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# Reflections on Psychoanalysis <> Politics 2025

**The Analyst as Co-Resuscitator**

I think of how unusually parched my throat was when it was time for me to speak on our PSA <>POL Palestine panel, an instant desertification that came over me from nowhere. When the panel was done, an attendee told me, “I had this pit in my stomach when you started speaking, I didn’t know what you were going to say.” In *Whither Fanon*, David Marriott writes that, “Fanon often says of himself that he is the one who waits, the one who does not inaugurate but the one who anticipates catastrophe” (Marriott, 2018, p. xviii). And what if one tires of being Cassandra?

I’d chosen to speak on the 2024 fall of the Assad regime in Syria and its connection to Palestine during the genocide, going over the presumption of truth from inertia and how this can so easily collapse, and the subjective mode of lagging that haunts the prisoners who weigh action against inaction. This prisoner faced a form of industrialized torture that rendered him nonverbal in any meaningful sense of speech under dictatorship until the very outbreak of freedom. And I wanted the audience to see the position of this prisoner, besieged by the forces of a totalizing death drive, a complex of prisons and torture techniques and surveillance imported into the Middle East from colonial administrations, Nazi exiles and Stasi agents, birthing something new in Baathism. It swallowed up the life-binding forces of anti-Zionism and socialism in the region, forever disfiguring what pan-Arabism would become, and alloying Eros to these new death-making powers. What’s left once the exhausted body of the narco-military father state collapses? Erich Fromm would say that libidinal energies that are no longer used to preserve a society “cease to be ‘cement’ and turn into dynamite” (Fromm, 1932/1983, p. 134). I wanted the audience to see this prisoner, in Gaza and Syria, who cannot but find their way to an act that unbinds these localized death machines and gives way to recognition of self and other and the full speech that still cannot come through.

We’d invited our psychoanalytically inclined attendees to donate to the Hind Rajab Foundation as the act that framed our panel. This would support HRF’s work in pursuing IDF soldiers and Israeli government officials who travel to countries under the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court to prosecute them for war crimes based on evidence from their own social media admissions. Unlike the Simon Wiesenthal Center’s pursuit of Nazis in 1977, compromised by its defense of Israel under the 20th century liberal international order, HRF was founded in the midst of the Gaza genocide itself and the collapse of this order, with the hope that it would be more geopolitically feasible for smaller nations to break free and prosecute Israeli war criminals. Attendees didn’t appear to consider this controversial at all. Indeed, many had been organizing against the genocide before convening here. The act was out *there*, and not in the conference. We were only referencing its externality.

One year later, the situation in post-Assad Syria continues to be dismal. But still, to invite regret and nostalgia here would imply desire for the naturalization of the narco-military father state. One now sees a compulsion to repeat the Baathist/ISIS death drive alongside a fight for new life and the recovery of repressed memory. Here in the US, it’s hard to even think under our own totalizing death machine. By failing to challenge Israel’s genocide in Gaza, psychoanalysis risks its own naturalization of the American

death drive and its compulsion towards zero, while holding onto a mid-century phantasy of managed decline, where Eros is only ever in privatized form. But the defiance of Minnesotans to ICE terror breaks through this numbness. We encounter the truth of the death drive everywhere, from military weapons exports, to prisons, to the opioid crisis, to school closures, homelessness and Colosseum-style prediction markets. Loneliness plagues the landscape and the Other of the screen presses up against the body with no separation. We struggle to see a future that competes against the LLM that agrees that the suicidal child should kill themself. How should the analyst position herself in relation to desire, if life outside of death becomes impossible?

Perhaps another way of thinking of the act, for the conference and beyond, is one of "co-resuscitation." I take here as inspiration the psychoanalyst Catherine Vanier (née Mathalin) and her groundbreaking analytic work with babies, families and doctors in neonatal intensive care units in France. I've come to hear Antonio Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* quote about morbid symptoms as the problem of a stillbirth. For Gramsci was not writing from the ivory tower, but from the prison cell, where he was left to rot and die: "The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum, morbid phenomena of the most varied kind come to pass" (Gramsci, 2011, p. 33). The old world has been dying for quite some time now, and there is no new being born. The hope for the new signals a profound disavowal of the birthed present, the time of monsters. Every time Gramsci is quoted, it is as if we are declaring that these barren and stochastic disasters of deathmaking are not our children.

Vanier's work in the NICU points to this fragility of new life and how hard it is, actually, to hold a space of ambivalence in the "co-resuscitation" of ever smaller babies:

Resuscitating babies and, at the same time, their desire to live … It is a vast project, which puts me in the position of both psychoanalyst and resuscitator … The question of desire arises not only for the babies and their families but also for the doctors and their teams. So who is being resuscitated? (Vanier, 2018b, p. xx)

In her 2018 presentation at the Après-Coup Psychoanalytic Association, *Connected Babies*, Vanier presents the ethical stakes of life and subjectivity-making today:

The baby does not experience any lack, the crying is not transformed into a call … For premature babies, the world of machines is purely real, and they cannot make any sense of it. There is a serious risk that a baby, during this period of resuscitation, will have no choice but to identify with the machine, this absolute Other, if no one comes to take up a position between the baby and the machine. However, by making use of the machines while continuing to suppose some degree of subjectivity in the babies hooked up to them, we can help the babies to become constituted as human subjects …We can hope that they will manage to communicate, despite everything, with those around them, forcing them into a dialogue. (Vanier, 2018a)

What could this look like, on the other end of the life-death spectrum, in the midst of a global crisis of the symbolic order, when identification with the death machine feels more real than any other signifier? The remotely piloted drone operation, the tank, the missile, the matrix economy of checkpoints and prisons and torched olive groves and wildfires and tear gas, and babies found dead and decomposed in evacuated Gaza? Co-resuscitation might require a different position of analytic neutrality, because the fascist death drive is the point of foreclosure of all ambivalence and all space. Analytic co-resuscitation would imply the risk of life at the very edge of probability. It also implies proximity, a bridging, an expansion of aerated connection and lineage, and a willingness to stay with the social link, even in ambivalence, and with the act that unbinds the old and makes space for the new.

**The Analyst in the Interregnum**

"The old world is dying and the new cannot yet be born; in this interregnum, morbid phenomena of the most varied kind come to pass" (Gramsci, 2011, p. 33).

I read this over and over again. For days.

My mind darts back and forth between then, the conference in February 2025, the time of genocide before the theatrics of a ceasefire, and now, the doldrums of a life continuing uninterrupted when it should be. Almost a year later, we—sometimes fearfully, sometimes apathetically—carry on. We carry on as the US pillages without a need for even the flimsiest pretense, because sophisticated narrative arcs are not for the mighty. We carry on, as ICE officers embracing the full cliché of fascistic military aesthetic execute people and sneer. We carry on as starvation and annihilation in Gaza continue while language lags behind, still calling it a ceasefire. We carry on as the Israeli Defense Forces kill paramedics and newborns, eliminate bloodlines, shoot kids running to recover the corpses of other kids, turn refugee tents to scorched ash, confine humans to concentration camps and spray toxic glyphosate across villages and farmlands. We carry on as the new Board of Peace proposes plans for exciting investment opportunities over the rubble. The space between now and then widens—a gaping yawn—suspiciously comforting and languid. Then, we gathered to think, we gathered our thoughts. Then, I spoke about the position of Palestine in the relationship between psychoanalysis and politics. Questions fill up the vacuum of actions not taken. Uncertainty, our trusty alibi, even more, the sine qua non of our intellectual exercise and analytic practice. Now, time casts its shadow and meaning emerges. Was there more to wager and more to lose? Were we mourning the old world or preserving it? During the past year, institutions generally, and our field especially, have made one recurring melancholic choice, to grasp for the dead old world under the guise of being future oriented and in reality. In reality, they've decided better to live in the undead in-betweenness than suffer the loss of the old world. The ripe moment of violent birth is here, and we are its bad midwives.

Since the conference, I've been thinking about the role of Palestinian resistance, rather than the analyst, in uncovering the symptom and wedging open a space for the new to be born. The farther I stand from acts of resistance, organized and militant, the more its role comes into focus. At first glance they appear futile, romantic rather than strategic, a self-sacrificial fidelity to a nostalgically held lost object, and we know there is no futurity in melancholia. But to look again is to see Palestinian resistance has created the crisis, it has brought about the state of emergency that Benjamin (1968) claims is necessary to improve our position in the struggle against fascism. To see things with such focus requires a remembrance of a Fanonian temporality that comes under frequent attack—a temporality in which the object is named and its loss recognized but not final in the reality of the present moment, facilitating conditions for a futurity in which the colonized *is* future-oriented as they were *before* the imposition of settler temporality (Siegel, 2023).

Israel-Palestine director of Human Rights Watch Omar Shakir, recently resigned in protest of the organization's blocking of a report that accuses Israel of committing "crimes against humanity" by denying Palestinian refugees' right of return. Kenneth Roth, previous executive director of HRW, plucks out some Palestinian refugees who are now citizens of Jordan or assimilated in places like Detroit, Michigan as evidence that Palestinians writ large no longer experience the extreme suffering from the expulsion and dispossession of their parents and grandparents to make Shakir's legal argument defensible. To put this debate in different terms, what seems to be at issue is the temporality of dispossession and the finality of object loss. In reality, the fact of Palestinian dispossession and the loss of Palestine is not settled business. The present suffering of Palestinian refugees does not make them melancholic but politically

engaged—harbingers of a future that reveals the contingencies of settler time. This is how Abourahme (2024) names Palestine "a living archive of our future." In this temporality, what is challenged as reality is the fait accompli of the colonized's situation and finality of their loss, calling into question the uninterrogated status of the colonizer, or great powers, and framing the colonizer's investments and invulnerability to loss melancholic, or out of tune with time. Liberalism is a defeated project. There is no such thing as great powers and their outposts shepherding the world justly and equitably without the use of hegemonic violence. Cling to the fantasy all you like, we already live in a world after this possibility.

When the ceasefire was announced in October 2025, institutions and their elites spoke of an enthusiasm to move forward, relieved that their momentary lapse in efficacy had ended, a mere blip in the otherwise vital post-WWII multilateral world order, and were now eager to rebuild, restore, and carry on. As this rhetoric unfolded, I found myself longing for what felt like the now-gone state of emergency. I (thought I) was melancholic. I wanted to go back in time and stay there. That Palestinians have been in a decades-long melancholic state of clinging almost delusionally to an unrelinquishable but already lost object, Palestine, is a familiar application of psychoanalytic theory, an application that I have grappled with myself. Several Palestinian scholars—more recently, Omar (2023)—have troubled this application well by making the case that Palestinians have knowingly and intentionally deferred mourning as a political act of refusal at the hands of a colonizer that demands the acknowledgement of final loss and the acceptance of Zionist temporality which insists Palestine and the Palestinian was never there to begin with: "never forget you were never there." A demand for political mourning without psychic mourning as a condition of surrender. And yet, Palestinians remain today as they did then. Workers strike despite the painful costs capitalism imposes on them and their communities. The premise of non-reciprocity constitutive of fascistic colonial domination when inflicting pain and sowing fear is no longer. From apartheid Israel to Minneapolis, fear can belong to the oppressor and both will be touched by violence. Self-interested institutions cling to logics that preserve their standing while insurgent forces puncture the myth that this is settled business without contingencies. Kushner introduces the plan for Gaza by saying "We have a masterplan, there is no Plan B", "Let's plan for catastrophic success." It bears reconsidering what, in fact, is the lost object that cannot be relinquished and what reality has confirmed is gone. It is too on the nose, though not incorrect, to expose the melancholia of a Zionism that craves the return of biblical Israel and a Republican Party that wishes to 'Make American Great Again.' It is reputable, progressive, psychoanalytic institutions—making no wagers, preoccupied with de-escalation rather than fomenting emergency, and refusing to meet this moment of fascistic violence and genocide without so much as interrogating whether they are in tune with their time—that preside over this interregnum of morbid symptoms.

The resuscitative involvement by the analyst in this interregnum is motivated by self-preservation rather than seizing upon the risk. It is wrapped up with stabilization and self-reference rather than desire and disorganization. Melancholic resuscitation can be a repetitive revival of the object within the confines of the subject. Though it need not be that way. Resuscitation that involves the unbinding of the analyst's position—a state of dispossession—for the sake of the object's life, invites a self-wagering turn towards the temporality of the unknowable other. In her Avenali Lecture "Fighting Fire with Fire: Aesthetics, Exigent Sadism, Insurgency," Saketopoulou (2025), inspired by Laplanche, further develops her thesis on the fragmenting, destabilizing, anarchic and aggressive forces of the sexual drive that Freud sequesters away in the death drive to retain the sexual drive as primarily self-preservative. She frames the liberal institutional response to fascistic violence—the turn towards reason and critique—as the work of the self-preservative aspect of the drive, that of ordering and binding. It is the same move towards self-preservation—not the move towards the unruly and disordered—that takes hold in the nativist and racist border and control regimes enacted by the ICE agent and the US soldier. Within this frame, melancholia is self-preservative. The self is so impoverished by the taut rigidity of identity that loss of object is loss of ego. In the preface to de M'Uzan's *Death and Identity*, Scarfone discusses a divide in identity that makes it "possible for 'I' to refer to 'me' or 'myself'" (de M'Uzan, 2013, p. xii). It is this more malleable state, brought about in an ego that suffers through the unbinding of the sexual drive, that creates the capacity for adjustment to reality's changing circumstances and facilitates mourning. To me, this means an openness to surprising oneself. It is where violence and disorder make up the stakes that we have any chance against stillbirth. It is not from the

womb of melancholic self-preservation, but out of this insurgent atmosphere that a new world is born.

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