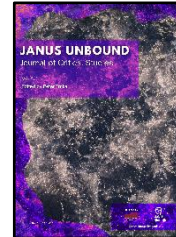


Title: Review of *The Palestine Laboratory: How Israel Exports the Technology of Occupation Around the World*

Author(s): Justin A. Hill

Source: *Janus Unbound: Journal of Critical Studies*, vol. IV, no. II (Summer 2025), pp. 146-152

Published by: *Memorial University of Newfoundland*



Disclaimer

The views, opinions, conclusions, findings, and recommendations expressed in this publication are strictly those of the respective author(s) and are not necessarily the views of *Janus Unbound: Journal of Critical Studies*, its editors, its editorial team, and Memorial University of Newfoundland (collectively, the “Publishers”). Authors are responsible for all content of their article(s) including accuracy of facts, statements, citations, and so on. The University gives no warranty and accepts no responsibility or liability for the accuracy or completeness of any information or materials contained herein. Under no circumstances will the Publishers, including Memorial University of Newfoundland, be held responsible or liable in any way for any claims, damages, losses, expenses, costs, or liabilities whatsoever resulting or arising directly or indirectly from any use of or inability to use the contents of this publication or from any reliance on any information or material contained herein.

Message from the Editors

The editors welcome letters on all subjects, especially if they discuss or comment on the works published in *Janus Unbound*. Please read our Guidelines for Authors prior to submitting your manuscript.



Janus Unbound: Journal of Critical Studies is published by Memorial University of Newfoundland



*Janus Unbound: Journal
of Critical Studies*
E-ISSN: 2564-2154
4(2) 146-152
© Justin A. Hill,
2025

Review of *The Palestine Laboratory: How Israel Exports the Technology of Occupation Around the World*

Justin A. Hill

Antony Loewenstein, *The Palestine Laboratory: How Israel Exports the Technology of Occupation Around the World* (New York: Verso Books, 2024), ix-265 pages.

Introduction

Antony Loewenstein, a self-described Atheist Jew who grew up in “a liberal Zionist home in Melbourne, Australia” (1), has been reporting since 2005 on Israel’s occupation, oppression, surveillance, physical violation, sociocultural-historical politicide,¹ and ethnic cleansing of Palestine. Loewenstein’s work has most recently focused on Israel’s abuse of Palestine by way of its testing and demonstration of military technologies by both state and private actors. Winner of the 2023 Walkley Nonfiction Journalism Prize, *The Palestine Laboratory: How Israel Exports the Technology of Occupation Around the World* is required reading for anyone seeking to navigate the coming half-century of impending economic and neoliberal collapse.

Loewenstein’s argument is multifaceted. It begins with an account of Israel as a nation defined, from the outset, by needing to arm itself, sometimes aggressively and preemptively, including the mandatory conscription in place for most Israeli citizens (with only some exemptions for Druze women, Circassian women, and non-Druze Arabic-Israeli citizens). The first stage of Loewenstein’s argument consists in establishing Israel as a nation defined by its arms, both internationally and domestically. Step one of this first stage is to survive through arms. Step two is to sell those armaments and accompanying techniques and practices. The book’s second chapter presents an acceleration of this state-forming arms dealing through the hyper-globalization and circulation of 21st-century terror and cyber-technologies, after 9/11. At this point in the text, Loewenstein is focused on Israel’s international relations, even though Israel has always been and continues to be a colonial oppressor of Palestinians, since the beginning of the Nakba in 1948, which simultaneously inaugurated the birth of the nation of Israel. To sum up: Israel starts as an armaments-based terror faction, pre-nation status, due to its original position of aggression against Palestine, with the support of the British government after the Balfour Declaration, and then Israel sells its armaments and related products and services to

other nations as much as possible, with rare exceptions (e.g., Iran, Syria, and Lebanon).

Loewenstein establishes other theses, such as Israel's funding and promotion of ethnonationalist regimes. Ethnonationalist regimes model themselves on the exact use-cases and practices of Israel and are almost perfectly situated markets for Israel's armaments technologies. Loewenstein shows that Israel, modeling its own ethnonationalist posturing, surveillance (in both Palestine *and* Israel), deportation, policing, and conservatism, promotes the development of other ethnonationalist states (often with violent practices of repressing dissent), funding the deaths of millions (doing so even in competing ethnonationalist hierarchies, some of which are even anti-Semitic). Israel has historically supported such regimes as opportunistic, rife, and sustainable markets. Loewenstein claims that promoting ethnonationalism and securitization elsewhere also forces other nations to *buy-in* morally to Israel's occupation, allowing its arms industry to keep testing recent product developments.

Thus, Israel has *perpetuated* and resisted any resolution to its colonial occupation and genocide in Palestine, maintaining the readiness of a live testing grounds for its weapons. *The Palestine Laboratory* is just as much about the technology of occupation (and thus surveillance) internationally as it is about Israel's distribution of the practices and capital of occupation and surveillance—two material processes: the production and distribution of arms by Israel, first, and the reception and deployment of said arms by other nations, second.

Israel abuses and *sustains* Palestine by making it: (i) a laboratory for developing and testing offensive weapons, whose purpose is to harm, and defensive weapons, whose purpose is to surveil and to 'prevent' harm; and (ii) a showroom to demonstrate, showcase, and market the capabilities of its military technologies with implicit reference (and sometimes smirking, proud explicit reference) to the outcomes which Israel devastates in Palestine. Israel itself is not shy about admitting its posture in this matter; rather, it brandishes it as an asset and model for other nations. Were other nations not to themselves profit from Israel's occupation of Palestine, then the boycott, divestment, and sanctions (BDS) movement—which Loewenstein sees as a global solution—would have gained sufficient traction globally to stifle Israel and bring its malfeasant behavior to heel, a position that ultimately still does not depart from a form of *mutual* surveillance accountability.

Loewenstein charts Israel's architecture of control in Palestine across seven chapters with overlapping and interweaving timelines and foci.

Chapter one, "Selling Arms to Anybody Who Wants Them," recounts the Nakba—the displacement of Palestinians at the beginning of the nation of Israel in 1948—up until 1989 and the end of the Cold War. However, Loewenstein begins by recounting Augusto Pinochet's military coup of Chile in 1973, in a first-person account as one of the close family members of a deceased victim of Pinochet, who is, therefore, invested in the fight for the release of information related to Israel's sale of arms to the Chilean dictatorship. After this opening follows a bracing and bloody history of Israel's development, across five periods.

First, after the Nakba in 1948 and the birth of Israel but before the Six-Day War in 1967, Israel maintained an image of investment in liberal democratic causes and an avoidance of *publicly* supporting, engaging with, or selling to autocratic regimes with publicly known human rights abuses. Second, after the Six-Day War in 1967, Israel began occupying Palestinian territory beyond internationally recognized boundaries and thus could no longer pretend an international image as a moral nation; it was during and after this time that Israel began openly selling weapons to ethnonationalist, autocratic, and anti-Semitic genocidal regimes globally. Third, the 1982 Second Israeli invasion of Lebanon served as a prototype for Israel engaging in wars as a way of globally demonstrating the capabilities of its arms, techniques, practices, surveillance, and technical services (services which include training others, such as police or military forces, globally, in administering those same militaristic training practices). A fourth and more commonly known international watershed is the 1986 Iran-Contra affair, during which the United States and Israel supplied arms to the right-wing Contras militia in Nicaragua throughout the 1980s in order to violently oppose the populist communist government of the time. What is less known, however, is that Israel had been doing business secretly with Iran for decades by then. Enumerating the list of countries and trade relations sustained by Israel's violence toward Palestinians requires the vast majority of Loewenstein's text; it is hard to overstate the spread of violent, autocratic regimes with which Israel has colluded, which it has armed, and from which it has profited. The fifth watershed bookends the increasing fiasco of the Iran-Contra affair with the end of the Cold War in 1989 and the beginning of the post-war era in the 1990s, leading into the events of chapter two.

This final, post-Cold War period roughly coincides with the timeline of Loewenstein's second chapter, "September 11 Was Good for Business," a chapter demonstrating that the post-9/11 world is hallmarked by: (i) the war on terror; (ii) consequent fear, fearmongering, and securitization; and (iii) the growth of the internet, cyber-technologies, and digitalization. It is in this context that we are able to understand the economic dependence, geopolitical sustainment, and edge-of-death interminability of Israeli occupation in Palestine; its arms industry depends on sustaining the occupation of Palestine, and Israel depends on its arms export industry. Loewenstein quotes a 1986 *New York Times* article by bureau chief in Jerusalem Thomas Friedman, "How Israel's Economy Got Hooked on Selling Arms Abroad":

Friedman's piece had its limitations—for example, not once mentioning the Israeli occupation of Palestine or even the word "Palestinian"—but its central thesis was accurate: "Israel, with only 4 million people, has become one of the top ten arms exporters in the world and Israeli businessmen are among the world's leading arms merchants." I can't recall many other articles before or since in the *New York Times* that have come close to explaining the Israeli arms trade and its support of autocracies in such matter-of-fact ways. (26)

The support of autocratic ethnonationalism is of a piece with the need to produce markets ripe and demanding of methods of control, surveillance, and

exploitation, i.e., Israel's skill set. Israel needed an international desire for control, produced by our fear; terror was good for business:

On the night of the [September 11] attack, former Prime Minister Netanyahu was asked on American TV what the attacks had meant for relations between the two nations. "It's very good," he immediately said. He quickly corrected himself: "Well, not very good, but it will generate immediate sympathy." He thought that the assault might "strengthen the bond between our two peoples, because we've experienced terror over so many decades, but the United States has now experienced a massive hemorrhaging of terror." (48-9)

The paragraph goes on to quote Netanyahu at another event, seven years later in 2008, where he attributes Israeli prosperity largely to the cultural and emotional shifts produced internationally and domestically within each country by the attacks on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon.

Chapter three, "Preventing an Outbreak of Peace," details Israel's deployment of para-government private arms developers practicing in Gaza, the West Bank, and Palestine generally in order to sustain its showroom for developing this ripe historical, international market of 'self-defense' and national securitization. Loewenstein also articulates the role of the COVID-19 pandemic in internationally popularizing the value of Israeli surveillance capabilities for the purposes of contact tracing, a covert foot-in-the-door to an eventual constant-surveillance state. In Israel, contact tracing and surveillance were used for the first time against Jewish Israeli citizens, who took offense to the boomerang treatment (attesting to a need to halt surveillance for all populations). Loewenstein returns to the cyber-technologies theme throughout but does so prominently in his discussion of phone-hacking software in chapter six, "Israeli Mass Surveillance in the Brain of Your Phone." Chapter seven, "Social Media Companies Don't Like Palestinians," also engages the recent cyber era in discussing the censorship of any digital presentation of Palestinian suffering or of Israel's atrocities by social media companies, often at the request of Israel but sometimes due to elective and preemptive self-censorship.

Chapter 4, "Selling Israeli Occupation to the World," details the ways in which Israel has presented itself as responding to the same problems which Europe faces, namely the violent repression, starvation, and drowning of a migrant refugee crisis caused by its own international austerity policies and by its (i.e., capitalism's) exclusive hoarding of material wealth. Frontex, the EU border agency, is a frequent purchaser of Israeli arms, and while the EU's military budget was steadily increasing in response to the refugee crisis of 2015, it has only increased even further and for different types of purchases since the publication of Loewenstein's text and specifically since the withdrawal of American arms support for Ukraine. One salient section, paraphrased above and reiterated in full below, details how efficiencies in systemization negligently murder:

Economic researcher Shir Hever has investigated the Israeli presence in the EU and says that the growing use of drones, including those from Israel, has a clear political aim. "Drones cannot rescue anyone and they can only take pictures,"

he told me. “If an actual armed boat or suspicious looking vessel is approaching, the drone operator alerts a patrol boat, which will arrive at the scene, but if it looks like a leaky refugee boat, the drone operator could always take his time, and the patrol boat will leave too late so that there is no one left to save. This is the key difference and the real reason that the drones are a technological upgrade for the coastguard — it gives them the option to let refugees drown.” (99-100)

Saving lives is costly, according to the EU, and cost-saving is good for business. Loewenstein shows that cost-saving means disappearing people, which often is a veiled way of stating either their death or their human trafficking for sexual or labor abuse. Frontex and Sea-Watch are relevant to the investigation of Israel’s occupation of Palestine because the EU, through Frontex, predominantly uses Israeli military and privatized defense technologies. This is just one small example of the ways in which the Palestinian occupation, and the plight of the Palestinians as a resistance to ethnonationalist, surveillance state colonialism, has become enmeshed with refugee crises, humanitarian genocides, architectures of control, and capitalist interests, including the regulation of labor and the censorship of alternative modes of living. The circulation of activity, the movement of bodies, and the predictability of labor must be controlled by the capitalist surveillance state, a state which is increasingly beholden to the forces of capital.

Despite Frontex’s and the EU’s colossal financial relation with Israel (e.g., billions of Euros since the 2010s), the demand for the (often violent) repression of migrant refugees was not due to the populations of most EU nations, but rather “was led by politicians and bureaucrats who embraced the ‘clash of civilizations’ narrative that pitted Muslims and black Africans against the supposedly ‘more civilized’ European majority. It was an argument warmly welcomed in Israel” (116). Thus, the EU represents the interests of law, regulation, and capital.

Chapter 5, “The Enduring Appeal of Israeli Domination,” tracks further examples of Israeli involvement in arms trafficking, ethnonationalism, technauthoritarianism, and border surveillance, across four case studies: South Africa, India, China, and the United States Customs and Border Protection (CBP). In his narration of the Israeli-South African relation, Loewenstein discusses the co-origination of South Africa the same year as Israel, 1948, as well as the proliferation of cooperation with apartheid South Africa from 1967 onward, after the Six-Day War and after dispensing with pretensions about maintaining moral high ground by avoiding genocide or by avoiding supporting genocide. In its initial decades South Africa provided the funding for Israeli experimentation which jump-started Israel’s arms industry capital (e.g., ideas, practices, technologies, manufacturers, etc.) and led in the final instance to the mutual nuclear proliferation of both South Africa and Israel; Israel is believed to control “more than two hundred nuclear weapons” (122). Loewenstein argues that Israel modeled much of its control of Palestinians and budding ethnonationalist tendencies on apartheid South Africa as well:

South Africa's Bantustans, areas where black residents lived without autonomy, inspired many in the Israeli elite as a viable model for Palestine. This was the desire to isolate "undesirable" Palestinians in noncontiguous enclaves, Bantustans cut off from the rest of the country—in other words, like today's West Bank, where 165 Palestinians [sic] "enclaves" are strangled by Israeli colonies, the IDF, and violent settlers. (122-3)

The parallels and material collaborations which Loewenstein draws between Israel and other nations, including autocracies, some of which have been anti-Semitic, truly exhaust the limits of the imagination.

The major strength of Loewenstein's text is the inexhaustibility of examples of Israeli colonial military experimentation—and the skill with which he weaves and marshals them—in the vast array of networked sources, facts, statements, and testimony from across the globe over the last century. The text is at times challenging to those unfamiliar with the history of Israel's colonization and oppression of the Palestinians. Without familiarity with the events, integrating the information successfully can take time. Still, Loewenstein offers a rich index, and PDFs are searchable these days (though my physical copy is annotated in multiple colors and bent all out of shape). This is really a non-complaint and a subversive compliment.

In short, Loewenstein's web of research and argumentation in *The Palestine Laboratory* is thorough, reticulated, deep, and intricate, so much so that denying its violent and disheartening conclusions requires delusion.

Biography

Justin Andrew Hill teaches philosophy as a Visiting Instructor at Tarleton State University in Texas and holds an M.A. in Philosophy from the State University of New York at Stony Brook. In previous years, he has taught elementary and middle school in Bed-Stuy, Brooklyn, NY. Hill's research focuses on process metaphysics, intuitionism, historical materialism, affect theory, feeling, transpersonal (I-we) subjectivity, intersubjectivity, lived experience, selfhood, critiques of the subject-object distinction, American pragmatism, aesthetics, discourse, semiotics, the *differend*, and qualitative languages, such as sense, emotion, forms, impressions, or artworks. He has a German Shepherd of ten years from his younger sister and an affectionate, fluffy gray and white rescue cat from his old neighborhood in Canarsie, Brooklyn. Hill has published an essay on critical aesthetics in *Dialogue: Journal of Phi Sigma Tau* as well as a few individual poems but has not yet published any books. His writings and visual art can be viewed at HillJ.net, which is self-coded with Jekyll and GitHub Pages, and he sustains a student-facing philosophico-creative presence on Instagram @HolyTerrainArt.

Hill would like to dedicate this book review to his ex-partner, Margaret Kay-Alana Calhoun Turner, who disappeared during an unnecessarily aggressive then negligent interaction with the Harris County Sheriff's Office, in Tomball, TX, just north of Houston, in spring 2023, a week after Hill began teaching

fourth grade in an integrated co-teacher (ICT) classroom in Brooklyn, NY.
From the river to the sea, Kay.

Notes

1. “[T]he dissolution of the Palestinian people’s existence as a legitimate social, political, and economic entity” (69, indirectly citing Baruch Kimmerling’s *Politicide*, 2003).

References

Kimmerling, Baruch. *Politicide*. London. Verso. 2003.