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OMER BARTOV AND THE POLITICS OF HOLOCAUST MEMORY

From Activism to Historiography—and Back Again

Sabrina Soffer

ISGAP / THE INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF GLOBAL ANTISEMITISM & POLICY

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Sabrina Soffer*

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Preface

"The memories which lie within us are not carved in stone; not only do they tend to become erased as the years go by, but often they change or even grow by incorporating extraneous features." —Primo Levi

These words by Holocaust survivor Primo Levi in his essay "The Drowned and the Saved" speak candidly about memory and narrative. They raise the question of how memories influence the trajectory of one's personal development and history itself.

Prominent World War II historian Omer Bartov regards Primo Levi as one of the individuals who most influenced his thought and work. A closer look into Bartov's life and the evolution of his scholarship reveals his realization that in order to avoid "drowning"—whether literally, as Levi did years after writing about his survival in Auschwitz, or spiritually and figuratively—he had to embrace Levi's reflections. To save the importance of the tragic yet significant life Levi lived, Bartov dedicated his career to catalyzing historical work for one of life's most important feats: to "open up," to "love."[1]

Three generations removed from the Holocaust, Bartov's memories and "extraneous features" have converged into a historical methodology with a "personal political" approach. Bartov's intellectual journey—shaped by the memories he has uncovered and continues to confront—illustrates how external influences and personal reflection on one's past inform an individual's viewpoints and their dissemination.

Omer Bartov's intellectual evolution reflects the dynamics surrounding the impact and use of Holocaust memory. But more significantly, taken as a case study, this research illuminates the erosion of boundaries between scholarship and activism. When such boundaries are erased, not only is scholarship compromised but, in today's politicized academic climate, the scholar has been proven to fall prey to a morally required antisemitism.

Bartov's methodology—"history from below"—is emblematic of a postmodern academic culture that embraces subjectivism, prioritizing personal perspectives and moral relativism. A review of Bartov's past and work alongside his present activity and commentary reveals how his "personal-political" approach to scholarship has become normalized in academia. Backed by existing philosophical frameworks, politicized narrative-history conditioned for activism is displacing the importance of comprehensive evidence and facts, which are the pillars of academic rigor.

Introduction

In February 2004, Omer Bartov condemned student protestors carrying flags, banners, and posters that equated Zionism and Israel with Nazism, renouncing their rhetoric as virulently antisemitic. He described this "poisonous rhetoric" as emblematic of a new antisemitism with a "Hitlerite quality," one that legitimizes anti-Zionism and revives the myth of Jewish world domination. He argued that antisemites must be confronted "by putting limits to them through all available means, political, judicial, and, if necessary, by the use of legitimate force."[2]

Just over two decades later, in April 2024, Bartov joined anti-Israel campus protests permeated with the very rhetoric he once deemed "poisonous" and in need of confrontation. At the University of Pennsylvania's Gaza Solidarity Encampment, he delivered a teach-in titled "Defining Antisemitism" in which he emphasized "the importance of organizing and changing power," even as participants echoed rhetoric he had formerly denounced.[3] Amid calls for a "ceasefire" and an end to the "occupation," demonstrators waved the flag of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP)—a US-designated terrorist organization—and chanted "Al Qassam, make us proud," invoking Hamas's military wing and its campaign for the destruction of Israel.[4] Shortly after Bartov's teach-in, a rabbi and a student attempting to pass through the encampment were assaulted. This incident, one of several involving the harassment of Jewish and Israeli students, was widely documented and publicly known.[5] To this day, however, Bartov defends the demonstra-

tors from accusations of antisemitism. "There's nothing threatening about opposing occupation or oppression," he recently claimed.[6]

In 2004, Bartov also joined the editorial board of *Yad Vashem Studies*, the journal affiliated with the World Holocaust Remembrance Center in Jerusalem. At the end of the 2024 academic year, Bartov resigned from the journal's editorial board. In his resignation letter, he argued that editorial silence on Israel's actions in Gaza would leave a permanent stain on both the journal and the center.[7]

Several developments in Bartov's scholarly trajectory provoke curiosity. Among the most revealing is his selective acceptance of Holocaust analogies. In 2019, after the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) rejected the use of Holocaust analogies, Bartov joined 220 humanities scholars in signing a public letter urging the museum to reverse its stance. The letter argued that insisting on Holocaust uniqueness impedes historical learning, thereby undermining the museum's core mission.[8]

However, just a month after Hamas's October 7 attack on Israel, Bartov—along with other leading Holocaust and genocide historians—publicly rejected Holocaust analogies in response to the attack. Their open letter condemned political leaders' comparisons of Hamas to the Nazis and of Hamas's atrocities to the Holocaust. Such comparisons, the letter asserted, constituted "intellectual and moral failings."[9]

As a lifelong scholar of modern German history, World War II, and genocide, Bartov has consistently warned against loosely analogizing Holocaust events. In a 2002 lecture at the USHMM, he warned, "Comparative methods bring with them a significant liability." The danger, he explained, is that they often "prejudice scholars' conclusions" or distort public understanding. Even so, he maintained that "it would be unwise to reject comparative methods" merely because they can be misused.[10] This tension has remained constant in Bartov's thinking.

What has shifted is not Bartov's position on Holocaust comparisons in principle but his evolving definition of what constitutes appropriate as opposed to abusive uses of Holocaust memory—and the contexts in which he now draws such analogies.

To grasp Bartov's current framework for Holocaust analogies, one must turn from the dozen or so books he has authored on World War II and the Eastern Front to his most recent public writings and commentary on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and its surrounding politics. Since November 2023, Bartov has shifted from warning about the prospect of genocide to explicitly accusing Israel of committing "genocidal actions" in Gaza.[11] In articles for *The Guardian* and *The New York Times*, and in interviews with Al Jazeera and Democracy Now!, he has drawn parallels between the IDF and the Nazis, and between the Israeli public and early 20th-century Germans. In April 2025, Bartov retweeted—without comment—an article titled "Israel's Latest Vision for Gaza Has a Name: Concentration Camp."[12] In July 2025, he penned the editorial "I'm a Genocide Scholar. I Know It When I See It," in the pages of *The New York Times*, with the header "NEVER AGAIN" overlaying a photo of the destruction in Gaza. In September 2025, he claimed that the destruction of Gaza was greater than the destruction caused by the nuclear bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.[13] This confluence of rhetoric lends credence to the claim that Gaza today bears legitimate comparison to the Holocaust.[14]

Why the Shift—And What Does It Reveal?

When asked directly whether his views had changed since 2004, Bartov replied affirmatively and without hesitation.[15] What personal experiences, disciplinary shifts, or broader philosophical and political trends shaped his intellectual transformation? What prompted him to reframe his thinking on Holocaust analogies, Israel, and antisemitism? And how did these platforms—academic journals, mainstream media, social media, activist forums—influence what Bartov expressed and how his positions evolved?

These questions remind us that scholars can change their academic direction and convictions like any human being. Specific to Bartov, this paper will weave through the personal and political—his Israeli roots, scholarly discipline, and evolving methodology—to illuminate the arc of a singular intellectual journey. His transformation sheds light on broader academic currents among Jewish intellectuals, scholars across disciplines, and institutions that straddle monolithic academic culture and political polarization.

Like many Israeli scholars of his generation, Bartov was shaped by a state ethos steeped in national purpose, one that he felt mobilized history as an instrument of identity and politics. His evolution reflects the generational dilemmas confronting post-Holocaust scholars, where exposure to counter-narratives and eventual departure from dominant narratives became fertile ground for academic and ideological reinvention. Finally, in bridging the political with the personal, Bartov and scholars like him are recasting Jewish identity amid the intensifying ruptures of a post-October 7 world.

Note on Method, Argument, and Structure

This study of Omer Bartov's intellectual evolution seeks to reflect a nuanced grasp of his personal story and contextual backdrop. The *what*—Bartov's ideas—and the *how*—his intellectual trajectory—are carefully delineated. While pervasively explored, the *why*—the central concern of this inquiry—remains ultimately inconclusive, as it is impossible to isolate one factor or pinpoint the most influential one. As will be outlined, arguments surrounding the reasons for Bartov's shift are necessarily speculative, extrapolated from a matrix of personal, historical, political, psychological, philosophical, and geographic influences that have all played a role in shaping his thought. This paper does not aim to scrutinize Bartov's arguments as much as it intends to explore their evolution and their impact on the academic, social, and political climate. Scholarly and personal commentary critical of Bartov's claims are included where appropriate.

My direct engagement with Bartov has been minimal. I met him briefly following a lecture he delivered at the University of Maryland on April 7, 2025. Time permitted only two questions. Before and after this encounter, I reached out requesting a virtual meeting or written responses to questions, first on March 7 and again on April 8, 2025. These efforts went unanswered.

During my research process, I turned to other historians familiar with Bartov's scholarship and the Israeli generation in which he was raised. I conducted interviews with two such historians on March 19 and 25, 2025, which helped illuminate the context of Bartov's statements and ideas across books, articles, lectures, podcasts, and social media. Yet, even these sources could not yield a definitive account of his transformation. My final interview for this project took place on May 3, 2025, with a scholar who has long admired Bartov's work and expressed shock and disappointment at his recent comments, specifically those accusing Israel of genocide, and his resignation from the *Yad Vashem Studies* editorial board.

Regarding sourcing, I read over a dozen of Bartov's published articles and select chapters from several of his books, though timeliness made full-volume readings of every work impractical. The most critical text I examined in full was *Genocide, the Holocaust, and Israel-Palestine: First-Person History in Times of Crisis*, which was published in July 2023, mere months before the October 7 attacks. Alongside his written work, I studied Bartov's spoken interventions in podcasts, interviews, debates, and social media clips to better understand his oratory style and framing of ideas. In short, I endeavored to survey the broadest possible range of Bartov's written and verbal output, while acknowledging the impossibility of exhaustive coverage.

This paper adopts a chronological and thematic structure. Intellectual development rarely follows a linear path; it unfolds through a multidimensional, organically evolving web of influences over time. This study aspires to mirror the complexity of the transformation it seeks to

unravel. Bartov is, after all, an active scholar and human being whose future shift in ideas may require adding further pages to this paper.

Roots and Generational Memory

Holocaust survivors and their children are "both attempting to find [their] particular place in history," writes Ellen Fine, author of *Hidden Children and Second-Generation Holocaust Survivors*. Despite generational distance, "they share similar feelings as they respond to an event that has fundamentally shaped their lives."[16]

Bartov explores this psychological inheritance in *Genocide, the Holocaust, and Israel-Palestine: First-Person History in Times of Crisis*. In the chapter, "My Twisted Path to Auschwitz and Back," he recounts his early life, describing how "the Holocaust was everywhere and nowhere."[17] Born in 1954 in Ein HaHoresh, Israel, and raised among Holocaust survivors, he describes a paradox that encapsulates a society saturated with Holocaust memory, yet deprived of historical clarity, with its silences shaped by inherited trauma.

Mass trauma often engenders behavioral patterns that evolve across generations. Those generational patterns typically unfold as follows: the first generation is silent; the second excavates, affirms, or contests the narrative; the third seeks to rediscover, reinterpret, and reimagine inherited memory.

Bartov's life spans the second and third stages of Holocaust memory. Yet, as a first-generation Israeli, he has inhabited all three simultaneously. His scholarship during the second stage propelled a deeper reckoning in the third, where rediscovery was shaped by lived experience and political upheaval in both Israel and the United States. This fusion of the political and personal forged the public intellectual, scholar, and activist Bartov would become.

Before diving deeper, it is important to note that Omer Bartov was never *just* a scholar. Long before becoming an eminent historian, he was an activist. Two early moments that this section will discuss are particularly illustrative: building up the Peace Now movement in the early 1980s[18] and writing to Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin during the First Intifada, which began in 1987.[19] These formative experiences—combined with his family background—shaped the intellectual paths he would later follow, studying World War II, German military history, the Holocaust in Eastern Europe, and eventually, Israeli-Palestinian relations.

Bartov's early life and family background significantly influenced his intellectual development. His father—born in Israel and a veteran of the Jewish Brigade during World War II—was also a literary mastermind. He became a prominent journalist and outspoken Labor Zionist, part of a cohort that drifted "farther to the left with each passing decade," and came to be described as a "disillusioned Zionist."[20] Bartov's mother, who emigrated from Ukraine to British Mandatory Palestine in the 1930s, carried the trauma of her hometown of Buczacz, which was obliterated by the Nazis during the Holocaust.[21]

Bartov writes that native-born Israelis, or "sabras,"[22] were raised in a state culture that constructed national identity through the lens of Holocaust memory. He frames the founding of Israel as a paradox: a response to genocide that would later be accused of enacting its own forms of violence. He elaborates this idea in a chapter titled "Return and Displacement in Israel-Palestine," arguing that the historical fate of European Jews became mirrored—tragically and ironically—in the fate imposed by Israeli statebuilders on Palestinian communities. This transformation, he writes, turned "a community of increasingly fraught coexistence into a community of ethnic cleansing and Jewish national hegemony."[23]

In an April 2025 lecture at the University of Maryland titled "Making Sense of Mass Atrocities: The Meanings of Genocide in Historical and Contemporary Contexts," Bartov expanded on this paradox. He argued that "while Israel was born as a response to genocide—positioning itself

as the antidote to Auschwitz—it stands accused by many scholars of committing genocide itself."[24] Professor Dan Michman strongly disputes Bartov's claim that Israel was born as a response to genocide. In his article *"Holocaust Historiography: A Jewish Perspective,"* he argues that "the emergence of Zionism to prominence was severely harmed by the numerical reduction of the Jewish people," noting that "the 'Jewish problem' in Europe had almost been solved by the Nazi 'Final Solution,' thus putting the Zionist solution in jeopardy." Michman concludes that the "simplistic 'Holocaust to Israel' perception is therefore clearly a myth," though one that nonetheless "has more of an impact on the popular imagination than do balanced historians."[25] Bartov's accusations, and the link that Michman carefully dismantles, resonate not only in the present but also retrospectively implicate earlier critiques of the 1948 War of Independence and what many anti-Israel voices deem the state's foundational violence. While Bartov denied certain aspects of Israel's "foundational violence" in 2010, later sections of this paper will show how his present criticisms ultimately reinforce these earlier claims.

Bartov's framing projects Holocaust memory across the historical trajectories of both Zionism and the Palestinians. In short, Holocaust memory is inextricably entangled with the history of Zionism, the 1948 War of Independence, and the Nakba, a theme Bartov later explores. The Nakba—the mass Palestinian exodus during Israel's War of Independence—was notably absent from Bartov's formal education, even during his university years in Tel Aviv.[26] Though discourse surrounding the Nakba has grown in recent years,[27] its public commemoration was long stifled under Israel's Nakba Law. The law permits the Israeli state to withhold funding from institutions that commemorate Israel's Independence Day as a day of mourning, arguing that such observances threaten Israel's Jewish and democratic identity.[28] This suppression delayed Bartov's engagement with Palestinian history until later in his academic career, most notably after relocating to the United States.

His university studies bypassed the history of 1948 and the complexities of Zionist-Palestinian relations. Instead, he pursued advanced work in

World War II history, with an emphasis on the German military, ideology, and atrocity. His early education in Israel was steeped in left-wing Labor Zionism—a framework inherited from his father that emphasized pioneering nationalism and diaspora rejection. That idea emphasized diaspora negation and the strategic "mobilization" of Holocaust memory to support Israeli "nationalist narratives."[29]

Military service in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) is mandatory at age eighteen, designed to instill Zionist patriotism and civic duty. Bartov served between 1972 and 1976—including during the 1973 Yom Kippur War—and later held postings in Judea and Samaria, northern Sinai, and Gaza.[30] Ironically, it was during this period that Bartov first experienced deepening disillusionment with the Israeli military and political establishment. His alienation intensified during the First Intifada (1987–1993), as the Israeli leadership responded to Palestinian uprisings with rhetoric and tactics that he found morally untenable.

Bartov's estrangement from Israeli state identity grew from two formative experiences, as noted above. The first was a serious training accident during his IDF service, which left him injured and shaken. He attributed the accident to negligence and alleged a subsequent "cover-up" by his commanding officer.

Second, during the First Intifada, Bartov was alarmed by Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's directive to "break the arms and legs of Palestinians"—a phrase he saw as chillingly dehumanizing. He responded by writing to Rabin, citing his scholarship on the Wehrmacht to argue that IDF soldiers were undergoing a comparable form of ideological conditioning. Rabin, reportedly taken aback by the comparison, personally responded to Bartov's letter in shock at the comparison.[31]

Here, Bartov assumes the mantle of the child survivor, channeling the moral imperatives of the Holocaust through his academic authority to confront the Israeli leadership. At once, he occupied the paradox of a

first-generation Israeli bearing a second-generation consciousness, challenging and complicating the Zionist narrative he likely internalized.

After completing his reserve duty, Bartov returned to Tel Aviv University and later earned his PhD from Oxford in 1996. His 1991 book, *Hitler's Army: Soldiers, Nazis, and War in the Third Reich*, analyzed the Wehrmacht's ideological indoctrination and its complicity in atrocities on the Eastern Front.[32] Combining his military scholarship with firsthand Israeli experience, Bartov critiqued the mythologies of military ethics—juxtaposing the Wehrmacht's mythic "purity of arms" with the IDF's self-image as a "moral and righteous" force. As Bartov wrote of the Wehrmacht: "They preferred to think that the army had fought a decent war, even as the Gestapo and the SS perpetrated genocide behind its back."[33]

The 1982 Sabra and Shatila massacre marked another notable moment that provoked a generational shift in Israeli consciousness. This shift arose not only from the massacre itself but, as Dubnov described to me, from the political rupture it provoked and the precedent it set for Israeli protest culture.[34] Bartov co-founded Peace Now, the movement behind what became the largest protest in Israeli history: a mobilization that demanded a formal commission of inquiry into the killings.[35]

When asked about the influence of this generational shift on his views, Bartov clarified that he did not regard the massacre itself as the defining catalyst. He emphasized that, in retrospect, it was the protest movements surrounding the event, and their challenge to state authority, that profoundly shaped the collective memory of Israel's first generation. That same impulse resonates today in demonstrations opposing Israel's war on Hamas in Gaza, which echo the Rabin Square rallies demanding an end to the First Lebanon War nearly forty years ago.[36]

Though Bartov's criticisms of the Israeli military predated the massacre, it was the nationalistic awakening that followed Sabra and Shatila and his role within it that marked a turning point. The protests ushered him

into an intellectual posture rooted in re-evaluation and activism. From that moment on, Bartov's scholarship began to straddle dual imperatives: bearing witness to atrocity *and* interrogating the very state cast as its antidote.

Historikerstreit and the Politics of Memory

In the late 1980s, Bartov was not a scholar of the Holocaust, Jewish history, or the Israeli-Arab conflict but a scholar of German and World War II military history *who came from* an Israeli-Jewish perspective. Although his formal engagement with Holocaust and Genocide Studies would not fully crystallize until roughly two decades later, his entry into that field—and into the broader arena of public intellectual debate—was already taking shape in the late 1980s.

The decisive moment for his intervention came with his participation, albeit indirectly, in the contentious *Historikerstreit*. In 1986, German historian Ernst Nolte ignited this "historians' dispute" through controversial analyses of the events of World War II that bore implications for German national identity. The overarching argument of these historians was that the Nazis' crimes could be compared to those of the Soviet regime.[37] They also claimed that Hitler's war against the Jews was a reaction to Jewish Bolshevism, coupled with a Zionist "declaration of war" urging all Jews to support Britain in 1939. Liberal academics like German philosopher Jürgen Habermas and Israeli historian and Auschwitz survivor Otto Dov Kulka strongly resisted these theories in a series of essays. Habermas accused Nolte of historical revisionism, and stressed the uniqueness of the Holocaust. The risk, he said, was two-fold: First, "that the Nazi crimes lose their singularity in that they are at least made comprehensible as an answer to the (still extant) Bolshevist threats of annihilation. Second, that the magnitude of Auschwitz shrinks to the format of technical innovation and is explained on the basis of the [threat] from an enemy that still stands at [the] door."[38] In other words, for Habermas,

undermining the uniqueness of the Holocaust reduces the very blatant antisemitic component of the crime.

While the dispute formally concluded in 1989, Bartov intervened in 1992. His response was crafted as a review of Peter Baldwin's book, *Reworking the Past: Hitler, the Holocaust, and the Historians' Debate*. Bartov's article invigorated Habermas's claim of Holocaust revisionism, which attempted to suppress German guilt in the aftermath of the Cold War and on the eve of German reunification. However, he rejected Kulka's emphasis on Holocaust uniqueness. He extended the argument, asserting that the Holocaust should not be used as the standard by which all other mass atrocities are measured. Bartov predicted that these arguments would harm the German Jewish community and the nation's legacy.[39]

Bartov explains that, as Germany becomes more focused on its future, the desire to redefine its national identity by distancing itself from the past will likely intensify. He sees this effort as paradoxical, arguing that it is Germany's deep awareness of the horrors of Auschwitz that drives the urge to normalize its history. He feared that this push for normalization—rooted in a desire to repress the past—would lead to distortions of history and misuse of memory.[40]

Bartov may have conceptualized the Israeli establishment's repression of guilt over the Palestinian plight as parallel to Germany's post-war avoidance of guilt over anti-Jewish persecution. This analogy seems to inform his current view of the deep irony in Israel's memory culture, which he contends is now largely shaped by right-wing figures with racist motives—motives that historically targeted Jews and today are directed against Palestinians and Arabs in Israel and the United States.

Bartov does not deny that Jews are still being targeted in the present. In fact, he acknowledges the seriousness of contemporary antisemitism but attributes its rise to the Holocaust memory culture that protects Israel. This trend is prevalent in Germany and Israel, as well as in many American circles. By 2025, he cautioned that this stance was isolating Holo-

caust and Genocide Studies: "Many Jews who refuse to speak up against the genocide in Gaza are contributing to the problem in Holocaust and Genocide Studies. They contribute to an exclusionary tone promoted by a Holocaust memory culture protective of Israel. This is exactly the opposite of what the field intended to achieve."[41]

Pedagogy, Philosophy, and Methodology

In 1959, the seeds of Holocaust and Genocide Studies were sown. American scholars Yaffa Eliach and Franklin H. Littell worked to integrate Holocaust Studies into US universities through a multitude of lobbying efforts. Eliach and Littell set the precedent for many other Jewish academics in America who began establishing chairs in Holocaust Studies at universities. But it was not until the rise of a culture of ethnic affinity and a demand for minority representation during the peak of the civil rights movement that Jewish Studies programs emerged. In America, Holocaust Studies only gained prominence in the 1990s[42] as awareness spread and sealed archives in Eastern Europe and Russia opened for research use.[43]

The rise of Holocaust and Genocide Studies demanded professors.[44] These professors would emanate from fields across humanities-related disciplines: history, psychology, sociology, anthropology, Black Studies, Colonial Studies, Arab Studies, and more. This cross-pollination enabled novel—and, critics contend, sometimes distorting—approaches to interpreting and conveying the Holocaust's history and significance.

While some Holocaust and genocide scholars embraced and instrumentalized an analogical approach, others consider the Holocaust a more unique phenomenon with limited comparable aspects. Professor Norman Goda at the University of Florida, who will feature later in this paper, asserts the centrality of Jewish history within Holocaust studies in the volume *Jewish Histories of the Holocaust: New Transnational Approaches*.[45]

Tensions within Holocaust and Genocide Studies—particularly over the legitimacy and limits of comparison—persist. The roots of the tension

predate the field itself. In the 1960s, Hannah Arendt compared European colonialism to Nazi ideology through racism, a theme taken up by Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*, and by W.E.B. Du Bois's "The Negro and the Warsaw Ghetto."

Both Fanon and Du Bois employed this ideological parallel to explore the trope of the "ghetto,"[46] illuminating convergences between Jewish and Black histories. Yet Du Bois averted the charge of Holocaust supersessionism—the concern, voiced by many Holocaust exceptionalists, that analogies might eclipse the Shoah's gravity. Writing in 1952, he affirmed the Warsaw Ghetto's unparalleled horror: "Three years ago, I was in Warsaw. I have witnessed human upheaval—the screams and shouts of an Atlanta race riot, the marching of the Ku Klux Klan, the menace of courts and police, the decay and destruction of human habitations—but nothing in my wildest imagination equaled what I saw in Warsaw in 1949."[47]

Holocaust exceptionalists and other scholars worry that analogies dilute the uniquely antisemitic and industrialized characteristics of Nazi crimes and allow other atrocities to eclipse its historical primacy. Such supersessionism, they fear, can furnish ammunition for Holocaust revisionism or outright denial, trivializing and distorting the Jewish experience. Their concern is well-founded: trivialization and distortion of the Holocaust remain pervasive. Recent examples include posters displaying a swastika superimposed on a Star of David under the caption "the irony of becoming what you once hated," which conflates Judaism and Zionism with Nazism, and slogans declaring Israel's military campaign in Gaza a "Palestinian Holocaust," despite the historical incommensurability of the two events. Equally misleading is the recurrent pairing of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising with the intifada—two fundamentally different events invoked to suggest a moral equivalence.[48]

To reconcile this dispute, UCLA Professor Michael Rothberg advocated an integrative approach. His thesis in *Multidirectional Memory*[49] honors the unique aspects of the Holocaust while acknowledging and analyzing

comparable elements from other genocides that would prevent such parallelisms from going too far. Bartov agrees with Rothberg's notion that the Holocaust was a particular case of genocide with some universalizable aspects, and that invoking Holocaust comparison mandates ethical standards. Those ethical standards advocated by Rothberg are still obscure and risk being influenced by historical and political disputes.

Aligning with this trend, Bartov's career would develop in the American academic world, both intellectually and professionally. He served as a Junior Fellow at Harvard's Society of Fellows from 1989 to 1992 and held the Raoul Wallenberg Professorship in Human Rights at Rutgers University from 1992 to 2000. Since 2000, has occupied the Samuel Pisar Chair in Holocaust and Genocide Studies as well as the John P. Birkelund Distinguished Professorship of European History at Brown University.[50]

Like the second-generation child Ellen describes, who emerges from silence to confront inherited narratives, Bartov would reassess and then possess a voice surrounding stories and experiences that shaped him. American academia provided the analytical tools and intellectual latitude for rediscovery and respective responses. As he reflects in his 2007 book, *Erased: Vanishing Traces of Jewish Galicia in Present-Day Ukraine:*

> "This is a story of discovery of what there once was, what has remained, and what has been swept away. This discovery was my own because when I began this journey, I knew very little. Others who knew much more could no longer speak, or would not tell, or, most commonly, told only their own tales … the sounds implanted in a child's mind rarely vanish; at some point in one's life they return, gently prodding, subtly directing the now middle-aged man to look back and listen to the inner voice of his past, to ask the questions that had never been posed: where, when, why, how?"[51]

Bartov's historical method, "history from below," aligned with the American humanities' increasing adoption of postmodern philosophical frameworks. Beginning in the 1960s and through the 1990s, postmodern

thought, rooted in subjectivism and moral and cultural relativism, began to shape the academic climate. According to the National Association of Scholars, "Postmodernism includes the rejection of Western applications of reason and science since the Enlightenment to discover knowledge and advance human progress, which ideas are now deemed oppressive, a mask for power relationships. Postmodernism posits that there are no objective truths, moral universals, or fundamental realities—relativism—and that all claims to knowledge are 'socially constructed,' and established by groups based upon the beliefs of their cultures."[52] The father of postmodernism, French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard, embraced a skepticism of meta-narratives (or meta-history) and opted for micro-narratives (microhistory).[53] Historian Robert Eaglestone suggests that postmodernism recognizes possible parallel histories of the same event, with no singular authority on the grand historical truth.[54]

The field of postmodern philosophy is vast and requires nuance to give it the full scholarly analysis it deserves. For the sake of this study's focus, we will focus on one aspect of postmodernism's impact on the academic climate. French philosopher Michel Foucault, also the leading activist of the 1968 riots in France,[55] greatly inspired Edward W. Said,[56] whose seminal work, *Orientalism*, became the foundation for modern Middle Eastern Studies.[57] Said implanted the Palestinian cause into Michel Foucault's theories, notably his "radically revisionist account of the nature of knowledge,"[58] as did many other scholars in other identity or region-based academic disciplines such as Colonial Studies, Black Studies, Jewish Studies, Genocide Studies, and so forth.

In *Orientalism*, Said writes, "I have found it useful here to employ Michel Foucault's notion of a discourse, as described by him in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* and in *Discipline and Punish*, to identify Orientalism," and continues, "without examining Orientalism as a discourse one cannot possibly understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage—and even produce—the Orient … during the post-Enlightenment period." Simply put, Said theorized that European scholarship on the Middle East was not credible because Euro-

peans produced it. Only Arab scholars could authentically study and impart trusted knowledge about the region.[59]

To Said, European (and American or Israeli) scholars possessed inherent racial biases and imperial ambitions that hindered them from producing fair scholarship. Their merits counted little; identity mattered most. Race, religion, and ethnicity determined the truth value of knowledge more than its rationale or methodology. Foucault's postmodernism claimed that "all knowledge rests upon injustice (that there is no right, not even in the act of knowing, to truth or a foundation for truth) and that the instinct for knowledge is malicious (something murderous, opposed to the happiness of mankind)."[60] Beneath layers of academic jargon was a clear point: truth and power are fundamentally at odds. Power overrides the very possibility of achieving objective truth about anything. Knowledge and power are so bound up, Foucault believes, that they end up becoming one and the same. This notion generates a subjective notion of truth, whereby *one's* truth can be *the* truth because there is no objective truth.

Canadian academic Linda Hutcheon notes that, by viewing narratives as constructs subject to interpretation and indefinite scrutiny, this postmodern subjectivity offers "liberation."[61] In the context of Bartov's methodology and argument, this subjectivity and truth based on power dynamics fosters a narrative-based view of history using a micro-historical approach that prioritizes perspectives "from below."

One example of micro-history is the 1992 work *Ordinary Men* by Holocaust historian Christopher R. Browning, which investigates "the history of everyday life—achieved through a thick description of the common experiences of ordinary people."[62] While set in Germany, this grassroots methodology parallels Bartov's "history from below," which became central to studying atrocities beyond the Holocaust and a diversifying American society steeped in immigrant experiences and the ongoing struggle for equal rights.

Bartov developed "history from below" to address two key criticisms of Holocaust research and memory culture, including in institutions like Oxford University, American universities, and Holocaust museums such as Yad Vashem and the USHMM. In Israel, he observed that, while the Holocaust was embedded in national culture, rigorous scholarship on the event was often lacking. Conversely, in the Western academic fold, he found Holocaust memory and scholarship overly theoretical and idealistic, emphasizing universal lessons aimed at preventing future atrocities. Bartov noted that these lessons rang hollow, as "Never Again" became merely a "syndrome"[63] and an empty promise amid persisting genocides and mass crimes.

Bartov envisioned his methodology, which prioritizes immersion in primary sources, survivor testimonies, and visits to sites of genocide over visiting the cities where persecution was planned, to help avoid the politicization of Holocaust memory.[64] Visiting the destroyed Ukrainian towns, rather than focusing on Berlin, would promote more rigorous and intimate scholarship, fostering authentic connections with the subjects and remnants of shattered worlds.

Bartov had employed this intimate historical method in some of his earlier works before arriving in the United States, but it was in America that the approach gained momentum. Furthermore, his engagement with a diversity of scholars in an interdisciplinary field congruent with his historical method cultivated personal introspection.

Acquiring testimonies beyond just the victims and perpetrators and focusing on every participant present at the site of a massacre, along with the artifacts, the geography, and the fields of destruction, contributes to coloring a fuller truth. However, this approach also allows personal narratives "from below" to become *the* historical truth, as individual truths gain subjective legitimacy rather than remaining mere threads in the larger tapestry of history. While Bartov does not explicitly claim that postmodern frameworks influenced his scholarship and later commentary, his immersion in the American academic world, where postmod-

ern approaches in academia predominated, likely strengthened the ties between his historical methodology and later activism.

The Tables Turn in the 2000s

In 2004, Bartov became a member of the editorial board of *Yad Vashem Studies*. Dan Michman, the head of the International Institute for Holocaust Research at Yad Vashem, who is also a member of the editorial board, indicated that, over the years, Bartov expressed some critique of Israel's and Yad Vashem's emphasis on a particularist, nationalist narrative of the Holocaust and its memory, but that he cooperated with the institution by giving lectures and serving on the editorial board of its scholarly journal for many years. He also gladly accepted the 2019 Yad Vashem International Book Prize for Holocaust Research for *Anatomy of a Genocide: The Life and Death of a Town Called Buczacz*. However, shortly after October 7, 2023, Bartov accused the institution and its scholars of not publicly condemning Israel's war in Gaza and resigned from the editorial board of *Yad Vashem Studies*.[65]

In the early 2000s, in the aftermath of the Oslo Accords, the land-for-peace movement had become somewhat accepted in Israel. The Second Intifada, a wave of Palestinian terrorist attacks, including suicide bombings targeting Israeli cafés, buses, and city streets, that occurred between 2000 and 2005, is an important contextual factor to Bartov's writing at the time. While Bartov embraced a philosophy of ending the Israeli occupation of territories won by Israel in the 1967 war, which he called "stupid and destructive" in 2004, he still held strong opinions on Israel's antisemitic—and anti-American—enemies.[66]

In 2003, Bartov recognized the antisemitic nature of emerging anti-Israel movements that were gaining traction on college campuses. Anti-Israel actors, which he describes as a conglomerate of "students associated with Arab and Islamic organizations, Christian groups, and the left," began organizing on campuses during these preliminary stages and eventually launched the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS)

movement in 2005.[67] The BDS movement was ignited by the 2001 Durban Conference Against Racism, which equated Zionism with racism and turned Israel into a primary target.[68] In 2004, Bartov wrote that those student protestors who focused on equating Zionism—or Israel—with Nazism were spreading "virulent anti-Semitism" that had become "respectable" by presenting itself as anti-Nazism. This was often done through false Holocaust comparisons, using slogans such as "End the Holocaust," "Zionism is Ethnic Cleansing," "Sharon = Hitler," and "1943: Warsaw, 2002: Jenin."[69]

The final slogan refers to the 2002 Jenin operation. Dr. Ohad Leslau, a historian in the IDF's history department and a world expert on the operation, explains that the IDF engaged in heavy house-to-house combat in the Jenin refugee camp against Palestinian militants who had placed thousands of explosive devices and laid ambushes throughout the dense urban terrain.[70] The comparison between the Warsaw Ghetto uprising in 1943 and the Jenin operation in 2002 is factually untenable: the former was a desperate struggle for survival by the remnants of an annihilated people in the face of certain extermination, whereas the latter was a counterterrorism operation conducted by a sovereign state against armed militants.

In his 2004 article, *He Meant What He Said: Hitlerism Didn't Die with Hitler*, Bartov compares Nazi propaganda to anti-Jewish slurs and threats found in the 1988 Charter of Hamas, the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood. He writes, "the Islamic Resistance Movement [Hamas] has 'raised the banner of Jihad in the face of the oppressors in order to extricate the country and the people from the [oppressors'] desecration, filth and evil.' The Prophet, remember, said that 'the time will not come until Muslims will fight the Jews (and kill them); until the Jews hide behind rocks and trees, which will cry: O Muslim! There is a Jew hiding behind me, come on and kill him!'"[71]

In this article, Bartov suggests that such ideologies helped fuel the September 11 attacks and urged readers to take this rhetoric seriously:

"What Hitler said would be done to Germany, he did unto others; and he and his people became victims of the nemesis that he prophesied for his enemies. When Hitler wrote his second book, he was staring into a mirror." Bartov notes that, while Hitler has died, the Hitlerian antisemitic worldview has not. It has spread across the globe, from common citizens to leaders, from pacifists to militants, from students to intellectuals, and has taken on different and equally serious forms in the present. "When [antisemites] say they will kill you, they will kill you—if you do not kill them first," he writes.[72]

Bartov's stance on the weaponization of Holocaust memory and criticism of the settlement movement in Israel remained consistent: "There is every reason in the world to reject attempts to justify objectionable Israeli policies by reference to the Holocaust." However, when analyzing his stance on antisemitism, anti-Israel sentiment, and even anti-Americanism, his 2004 article stands as an anomaly in his body of work, signaling a mid-career shift. When asked about this in 2025, he stated that the context of the article surrounding Hitler's second book and understanding that dictators mean what they say—mentioning Netanyahu and other right-wing leaders—was important. But his statements doubling down on his present views should not take away from his harsh criticisms of "left-wing," anti-Israel movements and the violent, anti-Western motives of Hamas—and his imperative to apply the biblical phrase "rise and kill first" to antisemites—in his writing.

The seeds of his shift can be traced back to 2007, when his comparisons between Nazi forces and IDF soldiers reemerged—this time through a parallel he drew between the "vanishing traces of Jewish Galicia in present-day Ukraine" and the erased remnants of Palestinian culture in the Tel Aviv neighborhood where he was raised. This idea forms the basis of his aforementioned 2007 book, *Erased: Vanishing Traces of Jewish Galicia in Present-Day Ukraine*. "I spent much of my childhood and youth in a small neighborhood in northern Tel Aviv. Israel of the 1950s was poor, provincial, and isolated from the rest of the world. On a nearby hill stood the remnants of a Palestinian village whose inhabitants had fled during

the fighting of 1948. It was populated by Jewish refugees from North Africa who had been expelled from their homes by Arabic regimes. My own neighborhood was soon inhabited by Jews expelled from Poland by the antisemitic postwar Gomulka regime, mostly survivors of the Holocaust and their children."[73]

In 2023, Bartov reflected on the research behind *Erased*, noting how investigating the remnants of Jewish culture in present-day Ukraine brought back memories of his own childhood playing in "abandoned Palestinian villages," now inhabited by the new Jews—Israelis. For him, these experiences underscored how Israeli society, particularly in the post-1948 era, sought to forge a unified national identity by emphasizing Hebrew while marginalizing other cultural elements. He recalls that, in his 1950s Israeli generation, "Polish could be heard everywhere—at the grocers, the barbershop, the bank, and the post office," yet the dominant language among the youth was a "hard, direct, crisp Hebrew," because they "had no patience for the endless storytelling and punning of Yiddish, which seemed to us to be all about rhetoric and never about action, always observing reality by analogy and responding to events by recalling the past."[74]

Bartov's rediscovery of both his personal history and his mother's roots ultimately led him to value the richness of exile and diaspora, while growing increasingly critical of Israel not only for its suppression of Palestinian culture and history, as evidenced in the Nakba Law,[75] but also for the negation of diasporic Jewish life. This ties back to non-Zionist traditions—traditions of Jews back in the late 19th century who opposed Theodore Herzl's political Zionism to build a Jewish state—which he would later promote by organizing a conference at Brown entitled "Non-Zionist Jewish Traditions" on February 3–4, 2025. Some of the scholars in attendance included Shaul Magid, who recently published *On the Necessity of Exile: Essays from a Distance*, the chair of Brown University's inaugural Mahmoud Darwish Professor of Palestinian Studies, Beshara Doumani, and other scholars "disillusioned" with or opposed to Zionism.[76]

The Tables Turn Again in the 2010s

After Bartov moved to the United States, his engagement with other Jews who did not see Israel as central to their identity, as well as with Palestinian and Arab scholars and colleagues in the departments of Holocaust and Genocide Studies and History at Brown, opened him up to new perspectives. While not specializing in Levantine or Middle Eastern history, Bartov held a degree of authority on the region and on Israel-related issues by dint of being an Israeli scholar based in the United States and through his rigorous study of the Holocaust, genocide, and their broader implications.

During the 2010s, Bartov initiated his meticulous work on Buczacz, which he had initially undertaken in a historical context, and extended that same methodology to research on Israel-Palestine. His forthcoming work on the Levantine region, *The Broken Promise: A Personal-Political History of Israel and Palestine*, explores the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by combining personal narratives with political analysis.[77] His focus on the lives of Israeli and Palestinian individuals, adopting a "view from below," significantly impacts how he views the conflict and shapes the scholarship we see today.

While he may not have embraced all these new perspectives at the time, his mere exposure to them may have planted the seeds for his later shift, enabling him to uncover dimensions of history he once felt unable, or perhaps unauthorized, to see. Bartov, however, had not become exceedingly critical of Israel just yet. He even continued to mount similar defenses of Israel to those he made in 2004. In 2010, Bartov debated historian Martin Shaw as to whether the 1948 War of Independence—or the Nakba—constituted genocide. Bartov rejected the accusation.

The exchange between Shaw and Bartov is significant because it illuminates Bartov's commitment to a strict, historically grounded definition of genocide and a defense of Israel that contrasts with some of his pre-

sent commentary. The debate, which was conducted via email, developed as follows:

After Shaw submitted a paper to the *Journal of Genocide Research* concerning a conference at which Bartov was the main speaker, Bartov responded to Shaw's assertions. In summary, Bartov disagreed with Shaw's statement that the events of 1948 constituted a genocide, and argued that Shaw's labeling Israel's actions in 1948 as genocide "empties the term of historical meaning" and of its "judicial implications." He further stated that stretching the term in this way would implicate "so many countries and groups" that were engaged in warfare or ethnic cleansing—an argument echoing his earlier critique of Ernst Nolte in 1992, in the short aftermath of the *Historikerstreit*. Then, as now, Bartov emphasized that he was not opposed to comparisons per se, but to their political weaponization. Bartov also attacked "the idea that there is an inherent connection between emphasizing the Holocaust's centrality and uniqueness and legitimizing the State of Israel as a colonial entity with its history of ethnic cleansing and genocidal potential."[78]

Back in 2010, Bartov claimed that Shaw's arguments lacked grounding in scholarly research and historical evidence and criticized his telling of history—or "this telling of pre-history"—as "normally left out or distorted." He includes the necessary context in his argument, such as the fact that Israel "fought a just war" against Arab states that rejected the partition and rose up against it, culminating in an overall defense against the delegitimization of Israel.[79]

In a response to papers by British historian Donald Bloxham and Australian scholar Dirk Moses that same year, Bartov stated that their arguments lead to "a tortuous link … between the genocide of the Jews and the legitimacy of the state of Israel." The logic follows such that "since Israel is presented as a settler colonial state, and colonialism is intrinsically genocidal, the Jewish state is either committing or is on the verge of genocide." He stated that such an argument was a "rhetorical sleight of hand from scholars who are not, and do not feel they need to be,

knowledgeable about Israel or the Palestinians but wish nevertheless to express their political opinions; they end up using the Holocaust and the suffering of others for political ends."[80]

Bartov's statements in 2010 demonstrate continuity from his 2004 article, a sign that he had not yet shifted his views on Israel's enemies or anti-Israel sentiment. Later, we see how Bartov's contemporary accusations against Israel resonate with Shaw, albeit with minor disagreements. On August 17, 2024, Shaw reposted a link featuring a Bartov interview entitled "Why Gaza is Genocide," stating, "I've just watched this excellent interview. … We agree on much, but I cannot accept his idea that genocide was only a danger in October, and was not fully apparent until May (Rafah)."[81] While Bartov does not claim that Israel was "born in sin" or that Zionism itself is genocidal, some threads in his current arguments echo those unsound arguments for which he criticized Shaw in the past.

We will return to Bartov's more present commentary later, but it is important to note that around this time he became increasingly interested in how revisionist history was utilized in Germany, particularly regarding the country's reckoning with the atrocities committed in German-occupied territories during World War II. He may have held such an interest for a long time; however, it intensified in 2012–2013, when Bartov began conducting research on diaries and testimonies of the Holocaust in Eastern Galicia as a scholar-in-residence at the Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. In his 2023 book, he details this interest.[82]

In 2013, German courts had to reconstruct the historical context of German crimes that involved the eradication of local communities in occupied regions beyond the industrial crimes committed during the Holocaust—a history that was largely unknown to the German public.[83] Bartov's 2018 book *Anatomy of a Genocide: The Life and Death of a Town Called Buczacz* explores how ethnic cleansing turns into genocide at a local level,[84] and his 2022 book *Tales from the Borderlands: Making*

and Unmaking the Galician Past delved into the roots of residents in Eastern European towns and their everyday life—and how their dreams were shattered by the wrath of war.[85]

Bartov's research in the mid-2010s likely did not alter his views on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. However, the political context surrounding the use—and misuse—of Holocaust memory may have led him to increasingly view history as a tool for justice, accountability, and empathetic engagement with victims. What appears to have catalyzed Bartov's shift, according to Dan Michman, was the escalation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict from the 2010s to October 7, 2023.[86] Notable events include Israel's launch of Operation Protective Edge in 2014 and the continued expansion of Israeli settlements.[87] While these developments may not have directly influenced Bartov, his opposition to the Israeli settlement project and concern over what human rights organizations like Amnesty International labeled violations of international law and collective punishment of Palestinians likely played a role. The combination of these factors, along with the growing criticism of Israel within American academia through campus rhetoric and lectures,[88] may have contributed to—or at least planted the seeds for—his shift.

While events in the Middle East, global politics, and public opinion do not mark a definitive turning point in Bartov's views, developments in 2016 and 2017 stand out as significant moments impacting his opinions about antisemitism and anti-Israel sentiment, as well as his stance on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict itself. This transformation follows Bartov into his scholarly activity and commentary on these topics between 2019 and 2023.

Antisemitism, Left and Right

Perhaps Bartov took his 2004 principle that "some people, some regimes, some ideologies, some political programs, and, yes, some religious groups, must be taken at their word" a bit too literally.[89] Some people mean what they say, and say what they will do, and do what they say. In 2017, Hamas

attempted to redefine itself by publishing a new constitution. Intended to replace its extremist and antisemitic 1988 charter,[90] the updated document softened its stance on Israel, emphasizing that its conflict was with Zionism and the occupation, not with the Jewish people. It affirmed the positive role of the Palestinian Authority and appeared to accept the idea of a Palestinian state beyond Israel's pre-1967 borders.[91]

One should note, however, that the 2017 document did not annul the original 1988 charter, and statements by Hamas leaders continued to echo the earlier ideological framework. Accordingly, the revised text should be understood less as a substantive shift than as a tactical maneuver aimed at securing broader recognition and legitimacy. While many observers and commentators initially interpreted it as evidence of genuine change, subsequent developments suggest that such assessments were mistaken.

When I asked Bartov what had changed his views since 2004, he confidently pointed to this revised charter as the key factor. Bartov did not adopt the stance of Matthew Levitt and Maxine Rich of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy: "The international community should judge Hamas not by any moderation in the group's rhetoric but by its actions on the ground. So long as the latter remain militant and extreme, the relative moderation of the former means not much at all."[92] They also took the context of Hamas's growing economic isolation, tensions with Egypt, and its need for a public relations overhaul, even as it continued to militarize, into account.[93]

Indeed, even the more "moderate" 2017 Hamas charter contained language that was extreme. It declared that "Palestine is the land of the Arab Palestinian people," described Zionism as "a racist, aggressive, colonialist and expansionist project," and maintained that "there shall be no recognition of the legitimacy of the Zionist entity."[94] The question remains whether Bartov considered these clauses, but it is unlikely that he would have embraced them.

However, what could have resonated with Bartov was the line that "it is the Zionists who constantly identify Judaism and the Jews with their own colonial project and illegal entity."[95] In the modern academy, there is an ongoing and insidious attempt to sever the very real and millennia-old connection between Judaism, Israel, and Zionism. It is this framing, as also reflected in the Hamas charter, that may have blended with Bartov's memories of his early life in Israel and his experiences in the IDF.

These perspectives likely contributed to Bartov's move toward separating Judaism from Zionism and downplaying the role of Arab antisemitism or anti-Zionism as a significant component of global antisemitism. This logic aligns with the 2017 document's assertion that "anti-Semitism and the persecution of the Jews are phenomena fundamentally linked to European history and not to the history of the Arabs and the Muslims or to their heritage."[96]

Composed in 2005, the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition of antisemitism was adopted in Bucharest, Romania, in 2016, just a year before the 2017 Hamas document was published. It describes antisemitism as "a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews," and includes eleven descriptive examples, such as "accusing the Jews as a people, or Israel as a state, of inventing or exaggerating the Holocaust," and "denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination, e.g., by claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavor."[97] The non-legally binding IHRA definition elicited both direct and indirect responses from Bartov.

Bartov and other scholars rejected the IHRA definition and drafted alternative definitions in response, such as the Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism (JDA), which was developed in 2020–2021. The JDA distinguishes certain forms of antisemitism from anti-Zionism, combats the suppression of speech in favor of Palestinian rights and criticism of Israel, and invokes universal principles, linking the fight against antisemitism with the fight against other forms of bigotry and discrimination.[98]

Proponents of the IHRA definition argue that it does not limit legitimate criticism of Israel, unless such criticism crosses into harassment or incitement. Bartov, however, disagrees with the way the IHRA definition was being utilized. In a 2021 op-ed in the left-leaning Israeli newspaper *Haaretz*, he wrote:

> "The Israeli government and its supporters have a keen interest in blurring the distinction between criticism of Israel and antisemitism, in order to paint any substantive, harsh criticism of Israel's policies toward the Palestinians as antisemitic. … This effort by the Israeli government and its supporters makes use of the definition of antisemitism adopted by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) in 2016. Since that time it has been used, perhaps contrary to the intention of some of its authors, to stifle any biting criticism of Israel and its policies."[99]

While the JDA shares some common ground with the IHRA definition—such as designating Holocaust denial and minimization, along with tropes about Jewish control, as antisemitic—it reflects a clear departure from Bartov's earlier stances in 2004 and 2010. Then, he was particularly concerned with Holocaust analogies used to delegitimize Israel and vilify Zionism.

But with the advent of the revised Hamas document and in the wake of rising global right-wing populism—particularly following the election of Donald Trump in 2016 and the policies he postulated during his presidency—Bartov's focus shifted. He began to endorse Holocaust analogies when used to critique authoritarianism or human rights abuses on the political right.

This evolution was most evident in 2019, when Bartov and other scholars signed a public letter addressed to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM), challenging its condemnation of Holocaust analogies in a post by Democratic Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, in which she referred to US detention centers along the southern border as "concentration camps" and used the phrase "Never Again." After the USHMM issued a statement condemning the use of Holocaust

analogies as a whole, Bartov and his co-authors pushed back against the museum's stance. Their letter emphasized that, while acknowledging the risk of Holocaust distortion, learning from the past—and recognizing early warning signs of mass violence—was central to the museum's mission. While it did not explicitly endorse Ocasio-Cortez's comparison, the letter implicitly defended her invocation of Holocaust memory.[100]

Bartov's perspective on antisemitism continued to become more partisan. In 2022, he appeared to depart from his 2004 position, which criticized left-wing movements at Rutgers for disseminating virulent antisemitism. During a conference in Berlin titled "Hijacking Memory: The Holocaust and the New Right," he asserted that, historically, antisemitism has never come from the left.[101] (In 2025, he repeated this point but clarified that antisemitism existed on the left but had historically never come from the left.[102]) This partisan statement may have been motivated by a desire to resist the growth of right-wing movements around the world and the legacy left by Trump. It was made after years of being immersed in a predominantly left-wing academic culture.

In 2017, Professor Samuel Abrams identified a uniform leftward political shift in every university discipline between 1989 and 2014 and confirmed that the humanities and social sciences had become monolithically left-leaning by 2014.[103] Academic culture even shifted further left, as conversations surrounding racism and immigration unfolded under Trump in the subsequent years, culminating in the George Floyd riots of 2020. Academics responded to Trump's "hateful and discriminatory language and threats against minorities."[104] American Jews thus found a particular reason to feel aggrieved, responding to Trump's positions on antisemitism and Israel.

During his first term, scholars and political analysts contended that Trump consistently "blurred the lines"[105] between American Jews and Israel. Not only did he support Israel unconditionally, but he signed an Executive Order in 2019 enforcing Title VI of the Civil Rights Act using the IHRA definition, which the German-Jewish director of the Elie

Wiesel Center at Boston University, Michael Zank, said would "have a chilling effect on free speech."[106] The cumulative response from Zank, Bartov, and fellow scholars conceptualized a more universalist definition of antisemitism connected to other forms of hate and distancing American Jewish (or diasporic) identity from Israel. This was a means of disconnecting Jews from Israel and the IHRA definition, which were both associated with the political right.[107]

Bartov's resistance to the right coincided with his further engagement with Palestinian history—notably personal-political histories—which led him to openly criticize Israel in the past and the present. As for Holocaust comparisons, he authored an essay in a book that does not directly compare the Nakba to the Holocaust but still puts them on the same playing field. In this 2019 essay, he critiques Israel's treatment of *Mizrahim* (Jews from North Africa and Arab countries) and Palestinians in the early years of the state of Israel and beyond. He also emphasizes the importance of the interrelationship between victimhood and suffering and how feelings of victimization affect political and social relationships between Arabs and Jews.[108]

Bartov's articulation of the need to mend feelings of victimhood informs his placing of the Holocaust alongside the Nakba—not as a means of direct comparison but to promote understanding. More specifically, his essay illustrates the growing influence of new academic frameworks such as decolonial psychology, which gained prominence between 2015 and 2017.[109] Decolonial psychology blends the political, ancestral, psychological, and collective to undo the impact of colonization on marginalized communities, and many left-wing scholars have used it to criticize Israel for historically traumatizing Palestinians.[110]

In the essay, Bartov writes: "What is called for is a process of decolonization, whereby Israelis will not only have to be removed from occupied lands but must also be liberated from the occupier mentality deeply lodged in their psyche, while Palestinians will not only be liberated from Israeli oppression but also from the mentality of the colonized."[111]

The influence of American academic frameworks on Bartov and his collaboration with scholars critical of Israel in an intensively left-leaning academic environment and a right-wing political climate likely led him to double down on his criticism of Israel. This shift was reflected in his endorsement of the aforementioned Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism, which emerged between 2020 and 2021 as a counterweight to the IHRA definition, offering space for more pointed critiques of Israeli policy. Over time, the idea that intensifying criticism of Israel could serve as a catalyst for reform in Israel and fending off accusations of antisemitism related to Israel gained traction—especially as Israeli politics veered further to the right under Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's nationalist-religious coalition, which included far-right politicians such as Betzalel Smotrich and Itamar Ben-Gvir after the November 2022 election.[112]

Before exploring the political developments in Israel that influenced Bartov and many Jews and Israelis worldwide between 2022 and the present, let us first examine parallel trends in American academia that may have impacted Bartov's intellectual evolution.

The Qatari-Backed Choices Program at Brown University

Bartov's shift, specifically his use of Holocaust memory, his increased criticism of Israel, his repudiation of his 2004 criticisms of Islamist, Muslim Brotherhood-driven antisemitic ideology, and his more recent justifications of Hamas (the Palestinian wing of the Muslim Brotherhood), correlate with the evolution of a curriculum launched at Brown University in 1989. The Choices Program, a national education initiative for K-12 social studies curriculum hosted by Brown University, was designed to develop curricula emphasizing critical thinking for high school students in various subject areas. The program, which was closed down in April 2025, oriented itself toward a more "fluid" philosophy of "social studies" education using a national network of university professors.[113] Omer Bartov happened to be one of these professors, appearing in various video lectures about Holocaust memory, antisemitism, World War II, and more.[114]

The Choices Program's network and affiliations, which have been dissected by the Institute for the Study on Global Antisemitism and Policy (ISGAP),[115] was closed down by Brown University on April 11, 2025, due to its financial inability to continue the program[116] after the Trump administration asserted that it would pull $500 million in federal funding from the university in response to the leadership's inability to address campus antisemitism.[117] Closure aside, ISGAP found that the Choices Program was heavily influenced by Qatar Foundation International (QFI), which is part of the Qatar Foundation (QF).[118] These organizations play a key role in furthering Qatar's soft power effort to undermine American interests around the world by funneling billions of mostly undisclosed funds into Western education, donating $4.7 billion to US academia between 2001 and 2023.[119] ISGAP has revealed that Qatar's influence has pushed attitudes toward Israel, the orientation of academic departments, and scholarly frameworks in an anti-Western and anti-Israel direction.

While Omer Bartov neither embraces Muslim Brotherhood ideology nor brands himself as an anti-Zionist, his current criticism of Israel feeds many talking points that supporters of "Palestinian resistance" and the Hamas-aligned Muslim Brotherhood use to legitimize their message in Western eyes. The talking points of Israeli apartheid,[120] colonialism, ethnic cleansing, and genocide reflect Soviet neo-Marxist frameworks used by the USSR-Arab alliance to attack Israel during the Cold War.[121] Other talking points emphasizing Muslim indigeneity to Israel-Palestine or using Holocaust comparisons to shift the focus away from Jewish persecution and on to other "oppressed" or "genocided" groups align with the American progressive left's conception of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The chart below shows the evolution of the Choices Program curriculum about the Middle East from 2001, around the time that Bartov began teaching in Brown's history department, through 2022.

Figure 1: Key changes in Choices Program's unit on the Middle East (2001–2022)[122]

Topic	2001–2011	2015	2017–2022
Core terminology	Focus on state, sovereignty, diplomatic relations	Shift to colonialism, imperialism, nationalism	Continued emphasis on colonial framework, bolstered with video content
Israel's creation and recognition by Arab states	"Story starts in late 1800s"; includes Balfour Declaration	Limited to brief mention of Zionist movement	Creation of Israel removed from table of contents, primary sources supporting Israel's creation and recognition are omitted
Capital of Israel	Jerusalem (with note about recognition issues)	Inconsistent: Tel Aviv in student text, Jerusalem in teacher materials	Tel Aviv only
Religious context	Equal treatment of three major religions, detailed discussion of Jewish ties to region	Emphasis shifts to Islamic civilization and achievements	Muslims presented as indigenous, Jews portrayed as outsiders
Analytical framework	Regional stability, economic interests, democracy	Colonialism, imperialism, nationalism	Redefinition of "state" emphasizing recognition requirements
Holocaust discussion	Direct focus on Jewish persecution and extermination		Equates Jewish victims with other casualties, shifts focus from Jewish persecution

Bartov contributed to the Choices Program predominantly between 2017 and 2022. During this period, the Choices Program's media was revamped with video content, shifting toward so-called decolonial frameworks and straying away from Jewish particularism. 2017–2022 also marked the approximate time that the revised Hamas charter and the Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism were published.

Bartov's public contributions to the Choices Program include a series of videos, such as "What is history from below?," "What is genocide?," "What tactics did Hitler and the Nazi Party use to gain power in Germany?," "What is the history of 'antisemitism'?," and more.[123] These vid-

eos offer short, simple explanations of these topics that offer little room for controversy.

Bartov's more recent omission of the Hamas, Muslim Brotherhood, and Iranian threat toward Israel aligns with the 2019 (and current) edition of the Choices Program's Iran teaching unit which erases any mention of Iran's long-standing existential threat to Israel and reframes the narrative, removing any reference to Iran's threats or hostile language toward Israel and redefining Hezbollah as a "militant group" to which "the Iranian government also provides support."[124] An observer of a January 2024 interview with Bartov noted that he "spent less than 60 seconds mentioning Iran and its proxies," and in a November 2024 interview with *Haaretz* Bartov crystallized his current view that Iran is less relevant than the Israeli government in the October 7 conversation: "Inflating the Iranian threat is an Israeli manipulation meant to justify the occupation."[125] As previously noted, however, Bartov had recognized the link between Iran, Hamas, and the Muslim Brotherhood and the threat they posed to the West in 2004.[126]

Additionally, Bartov's 2019 letter to the USHMM defending Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's use of Holocaust memory to criticize Trump's immigration policy, which compared "detention camps" to "concentration camps,"[127] aligns with the 2017 shift in the Choices Program curricula, which "equates Jewish victims with other casualties, shift[ing] focus away from Jewish persecution."[128] This behavior marks a departure from his stance in the 1980s and 1990s, when he argued against far-fetched and politically driven uses of Holocaust memory, as seen in his response to the first *Historikerstreit* when he accused Ernst Nolte and his compatriots of trivializing the Jewish experience to reframe German identity and politics.[129]

Bartov's involvement with the Choices Program at Brown University, where he remains an employee, raises significant questions. Has Bartov distanced himself from his prior work, undermining or omitting important facts about antisemitic or terroristic ideologies and threats, and

extended his criticisms of Israel, due to his relationship with the QFI-funded Choices Program? Has the shift in the public platform that the Choices Program provides shaped Bartov's alignment?

There are different ways of constructing this formula that produce a notable shift in the dissemination of Bartov's views. Some might argue that the Choices Program was the primary catalyst for this shift—something Bartov himself would not acknowledge—which happened in the same year that Hamas released its revised charter. Others might contend that Bartov was not influenced by the Choices Program, instead attributing his evolution to the left-leaning academic environment in which he was immersed, as well as resistance to a rising global right-wing climate and other political developments, resurfaced memories, and his engagement with a "history from below" approach to Israeli-Palestinian affairs—all of which may have led to genuine personal revelations. The reality may be that a combination of some or all of these factors had an impact, but the truth remains inconclusive.

The following section, which discusses the impact of the proposed Israeli judicial reforms championed by Benjamin Netanyahu's right-wing coalition and Israel's actions in Gaza after October 7 on Bartov's thinking, demonstrates yet another shift that inched him closer to his current criticism of Israel. However, the above-mentioned omissions make it plausible that the QFI-funded Choices Program also had an impact. In reality, Bartov's intellectual evolution is not attributable to any single cause: the Choices Program's impact on Brown's history department may be just one of many factors. When noting that the development of the Choices Program's content mirrors the evolution of some of Bartov's ideas and how he disseminated them, we must remember that correlation does not always imply causation.

Israel's Judicial Reform and "Black Saturday"

The inauguration of the 37th government of Israel following the November 2022 general election coincided with the recent victory of the Trump

administration in the United States, which many American Jews opposed. The current Israeli governing coalition, led by Benjamin Netanyahu and cited as likely the most right-wing in Israel's history,[130] includes various national-religious and ultra-Orthodox parties. It followed the short-lived unity government led by Naftali Bennett and Yair Lapid, which had brought together eight diverse political parties, including the United Arab List.[131] American Jewish Democrats and liberal Israeli Zionists thus came together in opposition to right-leaning governments in their respective countries.

Netanyahu's coalition triggered nationwide protests when it proposed a controversial "judicial overhaul," a plan to reform Israel's judicial system, in January 2023.[132] While ostensibly a domestic issue, the proposal sparked widespread protests, including by American Jews and Israelis in the United States. The protests signaled the emergence of a broader anti-Netanyahu movement and triggered an explosion of societal tensions in Israel. These tensions served to encourage the anti-Israel forces that took advantage of Israeli division and distraction on October 7, 2023.[133]

In response to the formation of Netanyahu's 2022 coalition and the judicial reform proposals, Bartov played a prominent role by helping spearhead a petition known as the "Elephant in the Room."[134] The petition—which attracted more than 1,000 signatures from American and Israeli public figures, academics, and intellectuals—criticized the absence of Palestinian voices in "the cacophony of protests against the Israeli government's judicial overhaul." Furthermore, it highlighted what the petition referred to as a "jarring contradiction" regarding American Jews' "longstanding commitment to social justice causes," namely that "support for racial equality and other progressive movements stood in sharp contrast to their relative silence on Israel's ongoing occupation," which it described as a "regime of apartheid" that "reinforces the narrative of Jewish supremacism." The petition urged a reconsideration of economic, educational, and policy decisions within the American Jewish community and the broader US government, to ensure Israel is held accountable in public and international forums.[135]

Both before and after October 7, Bartov emphasized similar talking points in interviews and statements that he posted on X (formerly Twitter), the Qatari-funded *Al Jazeera* media network, the far-left Democracy Now! and *Jacobin*, and other media outlets. In a statement on *Al Jazeera* in August 2023, Bartov asserted that Israel is imposing an apartheid system and emphasized that "the occupation is the root of it all."[136]

Bartov joined X in 2021, and since his first post has used the platform to promote his writings, highlight quotes in media pieces, share podcasts, and circulate televised interviews. Today, he has over 20,000 followers. The popularity of the Elephant in the Room petition, along with Bartov's growing media presence, may have encouraged a further intensification of his views. One could argue that he had established himself as an outspoken scholar long before the 2020s—well before his criticism of Israel became more pronounced—but public intellectualism in the age of digital and social media introduces a different dynamic, platforming a form of "scholar-activism." This type of activism uses "action-oriented research approaches" to conduct research in alliance with oppressed communities: "If research involves people and places, then it should matter to the people in the places where scholars conduct research."[137] The fusion of scholar-activism with social media can create ideological echo chambers that tend to intensify opinions in pursuit of broader influence or solidarity.

Highlighting Bartov's social media engagement and activism is not intended to undermine the credibility of his scholarship but to understand how the dissemination of his opinions evolved, reinforced by press coverage via far-left outlets and those critical of Israel. Additionally, Bartov's "history from below" methodology has many points of convergence with scholar-activism. Writing personal-political histories that focus on mass atrocities is likely to emphasize those most impacted by "oppression," use testimony as history to help foster empathy, and bring those affected to a better political future. The risk with such an approach is that it may encourage the omission of facts that contradict the chosen narrative, leading to "action-oriented research" that cherry picks facts or

merely focuses on individual records, facilitating a one-sided view of history or micro-level narrative-based history.

On October 7, 2023, also known as "Black Saturday," Hamas breached Israel's southern border and carried out a massacre, murdering approximately 1,200 civilians and taking around 250 hostages. In the aftermath of this unfathomable horror, the responses from public figures and world leaders invoked personal and political historical memory. In the United States, Israel, and Germany, the Holocaust was a key point of reference.

In the days following Black Saturday, US President Joe Biden unequivocally condemned the atrocities committed by Hamas. In a *60 Minutes* interview, he stated, "Israel is going after a group of people who have engaged in barbarism that is as consequential as the Holocaust," affirming that Israel had the right to fully defend itself against the Islamist terrorist organization. Prime Minister Netanyahu told German Chancellor Olaf Scholz that "Hamas are the new Nazis."[138] These analogies reflect the Hitler-Hamas comparison that Bartov himself used in his 2004 article. Evidently, Bartov's perspective has since shifted, as demonstrated in this paper. But more notable than his evolving stance on Hamas is his reversion to a flexible position regarding Holocaust analogies.

On November 20, 2023, Bartov and several Holocaust and genocide historians—some of whom co-authored his 2019 letter defending the use of Holocaust analogies—published a statement condemning October 7 Holocaust and pogrom analogies. "Appealing to the memory of the Holocaust obscures our understanding of the antisemitism Jews face today…. Comparisons of the crisis unfolding in Israel-Palestine to Nazism and the Holocaust … are intellectual and moral failings."[139] Bartov thus appears to selectively endorse Holocaust analogies, supporting their use in some contexts while rejecting them in others. In this case, he refused to accept the invocation of Jewish historical memory in response to a brutal, Islamist-inspired assault driven by the very Jew-hatred he once denounced, but he supported it when defending Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez in the context of her comments on Trump's immigration policy.

By November 2023, Israel had launched its counter-offensive in Gaza aimed at eradicating Hamas, which has resulted in widespread destruction and tens of thousands of casualties. On November 10, Bartov expressed fears that genocide could occur, publishing his thoughts in a *New York Times* article entitled "What I Believe As a Scholar of Genocide." Bartov had not yet accused Israel of genocide, and initially resisted such accusations: "As a historian of genocide, I believe that there is no proof that genocide is currently taking place in Gaza, although it is very likely that war crimes, and even crimes against humanity, are happening." He continued, "We know from history that it is crucial to warn of the potential for genocide before it occurs, rather than belatedly condemn it after it has taken place. I think we still have that time."[140] This contrasts with the accusations made by Bartov's fellow historian Professor Raz Segal, who had already accused Israel of committing "a textbook case of genocide" on October 13, 2023 after it ordered "the besieged population in the northern half of the Gaza Strip to evacuate to the south, warning that it would soon intensify its attack on the Strip's upper half."[141]

Various factors contributed to the shift in Bartov's opinions and behavior regarding Gaza between the early months of the war and the months that followed, but the dramatic turn from uncertainty to career-changing activism is curious. Per Bartov, by the spring of 2024, the situation in Gaza had dramatically worsened, with rising casualty numbers and a transformation of the physical and political landscape. In Israel, tensions heightened as efforts to secure the hostages' release in exchange for a ceasefire intensified, accompanied by weekly Saturday night protests in Tel Aviv and other cities. Meanwhile, in the United States, university campuses were thrown into turmoil. Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) and Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP) organized anti-Israel encampments and protests, while pro-Israel students accused them of crossing the line into antisemitism and of justifying the largest massacre of Jews since the Holocaust. As Congressional hearings and investigations loomed, university administrators attempted—at least rhetorically—to

curb rule-breaking behavior tied to the protests, and some chapters of SJP and JVP were suspended.

While Bartov was observing the Israel-Gaza war from afar, he was facing the campus political wars up close. This tense academic environment led him to express concerns about the suppression of free speech and the improper invocation of the Holocaust. As he continued to publish scholarly work and commentaries between 2023 and 2024, Bartov also joined protests alongside professors and students, feeling that he had to fight for their rights and set the record straight on antisemitism. The pro-Palestinian encampments that emerged across US campuses became a site of activism for Bartov himself. These were protests involving left-wing students whom he had condemned in 2004 for endorsing antisemitic language. In late April 2024, he joined Segal and left-leaning students at the University of Pennsylvania's Gaza Solidarity Encampment,[142] where he warned against the political weaponization of antisemitism and would later defend those students from accusations of antisemitism in interviews on public platforms.

Bartov's activism in 2023–2024 marks the pivotal point at which his stance diverged sharply from the views expressed in his 2004 article, where he warned that "criticism of Israeli policies against the Palestinians has long been attached to anti-Americanism," and emphasized that "we must not ignore when anti-Israeli sentiments are transformed into blatant and virulent anti-Semitism."[143] Many of the same dynamics he had once criticized were visible in encampments across the country, where protestors held signs comparing Israel to Nazis, tore down American flags, and voiced slogans such as "We Love Hamas"—statements that could easily be interpreted as not only anti-Israel but also antisemitic and anti-American, not unlike the demonstration he writes about in his 2004 article.

This is not to suggest that Bartov joined the encampments because he embraced these extreme and anti-Western views. Rather, what likely resonated with him—and with many others—were specific points of advo-

cacy, such as labeling Israel "an apartheid state," calling for a ceasefire, and demanding an "end to the occupation." Significantly, Bartov felt comfortable immersing himself in an environment with some extreme facets. This is likely because many of the critical viewpoints of Israel that he had begun expressing in 2023 or prior were now being voiced by students and faculty at these demonstrations, compelling him to join. In essence, those protests gave him a home and a stage to preach from.

Bartov's activist position became clear when he resigned from the editorial board of *Yad Vashem Studies* in the summer of 2024, a position he had held for nearly two decades. His resignation came after Yad Vashem's Chairman, Dani Dayan, rejected a request in a letter written by 50 academics, including Bartov, asking him "to make an unequivocal moral statement as soon as possible" condemning "the public discourse that calls for the destruction and the commission of war crimes and crimes against humanity in Gaza." Dayan said that their requests were based on a "narrow and partial prism" that overlooked "genocidal expressions against the Jewish people and the citizens of Israel that have been made recently."[144] Against the wishes of fellow historian Christopher R. Browning, who had been involved in other scholarship and activity with him, Bartov resigned from the editorial board that June, writing in a letter that "to act as if the … extraordinary carnage by Israeli troops, including the killing and maiming of thousands of children, is either none of [Yad Vashem's] business or perfectly justified will leave a stain on the journal and on Yad Vashem for generations to come."[145]

While Bartov had clearly stated his condemnations of Israeli actions in Gaza up until this point, it was not until the late summer of 2024 that he publicly accused Israel of engaging in "genocidal actions." This public condemnation, which consisted of a thorough explanation, was first voiced after he returned from a trip to Israel and compiled his thoughts. In August 2024, he published an article in the left-leaning British newspaper *The Guardian*,[146] where he built on his November 2023 *New York Times* piece, stating that he no longer believed there was time before a genocide occurred: "By the time I travelled to Israel, I had become con-

vinced that at least since the attack by the IDF on Rafah on 6 May 2024, it was no longer possible to deny that Israel was engaged in systematic war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocidal actions."[147]

Bartov elaborates on this explanation and continues, "the rhetoric spouted by Israeli leaders since 7 October was now being translated into reality, namely—as the 1948 UN Genocide Convention puts it—that Israel was acting 'with intent to destroy, in whole or in part,' the Palestinian population in Gaza, 'as such, by killing, causing serious harm, or inflicting conditions of life meant to bring about the group's destruction.'"[148] Bartov's view of "intent" relies on the commentary of various Israeli leaders such as Netanyahu, Naftali Bennet, Yoav Gallant, Israeli President Isaac Herzog that was taken out of context or even invented. For example, on July 25, 2025, on a podcast with Noam Dworman, Bartov said that Netanyahu has never distinguished between Hamas and the Palestinian people, nor stated that "the Palestinian people are not our enemy."[149] In fact, on January 10, 2024, Netanyahu explicitly declared: "Israel is fighting Hamas terrorists, not the Palestinian population. Our goal is to free Gaza of Hamas terrorists and free our hostages. Once this is achieved, Gaza can be demilitarized and deradicalized, thereby creating a better future for Israel and Palestinians alike."[150] Dworman clips this statement into his podcast, proving that *Bartov's claim is based on sheer ignorance if not complete dishonesty.*

Bartov's further contention—that Israel seeks to render Gaza uninhabitable so that Palestinians cannot reconstitute themselves as a people—is equally untenable and exposes a striking double standard. The reality of urban warfare in Gaza is that Israel was obliged to conduct its operations in a particular way, which Bartov may criticize, but which does not meet any of the criteria of what constitutes genocide. In the aforementioned podcast, Noam Dworman quotes Bartov's own writing, in which he concedes that Germany had to be destroyed in order to defeat the Nazis. Bartov justifies this by noting that, although "the Americans and the British intentionally … bombed cities"[151] during World War II, this did not amount to a war crime on account of the fact that it was a war-

time necessity and because the Allied powers later occupied and rebuilt Germany. Netanyahu has likewise declared that Israel will help rebuild Gaza. The difference is that Hamas—the only actor with an explicit genocidal intent—has not yet been defeated.[152] Why, then, does Bartov dismiss Netanyahu's stated intention and presume that Israel will not rebuild Gaza, if consistency with his own argument would demand otherwise? Dworman similarly raises the following critical question. If Israel, like the Allies, aids in Gaza's reconstruction after Hamas's defeat, will it still be regarded as having committed a genocide or even a war crime? Bartov appears far too entrenched in his accusations to allow for a retraction. His response to Dworman is to make the aforementioned comment about Benjamin Netanyahu's failure to distinguish between the Palestinians and Hamas, which was entirely dishonest. As demonstrated by this conversation, Bartov's accusations do not hold water.

On the same day, July 25, 2025, Bartov made yet another distorted comparison to World War II. Appearing on Piers Morgan's show, he claimed that Israel's destruction of Gaza had surpassed the "destruction of Hiroshima" caused by the nuclear bomb at the end of World War II and that the civilian death ratios were unprecedented since the mid-twentieth century. Specifically, he stated as follows:

> "Statistics are that between 2 and 5% of the population have been killed, 60–70% of them civilians. A third of those killed are children. Over a thousand of those killed are children below the age of one. That's a ratio that has not existed in the 21st century, and indeed you have to go back to World War II for these figures."[153]

Here, Bartov not only assumes a contrived Israeli intent to kill civilians and children (which has already been proven to be untrue) but also relies on Hamas-provided casualty figures (which fail to distinguish between civilians and combatants), while also disregarding Israel's continued delivery of truckloads of humanitarian aid to Gaza as confirmed by the United Nations Monitoring and Tracking Dashboard[154] and the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation, as well as airdrops by the IDF, the United

Arab Emirates, and Jordan. Bartov also ignores the inconvenient truth that Hamas loots aid trucks and leaves the Palestinian population hungry. In August 2025, the United Nations reported that 88 percent of aid trucks slated for delivery in Gaza since May 2025 had been looted en route.[155] While Bartov accuses Israel of using starvation as a weapon of war, it is actually Hamas that is responsible for this crime.

Bartov's *The Guardian* piece compares the attitudes of Israeli and German forces in the aftermath of catastrophic loss:

> "*Look at what happened to us in 1918*, German soldiers said in 1942, recalling the propagandistic 'stab-in-the-back' myth, which attributed Germany's catastrophic defeat in the First World War to Jewish and communist treason. *Look at what happened to us in the Holocaust, when we trusted that others would come to our rescue*, IDF troops say in 2024, thereby giving themselves license for indiscriminate destruction based on a false analogy between Hamas and the Nazis."

He also recounts telling a group of IDF reservists—whom he characterizes as "right-wing students"—at Ben-Gurion University the story of how disillusionment and indoctrination in 1930s Germany led to Nazism's rise in its institutions.[156]

This analogy would have been more consistent with Bartov's scholarly principles had he acknowledged the vast contextual differences between 1930s Germany and contemporary Israel, just as he scrutinized the contextual differences between Hamas and the Nazis in his 2023 letter condemning comparisons between October 7 and the Holocaust.[157] It would also have lent moral consistency to his argument had he condemned both Hamas and Israel for alleged "genocidal actions" or "intent." Instead, the article doubles down on the comparison between Nazism and Israel without such critical distinctions. And, for reasons that remain unclear, Bartov continues to repeatedly omit any mention of Palestinian indoctrination to kill Jews or Hamas's jihadi, antisemitic, and anti-Western ideology—an ideology that directly motivated the atrocities of Black Saturday.[158] In an

interview on *Al Jazeera* a month later, Bartov attributed more guilt to the IDF than to Hamas because, while "the IDF is engaged in demolition," conducting its warfare "deliberately" and "intentionally," Hamas was merely "a guerrilla" organization rather than an "organized military."[159]

Bartov's approach to contextual clarity also shifted over time. In his 2010 debate with Martin Shaw, he criticized Shaw for omitting key facts, such as Israel's offer of statehood to the Arabs. Yet, in his current analysis, Bartov omits crucial context, such as Hamas's rule over Gaza since 2007, its use of human shields, and the generally peaceful nature of Israeli border communities. His once-consistent emphasis on context, evident in his emphasis on the ethics of Holocaust comparison, is now applied selectively. This is a trend typical of scholar-activists, which Bartov had by now become.

Standing as the principal scholar and spokesperson leveling genocide accusations against Israel, Bartov is also playing a role in changing the way we conceive of the term "genocide." During a lecture on mass atrocities in April 2025, when discussing the Israel-Hamas War and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, he deliberately stretched and blurred the definition of genocide, while acknowledging that it is indeed a legal term. Bartov also suggested that he insists on using the term "genocide" in debates not because it is legally accurate but because it is rhetorically necessary, on the grounds that there is a growing tendency to dismiss suffering altogether if it does not meet the genocide threshold. In addition, while arguing that the difference between genocide and war crimes does not matter, at least not from a Palestinian perspective, Bartov also claimed that the integrity of legal standards was superseded by the need to persuade a broader audience by using language that raises awareness.[160]

In essence, what Bartov is saying is that, while there is no consensus on what constitutes genocide, and even though the legal definition may not match what is happening on the ground, we should still call the Gaza war a genocide in order to persuade particular audiences to care about the issue.

Was it the severity of the destruction in Gaza, coupled with his ability to witness the war unfold in real time, that led Bartov to make an exception to his previous position? Or was it his growing engagement with anti-Israel media outlets and activist groups—many of which were amplifying his views—that influenced this viewpoint? Were Bartov's long-held viewpoints, and certain memories from his childhood that had resurfaced, now finding validation within liberal academic circles, giving him the sense that he could finally speak to these points more openly? Whatever the reason, Bartov's *mea culpa* reveals his own intellectual dishonesty and hypocrisy. Not only does he defend the use of Holocaust analogies in the context of the Israel-Hamas war, he actually advocates their deliberate misuse.

The answer is undoubtedly multifaceted. Bartov was clearly influenced by developments in the Gaza conflict—developments he scrutinized as a scholar with a curated contextual lens. Additionally, he had *a priori* contempt for Netanyahu and the Likud-led government—as did his father—which bolstered or at least laid the groundwork for his criticisms. But just as significant is the broader public and intellectual climate: the voices within Israel criticizing Netanyahu, the amplifying chorus of scholars accusing Israel of genocide, and above all, the platforms Bartov has been given by major news outlets and digital spaces that have helped him legitimize and promote his opinions. These channels have not only given Bartov a home for his ideas but have also emboldened him to voice them more forcefully, more extremely, and more publicly. They have also inspired him to build a home for fellow scholars' ideas that align with—and feed—his own.

The Academic Current and Its Consequences

Bartov has lectured at many public events before and since October 7. Since Black Saturday, his lectures have followed a particular theme, namely the war in Gaza or mass atrocities and genocide more generally. However, a recent conference he organized at Brown University stands out, deviating thematically from the rest.

The February 2025 conference on "Non-Zionist Jewish Traditions" reflects the broader intellectual and political currents tied to Bartov's scholarship and activism, unveiling how his ideas are increasingly aligning with—and feeding—deliberately anti-Zionist movements. His activism, together with the growing influence of anti-Zionist scholar-activist movements, is reshaping the field of Holocaust and genocide studies, as well as academic and public discourse on Zionism and antisemitism.

Co-sponsored by Brown's Cogut Institute for the Humanities, the Departments of History and Religious Studies, and the Center for Middle East Studies, the "Non-Zionist Jewish Traditions" conference was convened to "address the changing relation to Zionism and the State of Israel in various Orthodox communities, in socialist and communist Jewish traditions, in the United States and Europe, among Ottoman and Arab Jews critical of the Zionist idea before 1948, among those who refused to immigrate to Israel or who lived there as dissidents, and among disillusioned Zionists in Israel and abroad." In other words, the conference would revive old ideas of opposition to the Jewish state before 1948 and explain their relevance today. Panel topics went beyond the specifics of these ideas and included topics such as "Disillusioned Zionists" and "Anti-Zionism, Anti-Semitism, and the Stakes of the Debate."[161]

Participants included scholars from various institutions, such as Ariella Aïsha Azoulay of Brown University, Aslı Ü. Bâli of Yale Law School, and Shaul Magid of Harvard University—all of whom are known for consistent criticism of Israel, affiliation with movements akin to BDS, or opposition to Zionism. Azoulay is on the advisory board of the explicitly anti-Zionist Institute for the Critical Study of Zionism (ICSZ);[162] Bâli was appointed president of the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) a year after its scholars passed a BDS resolution in 2022;[163] and Magid recently published a book entitled *The Necessity of Exile: Essays from a Distance*, reclaiming exile as a positive stance for constructive Jewish engagement with Israel/Palestine, antisemitism, diaspora, and a broken world.[164]

Maya Rackoff, a student at Brown, described feeling as if she had entered an echo chamber during the conference: "The characterization of Zionism as inherently racist and genocidal went unchallenged, creating a hostile environment," she wrote, adding "professors did not merely criticize the Jewish state, they attacked the founders of Zionism and their adherents as genocidal, Jewish supremacists" with no opposing view offered. During the roundtable on "Anti-Zionism, Anti-Semitism and the Stakes of the Debate," Beshara Doumani, a Palestinian studies professor at Brown, remarked that "Global Israel" had become "the north star of the rise of fascism all over the world." Adi Ophir, visiting professor of humanities and Middle East studies, asserted that "to pursue a liberatory imagination of what it means to be a Jew, the first move is to become an anti-Zionist."[165]

This handful of scholars—defined by their organizational ties, publications, and rhetoric—embodies the prevailing critical stance toward Israel within a conference hosted by Bartov himself. This increasingly monolithic criticism of Israel has become mainstream in academia, illustrating how scholar-activism is shaping public discourse on Israel, Zionism, and antisemitism.

A 2019 essay entitled "On Three Anti-Zionisms" by Shany Mor, an associate fellow at the Hannah Arendt Center at Bard College, offers insight into the purposes and implications of organizing a non-Zionist Jewish traditions conference suffused with Israel critics. Mor identifies three strands of anti-Zionism: *alpha anti-Zionism* relates to non-Zionist Jewish traditions; *beta anti-Zionism* characterizes much of the Arab Muslim world's rejection of a Jewish state in the Middle East; and *gamma anti-Zionism* accepts the existence of Israel but views its very creation as inherently sinful, rendering all of its actions immoral.[166] While each form of anti-Zionism is distinct, they can converge. For example, alpha anti-Zionism can be invoked to legitimize the goals of beta anti-Zionists under the guise of Jewish political imaginations, and, in doing so, feed gamma anti-Zionism.

As of November 2023, Bartov identifies as a Zionist. Regardless of his intentions, however, the impact of his rhetoric and the conference he organized reflects the combination of the three forms of anti-Zionism that Mor describes. While affirming Israel's right to exist, he holds the ahistorical view that "should the Palestinian issue be resolved, antisemitism will diminish."[167] Indeed, Arab discrimination against Jews has a long history—one that begins long before the State of Israel was established. Taken alongside his argument that the creation of the State of Israel, which was intended to solve antisemitism, has instead exacerbated it, Bartov may seek to resolve this paradox using Magid's thesis, suggesting that Jews might ultimately be better off without a state of their own.

Another aspect of Bartov's rhetoric is the mourning of diasporic Jewish life—a theme echoed in Azoulay's conference presentation, entitled "Ima, Why Didn't You Love Me in Ladino?," and in Bartov's own reflections in *Erased: Vanishing Traces of Jewish Galicia in Present-Day Ukraine*, where he laments the decline of Yiddish in favor of Hebrew during the early years of modern Israel. The deployment of alpha anti-Zionism accelerates the cycle of falsehoods peddled by Bartov and fellow scholars who accuse Israel of genocide. Their lament over diasporic languages injects an emotional charge that culturally stains Zionism rather than engaging with it on historical or moral grounds.

Azoulay's aims are evident, given that she is a member of the Institute for the Critical Study of Zionism (ICSZ), which expresses solidarity with students and faculty who support anti-Israel activism on campus, much like Bâli's MESA. Bartov's Elephant in the Room petition and his advocacy related to campus demonstrations align with the efforts of these scholars seeking to hold Israel accountable and legitimize the behaviors of anti-Zionist groups.

Bartov may believe that his criticisms of Israel will help improve the country's government, combat antisemitism, and promote a better future for Jews and their neighbors in Israel and globally. However, some of his

recent rhetoric echoes and fuels blatantly anti-Israel and antisemitic activity. The reason for this is not merely the dissemination of these ideas but also the omission of important facts and a lack of balance in portraying events, painting an incomplete picture of the past and present. To paraphrase Rackoff, if our mission is to examine Zionism and Israel academically, it is imperative to include professors who do not consider Zionism a fundamentally fascist, genocidal, and Jewish supremacist movement, and who are willing to speak to this effect.[168] This goes for every subject matter.

A Response to Bartov

Thus far, this paper has explored the methodological approaches, academic factors, and political trends behind Bartov's shift. More importantly, the findings illuminate the reasons why academics may change their views, alongside the increasing blurring of the boundaries between scholarship and activism. Professor Norman J.W. Goda, a Holocaust and genocide scholar at the University of Florida, spoke to me about this topic in the context of Bartov's thought and work. He noted that he has long admired Bartov's scholarship and expressed shock and disappointment at his recent comments, specifically his accusing Israel of genocide and his resignation from the *Yad Vashem Studies* editorial board.

In February 2025, Goda published "The Genocide Libel: How the World Has Charged Israel with Genocide," providing a thorough history of the "genocide libel" against Israel.[169] He demonstrates how, by stretching its boundaries, the legal definition of genocide has been turned from a standard of impartial judgment into a tool of political expediency. The accusation, he declared to me in an interview, has "no basis in reality."[170] On June 3, 2025, Goda and Jeffrey Herf published an op-ed entitled "Why It's Wrong to Call Israel's War in Gaza a 'Genocide'" in the *Washington Post*, in which they refuted the charge that Israel has committed genocide in Gaza. They both acknowledge that "Israel's war against Hamas in the urban environments of Gaza has led to thousands of civilian casualties," while simultaneously asking: "But is genocide really the

correct way to describe the war? Do the accusers define genocide accurately in terms of law, or have they stretched the definition of the crime? Is their evidence reliable? Finally, can we say that the genocide accusation, made against Israel and its supporters in this way, is antisemitic?"[171]

The piece argues that the genocide accusation is less grounded in factual evidence than in a moral requirement, a framing that has led media figures—and even scholars—to stretch the definition of the crime. The civilian–combatant ratio remains uncertain, and the casualty figures reported by the Hamas-controlled Gaza Ministry of Health cannot be regarded as reliable. In this context, the genocide charge, as it has been articulated and received in the West, has positioned Israel—and, by extension, the Jewish collective—as the embodiment of ultimate evil, such that all forms of evil become equated with Israel.[172]

As Goda and Herf claim, "the world press must practice more humility and skepticism." In our conversation, Goda insisted that scholars must do the same and should do everything to avoid presenting political convictions as facts. Goda explains that while we can and should acknowledge the catastrophe unfolding in Gaza, the legal accusation of genocide does not hold under established standards—standards that have remained unchanged since the adoption of the 1948 Genocide Convention. There is, he suggested, a clear difference between a just war, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and, ultimately, genocide. "If you're going to accuse someone of genocide," he warned, "you need to have all your ducks in a row."[173] That means demonstrating a clear and unbreakable link between genocidal *intent* and *action*. Despite there being no clear link, the continued insistence on the word genocide, rather than any other crime, is rather curious to Goda.[174]

In "The Genocide Libel,"[175] Goda demonstrates how decolonial theory, conjoined with moral relativism, has paved the way for the popularity of the genocide charge against Israel. The facts emerging from case law and various UN sessions concerning genocide accusations against Israel reveal a troubling pattern. Decolonial theory has often been employed

not as a tool of evidence-based reasoning but as a means of legitimization through false and selective comparisons between colonized groups and European colonial powers. Goda's thoughts suggest that he would reject postmodernist theories that question the legitimacy of Western legal frameworks particularly those with serious judicial and reputational implications. Goda asserts that "there *is* an international consensus on the definition of genocide, even if no one wants to admit it; only one legal definition exists." Only "case law," rather than selective comparisons and personal analysis, "shows how a charge of genocide would hold up."[176]

Goda does not believe that scholars should refrain from exploring or teaching about the theoretical and sociological critiques of Western legal standards and frameworks; he simply cautions against teaching through a postmodern lens alone. In other words, teaching *about* postmodernist critiques as objects of analysis is valid scholarship, but that is fundamentally different from teaching *through* them in isolation, where such postmodern critiques become the guiding framework rather than the subject of critical examination. The same distinction applies to the postmodern tenet of moral relativism, whose intuitions can be studied and understood but should not be instrumentalized as the guiding force behind scholarship or comparisons.

The distinction between understanding a theoretical framework and subscribing to it requires an emphasis on comprehensive context. As Goda notes, "Israel's war against Hamas is tragic, evidently because of Israel's military action, but it is more tragic that Hamas believes it can fight by killing civilians and taking hostages on October 7 or by hiding behind [Gazan] civilians."[177] Here, Goda's commentary demonstrates empathy and humility balanced by evidence.

Goda's analysis is rooted in legal and historical precedent, not theory-driven frameworks. He uses case law, attempted resolutions, historical patterns, and more to explore the historical evolution of genocide accusations against Israel compared with those against other nations, like the

United States. He demonstrates how selective comparisons driven by decolonial theory have increased the public legitimacy of the genocide libel but have ultimately proved unsuccessful in its consensualization. He examines the meticulous efforts required to inscribe the legal definition of genocide in the UN Convention and points to the many instances in which states—Israel among them—have faced politicized accusations, most of which have not withstood legal scrutiny.[178]

Goda does not shy away from the humanitarian cost of the Gaza war. He explicitly mentions that tens of thousands of Palestinian civilians have been killed since Israel began its counter-offensive in Gaza.[179] Israel's military activity, he argues, demands a serious discussion about the proportionality of military responses and policy. He simultaneously discusses Hamas's tactic of embedding fighters and weapons within civilian infrastructure—hospitals, schools, mosques, and shelters—thus deliberately placing civilians at risk and complicating Israel's operational decisions. This context is both comprehensive and critical, inviting evidence-based understanding.

Another crucial element of evidence-based reasoning is contextual interpretation. Bartov, for example, cites inflammatory rhetoric from Israeli officials—such as Netanyahu's invocation of *Amalek*,[180] a biblical tribe traditionally portrayed as the Jewish people's perennial nemesis, or Defense Minister Yoav Gallant's description of "human animals"[181]—as indicative of genocidal intent. However, Goda points out that Bartov omits some key context. For example, prior to October 7, Netanyahu had used similar language on various occasions, and Gallant's statement was directed specifically at Hamas, not the Palestinian people. Gallant also proceeded to say, "We will wipe out this thing called Hamas, Hamas—the Islamic State of Gaza—will be wiped from the face of the earth."[182] As Goda notes, these statements came in the immediate aftermath of unprecedented violence, when emotions were raw and the scale of Hamas's atrocities was still being grasped. To present these comments as definitive proof of *genocidal intent*, backed by *mens rea*, distorts the context in which they were made. This maneuver also glosses over the very essential link

between genocidal action and intent to destroy a particular ethnic or religious group rather than a legitimate military target.[183]

Scholarly conclusions must be grounded in the most comprehensive body of evidence possible. Thus, scholarship must set out to ask questions that address as many facets of a complex issue as possible and employ evidence that focuses on analysis rather than activist aims. This is because selectively chosen questions predispose scholars to a particular framework or set of facts that skew the reality of the issue. Likewise, evidence that is selectively chosen—or intentionally omitted—to fit a particular political message compromises scholarly integrity.

Conclusion and Personal Commentary

"Human memory is a marvelous but fallacious instrument."
—Primo Levi

Human memory is "marvelous" in that it can stimulate intellectual engagement and revive past experiences, yet "fallacious" in the way personal recollections may blur or distort reality. Bartov's intellectual evolution illustrates how memory, in concert with broader societal developments and political currents, can influence historical methodology and its deployment. The case of Bartov's shift also exemplifies how philosophical and political paradigms can encourage an activist approach to scholarship. This has ramifications not only within Jewish life and Holocaust and genocide studies but also for the trajectory of scholarship and the future of the academy.

Bartov's early biographical overview leading into his mid-career shift hints at reasons for his change of heart but does not provide a conclusive explanation. Experiences from his past may have been recalibrated post-shift to lend more weight to his current views. For instance, Bartov's comments on the Sabra and Shatila massacre suggest a retrospective influence on his overall perspective, which can likely be applied to other aspects of his statements today. What is most clear, however, is that Bar-

tov's shift reflects an internalization of Hamas propaganda in the context of his resistance to the rightward shift in Israeli and US politics that he sought to resist.

Bartov's post-October 7 activity—especially his heightened rhetorical criticism of Israel, his initially reluctant but now blatant genocide accusations, his participation in anti-Israel protests, and his promotion of non-Zionist Jewish traditions—follows an ever-increasing trend of resistance to right-wing politics. But it can also be attributed to both internal and external influences on his scholarship. While the external factors in the academic world and far-right politics have been covered in this paper, the internal ones—specifically his recollections and methodology—form a significant point on which to conclude this research.

In 1998, Bartov acknowledged the reality that the scope of a historian's work is up to their discretion and is unavoidably shaped by their methodological choices. In a review of Dan Michman's book *The Holocaust and Holocaust Research: Conceptualization, Terminology and Fundamental Questions*, he writes, "The goal [of historiology] is not to discover any 'ironclad rule' for writing history, but to understand and portray the human race in all its nuances and various complexions, including all that is wonderful and terrible in it."[184]

Bartov further contends that fuller, richer historical truth often emerges in subsequent generations. Thus, his scholarship, like that of all historians, invites scrutiny. History deserves new chapters that not only expand its volumes but, like classic Jewish texts, invite open interpretation and debate, free of deliberate omissions that censor certain perspectives and distort reality.

The "history from below" methodology, focusing on sites of destruction and victims' experiences, achieves a rare historical intimacy, filling the record with details largely absent from public view. It can simultaneously allow vivid color to overwrite—or even redraw—the underlying sketch. Indeed, a historian's sketch must ultimately contain the full array

of facts, framed within a comprehensive context, irrespective of opinion or perspective.

One may argue that history can never be completely objective: it is always examined in hindsight, and absolute truth is forever out of reach. Yet there is a crucial difference between factual gaps born of ignorance and those created by design. The former are innocent; the latter, deliberate. Having examined his positions and various critiques of those positions, I believe that Bartov falls into the latter category—deliberately compromising scholarly standards and straying further from reality for political purposes, rather than striving to get closer to it. His current actions are as intellectually dishonest as they are dangerous.

Bartov's decision to stretch the term "genocide" to cover Israel's war against Hamas in Gaza for political purposes, despite acknowledging that there is no consensus on the genocide charge, leans heavily on pathos while sidestepping logos and eroding scholarly ethos. By adding that those being bombed "don't care"[185] what the atrocity is called, he shifts attention from contested evidence to moral sentiment, which can be supported by "history from below" narratives.

In January 2025, the then Dean of the Graduate School of Education and Human Development at George Washington University, Michael J. Feuer, wrote an article in *Fathom* entitled "Campus Protests and Deferred Maintenance." In the article, he encourages a recommitment to "deferred maintenance" of our "intellectual infrastructure," framing the stakes with three important questions: "Have we abdicated our professional and moral responsibility by allowing *narrative* to displace *evidence*? Have we forgotten that what distinguishes liberal education from the random diffusion of uncurated claptrap is the culture of *disciplined inquiry*? As we have understandably sought to welcome an ever more diverse set of perspectives into our scholarly tent, have we become unwilling to test each other's hypotheses, respectfully, with *facts and logic*?"[186]

Writing "personal-political" history, as Bartov continues to do, is a valuable addition to the pages of history, but it should not overtake established facts—or facts that still need to be uncovered—or methodical research. The pen of history should be wielded with circumspection; authors should remain mindful of which hat they wear when writing—that of the professor or that of the politician. That is not to say that the professor cannot hold or express political opinions openly—as long as they are transparent about their motives, do not present outright lies as fact in the classroom, and present counterarguments through their teaching.

Even good intentions, when informed by radical frameworks or activist motives, can produce outcomes that are ineffective and counterproductive to the original goals. Falsely accusing Israel of genocide does nothing to alleviate the suffering in Gaza, just as portraying every Gazan as a terrorist does nothing to ensure Israeli security. The scholar possesses the responsibility to illuminate sobering realities with intellectual honesty, to challenge prevailing assumptions through reasoned debate and inquiry, and to encourage critical analysis with comprehensive evidence. This approach, which should be reflected in the delivery of scholarship, constitutes the scholar's duty of care. When this duty is upheld within the sacred halls of educational institutions, scholars can elevate academic discourse, positively impact students, and help foster moderation and ethics in society.

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Sabrina Soffer is the forthcoming co-author of *A Light Amid the Storm* with Israeli Ambassador to the United States, Dr. Yechiel Leiter, and serves as the Young Leadership Research and Diplomacy Fellow at the Jerusalem Center on Security and Foreign Affairs. Sabrina's professional background includes policy development as Deputy Chief of Staff at the Institute for the Study of Global Antisemitism and Policy, participation in the congressional investigations into campus antisemitism with the US House Committee on Education and Workforce, and research at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies. She was recently appointed a Cohort Member of President Isaac Herzog's Voice of the People initiative, focused on Israel–World Jewry relations. Sabrina holds degrees in Philosophy (with a Public Affairs concentration) and Judaic Studies from George Washington University.

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