide an example of building democracy from the ashes of genocide, but it may also, I believe, reconfigure its relationship to the Nazi past from contrition and guilt to positively contributing to bringing peace and reconciliation between Jewish Israelis and Palestinians. It may take time. But it is a worthy goal to strive for.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Martin Shaw argues that “[y]et it was implausible to argue, as Bartov did, that Israel’s campaign only became fully genocidal during 2024: the violence was front-loaded, and analysis confirmed an exceptional rate of killing in the first month of the war” (Shaw, 2026, p. 590).
- 2 In his 2025 NYT article, Bartov wrote that his recognition of the Israeli genocide in Gaza “was a painful conclusion to reach, and one I resisted as long as I could” (Bartov, 2025a).
- 3 <https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/vogelschiss-aeusserung-ein-versuch-die-grenze-des-sag-baren-100.html>

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