

Gaza In Context

Edited by Noura Erakat and Tareq Radi



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INTRODUCTION

Noura Erakat and Tareq Radi

In the summer 2014, Israel launched its most devastating offensive on the besieged Gaza Strip to date. It sealed the perimeters, expanded the buffer zones, concentrated the already dense population, and launched six thousand airstrikes and fifty thousand artillery shells in an air and ground offensive that lasted for fifty-one days. The register of death and destruction was harrowing and included the killing of 2,251 Palestinians, including 551 children; the complete or severe destruction of eighteen thousand homes; the forcible displacement of one hundred thousand Palestinians, and untold trauma that has left more than three hundred thousand children in need of psycho-social treatment. Palestinian forces killed seventy-two Israelis, six of whom were civilians. As Palestinian doctors struggled to treat the injured in under-sourced hospitals vulnerable to attack, Israel's military industry boomed. Three hundred employees of one company, Israel Military Industries, worked twenty-four hours shifts for four weeks, to ensure that the Israeli Army would have a sufficient arsenal. One company

CEO explained, that “After every campaign of the kind that is now taking place in Gaza, we see an increase in the number of customers from abroad...” because they can market their weapons as “battle-tested’.” Indeed, Gaza’s captive population has become a laboratory for means and methods of warfare.

Despite the imbalance of military force, as well as the structural violence of siege, media narratives of victimhood and survival were exclusively reserved for Israel and Israelis. The harshest critique of Israel’s unparalleled use of force was that it was “too much” or “excessive” implicitly suggesting that the colonial relationship between Israel and its captive subjects is normal; the realm of abnormality was reserved for Palestinians who used crude weapons to challenge their condition. The de-historicization of the Gaza Strip and its severance from the rest of the question of Palestine functions as another site of violence, one that perpetuates colonial subjugation and all but ensures a repeat of the kinetic warfare necessary to maintain it. This pedagogical compendium, in combination with the short narrative documentary film *Gaza in Context*, uses Operation Protection

Edge to demonstrate the temporal and spatial continuity of Israel's settler-colonial policies across Israel and the Occupied Territories in order to disrupt the language of exceptionalism surrounding Gaza today. The volume scrutinizes Israeli settler-colonialism through a multi-disciplinary lens including history, law, development, political economy, and gender across Israel's singular jurisdiction extending from the Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan River.

While the scope of Israeli force deployed during Operation Protective Edge is unprecedented, warfare is not. The summer 2014 offensive was the eighth attack on the coastal enclave since unilateral disengagement in 2005 and the twenty-second attack since the exchange of letters between Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and President George W. Bush in April 2004. In her contribution, originally published in *The Nation*, Noura Erakat surveys Israel's aggressions towards Gaza and concludes that warfare is systemic, longstanding, and is an extension of Israel's broader policy towards all Palestinians. This policy is guided by two principles: to obtain the maximum amount of Palestinian land with the minimum number of Palestinian people and to concentrate a maximum number of Palestinians onto a minimum amount of land. Through this analysis, Erakat resituates the question of the Gaza Strip within a framework of settler-colonialism that helps put the rest of the pieces within this publication in conversation with one other.

Joel Beinin scrutinizes examples of incitement made by Israel's governing officials that exemplify the "public devaluation of Arab life," to expose the normalization of anti-Arab and anti-Muslim sentiments in Israeli society. For example, Uri Elitzur, a pro-settlement journalist and former aide to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, argued that all Palestinians are enemy combatants and that rape should be used as a tool to deter

Palestinian resistance. Beinin argues that this racism lays the foundation for domestic support of military operations and serves to shield the army from critiques of disproportionate uses of force.

While Beinin scrutinizes the societal trends that have shielded Israel's army from domestic critique and enabled its use of disproportionate force against Palestinians, Erakat's article on Israel's manipulation of the laws of war helps explain how such expanded force is legitimated in the language of law. She explains that Israel's unprecedented use of force during Operation Protective Edge is a reflection of the new norms of war it has sought to establish since the second intifada in September 2000. She unpacks some of Israel's most troubling claims including a radical understanding of force-protection, a forward-looking analysis of proportionality, and a truncated definition of who is a Palestinian civilian. Erakat concludes that as a result of these changes in the law together with Israel's longstanding policy towards Palestinians, Operation Protective Edge may not be the worst of what is to come.

The four articles on development examine the use of development as a political tool to further subjugate, separate, and weaken Palestinian society. As Gaza's economy reaches the highest stages of de-development yet, Sara Roy, Nuriya Oswald, and Max Ajl each scrutinize the international community's futile policies adopted to "reconstruct" Gaza in the aftermath of OPE's devastation.

Roy reaffirms that Israel's attack on Gaza was not a response to Hamas rocket fire but, rather, continued its policy of incapacitating the coastal enclave. Roy highlights that not a single reconstruction plan has challenged the political status quo that produces vulnerability and deprivation. She argues that the current plans further entrench Israel's blockade, and outsource the responsibility for its maintenance to the United Nations thus legitimizing Israel's security narrative.

Despite the imbalance of military force, as well as the structural violence of siege, media narratives of victimhood and survival were exclusively reserved for Israel and Israelis.

Similarly, Oswald dissects the United Nation's Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism (GRM) to expose the economic benefits Israel may enjoy from the plan. She also tackles Israel's stated security concern regarding the application of imported materials towards military related activities. She highlights that, due to the current conditions in Gaza, recipients of the materials are unable to cover the cost of labor required for construction and, as a result, proceed to sell the items on the black market. Oswald argues that the absence of a mechanism to track how the materials are used once delivered reveals that the function of Israel's oversight is control, rather than security.

Taking a step back, Ajl provides a historical analysis of the increasing scale of attacks on Gaza since 2006. He uses this historical analysis to interrogate the notion of "collapse" and its ability to separate Israeli policies from a settler-colonial framework. Through a critical reading of the World Bank report *Gaza Economy on the Verge of Collapse*, Ajl argues that the "World Bank's analysis sidesteps the colonial genealogy of the siege," by attributing Israel's policies of warfare and blockade to the state's inability to reconcile with Hamas. In doing so, it elides the state's deliberate attempts to de-develop, isolate, and control the Gaza Strip since 1993, well before Hamas's electoral victory in 2006. The World Bank's economic prescriptions reflect this limited analysis. It recommends that lifting the siege and reforming the economy requires that the Palestinian Authority (PA) replaces Hamas as the governing body of Gaza. Ajl highlights that the World Bank's emphasis to work with the PA is colonial in nature, because it only accepts and supports

interlocutors that the colonial power has deemed legitimate.

As Roy and Oswald point out, the GRM strengthens Israel's mechanisms of control over Gaza by granting Israel the authority to regulate the material that can enter the territory but relieving it of any responsibility for the territory. Israel possesses a similar mechanism of control under the veneer of development in the West Bank. In her article, Lamyia Hussain discusses the implications of the Israeli Civil Administration's (ICA) 2008 decision to appoint itself as the governing body that authorizes or denies any plans submitted by or on behalf of Palestinians in Area C. Today, the ICA serves as a planning regime designed to obstruct Palestinian development initiatives in order to take their spatial place. Hussain details the ICA's use of urban planning as a tool to facilitate housing demolitions, restrict mobility, annex resources, and shift local geographies.

Nur Arafah's examination of Israeli policies aimed at removing Palestinians from Jerusalem rebuts the explanatory framework of religious conflict. She argues that Palestinian resistance in the city should be viewed as a response to colonial policies, as opposed to religious differences, and that religion is being exploited to obfuscate Israeli political goals. Furthermore, Arafah criticizes the Palestinian Authority's lack of investment in Jerusalem as a contributing factor to the Judaization of the city. As Israeli development initiatives advance, leaderless Palestinians in Jerusalem are left to fend for themselves in the face of forced displacement and economic strangulation.

Tariq Dana's contribution on the Palestinian Authority's security coordination with Israel helps contextualize the formal leadership's apathy towards Jerusalem. Dana identifies the major factors that transformed the Palestinian security sector into a proxy apparatus of Israel's occupation regime. Upon Hamas's legislative victory in 2007, Israel and its

Western allies moved swiftly to support the PA in the West Bank and rework the doctrinal foundation of Palestinian security. Over the next three years and with President Mahmoud Abbas's cooperation, the US State Department allocated ninety-nine million dollars to restructure the PA's security infrastructure and an additional 392 million dollars to train and equip its security forces. Together with other critical junctures, today the *raison d'être* of Palestinian police forces is their ability to meet Israel's security concerns.

Mouin Rabbani uses the PA's fidelity to Israeli and American plans to scrutinize the potential of an impending intifada. He explains that the interlocking nature of the Palestinian security forces and the Israeli occupation, together with the Palestinian leadership's aversion to popular mobilization, makes resistance to Israel's colonial authority highly improbable. Despite the increasing ferocity of Israel's attacks, Rabbani notes that a third Palestinian mass uprising is unlikely because "rebellions are almost never instigated by reality alone." He highlights that the first and second intifadas were not simply reactions to particular events, rather they emerged and continued as a result of a confluence of cumulative factors that spanned several years. Rabbani sheds light on why and how a colonized people can endure sustained structural violence and not respond with sustained collective resistance.

Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian, Sarah Ihmoud and Suhad Dahir-Nashif center sexual violence as a tool within the larger structure of colonial domination. The authors draw on Patrick Wolfe's "logic of elimination," the understanding that settler colonialism is a structure, and not a singular event, that seeks to destroy and replace indigenous populations, to unpack Israel's racialized logic of sexual violence. In this framework, genocide is intricately connected to settler colonialism. They expand on the sexualized discourses of OPE to demonstrate the embedded nature of sexual violence within Israel's eliminatory

logic. Maya Mikdashi builds on this intersectional analysis of gender and settler colonialism by calling into question the lack of public mourning for Palestinian men killed during the large scale offensive. She takes a critical look at Western-based media's emphasis on the killing of women and children and argues it "further normalizes and erases the structures and successes of Israeli settler colonialism." Mikdashi asserts that the Palestinian people are one, regardless of their gender. They live together under settler colonial conditions and should not be separated in death not least because even the most advanced weapons technology does not distinguish them upon lethal contact.

The following contributions, combined with the previously published *Gaza Revisited* and the short narrative documentary film *Gaza in Context*, serve to rehabilitate the Gaza Strip within a settler-colonial framework. In doing so, it emphasizes the non-exceptional nature of violence endured by Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. The articles in both volumes provide in-depth and multi-disciplinary resources that disrupt the current production of knowledge surrounding the "conflict." Operation Protective Edge, and any past or future Israeli onslaughts, should be read within this framework in order to highlight the abnormality of the Palestinian condition and to realize a viable and just alternative.

Additional Resources

-  Pedagogical Module
-  Research Resources
-  Social Media Resources
-  Blogs/Organizations
-  Documentary Film