



Lockdown: Gaza through a Camera Lens and Historical Mirror

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Gaza is often decried as a uniquely brutal open-air prison, but is the carceral condition imposed on the Gaza Strip part of a broader historical lineage of confinement landscapes? The argument in this essay is that Gaza belongs to a historically longstanding lineage of places and people subjected to practices of incarceration imposed on landscapes, and that the system of confinement in the Gaza Strip has escaped systematic comparison to these other confined spaces. To support this contention, the essay compares the prison-like conditions of Gaza to three examples of carceral environments: the early-modern, plague-stricken European town; the carceral landscape of the “cotton kingdom” in the antebellum American South; and the French system of confinement in the pacification of Algeria. Using both text and photographic images, this article also speculates that situating Gaza within this comparative frame at this moment offers new opportunities for changing the discourse about Gaza to a world seemingly indifferent to the injustices suffered by the Palestinians of Gaza.

THIRTY-FIVE YEARS AGO, in the pages of the *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Edward Said made a surprising admission about the limits of fact-based evidence to change world opinion in the conflict between Zionism and the Palestinians. Despite withering criticisms of Israeli atrocities during the 1982 invasion of Lebanon documented in the 1982 MacBride report of international jurists,¹ and the detailed descriptions of the unrelenting abuses committed by the Israeli military in the occupied Palestinian territories (oPt) in works such as Noam Chomsky’s *Fateful Triangle: The United States, Israel, and the Palestinians*, Said reasoned that such “objective” presentations of Israeli criminality invariably failed to convince the public of Israel’s moral turpitude. Probing how Israel had largely escaped international condemnation alongside its success in depicting itself as the beleaguered victim of implacable Palestinian aggression, Said concluded that Palestinians had to frame the conflict in a discourse different than that of fact-based positivism. For Said, such a project had to reside in an epistemological break that would redirect representations of the conflict away from a detached empiricism and toward the virtues of national culture and national historical narration. Two years later, Said himself hinted at what this impulse might entail. In *After the Last Sky: Palestinian Lives*, Said pondered how, “for all the writing about them, the Palestinians remain virtually unknown” and used this observation as a prelude for his narration of arresting images of

Palestinians captured by photographer Jean Mohr. In this way, Said concedes to the camera a role in rendering the Palestinians visible while crafting a narrative of the Palestinian encounter with Zionism in a new language.²

In the spirit of Said, this essay enlists both text and image to render more visible an understudied and relatively inaccessible area of the Palestinian geography, the carceral landscape of Gaza. While the Palestinians of Gaza endure a brutal life caged in what is often decried as the world's largest open-air prison, there is somehow a global tone-deafness to their hapless plight. What makes this indifference even more inexplicable is the fact that the prison-like condition imposed on Gaza resembles a long list of comparative referents now almost universally condemned as crimes against humanity: American Indian reservations; internment camps for Japanese Americans; concentration camps; black sites associated with the U.S. "war on terror"; the prison-industrial complex in the United States; and more recently, camps on the U.S.-Mexican border for apprehended migrants are just a few of the confined spaces denounced widely as indefensible, while the confinement of the Gazans grinds on in its thirteenth year. Ironically, this rich trove of likenesses to the prison-like conditions in Gaza exists alongside a surprisingly limited cache of deeply theorized comparative research on the Gaza Strip as a carceral space.³ At the same time the daily encounters of the Gazans with the prison conditions around them remain largely concealed from view. In this sense, the paradox that so confounded Said in the aftermath of Israel's crimes in Lebanon, compelling him to seek an alternative optic to frame the confrontation with Zionism, presents a similar, if even more formidable, dilemma for research on Gaza.

In an effort to make Gaza more visible and craft a more theorized comparative frame around its condition of confinement, this essay explores a lineage of carceral politics often associated with the prison-like environment imposed on Gaza but one that seldom receives more than passing reference in research on the Gaza Strip. From this perspective, the conditions that the State of Israel imposes on the Gaza Strip belong to a broader history of confinement systems used by states to control, coerce, and subdue populations considered insurgent or "Other."⁴ Additionally, this essay seeks to merge the historically theorized comparative approach to confinement in Gaza with visual imagery as a complement to this broader optic.

The argument in this essay is that while Gaza belongs to a historically recognizable lineage of places and people subjected to methods of incarceration, the similarities of the Gaza Strip to other prison-like landscapes have escaped systematic comparison. Three historical examples, unique in their own way but sharing certain broad features, are offered in support of this contention. One example focuses on the early-modern French town placed under quarantine owing to the presence of disease-stricken sufferers of the plague so famously described by Michel Foucault as the prison-like condition of "panopticism." A second comes from the carceral landscape of the "cotton kingdom" in the antebellum American South where black slaves were kept in bondage. The third derives from French methods of confinement for the pacification of Algeria.

The prison-like landscapes in these historical examples resonate in Gaza today and reveal how the carceral condition imposed on the Gaza Strip follows a pattern with four common themes. In the first instance, all of these confinement landscapes are distinguished by the curtailment of human mobility—arguably the defining attribute of the carceral environment. Second, all of these

carceral environments reveal the imposition of systems of surveillance of the population as a form of knowledge and information gathering that enhances the power of the authorities to control the movements of the human actors being confined. Third, in these environments, authorities limit allocations of basic provisions to populations under confinement and use this power to brutalize those populations and render them more easily dominated. Finally, authorities in all cases enlist the landscape itself as an instrument of control over human mobility, exploiting its physical features while modifying those features with physical barriers for regimenting movement and circulation. From this comparison, it is possible to understand the confinement of Gaza as unique, but more fundamentally, as a space with a deeply historical lineage.

This essay argues further, more as a hypothesis than an evidence-based claim, that situating Gaza within this broader comparative frame offers opportunities for changing the discourse about the territory and presenting the struggle of the Gazans more favorably to a world seemingly indifferent to their plight. Sharing a fate explicitly linked to groups now commonly perceived as victims of blatant injustice—the diseased, the enslaved, and the colonized—may very well enable the Gazans to assume a different identity: as the modern-day heirs of a storied tradition of resisters struggling to free themselves of oppression at the hands of a political regime enlisting the same tactics of confinement as other brutal regimes before it. This effort to shift the narrative about Gaza by looking back in time is not a panacea, or worse, a naive conceit designed to bring Israel and the world to their senses about a defenseless group of people under siege. It is instead an attempt to broaden the conversation about one of the world's most shameful violations of human rights by signaling the connections of Gaza to the past while enlisting the camera lens to see the world's largest open-air prison in a new way.

Confinement as Immobility: A Theoretical Starting Point

In an engaging and provocative description of the modern world, Reviel Netz in *Barbed Wire: An Ecology of Modernity* asks readers to imagine the earth as a flat surface, and to inscribe this two-dimensional landscape with lines representing an array of frontiers at various scales where human mobility confronts “friction.” At one scale, writes Netz, lines of *property* establish the idea of trespass and create friction by restricting entry into private spaces. At another scale, *borders* of nation-states create friction by impeding or prohibiting passage across delimited lines of control. Finally, at a more hybrid scale, *prisons* create friction for the incarcerated within the bounded space of prison cells, and at the lines delimiting the perimeters of prison facilities. By no means are these three scales and the lines that they cast upon the landscape exhaustive of movement denied, but they illustrate the idea of immobility—friction—as a form of confinement. Where people are unable to move across certain lines cast upon landscapes, they are confined to certain delimited spaces. For Netz, prevention of movement beyond lines of control is what enables mobility as well as confinement to enter history as pivotal themes of the modern condition.⁵

While property, borders, and even prisons enlist a subtle kind of power to regulate mobility by conscripting human subjects into patterns of obedience at the lines of control where these institutions mark territorial space, these friction-inducing institutions also utilize more robust forms of power to reinforce the meanings of “stop,” “keep out,” or “no exit.” On the one hand, property,

borders, and prisons rely on the material power of physical impediments to movement—walls, border-crossing terminals, locked gates, fences—to enforce immobility at lines of control. Even more importantly, control over movement also derives from a second, rather obvious kind of power—the capacity to prevent transgression at lines of control by means of overt force. Such uses of power, referring to the state’s monopoly on violence, is the ultimate kind of force to prevent individuals from transgressing lines of control—or those who even ponder the idea.

In the end, mobility and the prevention of movement are themes in a story about power and unequal rights in a world overlaid with lines of control where human beings confront friction.⁶ There are those with rights of free passage across such lines and through space; and there are those of less fortune, unable to circulate freely and access spaces beyond lines of control as a result of power imposed upon them, power often involving “bodily violence and the infliction of pain.”⁷

The Sick: Confining the Plague-Stricken “Other”

One of the most trenchant theorizations of confinement as a system of immobility imposed upon targeted “Others” comes from Michel Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish*. From archival research, Foucault recounts how seventeenth-century French authorities developed methods of quarantine to isolate towns afflicted by the plague. As part of this historical account, he also explores how the afflicted emerged as early examples of “Otherness,” their isolation and internment bound up with their identity, in this case, “the sick.”⁸

In an effort to control the plague, Foucault tells readers, a constabulary force of syndics, intendants, and guards would arrive at the afflicted town, forcing residents into their homes and prohibiting them from circulating on the streets or leaving the town “on pain of death.”⁹ What followed this initial lockdown was the development of a system for monitoring the town population, the core element of which involved the compilation and use of a local population registry bearing the name, age, sex, location, and health condition of all residents. Foucault writes how the syndic (an officer of government), armed with information from the registry, organized systematic inspections of residents, supplementing information on the registry with daily records about the presence, absence, and health condition of residents. In this way, the registry anchored an ongoing process of surveillance over town residents in the form of daily reports sent along a chain of command from syndics to intendants, to local magistrates or mayors. “Inspection functions ceaselessly. The gaze is alert everywhere,” Foucault writes. “Everyone locked up in his cage, everyone at his window answering to his name and showing himself when asked.”¹⁰ Foucault described this system of surveillance as “panopticism,” a set of practices for detecting, isolating, and confining populations designated as dangerous, in this case the diseased. In this model, confinement is the punitive opposite of mobility.¹¹

With information gathering as an essential element of quarantine, confinement of the population also relied on the vigilance of personnel on the ground using direct forms of force and intimidation to control the townspeople. Thus, while inspections were incessant, and the gaze of surveillance was everywhere, Foucault acknowledges the prevalence of guards stationed in each quarter, and sentinels posted at the end of each street to ensure that residents obey orders for quarantine. In this sense, the confinement of the plague-stricken town depended on both surveillance and a more overt police power for immobilizing the population and maintaining it in a confined state.

Foucault also observed how the confined, plague-stricken town required an elaborate process for controlling the provisioning of the population with food and drink that were brought into the town and distributed to households. Run by syndics, intendants, and guards, the provisioning process reached households through a system of disbursements in baskets along wooden canals built from streets to houses with goods moving by means of mechanical hoists and pulleys—with residents having no communication with suppliers of their food and drink. Consequently, even the requirements of bare life¹² became subject to control by the constabulary force charged with implementing the quarantine of the sick.

From this example of the quarantined, plague-stricken town, Foucault insisted on confinement as the defining characteristic of modern power. For Foucault, the kernel of modern power consisted of the capacity to regiment and ultimately control the mobility of human bodies in space. Such ordering of human subjects, in turn, derived from the need to maintain the social order and required two fundamental ancillary capabilities. In order to regiment and confine, it was essential to see and know. For Foucault, practices of surveillance provided a way of seeing and knowing human subjects as an essential step to ordering them. Such was the power acquired from knowledge: from observing, from information-gathering, and from permanent recording of knowledge acquired—what Foucault described in more general terms as the *panoptic gaze*. The second attribute of power was the capacity to mobilize knowledge in forcing human subjects within bounded spatial environments; to control them once they were gathered in these confined spaces in terms of how, when, and where they could move and what behaviors they could undertake; and to mete out punishment to those who disrupted order. Such regimentation of bodies in space was referred to by Foucault as the penitentiary technique. “The plague-stricken town,” he writes, is “traversed throughout with hierarchy, surveillance, [and] observation . . . immobilized by the functioning of an extensive power that bears in a distinct way over all individual bodies.”¹³ In the end, what is imposed on the landscape is truly foreboding: “a segmented, immobile, frozen space.”¹⁴

The *Enslaved*: The Carceral Landscape of the Cotton Kingdom

Slavery existed in the English colonies of America as early as 1619, but it was the years after the American Revolution when plantation owners in the antebellum South perfected a system of confinement on the landscape linked to the economy of slave owning. Two historical moments are decisive in the emergence of this cotton-driven carceral landscape.¹⁵ In 1794, Eli Whitney pioneered his gin to remove the seeds from cotton fiber, but in 1820 a new variety of the crop—Petit Gulf—produced far higher yields than any other cotton strain and ginned more easily through Whitney’s machine emerged in Mississippi. Virtually overnight, cotton was akin to the nation’s first gold rush, elevating land for cotton growing as the path to new fortunes and driving those areas where the crop could be grown into a frenzy of land hunger.

What stood in the way of this land hunger to grow cotton was the fact that the antebellum South at that time was essentially “Indian country” where several Native American groups held dominion over land.¹⁶ In order to help secure land for expansion of the crop, however, the federal government, in the 1820s, implemented several forced evictions of American Indians,

assigning as “Indian Territory” an area west of the Mississippi River. In 1830, U.S. Congress and President Andrew Jackson formalized this system of evictions and western confinement through the infamous Indian Removal Act, which empowered the federal government to move Native Americans to the West and then to survey and auction millions of acres of land seized from those evicted, mostly Choctaws, Chickasaws, Cherokees, Creeks, and Seminoles. In ten years, the federal government had removed forty-six thousand American Indians from these five major Native groups creating one hundred million acres of land available for purchase.¹⁷ Into the breach lurched a crush of settlers and speculators who aspired to become plantation owners and who found in the government a partner willing to sell them land at a fraction of its value, often at prices as low as forty cents per acre.¹⁸ Speculators buying land at such prices would then resell it to aspiring plantation owners and make exorbitant profits.

One simple metric reveals the scale of change associated with this mania for land. In 1800, the United States produced 6.5 million pounds of cotton; by 1835 the five largest cotton-growing states alone were producing 500 million pounds of Petit Gulf, making it the country’s largest agricultural commodity. William Henry Sparks, a lawyer in Natchez, Mississippi, described how this cotton-generated land grab had completely transformed the landscape. “Where yesterday the wilderness darkened the land with her wild forests,” Sparks observed, “today the cotton plantations whitened the earth.”¹⁹ Peter Pitchlynn, a Choctaw removed in 1831 who returned to his home for a visit fifteen years later, was mournful upon seeing the land of his birth. What he witnessed was a “sickly” landscape of “vast cotton fields worked by hundreds of slaves whose work songs rang out like dirges across the ravaged delta.”²⁰

These cotton plantations anchored a system of forced labor, equated in countless slave narratives to incarceration, where bodily suffering was integral in the enforcement of confinement and the regimentation of the enslaved worker.²¹ Punishments meted out to slaves were undertaken by plantation owners as spectacle not only to discipline the worker, but to strike fear into those who witnessed such suffering with the message that disobedience, not to mention escape, was unthinkable. These same slave narratives, in turn, projected images of freedom equated to mobility, invariably framed in metaphors of birds in flight. It is little wonder that plantation owners such as Chancellor Harper cautioned his slave-owning brethren to be vigilant lest slaves be tantalized by ideas of escape inspired by the imagery of birds moving freely through space.²²

Central to this carceral landscape was a cartography of boundaries that slaves were forbidden to transgress. Anchoring this carceral environment was the plantation, a bounded space suffused with lines of control and thoroughly immersed in systems of surveillance, from the watchful gaze of the field supervisor to the owner himself. This gaze constantly monitored the enslaved and effectively chained them to the plantation and its surrounding cotton fields. Beyond the perimeter of the plantation in outlying woodlands, however, was the territorial space of potential freedom constantly beckoning to the enslaved but reachable only at great risk. Even in these outlying wooded areas, however, the same culture of slave owning was imprinted into the landscape, and thus a person with black skin moving freely in the woods absent a master was, at the very least, a suspected runaway. In this sense, even the space beyond the plantation came into the slave owner’s visual field by virtue of an ever-vigilant culture wary of any black person circulating beyond the

plantation boundary. The runaway who reached areas of “freedom,” but who would inevitably emerge from concealment in the woods to seek sustenance, always risked coming into the gaze of this slave-owning cultural landscape. A simple question, “To whom do you belong?” was generally sufficient for apprehending aspiring escapees, many of whom were caught and returned—and then brutally beaten—owing to these practices of surveillance that extended the line of control into the plantation hinterland.²³

If the legal and cultural landscape served as an instrument for incarcerating the enslaved, confinement of slaves also involved control over processes of bare life, with special emphasis on keeping the slave body barely above the minimum required for survival. Such control began with tightly regulated, meager food rations because a hungry slave had little energy to seek routes to freedom, but more importantly, a man already compromised by hunger was less capable of enduring the hardships associated with escape into the surrounding forests. Time after time runaways were apprehended because they were forced to come out of hiding in these forested areas to secure food. Upon relinquishing their position of concealment to obtain provisions, escapees emerged into the visual field, not necessarily of the slave owner directly, but of whites circulating in areas beyond the plantation who upon seeing a person with black skin in the woods posed an immediate threat to the runaway. By limiting food intake, “slaveholders were able to convert the distance needed for escape into privation,” recasting the environs beyond the plantation into areas of starvation.²⁴ In this way, control of bare life redefined the relationship between the body of the enslaved and the contours of the landscape, effectively remaking the landscape into a space of confinement.

Similarly, this remaking of space also occurred by the rationing of simple commodities such as shoes, recounted by numerous runaways who spoke of their feet as an index of their vulnerability. Without shoes, the limited capacity of runaways to endure the pain from traversing the landscape beyond the plantation served slaveholders as a *physiological perimeter*. One slave, Andrew Jackson, described how during an attempted escape, he had been slowed by numerous efforts to bathe his bruised and swollen feet and was run down barefoot in an open field. Through parsimony over such bare-life necessities as shoes, slaveowners were able to lay down a line of control at the plantation perimeter. In this way, body, bare life, and landscape became intertwined in a perverse, yet effective, system of enforced immobility.

In the end, the landscape that confined black slaves comprised a dual type of incarceration. In the first place, native groups were removed from their homelands and confined by the U.S. government in a system of reserves to make way for the onslaught of settlers seeking fortunes from cotton growing. As the indigenous were cleared from the lands and interned, a landscape of prison-like spaces associated with slave plantations emerged on the lands of evicted Native Americans and spread throughout the American South, immobilizing black slaves by chaining them to the property of their masters. In this way, American Indian reservations of removed indigenous Americans and the cotton plantations worked by slave labor were complementary elements of a landscape where two groups of people were confined and kept in bondage. With the native people forced into reservations, and blacks held on plantations, the landscape was cleared of color and essentially made white.

The *Colonized*: The Carceral Landscape of Colonial Algeria

At roughly the same time as U.S. slave owners were imposing a system of confinement on the landscape of the “cotton kingdom,” French colonization was establishing a similar project on the landscape of Algeria. Enduring for the next 130 years, colonization of Algeria introduced novel ways of integrating the various elements of confinement—surveillance, forced relocations, and, above all, the brutalization of the population. This campaign in Algeria was also noteworthy for the theorization it spawned among colonial military officers about best practices for subduing and controlling colonial subjects.²⁵

Central to early French colonization in Algeria was the idea of *la razzia* (a word borrowed, ironically, from the Arabic term, *ghaziyya*), denoting a brutal kind of warfare against civilians.²⁶ As a starting point for this civilian-directed campaign, however, *la razzia* involved the creation of a surveillance apparatus, the Bureaux Arabes, to gather intelligence on the Algerian population. After 1840, the Bureaux assumed a central role in the *razzia* campaign under the commander of French forces in Algeria, Marshall Thomas Robert Bugeaud. Insisting that knowledge was a supplement to brute force, Bugeaud believed it essential for the various Bureaux to know the country—its people, its customs, and its laws—and to become embedded in local affairs as a way of cultivating the loyalty of locals and, above all, finding out more about local resistance leaders. To this end, the Bureaux directed its staff to study local communities, especially in markets and in mosques, and to file reports on the situation uncovered through these intelligence-gathering sorties. Bugeaud also played an instrumental role in developing a system for monitoring the population through identity documents. In 1841, in conjunction with an edict forcing Algerians living near French settlements to relocate into “reserve areas,” Bugeaud made it mandatory for those confined to these areas to carry identity medallions as a prerequisite to exit and enter their reservations.²⁷

Nevertheless, if *la razzia* included a surveillance infrastructure for population control, it depended even more on the brutalization of Algerian civilians.²⁸ Promoted unflinchingly by Bugeaud, this effort consisted of attacks on the subsistence systems of the civilian population aimed at destroying peoples’ lands, livestock, crops, and fruit orchards. In this sense, *la razzia* was a targeted and systematic assault on bare life. Interestingly, these efforts at ravaging material life as a tactic of colonization were heartily endorsed by the celebrated French politician, historian, and political theorist Alexis de Tocqueville. Although critical in his 1841 *Essay on Algeria* of what he called the “Turkish manner” of indiscriminate killing of the population promoted by some French military officers, de Tocqueville fully supported French tactics of burning harvests, emptying grain silos, and killing livestock. “I think all means of destroying these tribes must be employed,” he wrote, “and we must do it by destroying harvests not only during harvest season but year-round.”²⁹ Aimed at producing a crisis of subsistence, such marauding had the more sinister purpose of seeking to break the will of the Algerians by inflicting the harshest forms of suffering on them.³⁰

This uninhibited plunder of Algerian material life profoundly altered the landscape. Bugeaud himself boasted that what had been hillsides of villages, orchards, and croplands were transformed into blackened wastelands.³¹ Very few of the country’s rural villages escaped this targeted destruction. As Jean-Jacques Pélissier, the commander who eventually replaced Bugeaud, was to

remark, “Wherever we go in Africa, men flee, and the trees disappear.”³² Indeed, Pélissier was a testament to this blackening of the landscape when, in June 1845, he perpetrated what was arguably the most heinous crime of early French colonization in Algeria: ordering soldiers under his command to set fires in caves where villagers from Dahra had retreated after their village had been plundered by his troops, a measure that resulted in the deaths of six hundred people.³³

These early practices of French colonization during the nineteenth century—information gathering; forcible population relocations; scorched-earth attacks on property, crops, and livestock; and bodily brutality—continued in later French campaigns of confinement and counterinsurgency in Algeria during the 1950s. Anchoring this twentieth-century campaign of confinement and population control was a form of surveillance connected to mapping the landscape known as *quadrillage*.

Initiated in 1954, but implemented more systematically in 1957 by the commander of French troops in Algeria at that time, General Raoul Salan, *quadrillage* divided the country into a grid of mapped quadrants or *secteurs*.³⁴ The aim of this program was to turn the landscape into discrete, knowable spaces where the population could be counted, measured, monitored, and placed under surveillance. Through such directed forms of information gathering, the military reasoned that it was possible to identify potential collaborators, as well as rebels and their sympathizers, facilitating efforts to subdue and control the space. For the urban space of Algiers, this campaign was overseen by Salan’s protégé, Roger Trinquier. For the Algerian capital, Trinquier created a special intelligence-gathering and mapping unit, the Dispositif de protection urbaine (DPU), that divided the city into sectors, subsectors, blocks, and buildings in what was effectively a Cartesian-like coordinate system. In each of these spaces, the DPU deployed French Muslim soldiers or locals who had served in the French army to spy on the local population with the aim of reporting on people’s movements and identifying those in the area considered to be threat.

In rural Algeria, *quadrillage* identified two types of quadrants critical to the aims of knowledge gathering and population control.³⁵ One type was described as “pacification zones”: largely rural villages where the French military engaged in a concerted surveillance campaign with the initial objective of learning about the population by monitoring its customs, habits, leaders, and circulation patterns. The more strategic aim of this effort, however, was to obtain the knowledge needed to identify insurgents concealed within the local population and to locate those in the community potentially sympathetic to the French, and thus recruitable as collaborators. As part of this campaign, residents of the pacified *secteur* were registered through census techniques and given identity cards that they had to carry at all times.

If the pacification zones were centers of surveillance; the second type of sector, known as *zones interdites* (forbidden areas), represented areas of direct confinement.³⁶ Beginning in 1957, the French army resettled rural Algerians into the equivalent of internment camps, known as *centres de regroupement*. From 1954–62, roughly 2.4 million rural Algerians—about 33 percent of the rural population—were “regrouped” into these internment camps while another 1.1 million fled to urban areas, mostly to Algiers. In the camps, food, water, medicine, and shelter itself were strictly controlled by the military and were sporadic, giving rise to incessant hunger and disease. This clearing and confinement of the countryside, however, had the additional rationale of making it more difficult for insurgents to traverse the countryside without being seen by the French military

and killed. In sum, *regroupement* not only created spaces of confinement on the landscape for those forcibly relocated; it also reorganized the landscape itself into a space of immobility by preempting possibilities for movement across space for those seeking to resist colonization.

Finally, to this already confined and surveilled landscape, the French added another key element: physical barriers built into the land aimed at impeding the mobility of Algerian insurgents across territorial space.³⁷ For the French military, the imperative of preventing free movement on the land assumed critical importance in 1956 when Tunisia, to the east of Algeria, and Morocco, to the west, won independence from France and became safe havens for Algerian insurgents to train recruits, obtain and stockpile weapons, and launch attacks against the French military. By 1957, however, the military had developed a blueprint to shut down these cross-border incursions, focusing on a system of physical impediments along the two borders.

Anchoring this system were two electrified barbed-wire fences with motion sensors and radar built along the borders of the two neighboring countries. In a 90-meter-deep area running on the Algerian side of the barriers, the French deployed land mines that created a virtually impassible geography for insurgents. At intervals of 2–3 kilometers were guard towers where a force of eighty thousand was dispersed to patrol the barricaded border areas. Along the Moroccan border, the barrier known as the Pedron line was roughly 90 kilometers in length, while the fencing of the Morice line along the Tunisian border was more formidable, at 460 kilometers. Designed to seal the Algerian territorial space and create an impassible border landscape, these elements inflicted heavy losses on insurgents who suffered an estimated six thousand casualties from fencing, land mines, and policing of the seam zone by French troops.

Although the Algerian resistance eventually forced the French military to withdraw from the country in 1962, the occupation of Algeria provided lessons in counterinsurgency not only to the French, but to a host of other purveyors of colonial counterinsurgent conflict—including the State of Israel.

The *Imprisoned*: Gaza Confined

Embedded in the carceral landscapes described above is a pattern of features that would reappear in the various confinement systems imposed on Gaza. In the first instance, those landscapes are profound embodiments of immobility marked by a population whose rights of free movement have been eliminated. Second, the three cases reveal techniques of knowledge gathering and surveillance of the targeted population to identify them and enforce the systems of immobility imposed upon them. Observable on these landscapes are strict controls over, and assaults on, systems of basic provisioning that brutalize the targeted groups and intensify their confinement and immobility. Finally, in all three cases, authorities enlist the landscape itself as an instrument of immobility, exploiting its physical and social attributes to surveil space with panoptic vision in order to apprehend movement while modifying the landscape to create physically impassable spaces.

These features of confinement landscapes become part of the carceral environment in Gaza along a pathway of historical memory marked by a line of Western military figures involved in subduing and confining groups of insurgent “Others” who end up influencing key figures of the Israeli leadership. This pathway encompasses the writings of French and English colonial military officers, from Bugeaud in the mid-nineteenth century to the English General C. E. Callwell, whose 1896 book *Small Wars: Their Principles and Practice* pays homage to Bugeaud while inspiring an entire cadre of twentieth-century promoters of counterinsurgency.³⁸ In his memoir, Callwell writes admiringly of the brutality employed in Algeria by Bugeaud who, according to Callwell, appreciated the fact that he had to reach the Algerians “through their crops, their flocks, and their property.” *Small Wars* would go on to influence Orde Wingate, one of the most prominent of all colonial theoreticians, described by Winston Churchill as “a man of genius.” It was the legacy of these ideas that made their way into the outlook and practices of the Zionists in Palestine. Wingate, for example, was revered by the early Israeli leadership, most notably the country’s first prime minister, David Ben-Gurion, and by the celebrated Israeli general Moshe Dayan. The latter wrote admiringly about how “every leader of the Israeli Army, even today, is a disciple of Wingate.”³⁹

At the same time, if Zionists studied the lessons of confinement and control in writings from Bugeaud to Wingate, their movement also appreciated the affinity of the Zionist settlement project with the experience of Anglo-American colonizers. Mainstream Zionists such as Bernard Rosenblatt, a member of the World Zionist Executive in Jerusalem in the 1920s, commonly spoke of Zionist pioneers in Palestine as “Jewish Puritans . . . facing the dangers of Indian warfare.”⁴⁰ It was Ze’ev Jabotinsky and revisionist Zionism, however, that most emphatically compared Zionist settlers in Palestine to colonizers in the United States while embracing the idea of confinement as a common cause of both settlement projects. With extraordinary candor and prescience, Jabotinsky cautioned his Zionist brethren that unless Zionists followed other colonizers and put in place policies harsh enough to subdue and confine the colonized behind the force of an “Iron Wall,” Zionist colonization would flounder.⁴¹

Nakba: Foundations of Gaza’s Carceral Space

From the inception of its founding as a state in May 1948, the Zionist regime turned to policies of confinement in order to consolidate territorial acquisitions gained from war and achieve certain ethno-religious demographic aims. Two groups of Palestinians were the targets of this confinement campaign.

One group consisted of those Palestinians who managed to remain *inside* what became the territorial container of the new state following the conflict of 1947–49, commonly referred to as Palestinian citizens of Israel (PCIs). Of this group, the story of the Bedouins from the Naqab desert in the south is most revealing.⁴² Roughly 90 percent of the pre-1947 population of Naqab Bedouins were evicted from the area by victorious Haganah militia and later the Israeli military. At the same time, authorities from the new state interned the remaining thirteen to fourteen thousand Bedouin in a million-dunum parcel of land near Beersheba, known as the Siyaj, an

Arabic word meaning “fence” or “enclosed area.” Dispossessed and confined in the Siyaj until 1966, Bedouins were without basic services, forbidden to build permanent housing, and required to obtain permits to enter and exit the Siyaj. According to Khalil A. from the Bedouin community of al-Sira, “What the State of Israel did in removing us from our land and transferring us to the Siyaj was exactly what the U.S. did in removing Indians from their lands and placing them in reservations.”⁴³

The second group comprises the 750,000 Palestinians who were driven from or fled their homes during the 1947–49 conflict and were forced to live as refugees in camps *outside* the frontiers of the new state in what is arguably the defining event of modern Palestinian history, the Nakba. In policing these lines and preventing those refugees from returning to their homes and property, the new state effectively confined them to spaces outside its territorial container. Of these displaced refugees, fully 200,000 of them went to Gaza—including many of the evicted Bedouins from the southern part of the Naqab.



Figure 1. Part of a mural commemorating the Nakba near Al-Azhar University, Gaza City. (2017, photo by the author)

Virtually overnight, the population of the Gaza Strip increased fourfold to 260,000 as the territory emerged as a haven for refugees. Not only did this resettlement of Palestinians in Gaza represent a confined population in terms of prohibitions on movement across lines of control. Those who arrived in Gaza from this exodus formed concentrations of refugees in *camps*, harkening back to camps of a more macabre variety during World War II, while echoing the variations on concentration and confinement from the history of slavery and colonization.⁴⁴

Palestinians who came to Gaza in this mass exodus known as the *hijra* expected to be there perhaps a few weeks and then return to their homes.⁴⁵ “We lived in Hamama, just north of

Gaza City near Majdal,” explained Ibrahim Omar Musa S., whose story is a metaphor for the experience of countless numbers of Gaza’s refugee population. Speaking from his home in present-day Gaza City, he said, “In 1948 we had to abandon our farm of four hundred dunums when Jewish soldiers came to Hamama and forced us out. We walked for three days to Gaza but thought we would be there only a few days, maybe a couple of weeks. . . . We lived in several places for the first two years, but in 1950 we moved into the Shati’ refugee camp—and lived there for the next twenty-five years.”⁴⁶ In this way, Shati’ functioned as a kind of carceral environment: a camp among camps of confined human beings frozen in space.⁴⁷



Figure 2. Ibrahim Omar Musa S. in his home in Gaza City. (2015, photo by the author)

Refugees in such camps suffered from constant shortages of food, but this situation was most severe in the camps in Gaza.⁴⁸ From 1948–56, a small but determined number of refugees from camps in Gaza secretly pushed across the lines of control to plough fields and harvest crops at their now-abandoned farms in a desperate effort to gather whatever foodstuffs they could secure in response to food shortages and acute hunger in the camps.⁴⁹ By June 1950, Israeli intelligence had already conceded the critical nature of this problem, writing that the refugees in Gaza were “condemned to utter extinction as the goods they brought with them are being used up bit by bit.”⁵⁰

Even though by the latter half of 1948, the State of Israel recognized the humanitarian crisis it had caused, it attempted through brute force to prevent refugees from returning to their homes and

farms for food and belongings. Military Order 40 instructed commanders in the southern district to stop these individuals by expelling them back to Gaza from the villages to which they were trying to return and destroying all buildings and croplands in the abandoned villages. This order instructed military commanders to survey the routes used by refugees to return to their villages and to lay land mines along those routes.⁵¹ In addition, the State of Israel reinforced this military response with a cordon of settlements—known as Mivtahim (so-called protective havens)—near the Gaza perimeter to fortify the frontier areas against returning refugees. Perhaps most draconian, however, was a “shoot to kill” policy instituted by the Israeli military to curb the return of Palestinians to their homes. In June 1949 the Israeli Army’s Southern Command General Yigal Allon declared an eight-kilometer-deep strip on the Israeli side of the border both with Jordan and Gaza to be areas where “every stranger found will be shot, without interrogation.” This policy resulted in thousands of Palestinian deaths between 1948 and 1956.⁵²

Not surprisingly, Palestinians reacted with outrage at this violence, and some engaged in a series of defensive reprisals against Israeli targets on the border blocking their pathway back to their homes, the most famous of which occurred in April 1956 when a group of Palestinians from Gaza crossed the line of control and killed Roi Rothberg, the security officer of nearby Kibbutz Nahal Oz.⁵³ Still, the shoot-to-kill orders, the laying of land mines, and the aggressive reinforcement of the lines of control had a dramatic impact on refugee returns. By the latter part of 1956, the traffic of Palestinians from camps in Gaza to their former homes and farms inside Israel essentially ceased with refugees interned in a partitioned and immobilized space.

Occupation: Tightening the System of Confinement

Military occupation of territory populated by civilians has as one of its primary aims the containment of people’s mobility.⁵⁴ When Israel, together with Britain and France, initiated its war on Egypt in 1956, ostensibly for protection of the Suez Canal, the new state exploited its role as part of the surprise invading force and occupied the Gaza Strip. Among the objectives of this initial Israeli occupation in Gaza was the elimination of Palestinian resisters to Israel known as *fedayin*.⁵⁵ In pursuit of this goal, the occupiers sought to lock down and affix the population in place as a first step in identifying and locating all males in Gaza aged fifteen to sixty—the most likely *fedayin* suspects—and enlisted the Israeli state security apparatus, Shin Bet, for this task. Drawing from a surveillance infrastructure used inside Israel to control PCIs placed under martial law since 1948–49, Shin Bet compiled lists for arrest, interrogation, and incarceration. In this sense, the State of Israel complemented its confinement of the Gazans enforced since 1948 through violent border policing, with the logic of occupation including movement controls, surveillance, and actual internment. By March 1957, however, international pressure forced Israel to relinquish its position in Gaza—but it returned ten years later, imposing what became a more permanent state of exception on the Palestinians of Gaza.

This second, more long-term Israeli occupation of Gaza began on 8 June 1967 after the Israeli military vanquished the armed forces of Egypt, Syria, and Jordan and seized territory formerly held by these Arab states. What differentiated the occupation of 1967, however, was the role of Jewish settlement as an instrument for enhancing Israeli control of the area, similar to what was

occurring in the other newly seized areas of the West Bank and the Golan Heights. Israeli general Ariel Sharon explained this rationale, recounting how, at a cabinet briefing, he recommended the creation of Jewish settlements—Jewish “fingers” as he called them—in Gaza to partition the district and better control the area. “I wanted [a settlement] between Gaza and [Dayr al-] Balah, one between [Dayr al-] Balah and Khan [Yunis], one between Khan [Yunis] and Rafah, and another west of Rafah,” he explained.⁵⁶ “If in the future we wanted in any way to control this area . . . we would need to establish a Jewish presence there.”⁵⁷ Sharon’s vision signaled how Jewish settlement would anchor a more confined space along with control over provisioning and bare life.

The most basic element needed for settlement is land, and Israel implemented a system of land seizures similar to that being used in the West Bank for Jewish settlement in the Gaza Strip. These expropriations in Gaza began in 1972, and by 1984 the Israeli occupation authorities had seized control of 31 percent of the land in the Gaza Strip; six years later, this figure increased to 58 percent.⁴² During this period, the landed footprint of these settlements was constantly expanding, owing to an increasing settler population and an ever-larger area takeover by settler agriculture. At the same time, buffer areas around these settlements, including areas of settler cultivation, were also expanding. In practice, an ever-shrinking land base stemming from Israeli land seizures for settlement meant that over half the territorial footprint in Gaza was off-limits to the Gazans, confining them to just over 40 percent of the area. More significantly, the area under Palestinian cultivation inside Gaza decreased from 198,000 to 100,000 dunums, a decline of nearly 50 percent that forced many Gazans out of what was historically their major economic activity. In this sense, the territorial space of Gaza itself was evolving into a more confined, prison-like environment under the occupation.



Figure 3. View of a portion of the Gush Katif settlement bloc. The cleared and denuded area in front of the settlement functioned as a security barrier and made it easier for sentries in the tower (center) to spot movement near the settlement. The image shows how land was taken out of circulation, removed from any agricultural use, and rendered off-limits to Gazans. (2005, photo by the author)

Complementing this program of settlement and immobility was the Israeli takeover of Gaza's water supply and distribution, reflecting an effort to control one of the essential elements of bare life.⁵⁸ On the one hand, this takeover involved direct appropriation of water sources inside Gaza, both surface water and water from Gaza's underground aquifers, by the Israeli water company, Mekorot. Supplementing this expropriation was the reallocation of water through a system of permits and quotas that diverted supplies from the Gazan people to settlers, and even to Jewish Israelis inside the Jewish state. Military Order 158 required Gazans to obtain permits for drilling any new water well but, in practice, such permits were almost never granted. By contrast, Israeli settlements were not only allowed to drill their own wells but were permitted to drill at depths far greater than their Palestinian counterparts, enabling the settlers to draw off a greater share of limited underground supplies. Quotas on water use, in turn, affected all Gazans, but the most draconian restrictions were imposed on the Strip's largest water users: farmers. As a result, the takeover of the water supply by Israel, and the redistribution and diversion of this resource to settlers and Jewish Israelis through quotas and permits ruptured the fabric of Gaza's primary economic sector—agriculture, especially citrus—by making scarce one of the essential inputs for farming. In this way, Israeli water policy rendered Gazans dependent on Israel not only for water itself, but also for foodstuffs owing to the impact of the water policy on Gaza's agriculture. Israel's land confiscations and takeover of water supplies in Gaza thus acted in concert to create a confined landscape, alongside restricted access to one of the most basic necessities of life.

Israeli authorities also implemented direct forms of confinement and immobility on the ground itself.⁵⁹ After initially relaxing the lines of control around the Gaza Strip in 1967, the State of Israel closed down this system in 1971 and authorized only three heavily monitored points of access into, and out of, Gaza: at Erez, Rafah, and Nahal Oz. Complementing this more tightly regulated space was the first effort by the State of Israel to seal the Gaza Strip by means of fencing around the Gaza perimeter. The occupation authorities also targeted what they perceived as epicenters of resistance—the refugee camps—demolishing thousands of houses in Jabalia, Rafah, and Shati' camps to widen roads within these communities that enabled easier access for military patrols. In addition, they built walls around camp perimeters with entry and exit controlled through monitored gates. All of these measures were aimed at controlling mobility.

Another critical instrument of immobility imposed inside the territory of Gaza was the checkpoint, the two most notorious of which were Abu Huli, located in the middle of the territory near the Dayr al-Balah refugee camp, and al-Matahin, located just south of Gaza City. Both checkpoints were located on the major north–south artery running the length of Gaza and controlled north–south movement. Anyone travelling from Rafah in the south to Gaza City and beyond, to Bayt Hanun or Bayt Lahiya—or in the opposite direction—would have to pass through these two points where the wait times could exceed one hour, and often much more. When travelling between Gaza City and Rafah, Hisham M. explained the ordeal: “Often, in trying to return home to Gaza City from Rafah, I would wait at Abu Huli but it would close and I would have to go to Khan Yunis and sleep overnight with friends and return the next day.”⁶⁰ Even more dramatically, individuals who were wanted by the Israeli military could never pass these checkpoints for fear of arrest. In this way, an entire segment of young Gazan men was unable to travel along the north–south artery from one end of Gaza to the other—for decades.

Finally, in a telling example of how the occupation regime in Gaza put in place its own version of the *quadrillage* in Algeria, Sharon, in his memoir, emphasized the need for the military to develop systems of surveillance to track people and their movements. His admitted goal was to locate and eliminate those in Gaza whom he designated as “terrorists.” Such a project, he reasoned, required “a detailed knowledge of everyday life [in Gaza]” that could be imprinted into maps, and to this aim, he divided the entire Gaza Strip into “squares,”

sometimes a mile by a mile, sometimes a mile by two miles. . . . Each square was given a number and into each square I put a squad of soldiers. ‘You only have one problem,’ I would tell them. ‘This one single square is your problem. It is your job to know this square inside and out, . . . the soldiers became inventive at these things, themselves. They might hide on the roof of a house just watching. They would perch in trees above favorite luncheon spots of farm workers. . . . Before long it seemed like all the trees were crawling with Israelis.’⁶¹

The World’s Largest Open-Air Prison

In an emphatic rebuke to the State of Israel for justifying its blockade of Gaza by reference to “rockets fired from the territory by Hamas,” journalist Amira Hass pointed out that the isolation and quarantine imposed on the territory predated Hamas and “began long before the Qassam rockets.”⁶² By the time the Nakba descended over Palestine, the Gaza Strip was already assuming the form of an immobilized and frozen space, enclosed by impassable lines of control, kept at the level of bare life, constantly surveilled and monitored, and bearing the brutality of incessant bodily violence. Yet, if the landscape of Gaza since 1948 is replete with echoes of past carceral environments, there is little denying that the siege imposed upon the territory since 2007 has given new meaning to the moniker assigned to Gaza as the “world’s largest open-air prison.”



Figure 4. Inside the Gaza Strip, north perimeter. (2017, photo by the author)

Perhaps paradoxically, it is the Oslo peace process that initiated this intensification of the carceral space that Gaza is today. Within one year of the 1993 Oslo I Accord, the State of Israel had initiated construction of a more formidable barrier around the Strip's perimeter and by 1996 had completed sixty kilometers of new barbed wire, sensor-laden fencing around Gaza.⁶³ By June 2001, in the context of the Second Intifada, Israel's military completely reengineered a far more impregnable system of impediments around Gaza that gave it the appearance of a more macabre, prison-like space.⁶⁴ On the northern perimeter and in certain sections, the barrier assumed the form of a concrete wall. Where fencing prevailed, the barrier was equipped with technologically advanced observation posts enabling soldiers on site or stationed remotely to monitor a field of view six kilometers inside the Gaza perimeter. The barrier was also demarcated by a five-hundred-meter buffer zone that was created by clearing all areas near the structure of any obstructions interfering with sightlines, including croplands and orchards. These changes to the landscape, in turn, were but a signal of what the territory and its residents were poised to endure with the blockade.



Figure 5. In the shadow of a surveillance tower, young boys salvage concrete and stone from an area destroyed by Israeli missile fire near the Erez checkpoint, at the northern edge of the Gaza Strip. (2012, photo by the author)

On 19 September 2007 the State of Israel designated the Gaza Strip a “hostile territory” and, with its decision to blockade the area, implemented a campaign of economic warfare against the people of Gaza. This campaign was designed to bring the territory to the precipice of bare life by means of a quarantine, keeping entry of basic goods into the territory to a “humanitarian minimum.”⁶⁵ At the same time, the siege placed strict prohibitions on human mobility in and out of the territory. In addition, one of the early measures of the siege was the designation by the Israeli military of “Access Restricted Areas” (ARAs) along the perimeter lines of the Gaza Strip where Palestinian presence was forbidden. This policy for restricting movement resulted in the removal

of almost twenty thousand acres for circulation and use, much of it the most fertile agricultural land on the Strip's eastern edge.⁶⁶

In using the blockade to control provisioning, the State of Israel itself made estimates of the precipice for bare life in Gaza.⁶⁷ According to its calculations, Gazans required 106 truckloads of food and essentials be brought daily into the territory. Just prior to the blockade—still a period of intense deprivation—food and basic imports into Gaza amounted to about 400 daily truckloads. In this sense, the blockade was going to reduce consumption by roughly 75 percent. During the first six months of the blockade, however, what actually passed into Gaza was a daily average of 67 truckloads of food and basic supplies, roughly 65 percent of what Israel itself considered bare life. In addition to these cuts, Israeli authorities imposed severe electricity and fuel cuts on the population, a decision upheld by the Israeli Supreme Court that these services were not essential to human needs.⁶⁸ By 2008, a cable from the U.S. embassy in Tel Aviv acknowledged that “as part of their overall embargo plan against Gaza, Israeli officials have confirmed on multiple occasions [to us] that they intend to keep the Gazan economy on the brink of collapse without quite pushing it over the edge.”⁶⁹



Figure 6. Gazans jostle for gasoline at one of the few operational service stations near Bayt Hanun while a policeman with his hand on the shoulder of one person tries to keep order. (2012, photo by the author)

One of the most revealing examples of this immobility imposed on Gaza's economic space comes from the fishing sector, whose activity is inherently dependent on access to, and mobility on, the sea. In the year 2000, Gaza had roughly 10,000 registered fishermen.⁷⁰ By the end of 2019, the number of

individuals earning a living from fishing had shrunk to 3,617. As part of its blockade, the State of Israel established a maritime exclusion zone that reduced the area where fishing boats could operate. Already by 2006, the Israeli Navy had reduced the fishing limit on boats from Gaza from twenty to ten nautical miles, but by 2009, the fishermen of Gaza were restricted to a three-mile area, a limit that nevertheless fluctuated according to the whims of the navy—at times reaching six miles, while at other times, fishing was prohibited. With so many boats confined to such a small area, the result was overfishing of extremely limited stocks close to shore while more lucrative fish—large sardines, tuna, and mackerel—catchable at ten to twenty miles were well beyond the allowable range. In the process, fishermen have become completely impoverished with 95 percent of them earning less than \$4.50 per day. In many cases, however, fishing was the only job they had ever known and the only means of supporting their families. “I have been fishing for thirty years,” explained Adel S. from his boat at the Gaza port. “It’s the only work I have ever done. My problem is that I can usually only go out two miles. If you go closer to the three-mile limit, you risk getting arrested—or worse, shot!”⁷¹



Figure 7. Confinement for Gaza fishermen means depleted stocks and small fish as catch. (2017, photo by the author)

Such violent enforcement of the fishing limit referred to by Adel S. is but another affirmation of the ties between confinement and bodily brutalization. The Israeli Navy enforces fishing limits by routinely opening fire at fishing boats, resulting in casualties and damage to fishing craft. Often, those fired upon try to escape by jumping into the sea and are apprehended by Israeli naval vessels while their boats and equipment are confiscated, and their nets permanently lost. Not surprisingly, such violence discourages many fishermen from pursuing

their craft even within the permissible fishing areas. Fatalities are not unusual. From 2007–13, Israeli Navy patrol boats killed 5 fishermen from Gaza and injured 25 in the course of enforcing the fishing limit. More recently, in 2018, 4 fishermen were killed in such incidents, while during 2019, Israeli naval forces opened fire on fishing boats off the Gaza coast on 347 occasions causing 16 serious injuries.



Figure 8. A fisherman mending nets at his home in Shati' camp. (2017, photo by the author)

In many ways, the violence directed at Gaza's fishermen testifies to what has arguably become the defining attribute of Gaza as a carceral space under blockade—the bodily brutalization of the Gazan people stemming not only from economic warfare but from incessant military bombardments.⁷² Such military actions are not new in Gaza. The 1956 massacre in Khan Yunis, during which the Israeli military killed an estimated 275 to 515 Palestinians, is perhaps the earliest of these incursions.⁷³ Nevertheless, the frequency and ferocity of these assaults just prior to, and during, the blockade—and, above all, the impacts of these actions on the young—only magnify the interplay of confinement and bare life.

In 2006, just before the formal declaration of the blockade during Operation Summer Rains, the Israeli military killed 416 Gazans, including 48 children, while destroying roughly 500 homes. In 2008–9, during Operation Cast Lead, the figures included 1,416 fatalities, including 295 children, with 3,540 homes destroyed. By far, the most devastating of these major bombardments was the 2014 operation known as Protective Edge. During this attack, well over 2,000 Gazans lost their lives, including 526 children, while over 18,000 homes were destroyed. Given that virtually all children born since 2006 in Gaza have never left the small space of the Gaza Strip, this cohort of young persons has a life experience consisting essentially of confinement, impoverishment, brutalization, psychological trauma, and death.⁷⁴

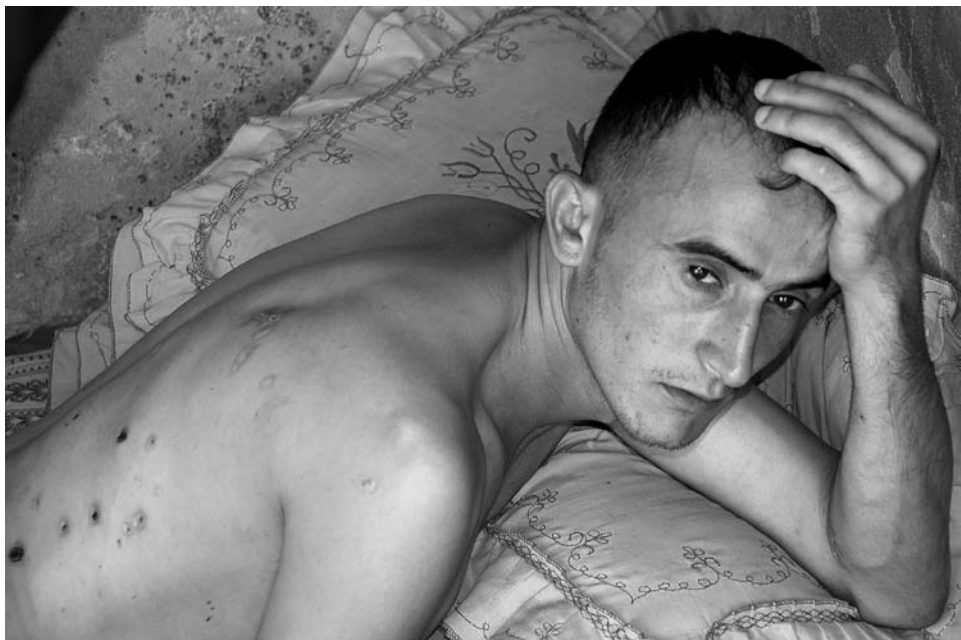


Figure 9. Resident of Rafah wounded during Operation Summer Rains being treated by the Palestinian Medical Relief Society after the Israeli military shelled his home. (2006, photo by the author)



Figure 10. Youth in Gaza City peering into the just-lowered coffin of a ten-year old killed by an “errant” Israeli missile strike on a car during Operation Summer Rains. (2006, photo by the author)

This inventory of houses destroyed reveals a final point about the role of surveillance in the confinement and brutalization of the people in Gaza. During the onslaught of Protective Edge, the State of Israel made numerous public references to its sense of compassion when it was revealed that the Israeli military telephoned owners of houses minutes before they were to be destroyed so that the families could escape with their lives. Never did a single major media outlet inquire as to how it was possible for Israel to make such phone calls. That these calls were possible, however, stems from the fact that the State of Israel still maintains information on every Gazan. Despite its “disengagement” from Gaza in 2005, Israel retains one of the most critical elements of its surveillance infrastructure, a population registry for Gaza, from which it was able to triangulate information on addresses of targeted houses, the houses’ map coordinates, and the telephone numbers of residents at the targeted addresses. From this perspective, the warnings given to Gazans before the bombardment of their homes are not even remotely compassionate. They are instead a reminder of Israel’s panoptic gaze in imprisoning Gaza.



Figure 11. A Family being treated in one of the mobile clinics of the Palestinian Medical Relief Society in Bayt Hanun. (2015, photo by the author)

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In 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights affirmed in Article 13 that freedom of movement within and between nation-states was fundamental to the human condition. Ironically, in that same year, Palestinians who had just become refugees in Gaza, and who were seeking to return to their homes and farms within the newly created State of Israel, were forcibly prevented from exercising this basic human right. In many respects, confinement and its ancillary complements of surveillance, bodily brutality, impoverishment, and ongoing degradation of the

landscape, have defined much of Gaza's history ever since the United Nations passed its landmark declaration. From 1948 onward, but especially after 1967, the confinement practices imposed on Gaza have only intensified, reaching new levels of control over bare life with a formal blockade put in place in 2007 and still enforced today, imbuing the territory with its now-familiar moniker as the world's largest open-air prison. Now effectively quarantined, Gaza has its own historically distinct attributes, but as this essay has argued, what defines Gaza as a unique kind of lockdown finds resonance in certain landscapes of the past. Such a comparison does not diminish the suffering endured by the Gazan people at the hands of their keepers but instead amplifies their experience as heirs to groups of people resisting power and domination while fighting for their rights.



Figure 12. Young Gazans in front of their house in the Shuja'iya neighborhood destroyed in Operation Protective Edge. (2014, photo by the author)

At this moment, in what is a truly unsettling and even lurid turn of the events, the world is poised to confront something of what Gazans have been forced to endure for the last fourteen years, if not for the past seven decades. At this writing, country after country is forcing its citizenry into forms of quarantine in response to Covid-19 akin to what Foucault described as the lockdowns in European plague-stricken towns. It did not take long for social media to begin making the obvious connection to the plight of the Gazans. "Dear world," reads one Facebook post, "How is the lockdown?" The "letter" is signed from Gaza.⁷⁵ Indeed, lockdown is now something people virtually everywhere associate with hardship, distress, and morbidity. In these circumstances, the idea of deliberately placing an entire population—including children—under quarantine, not because they are sick but in fact to punish them, can only be interpreted as something cruel and unusual. If ever there

were a moment of opportunity to change the conversation about Gaza among a world community previously indifferent to the injustices suffered by Gazans under the blockade, that time might be now. For the past two years, the Gazans have been trying to convey their plight to the world through weekly mass protests at the sites of the fencing and walls that symbolize the confinement forced upon them. Known as the Great March of Return, these actions have been met with a violent response by the State of Israel, and despite the untold injuries and fatalities inflicted upon unarmed protestors, the Gazans have encountered a mostly eerie silence from the rest of the world. Perhaps now, people everywhere may be open to a different discourse about the blockade of Gaza and the forcible quarantine and punishment of the Gazans—one that affirms unequivocally, as stated in the Universal Declaration, that they are entitled to the same rights as everyone else.



Figure 13. Children just getting out of school in Jabalia. (2012, photo by the author)

About the Author

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ENDNOTES

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- 3 In this regard see Julie Peteet, "A Fortress Country and a Gated Enclave: Locating the Palestinian Margin" in *Gaza-Palestine: Out of the Margins*, ed. Mehrene Larudee (Birzeit: Ibrahim Abu-Lughod Institute of International Studies, Birzeit University, 2011), pp. 50–76, <http://ialiis.birzeit.edu/sites/default/files/Gaza-Palestine-Out-of-the-Margins.pdf>.
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- 43 Fields, *Enclosure*, p. 258.
- 44 Ariella Azoulay, "Concentration-Place," in *Gaza as Metaphor*, ed. Helga Tawil-Souri and Dina Matar (London: Hurst, 2016), p. 196.
- 45 Ilana Feldman, "Home as a Refrain: Remembering and Living Displacement in Gaza," *History and Memory* 18, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2006): p. 23.
- 46 Ibrahim Omar Musa S., in conversation with the author, 3 August 2015, Gaza.
- 47 See Jihad Abusalim, "From Fence to Fence: Retelling Gaza's Story," in *Gaza as Metaphor*, p. 85.

- 48 Benny Morris, *Israel's Border Wars, 1948–1956: Arab Infiltration, Israeli Retaliation, and the Countdown to the Suez War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp 35–36, 53.
- 49 Feldman, “Home as a Refrain,” p. 22.
- 50 From Abusalim, “From Fence to Fence,” p. 90.
- 51 For the rest of this paragraph, see Morris, *Israel's Border Wars*, pp. 124–135, 137; Azoulay, “Concentration-Place,” pp. 199–200.
- 52 Morris, *Israel's Border Wars*, p. 137.
- 53 In a startling eulogy of Rothberg, Moshe Dayan essentially concedes as cruel the confinement imposed on the people of Gaza. “Let us not hurl blame at the murderers,” Dayan implores his audience. “Why should we complain of their hatred for us? Eight years have they sat in the refugee camps of Gaza, and seen, with their own eyes, how we have made a homeland of the soil and villages where they and their forebears once dwelt. Not from the Arabs of Gaza must we demand the blood of Roi, but from ourselves. How our eyes are closed to the reality of our fate, unwilling to see the destiny of our generation in its full cruelty.” See Mitch Ginsburg, “When Moshe Dayan Delivered the Defining Speech of Zionism,” *Times of Israel*, 28 April 2016, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/when-moshe-dayan-delivered-the-defining-speech-of-zionism/>.
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- 58 This paragraph relies on Roy, *The Gaza Strip*, pp. 165–175.
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- 61 Ariel Sharon, *Warrior: The Autobiography of Ariel Sharon* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), pp. 252, 254–55; Khalili, *Time in the Shadows*, p. 202.
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- 67 This paragraph relies on Roy, *The Gaza Strip*, pp. xxvi–xxx.
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- 69 Roy, *The Gaza Strip*, p. xxviii.
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- 73 Filiu, *Gaza*, p. 97.
- 74 This point has been repeatedly emphasized to me by staff at the Gaza Community Mental Health Program, notably the late Dr. Eyad el-Sarraj and Dr. Yasser Abu Jamei, as well as Dr. Aed Yaghi at the Palestinian Medical Relief Society. See also Ahmed Abu Artema, "My Children Are Too Young to Know War So Well," *The Nation*, 21 November 2019, <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/gaza-bombing-children/>; and Sarah Helm, "Homeless in Gaza," *New York Review of Books*, 18 January 2018, pp. 24–26.
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