

WEEKEND

Michal Aharony

“A time will come, that you will not live to see, when Jews will erect a monument to you in Israel... and they will proudly claim you as their own,” the philosopher Karl Jaspers wrote to his close friend Hannah Arendt in 1963. That monument remains unbuilt in Israel 2019. Nearly 60 years have gone by since the trial of Adolf Eichmann, and Arendt’s name continues to generate fierce criticism among many Israeli intellectuals. Although she is considered by many one of the greatest thinkers of the 20th century, and even though she was a Holocaust survivor and a Zionist (at least for a certain period) – she was boycotted in Israel for many years and most of her writings have only recently been translated into Hebrew.

The strong feelings that Arendt, who died in 1975, arouses in scholars, especially Israelis, spring primarily from her 1963 book “Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil.” Based on a series of articles Arendt wrote for The New Yorker, the book is critical of the way Israel conducted the Eichmann trial and the way the defendant was portrayed. Instead of a murderous, anti-Semitic monster, Arendt saw something very different: a new type of mass murderer, but without malicious, necessarily lethal, motives, who neither considered the significance of his deeds or accepted responsibility for them. She attributed to Eichmann what she termed “thoughtlessness,” an inability to think from the other’s point of view.

Her book immediately sparked bitter controversy that persisted throughout the 1960s. Arendt was denounced, including by some of her closest friends, as anti-Zionist and said to be an example of “Jewish self-hatred.” She was accused of being favorably disposed toward Eichmann and of absolving him of guilt and responsibility for his crimes. Her good friend, the kabbala scholar Gershom Scholem, wrote to her that she lacked “love for the Jewish people.” Relations between them were severed in the wake of her response to his letter.

For long decades, Arendt was unofficially ostracized in Israel. Her books were not translated into Hebrew and her work was not discussed, in either the academic or public spheres. She was effectively subjected to political-intellectual excommunication. It was not until 2000 that “Eichmann in Jerusalem” was published here, and the Hebrew-reading public had the opportunity to judge the text for itself.

More recently, Arendt’s status in Israel has begun to change. Trenchant criticism is still leveled at her, but over the past two decades, a process has been underway reflecting new approaches to her thought. She is no longer taboo: Her writings are the subject of critical and more favorable consideration by such Israeli scholars as Adi Ophir, Michal Ben-Naftali and Leora Bilsky.

One reason for her gradual inclusion in public discourse is the dominance of post-Zionist and postmodern theory in academic circles beginning in the 1990s. The first conference on Arendt to be held in Israel took place in Jerusalem in 1997, with its lectures later issued as a collection of articles (in English), written mainly by scholars from abroad, edited by historian Steven Aschheim.

A notable step in introducing Arendt into the Israeli discourse was made by historian Idith Zertal. She researched Arendt’s thought and the controversies surrounding her, and beginning in the 1990s, published articles on these subjects in Israeli journals and newspapers. Prof. Zertal also discussed Arendt extensively in her book “Israel’s Holocaust and the Politics of Nationhood” (published in English in 2005), which dealt with the politics of Holocaust memory. In 2004, in the wake of the first Hebrew-language conference on Arendt, held at Tel Aviv University, a first collection of essays in Hebrew also appeared. In 2010, Zertal’s Hebrew translation of Arendt’s groundbreaking work “The Origins of Totalitarianism” was published.

The Arendt renaissance continued with translations into Hebrew of additional books, among them “The Human Condition” and “The Jewish Writings.” In the past decade, local universities have offered courses on Arendt, a play about her life was staged here and she was the subject of an Israeli documentary film.

Arendt challenged, and continues to challenge,



The Eichmann trial, 1961. Arendt’s primary argument that was in the atmosphere prevailing in Nazi Germany, he could not have distinguished between good and evil.

Gjon Mili/The Life Picture Collection/Getty Images

A question of conscience

Nearly 60 years after she reported on the Eichmann trial, Hannah Arendt remains a controversial figure among intellectuals in Israel. What is there about the concept of the ‘banality of evil’ that continues to generate such profound unease?

the Jewish and Zionist consensus. The conceptual revolution she fomented with the term “banality of evil” and its relevance 56 years after it first saw the light of day, remain difficult to swallow even in our world today. What is it about that concept that continues to the present to stir such deep unease among Israeli intellectuals?

Arrested by the Gestapo

Arendt was a Holocaust survivor in every sense, even if she did not define herself as such. She was born in 1906 to an assimilated Jewish family in Germany, and studied philosophy from an early age. She was Martin Heidegger’s pupil and wrote her doctoral thesis at the University of Heidelberg under the supervision of Karl Jaspers. In 1933 she was arrested by the Gestapo for engaging in Zionist activity, and was released after a week by a young officer she befriended. She succeeded in fleeing with her mother and reached Paris, where she spent eight years as a refugee. She also worked for Youth Aliyah, organizing groups of children and adolescents for immigration to Palestine. Following the occupation of France, Arendt was arrested and incarcerated in the Gurs camp in the country’s southwest, but managed to escape within a few weeks.

In 1941, Arendt and her husband, Heinrich Bluecher, fled to the United States, for which they had refugee visas, via Lisbon. She became an American citizen in 1951 and lived in the country, pursuing a distinguished academic career, until her death in 1975.

Arendt’s lengthy refugee experience went a

long way toward shaping her political thought. Her Judaism and her approach to the Jewish question also played an important part in this context. Arendt espoused a strong affinity for Zionism, even though she was critical of Zionist ideology and was increasingly censorious in regard to Israel.

Why, despite her biography, did her book generate such controversy? The answer lies, in part, in her critique of the political nature of the Eichmann trial. Arendt saw it as a show trial – a political event with a specific agenda. She took issue with the fact that the majority of the testimonies were not relevant to proving the defendant’s guilt. She also objected to the prosecution’s focus on the legal category of a “crime against the Jewish people,” which was intended to promote a Zionist-historical narrative in which the Holocaust was depicted as another link in a long chain of persecution of Jews. That approach, she argued, attested to the fact that the court did not grasp fully the singularity of Auschwitz. In her conception, the Nazis’ crimes were unprecedented and constituted “crimes against humanity.”

However, the source of most of the anger against her lay elsewhere. What brought about her boycott in Israel was her interpretation of Eichmann and characterization of the victims of the Shoah.

Arendt objected to the prosecution’s depiction of Eichmann as having been guided by a racist, murderous ideology. She offered an alternative interpretation: Eichmann as a bureaucrat engaged in advancing his career, who avoided contending with the consequences of his own deeds. Arendt contemplated the possibility of a “desk murderer” who perpetrates his harrowing crimes from afar, doing no actual killing himself and viewing himself as a law-abiding citizen who obeys his superiors’ orders. This was the context in which she coined her contentious and most widely misunderstood concept of the “banality of evil.”

Though Arendt’s book was subtitled “A Report on the Banality of Evil,” the term itself appears only once in the text, near the end. It has been subjected to endless interpretation. One reason for the initial bewilderment was that Arendt did not explain the term in the book’s first edition. She did so only in a postscript that appeared in a revised and expanded edition from 1965. Her later references to the term and her personal correspondence with friends shed further light on what she meant.

Arendt explained that she had not attempted in the book to articulate a comprehensive theory of the essence of evil, but rather intended to point to a phenomenon she had noticed during the trial. By “banality of evil,” Arendt had in mind two interconnected ideas. The first is that Eichmann was not a satanic figure or, for that matter, an extreme anti-Semite. He was an ordinary person. He had no motives for his actions other than promoting his own advancement. His deeds were monstrous, but the man himself was banal.

The notion of the “banality of evil” refers to the paradox created by totalitarian society, in which an unprecedented crime is executed optimally by an ordinary bureaucratic apparatus; it suggests the disparity between the vast dimensions of the crime and the unexceptional persona of the criminal. This challenged a long theological, philosophical, moral and legal tradition, extending from Augustine to Kant, which maintained that acts of evil must necessarily be a manifestation of evil intentions, and that the degree of the evil that finds expression in crimes must be consistent with the level of malice of the motives.

The second element that Arendt perceived in Eichmann was “thoughtlessness,” a trait she defined as the “almost total inability ever to look at anything from the other fellow’s point of view.” But this did not absolve him of responsibility for his deeds. The lesson to be learned from the Eichmann trial, in her view, was that this sort of thoughtlessness, which is “by no means identical with stupidity,” can “wreak more havoc than all the evil instincts taken together which, perhaps, are inherent in man.” Her primary argument was that in the atmosphere prevailing in Nazi Germany, Eichmann could not have distinguished between good and evil. Arendt termed him a “new type of criminal,” who commits his crimes “under circumstances that make it well-nigh impossible to know or to feel that he is doing wrong.”

What is so difficult to accept about Arendt’s hypothesis of the “banality of evil” – and what generated opposition to the book in Israel – is that she was positing here a new type of conscience. Contrary to the judgment handed down in the trial, Arendt did not believe that Eichmann needed to “close his ears to the voice of conscience,” or that he lacked a conscience altogether, but that the voice of conscience of “respectable” German society did not tell him that he should feel guilty for his deeds.

What is so difficult to accept about Arendt’s hypothesis of the ‘banality of evil’ – and what generated opposition to the book in Israel – is that we are confronted here with a new type of conscience.

Whereas the law in enlightened states presupposes that the voice of conscience tells everyone, “You shall not kill,” the law in Hitler’s state required the voice of conscience to tell everyone, “You shall kill.” Indeed, one of Eichmann’s claims in the trial was, Arendt writes, “that there were no voices from the outside to arouse his conscience.”

An additional reason for the rancor directed at Arendt was her criticism concerning the image of the victims of the Holocaust. She objected to the prosecution’s systematic evasion of dealing with the cooperation of the leaders of the Judenräte (the Jewish councils) with the Nazis. One of the most difficult allegations to accept in the book is that if the Jews had been less well organized, and if they hadn’t had a leadership, the overall number of victims would not have reached the dimensions it did.

“To a Jew,” Arendt asserts, “this role of the Jewish leaders in the destruction of their own people is undoubtedly the darkest chapter of the whole dark story.” This hypothetical claim is of course unprovable speculation by Arendt.

Moral outrage

Some of Arendt’s detractors understood the term “banality of evil” as a description of the crimes themselves. By this thinking, if the Nazis’ crimes were banal, it follows that they were not unforgivable. Others interpreted her comments about the responsibility of Jewish leaders as a classic case of blaming the victim. Both groups saw her book as a dangerous blurring of boundaries that could lead to moral nihilism. Criticism of

this sort, which was raised immediately upon the book’s publication, is still being voiced.

Israeli historian Anita Shapira, for example, maintains that Arendt’s critical approach reflects moral ambiguity, and this is what has made her a favorite of postmodernists. “Nothing is at seems.” There is no truth, no lies, no victim, no murderer. No one is guilty, none are innocent, there is no hierarchy of values, no value is absolute,” Shapira wrote, in a 2004 article, “The Eichmann Trial: Changing Perspectives.”

Elhanan Yakira, former head of the philosophy department of the Hebrew University, asserted in his book “Post-Zionism, Post-Holocaust” (published in English in 2009) that “Eichmann in Jerusalem” is not only Arendt’s worst book, it is also “morally scandalous” and a philosophical-moral failure. In a later article, he explained that his attempt to expose the book’s intellectual failure is part of a broad effort to expose the moral failure of today’s critics of Zionism, who cast aspersions on Israel with “the systematic use of the Holocaust as an ideological weapon.”

One of Yakira’s flagrant mistakes is his claim that Arendt engaged in an “act of suppression” vis-a-vis the Nazis’ crimes. Arendt, he maintains, barely refers to the annihilation itself. It is true that Arendt’s theory of totalitarianism focused more on the concentration camps and less on the death camps, but this in no way stemmed from a “suppression” of the crimes. The atrocities of Auschwitz jolted every fiber of her being. The act of annihilation is present throughout her book on Eichmann and guides her thinking.

One author who went a lot farther is Tzvia Greenfield, a Haredi journalist (and briefly a Knesset member from Meretz). In her 2017 Hebrew-language book “Collapse: The Disintegration of the Political Left in Israel,” she repeats the same baseless accusations against Arendt that were voiced 50 years ago. Time and again she reiterates that according to Arendt, “it was precisely the Jews themselves who effectively brought about the catastrophe of the annihilation” through the cooperation of the Judenräte with the Nazis. Greenfield even maintains that Arendt asserted that “Eichmann is the true victim of the historical events.”

It’s doubtful whether Greenfield, who accuses Arendt of expressing views that “border on Holocaust denial,” no less and no more, read “Eichmann in Jerusalem” carefully. Otherwise, it’s hard to understand how she could fault Arendt for undermining the “implications of the Holocaust” in order to justify Israel’s violent treatment of the Palestinians, in a book that was published four years before the Six-Day War. Greenfield draws a direct line between Arendt’s criticism of David Ben-Gurion and Zionist ideology, and the BDS boycott movement, which she maintains is undermining Israel’s legitimacy.

Let’s set the record straight: Nowhere in the book does Arendt absolve the Nazis in general or Eichmann in particular of guilt. She was vehemently opposed to the “cog in the machinery” theory, according to which Eichmann was supposedly not responsible for his actions. Functionaries are human beings, too, and as such are blameworthy and guilty. Eichmann, she argues, was accused as a human being; an individual human was on trial, not the entire Nazi regime. Nor, in contrast to many of her friends, did she object to the death penalty he received.

Furthermore, Arendt never claimed that the Jews were to blame for their own destruction. Her consideration of the role of the Judenrat is indeed an infuriating and painful part of her book, marked by a harshly judgmental approach and insensitivity. Even though her discussion of the topic covers only 12 pages, it was the issue that sparked the fiercest response and the



Arendt. “She knew she was aiming for what was intolerable. There aren’t many people who are capable of doing that and paying the price she did,” says Michal Ben-Naftali. Bettman Archive/Getty Images

most intense anger against her. Her views concerning the behavior of the Jewish leadership during the Holocaust were very similar to the dominant approach in Israel during its first two decades of existence. The judgmental approach toward the Jewish Police and the leaders of the Judenräte, and against everyone who was suspected of "collaboration" with the Nazis prevailed in the country. This was reflected in legislation – in particular the Law for the Punishment of Nazis and Their Collaborators (1950); in the Kapo trials in the 1950s, and in the trial of Rudolf Kastner in 1955.

At the same time, Arendt did not censure the victims themselves, who went to their death, supposedly, like "sheep to slaughter." On the contrary: She was critical of Gideon Hausner, the chief prosecutor, for asking survivor witnesses over and over, "Why did you not protest? Why did you board the train?" ... "Why didn't you revolt and charge and attack?" She argued that these were silly, cruel questions, which attested to a total misunderstanding of life under the murderous terror of the Nazi dictatorship.

Moreover, she also made a point of noting that no other non-Jewish population under German occupation behaved differently. Idith Zertal adds in her book that the prosecutor's approach aimed less at understanding the Jewish situation under Nazi rule, than at serving the needs of the Zionist narrative and self-image.

The stand Arendt took on the side of the survivors was given symbolic expression in her choice to sit among them in the courtroom rather than in the section reserved for VIPs and journalists. The hall, Arendt wrote, "was filled with 'survivors,' with middle-aged and elderly people, immigrants from Europe, like myself, who knew by heart all there was to know, and who were in no mood to learn any lessons and certainly did not need this trial to draw their own conclusions." Like many Holocaust survivors, Arendt too thought that the huge crimes committed by the Nazis could not be adequately represented through the trial, but nevertheless acknowledged that there were no other tools with which to judge them.

Arendt had little patience – neither for Hausner's theatricalities and nor for the dozens of witnesses heard in the trial. Her rhetoric was at times sharply honed, perhaps excessively so. Her tone was steeped in irony and at times showed a lack of empathy toward some of the testimony, infuriating the Jewish community in Israel and abroad. As the

Zertal shows how Arendt's ideas, 'which were rejected for years, are present in the thinking of young Israelis and influence their choices and decisions' during army service and afterward.

Jewish, Turkish-American philosopher Seyla Benhabib noted, many of the terms Arendt used in her book showed an astonishing lack of perspective and judiciousness, and above all strong emotional involvement and lack of distance from the topic she was examining. She wasn't able to find "the right public language, the right discourse through which to narrate past sorrow, suffering, and loss."

Zertal, too, believes that Arendt's rhetoric played a part in rendering the book controversial. "The things themselves," she told me in an interview, "the caustic, compassionless wording, were frequently more than the people of the time and of this place could bear."

But above and beyond that, she says, "What was acceptable and tolerated for the people of the Yishuv, the Zionist collective 'we,' was not permissible for the 'foreign,' Diaspora, anti-Zionist woman, as her critics termed her. She burst into the midst of the organized event of the trial and disrupted its ideological messages, which were on the brink of theology, about Zionist redemption that sprang from Jewish annihilation. The fact that she was a woman and a groundbreaking thinker, possessing a brilliant intellect, in a realm of knowledge that was completely ruled by men, did not facilitate her acceptance."

Beyond this, it is worth dwelling on the ambivalent position Arendt represents as a Jewish refugee, on the one hand, whose life was shaped by virtue of her Jewishness and by her ties with Zionism, and her critique of the Zionist project, on the other hand, as an outside observer. According to the writer and translator Michal Ben-Naftali, was deeply influenced by Arendt and devoted a book to her, "It is impossible even for a moment to accuse Arendt of being alienated from her Jewishness. Not only is she occupied with the commitment and responsibility that stem from that identity, but from the 1940s onward she writes about Jewish and Zionist matters from a position of involvement and concern, though this never leads to integration

or an unequivocal sense of solidarity."

Ben-Naftali adds, "It seems to me that precisely the uncommon fusion of caring and critical distance generates suspiciousness toward her in the best case, and massive recoil in the less-than-best case."

Saving the Jewish state

Even though Arendt didn't see herself as belonging to any political group, and even if it's hard to tag her as "left" or "right," her critical writing anticipated some of the central issues that appeared years later in studies conducted by the "New Historians" and "post-Zionists." Already in early articles from the 1940s, Arendt was critical of the Jewish nation-state, supported binational and multinational political frameworks, and warned about the threat posed to the Arab population of Palestine. In her book about Eichmann she came out against what she perceived as the Zionist project's exploitation of the memory of the Holocaust. Arendt touched plenty of raw nerves, which continue to generate searing disputes.

In 1948, at the height of Israel's War of Independence, and long before the Nation-State Law was promulgated and before Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu presented the plans for Auschwitz-Birkenau at the UN General Assembly, Arendt wrote the following in an article titled "To Save the Jewish Homeland": "And even if the Jews were to win the war, its end would find the unique possibilities and the unique achievements of Zionism in Palestine destroyed. The land that would come into being would be something quite other than the dream of world Jewry, Zionist and non-Zionist. The 'victorious' Jews would live surrounded by an entirely hostile Arab population, secluded inside ever-threatening borders, absorbed with physical self-defense to a degree that would submerge all other interests and activities."

"The growth of a Jewish culture would cease to be the concern of the whole people; social experiments would have to be discarded as impractical luxuries; political thought would center around military strategy; economic development would be determined exclusively by the needs of war."

Zertal's 2018 book "Refusal: Conscientious Objection in Israel" (in Hebrew), which deals with the issue of political evil and the possibilities of rising up against it, examines the intellectual, political and historical background of conscientious objection to army service in Israel, particularly in relation to the occupation. "Eichmann in Jerusalem" is the book's point of departure. Zertal shows how Arendt's ideas, including the "banality of evil," "which were rejected and repressed for years, are present in the thinking of young Israelis and influence their choices and their decisions" during their army service and afterward. The book contains interviews with soldiers of various ranks, from reserve officers to former Shin Bet security services director Ami Ayalon, who talk about how they became functionaries who only did their duty in operational actions, in a narrow realm that left them little room for thought.

"She is undoubtedly one of the greatest and most influential thinkers of the 20th century," Zertal told me. "And she chose consciously not to be a philosopher in the sense of thinking and reflection in isolation from the world, but saw herself as a political thinker whose philosophy is nourished by life's experiences. She experienced it all first-hand: world wars, Nazism, the Holocaust, totalitarianism, revolutions, post-colonialism, refugeehood and migration. Rare are the thinkers who have introduced into their work so many critical issues for deciphering the world, and did so with an intellectual passion and brilliance and with such uncompromising courage as Arendt."

I asked Ben-Naftali what she thinks makes Arendt unique. She replied that she was drawn to her thought "because of her nonconformist courage and because of her effort to dissolve clichés and norms of thought impartially." According to Ben-Naftali, "Arendt's writing is informed by tremendous complexity. It seems to me that many people cannot bear complexity in contexts that they consider to be 'volatile.' That tendency renders many of the debates on public issues superficial and effectively superfluous, and not only in this context."

"In a certain sense, Arendt knew that. She knew she was aiming for what was intolerable and was acting just plain tactlessly, touching on things that were not yet ripe to be touched on. There aren't many people who are capable of doing that and paying the kind of price that she did. In a way, the book was aimed, already when it was published, at the sensibilities of a generation younger than the one Arendt herself was part of. From this point of view, Arendt's writing still awaits us in years to come."

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A shooting position and the security barrier in Netiv Ha'asara, on the Gaza border. The mosaic has inscriptions about love and peace.

on Sunday at 7 P.M., killing yeshiva student Pinchas Menachem Prezuazman. Dozens of residents of the ultra-Orthodox neighborhood are gathered in front of No. 15 on the street, where only a year ago every apartment got a fortified security room. That didn't help Prezuazman, who was on the way back from synagogue, heard the siren, entered a stairwell that was packed with people, gave cover to a woman and was hit by shrapnel and killed.

The rocket fell in the courtyard and the shock waves damaged all the shutters and windows of the balconies in the row of houses on the other side of the street. Even though this is a Haredi neighborhood inhabited by the Gur and Belz Hasidic sects, an Israeli flag flies from a balcony of the building next to which the rocket fell. Every flag needs a balcony. The glaziers are glazing, the aluminum workers are paneling.

The families here have many children and a balcony can't be left without shutters. Prezuazman was a Ger Hasid, and left behind a baby girl of 15 months, and a pregnant wife. They moved here from Beit Shemesh. He was buried in Jerusalem. He was a volunteer with the Refua Veyeshua (Healing and Salvation) organization, which helps disabled children; his friends say he had a "gentle soul." They relate that a rocket also hit the roof of a residential building on Ba'al Hanes Street, but didn't explode there.

Habayit Hayehudi, a store that sells Judaica and religious articles, located in the building across from where the rocket struck, didn't open today. A sign on the bus stop offers transportation to the *hilula* (religious festivity) in memory of Joshua Bin-Nun, at the biblical figure's traditional tomb, located in the village of Kifl Haris in Samaria, the northern West Bank.

Six or seven alarms were heard here yesterday. The Hasids thought at first that something was wrong with the sirens, until they heard the booms. A few of them recited the afternoon prayers in the bomb shelter. Yisrael, a Belz Hasid and teacher in his 20s, says he was "in all the wars, and what happened yesterday never happened before. Thirty rockets at once. I am not a member of the security cabinet, we don't know anything about Eurovision and Independence Day, but we feel that people are making a mockery of us every day. The cease-fire won't last two days. What should be done? In my opinion, the public should be satisfied. The public was convinced that a ground operation was needed. It doesn't look like something that has a solution, but the last time there was a ground operation, we had three-and-a-half years of quiet."

"*Nem*" ("take," in Yiddish) he says to Yehuda Arieh, his blond son, whose white stockings are decorated with plastic pearls. Yehuda Arieh is a year and a half old, and yesterday he told his mother that he was afraid, his father says now. "Just yesterday I said to my wife that we can't relate to what's going on in Sderot and the Gaza envelope. And suddenly we're in the cholent."

QUIET

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courtesy. "Choice of your personal stone, gluing the personal stone to the wall and writing your wishes – for a fee." Someone has wished for a miracle, which is perhaps the most realistic inscription on the wall, behind which is concealed the cage of Gaza.

A few minutes' drive from there, away from the hope and the love, about 40 people, looking weary and grim, are sitting on a stone bench beneath a broiling-hot tin roof, piles of belongings strewn on the floor, the hot wind blowing in their faces. This is the entrance to the Erez checkpoint, aka the cage, which has been closed for a few days now. The faces of these people say it all. A fusion of exhaustion, despair, illness and the ordeals of the debilitating journey. Today is the start of the holy month of Ramadan, and all they want is to get home. Most have just had surgery or other serious medical treatment. They've been here since the morning, patients and their escorts, whom Israel allowed magnanimously to travel from here to East Jerusalem or the West Bank to receive medical care. But the door back to their homes is shut in their face, for now.

Salah Hilwa, from a neighborhood in the center of the Gaza Strip, arrived here at 7 A.M., escorting his wife, Siham, who is recovering from the stomach surgery she underwent 10 days ago at Al-Makassed Hospital in East Jerusalem. Both are 63 years old, parents to 10 children. Siham, her face sallow and drooping, is sitting with her husband, who's wearing a white

sweater. Most of the people here are wearing winter clothing, on the hottest day of the week. The couple left their home 12 days ago and this morning were told by the hospital that the Erez checkpoint was open. But Erez is closed right now, and the Ethiopian-Israeli armed guard – who also rushes over to us and demands that we delete the pictures we've taken – tells the unfortunates that the crossing will open "maybe in another month." If cruelty is an option, go for it. "Maybe you can help us," one of the Gazans asks us in Hebrew. "Help us. All these people are sick. My permit expires today and I am not allowed to stay here."

A group of high-ranking IDF officers is standing along the side of the road to Kibbutz Erez, at the spot where Moshe Feder, 67, was killed a day earlier, when an antitank missile hit his car. From an abandoned tank battery, east of Kibbutz Nahal Oz, next to the fence, Gaza looks steamy, vapors of heat rising from it at midday. Stretch out your hand and you can touch the Shujaiyeh neighborhood opposite. A truck barrels by, a bird flies overhead, someone shouts in the distance, tall buildings, two mosque minarets – and quiet on the face of the abyss. How I would like to be there, across the way, now. To report from there. What's going on now between those buildings and inside them. How much the walls shook from the surgical bombings. How terrified the children are. The picture is very blurred amid the haze of the heat.

"Yonatan Express Glazier, repairs in the customer's home," and also "Weizmann Shutters: Aluminum Work" have been parked on Yehuda Hamaccabi Street in Ashdod since the morning, along with vehicles belonging to representatives of the Property Tax department. This is where the last lethal rocket in this round struck,

PAPER TRAIL

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to families who were not willing to receive stolen children. Someone decided which child would be transferred, on which date, with which escort, by which route and to which family. Someone promised the recipient families that it would be possible to invent a story of birth or legal adoption, without which the child would not legally exist; someone then had to create the false documents for thousands of cases.

Here, too, diverse people had to be involved: the wicked-hearted who snatched infants from their cribs at night; the good-hearted souls who diapered and fed and calmed them and lulled them to sleep; the logistics officials and inventors of cover stories; the drivers and accountants – and many others without whose ongoing contribution the project of massive kidnapping and adoption would not have been possible. Those planning the policy would have had to identify in advance, before taking action, the thousands of people who would participate, keep the whole endeavor secret, and never again speak of their actions until their deaths, decades later, nor confess or express regret. Ever.

No note or document revealing any such extensive activity was ever found in the archives, but there are thousands of documents attesting to the deaths and burial of 1,000 infants. There are no lists of children designated for kidnapping or of families designated to adopt them, or of the assignment of caregivers or drivers. No document about who it was that organized all this. And a total absence of documents about planning, ongoing supervision, budgeting, etc. Nothing.

The whole thrust of the demand for investigation and for justice rests on the proposition that the state engaged in kidnapping children and lying about it. Had it been merely isolated cases of rogue actors, there would be no case for the state to answer and the Knesset to discuss. It's hard to see how governmental activity of this scale could have been kept secret in real time, with none of the participants talking about his or her role until they died. It's inconceivable

that no traces were left in the archives.

And if you want to say that the absence of hundreds of dark-skinned elderly Israeli with Ashkenazi names proves that the children were sent abroad, you have only added additional layers of planning, budgeting, logistical complexity and ongoing documentation, including that from the target countries, over which Israeli authorities have no control.

Were the deaths of a thousand children accompanied by impatience and intolerance on the part of clerks and medical teams vis-a-vis refugee parents who appeared to them foreign

and strange? Quite possibly. Was there alienation, condescension or behavior that could be taken as derision and racism? Probably. But an archive is not a good place to look for the record of such behavior.

My position is that of the archivist: What is found in the State Archives is not consistent with the allegations of institutional kidnapping and adoption, and what is not found in the archives also refutes those allegations.

Dr. Yaacov Lozowick was Israel's state archivist from 2011 to 2018.

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CLIMATE

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by 2050 due to the effects of climate change. By the end of the century that number may run into the billions. Where will all these refugees go? More and more countries are closing their borders and protecting them by means of walls and military means. It would not be farfetched to surmise that millions of people are liable to end their lives in camps or even to encounter live fire during attempts to cross a border. In other scenarios, strong states might take over weaker ones in order to provide "living space" for their citizens.

Already today, droughts caused by climate change are generating political tension in a number of regions. The murderous wars

in Darfur, Sudan, and in Syria have been attributed in part to the impact of prolonged drought. A decline in the flow of the Nile River is fomenting growing tension between Ethiopia, which lies along the upper part of it, and Egypt, where the Lower Nile flows. Many Egyptians blame the dam being built in Ethiopia for the phenomenon, but the real cause of the drying up is apparently climate change. The cooling-off in relations between Jordan and Israel – reflected in King Abdullah's decision to exercise his country's right to cancel the agreement under which Israel had access to the Zofar and Naharayim enclaves abutting the Jordan River for 25 years – is related to the serious water shortage in the Hashemite kingdom.

An ecological catastrophe is not like the case of a meteor striking Earth. It is not a one-time apocalyptic event, but a gradual deterioration, which will increasingly affect the systems that

make human life possible. People will respond to the aggravated situation with political measures that might be humane but are also liable to be lethal. All these processes will occur on a vast, globe-spanning scale.

The study of the Holocaust and the study of ecology are fields with very little overlap. But it's difficult today to recall the Holocaust of European Jewry 80 years ago without considering that a far larger genocide is a possibility that is becoming more likely and concrete. As Snyder warns on the final page of "Black Earth": "We share Hitler's planet and several of his preoccupations: we have changed less than we think."

Drawing comparisons with the Holocaust is an overused and in many cases demagogic rhetorical device. But when we speak in vague terms about the "climate crisis," it's crucial to understand what could be at stake: nothing less than genocide, and possibly a more sweeping genocide than anything previously seen in history.