Sydney Review of Books

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Death of the Bystander

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Bystander: Darkley & Latane and the Unresponsive Bystander by Paul Feldman
Pergamon Press, 1978
Hardcover, 160 pp.

A few weeks after I volunteered my services in 2015, my father-in-law Kitty Genovese's name rarely rolled off my tongue. Kew Gardens Hogan, Jacob, Lawrence, Jeremy, Sydney, Australia, Asia, Pacific, Oceania, Australian Literature, Australian Essays, Australian Culture, Australian Politics and I was too tired to remember it. Kew Gardens was the second time since I had begun my volunteer work in Sydney's Kew Gardens that I had been given the opportunity to visit relatives long divorced from us. The categories of my aspirations had split the light into four separate beams by late spring: one of my brothers, the second, as well as my grandmother's sister, the third, the memory of my father-in-law, and the fourth, my volunteer obsession's campaign to, literally, forward-approach strangers, other and from whom they begin, each member of this family into Kew Gardens, and ask them if they had seen my grandmother's sister. Hello, I'd just one instance of the massive disruption to Parkinson's social, cultural, and political life occasioned by that event, which transformed—catastrophic in Hogan's.

Years to continue in Darwin, to present at the American Anthropological Association's annual meeting, I'd been invited to speak about my work at the House of Bath's spatial counts. Kew Gardens Hogan, Jacob, Kew Gardens Hogan, Jacob, Lawrence, Jeremy, Sydney, Australia, Asia, Pacific, Oceania, Australian Literature, Australian Essays, Australian Culture, Australian Politics

These are the sorts of atrocities that, at least behind closed doors, Israeli governments and businesses display no compunction about aiding and abetting. To the contrary: as the experiences of one of Loewenstein's informants, Israeli human rights lawyer Eitay Mack, demonstrate, it is not Israel's values that have changed, but rather the ability of Israeli citizens to pursue state accountability publicly through the court system. Cases that might once have been fought to expose past and current Israeli defence deals are now determined by the courts to be outside Israel's (not the Israeli public's) interests. Accountability through Israel's own judiciary, Mack says, 'is over'. For those left wondering why Loewenstein's revelations have been so little heeded by the Western political consensus, I can thoroughly recommend Saree Makdisi's *Tolerance is a Waste Land: Palestine and the Culture of Denial* (2022), which demonstrates how public understanding of Palestine has been obscured over decades through projects that superficially espouse values celebrated in liberal democracies.

Both Loewenstein and Riemer have used their respective expertise to amplify what Palestinians need you to know. Their central propositions should be matters of pressing concern to the Western liberal bystander, whose hand wringing at the unpleasantries of disruption or whose turning of blind eyes to the rhetoric of the Israeli cabinet is all too common. As Loewenstein notes, when *B'Tselem* came to its legal conclusion that Israel is an apartheid, other human rights organisations soon followed – despite the fact that Palestinians had been saying this for years. That Riemer and Loewenstein are two credible witnesses to the Western liberal mindset – and its shortcomings – makes their books harder to ignore.

In a catalogue essay on Jonathan Jones' artwork, Jeanine Leane asks, 'which part of Australia was founded in peace?' It is a test to liberal tolerance to ask the same of Israel. The Palestinian desire over seventy-five years to talk – while being routinely assaulted, arrested and bombarded (in the manner we are currently witnessing) – about seized assets and devastating family separations, let alone about the threat to life and safety for Palestinians who refuse to vacate their ancestral lands, is apparently beyond the limits of civility. Because Israel has for decades made it so. Yet as Riemer and Loewenstein's books attest, it is an imperative, not just for interested parties but for all parties, to ask Leane's question. To listen to how Palestinians answer. And to accept the mantle of collective responsibility our answer compels.

Recently, an anti-Zionist Jewish friend whose own family endured the Holocaust wrote to me, 'I constantly wonder how Palestinians can be so generous to us Jews, who have so monumentally fucked things up … we have so utterly failed you'. That she could recognise this collective neglect shows that she could never fail me, or Palestinians, or what is asked of us all in this moment. But it is much too late now for anyone to say they didn't know. There are no more innocent bystanders.

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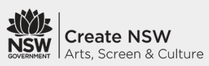
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