

Redbone

on my

Mind

A few reflections from a live-streamed genocide
November 2023-April 2024

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The enclosed essays were originally published on my Substack, which I started writing in November 2023 and has been frequently focused on Palestine and my live reactions to the ongoing genocidal response of Israel to the October 7th attacks.

As you'll read, I'm not an expert on Middle East politics, but I have a heart and a sense of responsibility borne of the both the connections between the U.S. and Israel and the parallels between settler-colonial projects here and there, past and present.

Living archives, especially those housed offline, feel important in this moment, and I hope you can use this zine as a jumping off point for your own reflections, learning, and movement into action.

All proceeds benefit Palestine Children's Relief Fund.

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On Rituals and Repair

What do you do when you don't "do" Thanksgiving?

"What are you doing for... this week?" It feels like many of the people closest to me are in a transitional state regarding the Thanksgiving holiday. We're beginning to agree that it's in poor taste to celebrate a mythologized event so tied up in our American history of genocide, but the luckiest among us still get the better part of a week off from work. Even "Friendsgiving" tastes off to me. Aren't we observing the same feast by a different name? Often with the same food? I'm happy to report that this year will be my first year successfully doing nothing resembling the turkey feast tradition. I hope to build on the "nothing" foundation in years to come, perhaps joining my friends who fast for the day or finding another way to observe the National Day of Mourning¹.

I have (mostly) great memories of Thanksgivings past with my large extended families. My divorced parents each have large families and both sides have hosted past meals topping thirty attendees. Now, though, one side has geographically scattered. The other, I prefer to visit when there is no risk of snow in the mountains. It's made it more convenient to call out of a tradition I don't believe in. As an adult, my queer household has made it a priority to build community and familial traditions outside of colonial holidays and networks of blood kin, but it takes that kind of a network to expand beyond Friendsgiving. And to me, that network is part of the point—a way to divest from the "nuclear family as the basic acceptable unit of society," a formation which itself is deeply colonial.

This year, my partner and I are bringing back an old classic from our Ad-busters days, the first heyday of Reverend Billy and the Stop Shopping Choir, and hosting a Buy Nothing Day on Friday. It's twice old-fashioned, because it feels like Black Friday scarcely exists as a dystopian holiday anymore, but it's always a good day to buy nothing, I suppose. We'll share the sauna we (mostly she) just finished building, swap clothing and household items, go for a walk in the country, and work on our mending with friends and neighbors. I'm not sharing all this about Thanksgiving to come off as smug, and I hope its received more as invitation than as admonishment.

hovered. I threw rocks at it until it went away. I heard that Israeli quadcopters have been playing recordings of crying children, among other sounds, into the ruined streets of Gaza to lure people out into the open to kill. Like how a cougar sounds like a crying baby if you're unlucky enough to hear it in the woods. **What the fuck are we doing, seriously?**, my shirt from another timeline asks.

The drone accelerated back up into the air and the little girl laughed and ran towards the tree line again, eager to be scared by what might, in another world, just be a toy.

¹ learn more at United American Indians of New England, www.uaine.org

The irony of the release of the Lavender story by +972 is that the iteration of the program the writers revealed is no longer particularly active. They essentially put themselves out of work by how “efficiently” they used the system in the first, and most deadly, weeks of the siege. They write,

“The fact that most homes in the Gaza Strip were already destroyed or damaged, and almost the entire population has been displaced...impaired the army’s ability to rely on intelligence databases and automated house-locating programs.”

So many family homes were bombed, there are no physical houses left to bomb. The scale of devastation is nearly impossible to grasp. No wonder everything looks gray, completely otherworldly, in the photos we see now.

Back at the literary festival, one of my favorite writers, Carmen Maria Machado, read from a story about fractured timelines and the people who could jump between them while retaining a coherent, single self. It was weird, and sad, and kind of hot—all the reasons I love this writer. As her character slipped through slightly altered parallel worlds, I found myself laughing a little too loud, before the punch line, or when no one else seemed to be laughing. Maybe it was too real in a moment where I often feel like part of me (the part that paid taxes) is across the ocean destroying entire worlds, another is watching it happen on a tiny screen that watches me back, and another is having a pretty pleasant spring afternoon in the park.

We went to the park before the reading, the park I used to get obliterated at as a teen and play at as a child, and sat in the too-green grass among families and picnic blanket girls and Frisbee Christians. I read a little, but it was a distracting scene. Before long, I heard the *vjiiii*, *vjiiii* sound of a drone nearby. Two young men (boys?) were flying it from the nearby tree line. I heard a little girl scream and looked up to see her running away on clumsy, three-year-old legs from where the pilots stood. I hadn’t noticed her family sitting right behind us until she ran back toward the safety of their blanket.

Oddly, my park companion and I had just had a conversation about drones in the car, and how we hated them. Once, we’d been sunbathing on a rock at a peaceful lake when one buzzed from around the corner and

We can’t have a functioning society without small rituals, seasonal rites, and excuses to gather. They don’t have to be the ones we grew up with in a culture that’s rapidly fraying from the strain of its own internal contradictions.

Particularly this year, I have colonialism on the brain. I don’t know what kind of dinner guest I would be for my biological families of varied political belief, but I know I couldn’t offer an honest life update to an uncle without mentioning the fact that I’m writing about the legacy of settler colonialism in our family. Working on this memoir dictates what I read, watch, think and talk about—even when there aren’t mass atrocities being funded by my government in one of the last bastions of old-school settler colonialism halfway around the world. Do they want to talk about the railroad, the gold mines, the buffalo, and our Montana ancestors? Or do they want to talk about Palestine?

The last month and a half has felt like an extended bout of *deja vu*. Ten years ago, I traveled to Palestine and Israel as a young activist-journalist and came back thinking about my own life in the American West. It was weird how I traveled across the world to learn about somewhere new and instead saw the desert hills that looked so much like my mother’s hometown in Central Washington. I made a body of work about this comparison—the ethnic cleansing, forced migration and ecological destruction done in my name as a descendent of white settlement and that being done in real time in the name of Zionist ideology 250 years later with militarized support from my own colonial government. I plan to revisit that work (a task I’ve avoided since making it out of self-consciousness) in the coming weeks and will be writing and sharing more about it then, so stay tuned.

I stayed active in Palestine solidarity work in the years immediately following my trip, doing popular education and supporting various campaigns, until our local group imploded. My activist focus shifted gears to the domestic during the early Trump years, when well-established social justice movements everywhere went into “absorption mode” to receive the liberal legions who’d just received their first (or at least loudest) wake up call. Combined with the internal politics that had fractured our group, my efforts were elsewhere, but Palestine remained on my mind.

My writing took a turn as well, and a trip to the back burner while I focused on my health for a few years before the onset of the pandemic.

When I came back, I found I had time to tackle the family history I'd inherited after the deaths of my maternal grandparents. These were the Montana ancestors whose stories I now held in my care. How to represent them, understand them, and respect them while still grappling with the violence that their presence in the West signifies? So when Hamas attacked Israeli citizens in early October and the Israeli government responded with the full capacity of its high-tech occupying military force (against a captive population comprised mostly of children), these two rivers converged again, flooding out most other thoughts.

The difference ten years later is the atmosphere. Much as I may go on about social media (see last week's post), the sheer visibility of first-person perspectives from Gazans, along with the visibility of their being silenced (through algorithmic suppression to more brutal and deadly means), and the general availability of solid analysis seems to have changed the ground game of the American solidarity movement. Seeing hundreds of thousands of people protesting, publicly mourning, and speaking up has been heartening, even as it's heartbreaking to know how much suffering it takes to move the distracted hearts of Americans to action. And how long will we remain in action and for whom?

For those who feel they haven't done enough, or who are seeking a longer-term way to contribute to movements supporting Palestinian self-determination, I recommend reading through the Campaigns section of the Jewish Voice for Peace website—not because they're the only group working on the issue, but because they do an excellent job laying out all of the ways the military-industrial partnership between the U.S. and Israel harms us all. The BDS (Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions) movement is another great place to find a foothold in your own life, whether on a household level or at an institution you work or study within. People in power are betting on our digital disaster/grief/rage fatigue (which is real), and I highly recommend unplugging from the reaction machine and finding a sustainable, long-term way to plug in to an offline movement.

Back home (for me, in the Western U.S.), our own colonial legacy looms. I should say that most of my work on these topics is directed toward fellow settler-descended white people, but I am always seeking the perspective of non-Indigenous people of color, immigrants of later eras who do not share the same direct history of violence in this land, Black

interviewed shared how little oversight the program was given by human controls, all in the name of “saved time” and “efficiency.” One describes his only role in the process (the rest of which, including surveillance, analysis, target rating, and weapon allotment, was outsourced to automated, AI-driven systems) was to confirm that an identified target was male. Since there are no women fighters in Hamas, the confirmation of sex was enough to press ‘ok,’ dispatching a drone, a bomb, or a tank to the home of the person identified, again, largely by automation alone.

Of course, there are precedents for this kind of broad targeting, particularly within recent memory during the sprawling Global War on Terror. It's not uncommon for all young men in an identified area to be treated as combatants, but the automation of the process, along with the increased surveillance powers available to military powers in this era, further dehumanizes us all. Anyone who's been part of a targeted social movement, especially in the post-9/11 era, (see Stop Cop City⁴ for a useful recent example) or a targeted racial demographic (see Stop and Frisk⁵, for one) knows the risks that emerge when a powerful, militarized force attempts to categorize human beings and predict our behavior. Yet, we normalize mass surveillance every day in our passive acceptance of tech oligarchy.

As the friend who texted me to talk about this story put it,
“I just feel angry and out of control, implicated and complicit...
that's U.S. technology... They are slapping us in the face with our
own vulnerability.”

I should clarify that we don't know for sure that it is U.S. technology at work in the cloud powering Lavender and Where's Daddy. We do know that American companies have provided material support for the state of Israel and that, according to Google's own employees, it's not possible to know exactly what a client uses computing services for once they're delivered, particularly not in the case of dedicated and highly secure systems. This week, 28 workers were fired after a No Tech for Apartheid day of action, and the first confirmed contract⁶ between Google and the Israel Defense Ministry was released. “Don't be evil,” indeed.

4 See “Federal agencies pushed extreme view of Cop City protestors, records show” at *The Guardian*, Dec. 6, 2023.

5 further reading on the surveillance connections between U.S. policing and the Israeli occupation available from Deadly Exchange at <https://deadlyexchange.org>.

6 See “Exclusive: Google Contract Shows Deal With Israeli Defense Ministry,” *Time*, April 12, 2024.

enact violence at a more-than-human scale.

I highly recommend you read the entire +972 story³ about Lavender, but I will also summarize the most shocking points here, in case you don't have 8,000 words in you right now. Writer Yuval Abraham (who also received an absurd level of backlash for his speech while accepting his documentary award at the Berlinale this year) reveals in the article that

“...Lavender — which was developed to create human targets in the current war — has marked some 37,000 Palestinians as suspected ‘ Hamas militants,’ most of them junior, for assassination.”

The sources, Israeli intelligence operatives, go on to reveal that they were given an unprecedented level of approved “collateral damage” to use in conjunction with Lavender’s analysis of targets.

For each alleged operative identified by the AI, they were allowed between 5 and 100 civilian casualties. They often repeated 20 as an average rate—20 “collateral” deaths per 1 possible “enemy combatant.” At this rate, that means a total of 740,000 “acceptable” casualties could result from the targeting of the 37,000 Hamas “operatives” identified by Lavender. 740,000 Palestinians in Gaza “rubber stamped” for a military-approved, AI-driven death. That’s nearly a third of Gaza’s total population.

The hypothetical end-scale of this destruction a) underlines beyond a shadow of a doubt the, yes, genocidal intent of the Israeli government, and b) renders absurd their official claim that “...our war is against Hamas, not against the people of Gaza.” Even if you don’t accept that an occupied people have a right to resist through all available means (I happen to think they do), you have to wonder what it means to be “part of the military wing of Hamas” when the 15, or 20, or 100 people who happen to, maybe, probably, statistically, be nearby at a given moment “count” as targets, too. If nothing else, I hope that anyone still reading will go on to interrupt the long-problematic language of the “human shields” narrative, should they hear it in the future.

Among those 37,000 targeted for assassination, “...it was known in advance that 10 percent of the human targets slated for assassination were not members of the Hamas military wing at all.” The Israeli sources

3 Yuval Abraham for +972, available at <https://www.972mag.com/lavender-ai-israeli-army-gaza/>

people whose legacy on this continent deserves its own distinct reckoning, and—of course—Indigenous people who know better than any of us how to heal this unimaginable damage. But I’m working to speak on what I know, which is “white supremacy culture”² from the inside.

For folks like me who hope to deconstruct the myths we’ve learned around our own colonialism, I would point to this resource³ that a collective I work with generated last year at Thanksgiving. It’s geared toward our region, spanning across the Washington-Idaho border on the land of the Schitsu’umsh, Palouse, and Nimiipuu people, but could provide a useful framework for inquiry where you live as well.

I recently read Toni Morrison’s *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* for school. While she focuses on what she defines as the “Africanist presence” in early American literature, I found it very useful for unpacking the use of the “wild” or “savage” Other as a broader trope, particularly as I immerse myself in the Western for my work. In one particularly relevant passage (which I violently highlighted), Morrison laments the one-sided nature of theoretical and functional explorations of racism.

“Another reason for this quite ornamental vacuum [on the presence of what she calls “Africanism” in white American literature]...in American criticism is the pattern of thinking about racialism in terms of its consequences on the victim—of always defining it asymmetrically from the perspective of its impact on the object of racist policy and attitudes...But that well-established study should be joined with another, equally important one: the impact of racism on those who perpetuate it. It seems both poignant and striking how avoided and unanalyzed is the effect of racist inflection on the subject.”

If Toni Morrison wants me to consider the impacts of the delusion of whiteness on my own family’s consciousness, that’s good enough for me.

I thought about this lack of self-reflection in our storytelling traditions when I went to write about *Killers of the Flower Moon* last month. I have still intentionally avoided reading any reviews or “takes” about this film,

2 When I use this phrase, I am specifically referencing Tema Okun’s framework: <https://www.whitesupremacyculture.info>

3 “Solidarity > Stuffing” available at <http://tiny.cc/e7s3yz>

because I wanted to preserve my genuine reaction before I got swept up into the automated frenzy of the Discourse Factory. The short version (because I'm getting long-winded here) is that I think it did a good job of doing what Morrison describes, examining "the impact of racism on those who perpetuate it." Rather than a friendly re-writing that favors the white ego (see *The Help*, *Green Book*, *Hidden Figures*, nearly any other Oscar-getting film with racial themes), it uncomfortably stares down our own complicity. Will a white audience take that message from a nearly four-hour film? I hope so.

The one commentary I watched about this film was a short Youtube video from the red carpet premiere featuring Osage language consultant, Christopher Cote. He said, "*As an Osage, I really wanted this to be from the perspective of Mollie and what her family experienced, but I think it would take an Osage to do that.*" I wholeheartedly agree and expect that there may be complaint online about the white-centric perspective in *Killers of the Flower Moon*. But I also believe that this kind of story needs to be told to white people in a more honest and adult tone.

In my favorite scene, we see the deadly contradictions embedded within political whiteness. In the film, Robert De Niro's iconic gangster persona is put to work on the character of William Hale, a two-faced rancher who masterminds a plot to kill Osage tribal members for their oil rights. His nephew Ernest (played by Leonardo DiCaprio) marries into the scheme and repeatedly betrays his Osage wife, Mollie (played by Pigeon Black-foot and Nez Perce actress Lily Gladstone). In a turning-point scene, Ernest is cornered by his uncle, who tells him he has to sign over his oil rights to the family (to William himself) just in case anything should happen to him. Ernest balks, wondering why they're talking about anything happening to him. He's supposed to be helping get other people out of the way of his right to the oil under the land.

Over and over again, De Niro repeats the phrase, "*You have to sign the paper. Sign the paper.*" DiCaprio clearly fears for his own life in this scene. He knows what informed viewers know: nothing good comes from signing the papers of a scheming white man. He also knows the violent acts this uncle is capable of committing, because he's been helping him commit them. "*You have to sign the paper.*" And grimacing, he does. Sign the paper. Acquire the private property. Pay the taxes that buy the knife-bombs that kill faraway children. How many times are we still

Do War Machines Dream of Ghost Children?

(And what of their programmers?)

At the literary festival, people complimented my beaded watermelon¹ earrings. I said in response that I wished I could wear a shirt every day instead that says "WHAT ARE WE FUCKING DOING, SERIOUSLY?" Maybe I should. Most seemed to understand what I meant by the aggression of that hypothetical shirt, my mixed feelings on the fruitlessness of wearing such a small symbol, wearing it to yet another event where the word "Palestine" wouldn't be uttered from stages occupied by artists.

That was last weekend, and I was still processing the news I'd heard a week before that. A friend texted to ask if I'd heard the Democracy Now! interview² about Israel's "Lavender" and "Where's Daddy?" AI programs. I hadn't, but I already had a stressful drive to make, north on unplowed roads, so I queued it up to get all my daily cortisol in one shot.

The way Amy Goodman's familiar voice curdled around the phrase "Where's Daddy?" still echoes when I think about this murderous software now. When I heard about it on the radio that day, all I could think was how perverse it seemed to name an assassination program (built to follow alleged Hamas operatives to their homes) "Where's Daddy." The collected images flashed: hundreds of men, some perhaps derisively called "daddy" by an occupying force, holding their own dead children, siblings, nieces, grandchildren, wives, and friends.

It's rare for me to feel shaken by state violence in a way that's novel. An unfortunate consequence of my long-term interest in studying the worst of organized human behavior, I suppose. But hearing the facts of this new wave of machine-human collaboration in state-sanctioned murder shook me. It belongs on a list alongside the slave ship, the concentration camp, the atomic bomb, Agent Orange, and unmanned drones—the technological innovations that have empowered humans, mad with power, to

¹ The watermelon shares the colors of the Palestinian flag and has long been used as a symbol of solidarity.

² April 5, 2024 broadcast available at <https://www.democracynow.org/2024/4/5/>

Meanwhile, we watched this film on Super Bowl Sunday. It's the biggest spectacle our empire has to offer and this year, it felt extra absurd. The game was held in Las Vegas, the American city perhaps most tied to consumption, myth making, and artifice. The Chiefs (somehow exempt so far from re-naming campaigns) were playing.

The blandest celebrity romance imaginable brought Taylor Swift's private jet to the stadium and her audience to the game. 100 million people watched a propaganda ad paid for by the Israeli government, a government whose narrative of frailty and victimization crumbles when you consider the budget necessary for those thirty seconds of airtime. And while we tuned in (or watched the memes and clips roll through social media later), our money and weapons bombed the captive civilian population in Rafah.

That night, when I checked my phone, the algorithm tried to bury news from Gaza (what I most closely follow on purpose right now) beneath images of Taylor, Blake and Ice Spice getting tipsy in the stands. I had to remind myself about the groundswell of attention and activism for Palestine from people who had never been involved before, about the urgent work being done to detach us from our violent legacy all over this country. The Super Bowl was just one more painful reminder of how well-resourced our default cultural products remain.

I remembered that the first scene in *Richland* was a high school football game. Not the Super Bowl by any means, but very much a normal Friday night in America. I thought about how normal the atomic bomb has become in the minds of the people where I live.

How normal destruction seems in a country so high on its own righteousness.

faced with a choice like this, to participate in a system that is meant to mostly hurt other people, but will sooner or later come to hurt us as well? Is it all the papers we sign that convince us of our separateness?

Cote expressed his hope for what viewers might take away from *Killers of the Flower Moon*, despite—or maybe because of—its white-centric perspective.

“I think in the end the question that you can be left with is ‘How long will you be complacent with racism? How long will you go along with something and not say something, not speak up? How long will you be complacent? This film was not made for an Osage audience, it was made for everybody not Osage...this is an opportunity for them to ask themselves this question of morality.’”

And I hope you do. Whether you're spending time with your nuclear family or experimenting with a new tradition, I hope we can all find time to consider our roles in living history and begin to step outside of their confines. I'd love to hear what others are doing in this vein, so feel free to reach out.

Christmas?

Remembering a scene from Bethlehem, reminding myself to remember

I've been trying to remember what Bethlehem was like ten years ago. On a packed whirlwind trip, we spent only one afternoon there, primarily so the Christian members of our group could visit the Basilica of the Nativity, its grotto which marks a long-standing place of pilgrimage—the site of Jesus' birth. Looking back at my notes from the trip, I remember that I didn't go to see the grotto. I wrote that I was "a little church-ed out," and opted to find food with a few friends. We wandered the shops lining the road near the church and were greeted eagerly—a free falafel sample turned into a deluxe lunch for six with tea, dessert, fries, a dizzying array of pickles. Stuffed, we wandered back into the hot, narrow street where a man balanced a many-tiered tray of cups and a coffee pot. His advertised price was "as you like." Only one of us wanted coffee in the heat, but he wanted a to-go cup. The coffee vendor told him to stay put and took off running to get a paper cup, his tray still perfectly balanced.

A shopkeeper beckoned us all into his stall's shade to shop. We explained we needed to stay visible for the returning coffee vendor and the shopkeeper waved his cell phone at us like we were dense—"I'll text him. Tell him you're here now." Someone among us must have commented on the hospitality of people in Bethlehem, prompting the shopkeeper to explain that we were among rare lingering tourists in the city. Nearly all guides of "holy land" tours had been strictly instructed by the Ministry of Tourism (of Israel) to avoid letting visitors wander Bethlehem, he told us. The vast majority of these tours left from either West Jerusalem (the portion of the city occupied by Israel) or Tel Aviv, provided tourists with food and other amenities there, traveled the six miles to Bethlehem to take in the pilgrimage sites, and left again to spend money and witness daily life back outside of the West Bank.

Many have pointed out the ironies of celebrating Christmas this year as over 20,000 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza since October, so many of them children. I wonder how it's possible for Christians around the world to meditate on the birth of their savior (canonically a Pales-

happened at Hanford was illegal"—versions of these sentiments predictably punctuated interviews with locals. In comparison to the permanent damage to the land, what does it say about our culture to have internalized and justified these rationales, to have swallowed such denialism whole?

In her artist statement about the film, Lusztig writes,

"We are living at a moment in history that is deeply structured by human denial, and it is in the shadow of this moment that this project about feelings and belief systems feels urgent... My intention with *RICHLAND* is to inhabit a more uncomfortable, intimate, and ambivalent space that ultimately points to the ways that each of us holds denial close."

I was surprised the extent to which this film moved me. Maybe it was seeing people, rural and suburban white people in Eastern Washington, so much like those I grew up with, navigate the ethical complexity of the world with such transparency. Maybe it was the inclusion of haunting music¹ and of Kathleen Flenniken's poetry². Maybe it was artist Yukiyo Kawano's hand-dyed fabric scale model of the Fat Man bomb floating in the hot desert air I could taste through the screen.



Maybe it was just the mushroom cloud mascot of it all, the stark example of the American embrace of violence as our cultural birthright.

1 The choral piece "Nuclear Dreams" by Nancy Welliver and Reginald Unterseher is performed live in the B Reactor in the film.

2 Interviewees read from her 2013 collection, *Flume*.

Director Lusztig's outsider perspective cut through the banality of living near Hanford. Her approach mixed the strictly observational with the theatrical and allowed huge questions to float in the theater's air like the swarm of gnats in the film's parting shot. What is our connection to history? Our responsibility as its inheritors? How do we navigate our roles within devious, complex systems? She didn't set out to make a straightforward "anti-nuclear" film. Rather, *Richland* is a portrait of the town as it exists today. And today, for the vast majority of residents, the bomb remains an achievement to be proud of. As one interviewee said, *"We did this amazing thing. An amazing, terrible thing. But people drop the 'terrible.'"*



The workers themselves did not know what material they handled. They didn't know the end purpose of what they produced. Many of them were exposed extensively to radiation and died of cancer. They learned what they had done alongside everyone else in the country from the local headline, "IT'S ATOMIC BOMBS!" I didn't live during the patriotic fervor of World War II, but I can understand, given its stakes, the ways in which pride would swell in a small community that took part in such a victory. What's harder to stomach is the persistence of such a simple, mushroom-cloud-as-victorious-mascot mindset today.

The only moments that felt overwrought in the film were perhaps those showing tourists within the B Reactor, gleefully posing in front of imposing nuclear equipment, one woman in form-fitting MAGA-printed leggings. Beyond that loaded image, the undramatic truth of how many people feel about their connection to our country's nuclear legacy. "People made money," "people sent their kids to college," "none of what



tinian child) without deeply mourning the horror of this violence we've supported all these months. I remember being struck by the gravity of the occupation in the West Bank seen through this lens even as someone who is not Christian, but who has absorbed enough—through literature and cultural osmosis—to understand the significance of the sites we visited. Bethlehem is only a few miles from Jerusalem, but the journey is complicated by checkpoints and the "separation wall."

The wall cleaves across many Biblical sites and routes, as well as communities and families who have been crossed by its path. The historic Jericho road, bisected. It's low hanging fruit to point out that had Mary and Joseph been making their journey to find a safe birthing place under this occupation, they wouldn't have made it to Bethlehem.

The relationship of Christianity to Palestine is oddly overshadowed in much of the mainstream discourse around the occupation and the so-called "Israel-Hamas war." Judaism and its relationship to the Zionist ideology which drives the project of the state of Israel, the (real) importance of countering anti-Semitism, and the resistance of groups like Jewish Voice for Peace often take the spotlight in this conversation. Alongside this is a common conflation of the terms "Palestinian" and/or "Arab" with "Muslim." This feeds the Islamophobic Western imagination, primed for generations now to fear the mysterious terrorist "other," while also erasing the reality of Palestinian Christians and a broad-based Palestinian secular society. Finally, the invisibility of Christianity in the conversation obscures the fact that Christian Zionism is the most potent source of international support for the state of Israel.

I don't generally observe a big to-do for Christmas. My family is somewhat scattered and quite secular overall. We've been getting a tree the past few years in my household to brighten things up, but we opt for a minimal gathering of friends. This year, I'm grateful in some ways for the fact that I'll be traveling on Christmas day and that I've been too busy preparing for that travel to engage in much merriment beforehand. It's felt so disorienting to engage in life as usual while witnessing genocide and suffering in real time on my phone screen. While I've continued to do what I can (calling my reps, posting online, participating in political education, using what platform I have to educate others), I hate the way I can set down "the work" and pick it up again. Based on conversations I've had and other writers I've read, I'm far from alone in this feeling.

So with Christmas cancelled in Bethlehem¹, and in the wake of JVP's impressive multi-city shutdown protests on the final night of Hanukkah, I encourage you to spend some time on your holiday break engaging, rather than looking away, with what Christmas and the Christianity of our dominant culture means to Palestine. I attended a fascinating (but too short!) webinar on Christian Zionism² a couple of weeks ago that I'd encourage you to watch. One of the incredible takeaways was that a quarter of Americans believe that Israel has a role in Biblical prophecy. Too often, I think those of us in secular or progressive religious communities underestimate the role of radical belief in our society. While the most radical evangelical communities may seem fringe to many of us, how does the nature of their apocalyptic and repressive belief creep out to influence the rest of us?

I was also reminded that CUFI (Christians United for Israel) has over ten million members and is the largest pro-Israel lobby in the U.S. despite a lower public profile than AIPAC. Three Republican presidential candidates attended the CUFI summit this summer. Particularly considering the ways that anti-Semitic tropes can easily slide inside of criticism of the "dark money" behind AIPAC, it's high time we begin naming CUFI every time we name AIPAC and discuss pro-Israel politicking.

¹ "If Jesus was born today, he'd be born under the rubble": Bethlehem set for forlorn Christmas", *The Guardian*, Dec. 24, 2023

² hosted by Showing Up for Racial Justice, <https://tinyurl.com/5crtyvu5>

It opens, as the film does, on a high school football game between the Richland Bombers—their mascot a mushroom cloud, their helmets bearing the outline of a B-52 bomber—and an unseen opponent. Once in the theater, I was hooked when the men drinking coffee and playing cards at Spudnut started to sing.

First, the WWII veteran, who grinned and bobbed his head, recalling every word to his gun ship's anthem just as they sang it when they encircled Japan. Talk shifts to the bomb and a second man (I believe a former or current Hanford worker) strikes up an earnest a capella rendition of Linda Allen's "Termination Winds," singing

"the desert wind can blow here 'til you've almost lost your mind / sand will fill your mouth and nose and eyes 'til you're half blind / some folks dig in deeper and just pray the storm will end / others pack their bags and leave these termination winds."

Music and art run through the documentary, braided with understated interviews and "all American" archival footage from the patriotic heyday of the early Cold War years. The older of the two Tri Cities women I sat between leaned over and whispered, "*I was there that day*" when footage of JFK's visit to Hanford (just two months before his assassination) played. "*They let school out...I remember it was so dang hot.*"

I grew up in Spokane, Washington, just a couple hundred miles from what we called the "Dry Shitties," with all the smugness not-great places reserve for punching down at their neighboring communities. I knew some about Hanford, the Manhattan Project's node on the Columbia River where plutonium was processed in secret for eventual use in the "Fat Man" atomic bomb detonated over Nagasaki. I knew about the pollution left behind and the "downwinders," the cancer and the cow's milk that delivered huge doses of radiation to the unsuspecting people living there, but only in the broadest strokes. It took years of learning and working as an anti-war activist and interviewing Hanford experts as a journalist to begin to chew and process the massive, horrific reality of what happened so nearby.

It would be more accurate to say, "what is happening," or "what will be happening forever."

From Richland to Rafah

Denial is a helluva drug

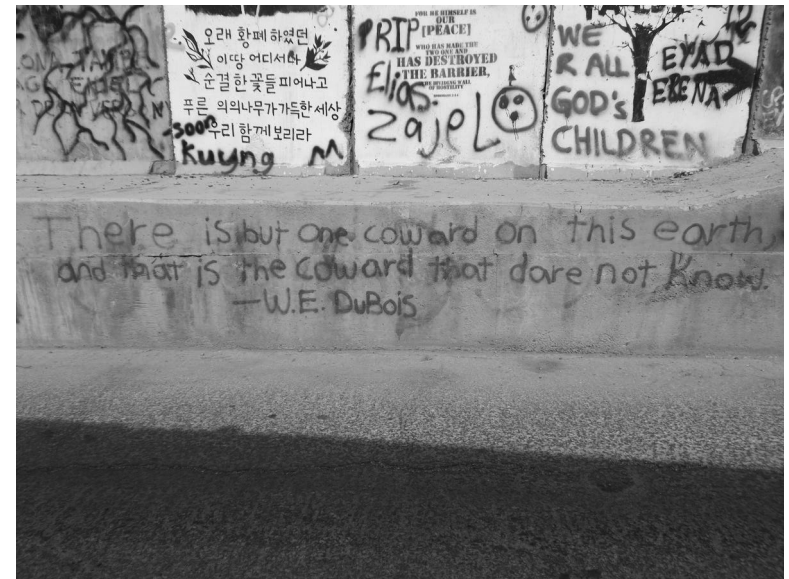
I have been trying to write a dispatch here, a review of a documentary, for weeks now. It fits to use this odd extra day on the calendar to finally just do it, imperfectly, the only way I know how to do anything right now.

I have been in my hometown the past week with occasion to see a lot of old and semi-distant friends. During a meeting at the public library, I saw one of these beloveds and they mentioned “your newsletter has slowed down.” They said it without judgment and, honestly, I was flattered anyone had noticed. I responded in the way I have been lately when people ask how I am, or how my work’s going. I sort of gesture out the nearest window, or to a phone, and say, “well, you know...” and all the people I like and respect know that I’m talking about Gaza.

We talked about the particular feeling—not a feeling like hearing bombs above your city and searching for your family under rubble, but a dreadful cousin feeling nonetheless—of living inside the heart of the Empire and feeling far from its levers of power. We agreed that doing the best we can is the best we can do.

I keep putting off this review because I feel if I look away from my phone or skip the news for a day or two, I will be too far away from what is happening to update the portion about Rafah. But, really, what was true on Super Bowl Sunday when I started to write this is just as true now, and more so. Thanks for your patience with me, and with each other, and for what I hope is your own version of continued, meaningful solidarity.

A couple of great resources to explore if you are Christian on the specifics of Christianity and Christmas in Palestine are: this document¹ from Kairos Palestine; Christ at the Checkpoint²; and this webinar³ hosted by Eyewitness Palestine (who sent me to the West Bank ten years ago) on the cancellation of Christmas in Bethlehem this year. Beyond that, it’s the same story. Keep calling your representatives, keep faxing, wheat-pasting, protesting, gathering, learning, fighting, giving what you can of yourself to reject the nearly unbelievable violence being committed in our names and with our money.



“We did this amazing thing. An amazing, terrible thing.”

I watched Irene Lusztig’s documentary *Richland* three Sundays ago at the Spokane International Film Festival, seated between two women of different generations from Richland, Washington. I knew I wanted to see it when I watched the trailer.

1 <https://kairospalestine.ps>
2 <https://christatthecheckpoint.bethbc.edu/>
3 <https://tinyurl.com/msnkp8m5>

Our Colonial Shadow

On Israel, language traps, and the nature of our fears

This is the final part of a three-part response and review of Naomi Klein's book, *Doppelganger: A Trip Into the Mirror World*.

The fragmentation hurts. You know that gathering for a specific, focused purpose matters, but you underestimate how jarring it will be to go eight days without hearing the word "Palestine" except quietly, from your own mouth. On the sixth day, you read "Ginza" in one of your texts and see "Gaza." A reader mentions a girl crushed by a building, somewhere else. You can't finish reading the Mailer piece because of the carnage spilling across the page. When you open your phone in brief spare moments, you see it flickering, but what can you do in this moment? You shouldn't even be on your phone. Tim calls, working on a story, to ask if you think young people will pull away from Biden over this and we'll get Trump again.

On the seventh day, another person finally names it during a dinner conversation and you find relief in each other's care. You talk about everything no one has been talking about this week and feel some small comfort. Someone asks a question that night at the reading (because the text was about war and mentioned a child character)—they say they don't imagine children being present for a war. No? Even now? And on top of the silence, now everyone is coughing. You take in so many images of Mary, unfamiliar saints and Jesus himself that you begin to consider prayer as a solution. Just in case.

The worst part is, despite all this, you're having a pretty good time.

I'm later than expected with this final installment of my *Doppelganger* review because I've just returned home (with covid) from a writing residency. It's fitting that I started this review thinking about compartmentalization and the ways that our technologies facilitate separation from one another and even within the self, because it's the same feeling I'm grappling with now.

and make me cultivate a version of the world famous hospitality I had the privilege to experience in Palestine.

Whether or not you'll be fasting, I'd love to hear in a comment what you're doing to keep Palestine alive in your life. There's so much you can do and it's never too late to begin. This weekend, we'll be making postcards and sharing a meal. The coming week's general strike is a great opportunity to commit to boycott targets² that are part of your life, whether that's Starbucks or your financial institution. Keep learning, and sharing and especially talking to each other. If you feel like you don't know enough to wade in, reach out to someone who seems to always be posting. Read a book, watch a documentary, join a local organization.

A final note on reading: it's Pub Week for my talented, brilliant, funny, big-hearted mentor, Susan Muaddi Darraj's new novel, *Behind You Is the Sea*. Buy it, gift it, order it for your local library! I'm excited to dive in soon. Naomi Shihab Nye writes, "We desperately need more books like this in which Palestinian people are presented as beautiful, richly complex human beings, not consigned to insulting, diminishing references. Gratitude to Susan Muaddi Darraj for her very necessary, beautiful work."

Until next time.

daily life. [Note: Now, I'd say it's about far more than "intention," but about context and consent. I don't think an individual person's intention matters when they're among a dozen others with cameras, all descending on a neighborhood like paparazzi. The word I searched for but couldn't find ten years ago is *extractive*.] I certainly understand better now the meaning of solidarity, especially when compared with charity or pity.

I don't feel a desire to save anyone, just to get what impediments to freedom and autonomy that I can reach out of the way. Even so, I'll feel strange saying, 'This is what Palestinians want' or even 'This is what one person told me that they want.' It comes back to the way I feel about being represented by another person. What could be a worse accidental result of my experience than to inadvertently misrepresent a stifled and oppressed people, adding another layer of oppressive barriers to their situation in the name of charity?

Privilege was certainly the major theme of the journey- from experiencing my advantages as a white American to the familiar patriarchal dynamic of our group at times... My biggest annoyance was with 'needy' group members during our home stays in the West Bank. How does it make sense to complain about missing a shower or two in a place with restricted, substandard access to water?

The same went for food, both in restaurants and homes. I understand wanting to remain vegetarian as an ethical personal practice, but I feel if you're accepting a person's hospitality, you ought to respect their rules and unspoken norms... eat whatever the hell they decide to put in front of you, or at least take the meat on your plate and pass it to a friend. Come on, people!"

Maybe the appeal of a fast, for me, ties back to running—my old steady coping mechanism I can no longer sustain—it's a way to place a difficult feeling into my body. A dear friend one town over texted me to tell me he'd be participating too. We couldn't break our fast together this week, but we started with sending food pics and texting about what we were doing that evening. I hope this practice will make us gather (something I'm grateful my little rural freak family is good at already) in our grief

Watching Palestine recede from my social media feeds as (some, but crucially not all, or even most) people lose hope, or endurance, or interest, and knowing that this absence reflects the reality that we are losing the people—especially the journalists¹—who have shown us the truth of their lives under siege. Watching the pandemic's second-largest surge sweep across the nation as the White House Press Secretary rolls not only her eyes, but her whole head at the mention of masking. Watching it all through the little screen.

As I wrote in the last installment of this review, Klein does an impressive job connecting our nations' (the U.S. and Canada) poor responses to covid with our ugly colonial roots and scarcely repressed eugenicist beliefs. She critiques the individualistic lens through which those in power urge us to view the pandemic, writing, "It recalls the ways in which colonial massacres were rationalized because, within the ranking of human life created by pseudoscientific racists, Indigenous peoples... were cast as 'living fossils.'"

I remember the way that fellow young people in my classes at the time characterized the pandemic in its early days, half-joking that the elderly most at risk were "going to die soon anyway." I remember the scarcely contained sigh of relief that escaped from the halls of power when we learned that the early stages of the pandemic had disproportionately killed and hospitalized Black and Indigenous people.

Klein continues, "Lord Salisbury, the UK prime minister, explained in an 1898 address that 'you may roughly divide the nations of the world as the living and the dying.' Indigenous peoples were, in this telling, the pre-dead, with extermination merely serving to accelerate the inevitable timeline." In how many ways have we been prepared to accept certain people's deaths as inevitable?



¹ At the time of writing, at least 100 journalists had been killed in Gaza.

I did not expect for the final third of this book to be about Israel, and I expect that many other readers didn't either, given that the focus on Naomi Wolf and the conspiracy culture she represents took center stage in most advance press for *Doppelganger*. While I feel it's not my place to comment on or critique Klein's analysis of her own Jewishness and her casting of Zionism as a shadow of Judaism, I will say that I learned a great deal about the complex web of identity that Jewish intellectuals and artists must navigate to survive and express themselves in our world.

Beset by long-standing anti-Semitic tropes on one side and the demand to stand with a genocidal regime on the other, there's often nowhere to land without facing accusations of being Jewish in the wrong way. One of my many takeaways from this book has been a renewed admiration and respect for the tradition of Jewish thinkers and activists who have shaped historical and contemporary movements for social justice, up to and including the tireless members organizing against Israel's latest attacks on Gaza with Jewish Voice for Peace.

While I can't speak to the experience of being an anti-Zionist Jew the way Klein and others can, I was glad to see her acknowledge and explore the parallels I couldn't help but notice when I visited Palestine. She writes about the many ways that the fledgling state of Israel would become a mirror of colonial projects from centuries past. "Many of Zionism's basic rationales were thinly veiled Judaizations of core Christian colonial conceptions: Terra Nullius, the claim that continents like Australia were effectively empty because their Indigenous inhabitants were categorized as less than fully human, became 'A land without a people for a people without a land'...Manifest Destiny became 'land bequeathed to the Jews by divine right.' 'Taming the wild frontier' became 'making the desert bloom.'"

Meanwhile, in today's Zionist movement, the Palestinian slogan "from the river to the sea (Palestine will be free)" is framed as "genocidal," and banned on university campuses as well as on social media. Reading this slogan as a call for erasure of the Jewish people requires willful denial of the dynamics of Israel's ongoing occupation and a bad faith reading of the demands of the broad majority of Palestinian people. What's most interesting, though, is the strange mirror effect present in the slogan and its backlash. Because who has defined these borders, the (Jordan) river and the (Mediterranean) sea? From whom and from what treatment do those chanting wish to be free? Just who, exactly, is the oppressor here?

I wonder about this boy now, as life in the West Bank deteriorates¹ in a less deadly (yet still horrific) parallel to life in Gaza. He'd be in his early twenties now, but statistically could well be dead, jailed, displaced by now.

My photos from this day remind me that we ended our day at the birthday party of an adorable two-year-old girl. It was hosted by the Burnat family, and I believe the girl was the niece of Emad Burnat, who directed *Five Broken Cameras*. The birthday girl's feet never touched the ground as she was passed lovingly from one relative to the next. She wore a poofy pink floral dress with matching hair bows and red shoes. Her mother's hospitality was unmatched. The cake was dense and wet with honey. I wonder about this little girl, too, who is now a teenager.

Looking at the images of children I met and interacted with is jarring on multiple levels. They could be the cousins of the children who keep appearing in our phones, covered in dust and blood. I know why we need to see them and why people on the ground insist upon showing them to us. I hate that it's not enough, yet. I hate that they're being made symbolic and used to shake us into caring. I want them to just be children.

When I remember the trip I took and how I felt, I remember anger, disorientation, and embarrassment. In my journal the morning after that party, I wrote:

"Something that's been bothering me the whole time we've been in and out of the West Bank meeting people is this sense of Western-ness through our big tourist bus, dozens of cameras, and visually obvious outsider status. E— described her discomfort as voyeurism, which I agree is the sensation. We just left Bil'in after homestays there; my group of 10 stayed with a family of 8 (children aged 17, 15, 12, 11, 9, and 2) and were welcomed and fed amazing food and hospitality. When we were with people...one on one, the sense of voyeurism faded, but I still felt strange.

The intention is what matters when taking photos, especially of

¹ Originally linked to the report "Violence and Forced Displacement Increase in the West Bank" in *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs*, January 19, 2024

A Vietnam veteran I admire told me that when he feels rage, he holds it close. He cherishes its presence and gives thanks that he can feel at all. This kid isn't angry though, and in this moment neither am I.

He's letting me catch up and keeps looking back with an unguarded smile, framed by the setting sun, the dust, and the houses we're approaching. His is the image I return to when I return there and it's steadfast, full of life. He is the other, living side of the portraits of other boys his age memorialized in the alleys of Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Hebron, they're gone. For throwing stones, full of anger and nowhere else to put it.

I keep unspooling mine behind me in the form of a muddy trail. Inhale 1-2 Exhale 3-4. Breathing in the possibility that there is no point, out the hope that it may be revealed, running from and towards and fast.



Scorched ground near where the above footrace took place.

Klein doesn't speak directly to this language conundrum in her extensive section on the doppelganger psychology of Zionism, but she does begin the book's section on Israel by discussing the ways that language reveals the insecurities at the heart of right-wing movements closer to home. It's been true in my own life. I remember a particularly shitty high school boyfriend howling that "a matriarchy would be just as bad!" when I first learned to articulate the perils of patriarchy. As though its only possible alternative would be an exact reversal of existent gender oppression. I remember a conversation with a relative in which he asserted that "white, straight, Christian men are actually the most oppressed!" Truly.

Complaints of "cancel culture" spew from the same mouths who ban books and attempt to increase the state's power to curtail speech. The same grifters who peddle silver suppositories, sketchy supplements and all-meat diets warn about the health risks of vaccines.

This tendency to point elsewhere to avoid accountability and self-reflection reaches its zenith in conspiracy culture. Klein quotes a 2022 reflection from Indigenous climate activist Julian Brave Noisecat, who noticed some disturbing trends in right-wing conspiracies du jour:

"I'm struck by the similarity of right-wing conspiracy theories to actual policies towards Indigenous peoples.

'replacement theory'—Manifest Destiny;

QAnon (mass institutionalized child abuse)—boarding and residential schools;

'plandemic'—smallpox, alcohol, bioterrorism;

It's all so Freudian. The fear that it will happen to them stems from an implicit admission that they did it to others. As though the Black, Brown and Indigenous downtrodden are just as hateful as they are and are going to turn around and do to them what they did to us."

Klein responds, "Is that part of what we are seeing? Are increasingly violent conspiracy theorists in the Mirror World afraid of being rounded up, treated as second-class, occupied, and culled because on some level they

know that these are the genocidal behaviors that created and sustain their relative but increasingly precarious privileges? Are they terrified that if the truths of the Shadow Lands—past, present, and future—are ever fully revealed and reckoned with, then it can only result in a dramatic role reversal, with the victims becoming the victimizers?”

Think about some of the language used even in mainstream, non-Fox-News world: “majority-minority,” for example, as a way to describe changing demographics in the U.S. Does that language itself reflect white anxieties about becoming the “minority?” Are “minorities” treated poorly or something?

Similarly, consider the way that right wing media (and the op-ed section of the New York Times) frame the acceptance of queer and trans people as some kind of slippery slope to mandatory decadence, a hyper-sexual reverse conversion therapy for all.

All of these tendencies to focus on and amplify our fears and divisions stem from trauma. The trauma we’ve endured, or that our ancestors have endured, alongside the trauma we perpetuate through our systems and which ripples out from our histories. Returning to Israel, Klein extends her understanding (as far as she can) to fellow Jews who stand with Israel, no matter what.

She writes,

“I understand the primal terror that leads many of my people to co-sign that contract, because the same trauma has been passed down through the generations to me. But I still can’t do it; the price is too high. And not just for Palestinians and Jews. Because the deal offered us is a version of the same poisonous deal all who are relatively fortunate on this partitioned planet are being offered. Take the gun. Accept the cages. Fortress your escape pod, and your borders. Perfect your kids. Protect your brand. Ignore the Shadow Lands. Play the victim.”

What is the end result of all this partitionment? In our national politics, it’s the absurd theater of our failed two party system. A stalemate in which no one “can” do anything, because each party must be, first and foremost, the righteous victim of the other’s machinations. For the individual, maybe it’s the feeling of fragmentation I opened this piece

“Sibaq?” He says to me, eyes wide, smiling, expectant.

He is maybe 12, holding the hand of his younger brother as we walk. I shrug my apologetic English speaking shrug and share my three functional words of Arabic.

He laughs, open and loud, “Amrika!” clucks his tongue in faux disappointment, as if to say: it isn’t your fault you’re so ignorant, Amrika.

And ignorant I am. Visiting his town, where money that I made has built miles upon miles of ten meter wall, topped with soldiers and razor wire. It separates his family from the majority of their farmland, transforming a ten minute walk into a day-long struggle. I’m young, like him. Probably closer to his childhood age than his parents’ adulthood, but based on what I have seen, this kid is years beyond me in what he’s witnessed here.

I came to see it, already angry, but unprepared for how the rage would escalate braided with hopelessness and moments of triumph, but under it all there, simmering. I’ve been angry a long time. The only thing that helps it is to run, long and fast and often.

The cops kill someone: run. Hear another friend’s campus rape story: run. Bombs drop: run. Unsure whether it’s from or toward, but a feeling of training for a yet unknown bout. Inhale 1-2 Exhale 3-4.

“Siba-aq!” He repeats it, a bit of childish whine creeping in this time, impatient. He helps out silly Amrika with a pantomimed series of three short lunges forward: ready...set...go. How he knows I’m a runner I don’t know. I may just look like a playmate by my age, and game for a footrace.

I pump my arms in a mock sprint and ask, “Sibaq?”

He grins, nods, shouts another countdown, and we’re off.

Or at least, he’s off. I hike up my floor length black dress and take off after him, sandals slapping the dust. I’m faster than he expected I’d be. It’s all those runs back at home, inhaling rage 1-2, exhaling sadness 3-4.

I reflected on the fact that anger always comes first for me, over sadness. When I finished, I called my Senators to express my disappointment that they hadn't supported Res. 504, but I also asked them how it feels to field all these phone calls for months on end, to watch the reports grow more dire, to know that our money and weapons have killed 1% of an entire population in 100 days and just keep doing nothing? I'd gone off script by that point.

As I've already written here, (with the timing of my starting this newsletter, it's been unavoidably Palestine-centric) I'm slowly revisiting my limited history in Palestine and deciding how best to rekindle my solidarity work.

This meant, tonight, going through my folders from the trip I took ten years ago to the West Bank. The folders are disappointing in some ways. My photos are bad, the audio quality in the videos renders them mostly not usable, and my notes are often vague. But today, I found a short piece that I wrote in the moment when visiting Bil'in. (Note: if you're an American who's heard of Bil'in, it's likely because of the Oscar-nominated documentary *Five Broken Cameras*, which chronicles the weekly protests against the incursion of the Israeli "separation" wall into the town, which is a few miles west of Ramallah.)



*a photo I took protesting
at the wall in Bil'in,*

trying to describe, the chronic cognitive dissonance of being alive in the dual spheres of the internet and the earth, and the way that feeling can act as an excuse to avoid taking action. In general, it looks like the digging deeper of trenches around our borders, our social hierarchies, our ideologies, and our truths, scarring the social and intellectual landscape into a stark, black-and-white death grid.

Israel-Palestine (commonly written this way, reflecting a built-in mirror relationship) is often presented as a stark and intractable issue, an impossible place doomed to conflict and chaos. Klein gently suggests to readers that this may only be true if we remain trapped inside of binary thinking.

She writes,

“It would help if more conversations could hold greater complexity—the ability to acknowledge that the Israelis who came to Palestine in the 1940s were survivors of genocide, desperate refugees, many of whom had no other options, and that they were settler colonists who participated in the ethnic cleansing of another people. That they were victims of white supremacy in Europe being passed the mantle of whiteness in Palestine. That Israelis are nationalists in their own right and that their country has long been enlisted by the United States to act as a kind of subcontracted military base in the region. All of this is true at once. Contradictions like these don't fit comfortably within the usual binaries of anti-imperialism (colonizer/colonized) or the binaries of identity politics (white/racialized)—but if Israel-Palestine teaches us anything, it might be that binary thinking will never get us beyond partitioned selves, or partitioned nations.”

This is not to say that the state of Israel is not a colonial project (it is), or that its state structures have not created a racialized, multi-tiered system of access and privilege (they have), but that our collective, binary ways of thinking through conflict and identity will not lead to any new understanding. I haven't been able to attend any in-person rallies or demonstrations for Palestine yet, but I have begun to plan a sign for when I get the chance.

I've been thinking about the slogan “Free Palestine” as both a mandate and a statement of fact. When we chant “Free Palestine” as Americans,

Day 104

On fasting, running, and endurance

we mean partially to say “Stop using our money to send weapons to murder children and bolster an illegal occupation! People in power: free the people under occupation from tyranny.” But in our utterly broken political system (in which I still call my representatives, and hope to pivot to physical postcards in the coming weeks), we sort of know that change from above is unlikely. So now, when I hear “Free Palestine,” I hear it almost more as a cheer, or an affirmation that we see a people—and in Gaza a majority-child society—show what it means to keep freedom alive in the worst of circumstances.

It’s not right. It’s a horror beyond comprehension. Never before have we seen so intimately and so immediately into the daily reality of those whose lives our money and weapons and political cover have come to crush. And it is **in no way** worth the cost of those lives for us all to have a realization about ourselves. But, I hope that the lesson we’re taking from the past three months is more like: “Palestine, free us from our colonial mythology,” “Palestine, free us from the violence of our psychological projections.”

I’m still workshopping the sign.

Klein writes toward the end of this section and the end of the book,

“...partitioning and performing and projecting are no longer working. The borders and walls don’t protect us from rising temperatures or surging viruses or raging wars. And the walls around ourselves and our kids won’t hold, either. Because we are porous and connected, as so many doppelganger stories have attempted to teach us.”

Please keep trying, keep calling, keep blocking the roads and mourning in public, and wear a mask when you do it, and remember there are so many other ways of being in the world. It’s not Biden or Trump (how depressing!). It’s not Evil or Diet Evil. It’s not you or me, them or us. Learning to hold complexity and contradiction might be the most important muscle we can build to survive the rest of this strange era.

Care for each other; don’t look away.

I’m sitting down to write my weekly post at the end of my first Thursday participating in the Fast for Gaza¹. While a fast isn’t for everyone, I want to get back in my body and remain connected in every way I can to the people whose lives my country is helping to destroy. Since I don’t have a steady, full time job, it’s hard to apply the call for general strike (for which there is a call next week) to my life. The recommendations for the fast are as follows:

While you fast:

- Donate to humanitarian efforts in Gaza.
- Refrain from spending on non-essential goods
- Spread the word that we have had enough.
- Write to government and business leaders demanding they recognize this tragedy and support an immediate and permanent ceasefire.
- Educate yourself on BDS (Boycott, Divest, Sanction), and join the boycott of goods that exploit and oppress Palestinians.
- Educate yourself on and join PACBI (Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel).
- Read and share art, writing, films, and music by Gazan artists.
- Be in community with others who need, want, feel a conversation isn’t enough.
- Make Gaza present.

I woke up early and ate breakfast in silence, reading highlights from South Africa’s case for genocide charges presented late last week at the ICJ. I tried to appreciate the simple food, the water that I used to prepare it and to brew my coffee. As the sun came up, I started the rest of my day. I was still at work at sunset, so I waited to break my fast until I got home. I put on a playlist of Palestinian music and cooked dinner, grateful for the peaceful moment and angry that peace has been denied to so many families for so long.