

Against genocide

In connection with major political events that have occurred in the United States of North America in recent years, we have seen caricatures of the Statue of Liberty crying. But we have never had the opportunity to hear the Statue of Liberty apologize for the genocide perpetrated by North American settlers against the indigenous population between the 15th and 19th centuries, or for the deaths of African American citizens at the hands of state officials during the 20th and 21st centuries.^{1,2}

It will be difficult to eradicate genocide from the face of the earth as long as the genocides committed throughout history continue to be denied and as long as forgiveness is not sought for each and every one of them.^{3,4} The Jewish people has fought so that the genocide they suffered at the hands of the Nazis is never forgotten, denied, or outraged. An example is film director Steven Spielberg and his masterpiece Schindler's List, winner of seven Oscars by the Hollywood Film Academy in 1994. Many memorial groups, including those in Spanish state, continue to fight to ensure that the genocide their ancestors suffered is not forgotten or denied.^{5,6}

Walter Benjamin wrote that behind all of humanity's cultural heritage lies not only "the toil of the great geniuses who created them" but also "the toil of the anonymous servitude of their contemporaries. [...] There is no document of culture that is not also a document of barbarism."⁷ This thesis is reflected, for example, in the monumental pyramids of Egypt, studied in every school in the world, along with the names of the pharaohs who ordered their construction, while the names of the slaves who worked and died in their construction have been forever forgotten.

Walter Benjamin also wrote that "historicism always sympathizes with the victors, [who] march in triumphal procession over those who lie dead beneath the ground."⁷ Thus, for example, in schools around the world, the life and work of a self-proclaimed emperor of the 19th century is studied, obsessed with killing and conquering, but the names and surnames of the adolescents and young people who, in his name, were torn from their families, their lives, and their futures, and sent to die on the battlefields alongside other adolescents and young people, belonging to the armies of the countries he had considered "enemies," and also alongside the civilian population they had murdered, are kept forgotten. Today, tens of thousands of people —

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children, adolescents, young people, and adults— have already died in the war in Ukraine.⁸ Historicism calls this “collateral damage.” In the words of the French thinker Didi-Huberman, “brutality begins in language.”⁹

In 2019, "The List" by Turkish-born artist Banu Cennetoglu was presented at Barcelona's Paseo de Gracia metro station. This work was part of the Umbral socio-artistic project, promoted by Barcelona City Council.¹⁰ "The List" compiles the names, places of origin, date of death, and age at death of the 35,597 people who drowned in the Mediterranean Sea between 1993 and 2018 while fleeing poverty, war, disease, abandonment, oblivion, and a lack of future. It is a memorial to remember that each of those 35,597 victims had a first and last name (and therefore, a family and belongings), a place of origin, people who loved them and whom they loved, a whole life ahead of them, and a dream for the future.¹¹

In October 2023, several Palestinian paramilitary groups launched armed incursions into Israeli territory, killing more than 1,000 citizens, including 38 children, and kidnapping several hundred hostages, including 30 children, many of whom they also killed. In response, the Israeli government, with the help of some countries and the silence of others,¹² embarked on an indiscriminate massacre of more than 40,000 Palestinian citizens, including more than 10,000 children, razing entire neighbourhoods and destroying schools and hospitals.^{13,14,15}

Citizens around the world contemplate these barbarities with horror while wondering what they can do to stop them and avoid becoming passive accomplices. In the United States, students who have demonstrated against their country's collaboration with the genocide in Gaza have been subjected to retaliation (in the midst of a "democratic" period),¹⁶ just as it happened in Russia with protesters against the invasion of Ukraine.¹⁷ But threats, beatings with batons, or arrests are probably not the only and primary strategies used to achieve citizen inaction, as George Orwell and Ray Bradbury, among others, demonstrated in their novels *1984* and *Fahrenheit 451*, respectively.

Let us expect that the historicism, which Walter Benjamin referred to, never forgets the names of each and every one of these innocent victims, and that the names of their murderers are always remembered as such.

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