



THE VIRUS, THE SETTLER, AND THE SIEGE GAZA IN THE AGE OF CORONA

DR. G. S. ABU-SITTAH

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COVER PHOTO

A Palestinian employee of the Ministry of Health wearing protective gear takes part in simulation training against the coronavirus (COVID-19) organized by the Ministries of Health and the Interior at a hospital in Gaza city on July 18, 2020.

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INTRODUCTION

THE GAZA STRIP is a space apart. For over a decade and a half, it has been hemmed in and besieged by Israel, abetted by Egypt in its cruel endeavor. The siege has reduced the territory's inhabitants to the barest level of existence, even as Israel, one of the greatest military powers on earth, regularly surveilles and uses the slightest sign of resistance as a pretext to bombard the 2-million strong population. The people of Gaza live in deplorable conditions, deprived of potable water, fuel, electric power, construction materials, and a vast range of ordinary goods, while waiting for another Israeli escalation. Immobilized in an area of 365 square kilometers, they are robbed of the ability to travel and of most other elements of human freedom.

All of this takes place daily in a vacuum, a space of exception and of silence about these and other daily infringements on human dignity that are rendered banal by the insidious propaganda generated by Israel and its enablers in the Western media. Driven by an unceasing emphasis on Israel's security, this false narrative stigmatizes and maligns the utterly insecure population of the Gaza Strip. Most of them are descendants of Palestinians driven from their homes in what is now southern Israel in the mass ethnic cleansing of 1948.

The struggle of Gazans to resist these appalling conditions—whether peaceful as in the protests of the Great March of Return, or violent—is invariably coded as aggression by Israel and its media partners, which casually label them as “terrorists” and thereby unworthy of sympathy or even attention, let alone relief from their ordeal. At best, theirs is seen as a tragic humanitarian case. In the essay that follows, Ghassan Abu-Sittah emphasizes the demobilizing logic behind this approach, for as he points out, “[h]umanitarian interventions are constituted as the opposite of political ones.”

As Abu-Sittah explains, the drive towards elimination and the increasingly restrictive enclosure of the indigenous population that is the essential dynamic of settler colonialism provides the best explanation of what Israel is doing in, and to, Gaza. He expands on this insight, laying bare the cold logic behind Israel's policies towards the Gaza Strip in particular, and the whole of Palestine in general, during the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

Abu-Sittah belongs to a well-known Gazan family, with a large network of relatives, colleagues, and friends in the territory. He is a distinguished plastic surgeon trained in the UK, who for many years taught at the American University of Beirut while also volunteering as a reconstructive surgeon in the Gaza Strip, Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon, and, most recently, after the Beirut port explosion of 4 August 2020. In consequence, he has had extensive experience with the treatment of war wounds and reconstructive surgery. Thus, he knows from extensive personal experience, as do few others, the intimate, human cost of the savage trauma that has been inflicted on Gaza over a decade and a half, largely out of the sight and hearing of the world. In the essay that the Institute for Palestine Studies publishes here to fill a gap in public understanding of the worldwide Covid-19 pandemic, Abu-Sittah

connects this trauma to the broader health and nutritional circumstances resulting from the Israeli siege.

As this essay went to press, the first community transmission of Covid-19 was reported in the Gaza Strip, now totaling almost two hundred cases, originating with a family of four in al-Maghazi refugee camp after contact with a visiting family member who tested positive after departing from Gaza.

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“The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the ‘state of emergency’ in which we live is not the exception but the rule.”

Theses on the Philosophy of History, Walter Benjamin

GLOBALLY, the COVID-19 pandemic has acted as a stressor that delineated power structures and the gradients within them at a national and supranational level. The study of epidemics has always offered insight into “the underlying structures of social relationship within and across group boundaries, including the mechanisms used to sustain complex social architectures of inequality over time.”¹ Like the bodies they afflict, these diseases are physical and symbolic artifacts that are “both naturally and culturally produced, and securely anchored in a particular historical moment.”² Pandemics can therefore either function socially as events, as developed by Alain Badiou,³ or alternatively as crises, as examined by Michel Foucault in his 1973–1974 lectures at the College de France.⁴ When a pandemic constitutes an event, it is an incident that is “absolutely detached from, or unrelated to, all the rules of the situation” and becomes a radical rupture.⁵ Whereas crisis, for Foucault, is experienced as “an intrinsic feature of the disease,” an epiphanic process through which “the reality of the disease becom[es] truth.” The pandemic is experienced as a revelatory incident during which what “appeared in its truth” was not the plague as a bacteriological threat but, instead, a cultural and political disease.⁶

Historians have explored the ways in which pandemics and quarantines have fostered, challenged, or instituted economic and power relations on the ground.^{7,8} Roy MacLeod noted when studying the influenza pandemic in Africa at the turn of the twentieth century that “epidemics also created conditions favorable to the consolidation of imperial or government rule.”⁹ The bubonic plague of 1901 in Cape Town, South Africa, resulted in the quarantine and forced eviction of most of the city’s African population to racially segregated quarantine camps. This experience later became the harbinger of future evictions and a precursor to racial segregation in the form of townships during apartheid.¹⁰

1. Merrill Singer, “Pathogens Gone Wild? Medical Anthropology and the ‘Swine Flu’ Pandemic,” *Medical Anthropology* 28, no. 3 (2009): pp. 199–206

2. Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Margaret M. Lock, “The Mindful Body: A Prolegomenon to Future Work in Medical Anthropology,” *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 1 (1987): pp. 6–41.

3. Alain Badiou, *Being and Event* (London: Continuum, 2007).

4. Michel Foucault, *Psychiatric Power: Lectures at the College de France, 1973–1974* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

5. Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil* (London: Verso, 2002).

6. Foucault, *Psychiatric Power*, p. 243.

7. Alison Bashford, *Quarantine: Local and Global Histories*, ed. Alison Bashford (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

8. John Chircop and Francisco Javier Martinez, eds., *Mediterranean Quarantines, 1750–1914: Space, Identity and Power* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018).

9. Roy MacLeod and Milton Lewis, eds., *Disease, Medicine and Empire: Perspectives on Western Medicine and the Experience of European Expansion* (London: Routledge, 1989).

10. Alexandre I R White, “The Art of Medicine, Historical Linkages: Epidemic Threat, Economic Risk, and Xenophobia,” *The Lancet* 395 (April 2020): pp. 1250–1251.

In this essay I will use what we know about the nature of Israeli settler colonialism and its siege of the Gaza Strip to guide us on how it will deal with this unprecedented event. I will explore those aspects of settler colonialism that influence Israeli policies and the challenges or opportunities that this pandemic offers to further its objectives in the Gaza Strip and particularly its endless siege. By examining the siege of Gaza and its utility to the Israeli colonial project, I hope to understand the dynamics of Israel's actions with regard to the pandemic, which in turn offers an opportunity to probe settler colonialism's strategic versatility in the face of such a historic challenge.

Why Settler Colonialism

In 1998, when Patrick Wolfe published his seminal book, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology*, he offered one of this field's founding statements: "[I]nvasion is a structure not an event."¹¹ Wolfe later stated that settler colonialism's essential feature is "a sustained institutional tendency to supplant the indigenous population," a cultural logic of elimination that "reconciles a range of historical practices that might otherwise seem distinct."¹² This logic of elimination, which Wolfe posits as the essence of the relationship between the settlers and the colonized, has to be the starting point for any analysis of the past and future of the Palestinian people, including this pandemic. It is in the very nature of structures that, often as not, the deep-seated regularities linking individual events can be traced forward as well as backward in time, particularly when they are, as he noted, "impervious to regime change."¹³ Reading settler colonialism as a structure exposes that it cannot be relegated to the past and that the present pandemic must be historicized.¹⁴ The process of settler colonialism is constantly being reinvented,¹⁵ and its logic is maintained by the rearrangement of colonial practices and discourses in contemporary times. Recognizing it as a structure rather than as an event allows us to chart Israeli policies toward the Palestinians during this pandemic as a product of the same logic that initially informed frontier killing as it mutates into different modalities, discourses, and institutional formations during the course of the pandemic. Just as settler colonialism has updated its racist discourse on racialized native populations—from being seen as backward, barbarous, or savage to then being viewed as Arab-Muslim-terrorists¹⁶—it can also produce the necessary stigmatization during this pandemic. Pandemics never emerge in a vacuum, and they serve as a "hegemonic hierarchy-legitimizing myth."¹⁷ A similar process can

11. Patrick Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology: The Politics and Poetics of an Ethnographic Event* (London: Cassell, 1999), p. 2.; "Nation and MiscegeNation: Discursive Continuity in the Post-Mabo Era," *Social Analysis* 36 (1994): p. 96.

11. Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006): pp. 387–409.

12. Wolfe, "Nation and MiscegeNation: Discursive Continuity in the Post-Mabo Era," p. 96.

13. Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native"

14. Bruno Huberman and Reginaldo Mattar Nasser, "Pacification, Capital Accumulation, and Resistance in Settler Colonial Cities: The Cases of Jerusalem and Rio de Janeiro," *Latin American Perspectives* 46, no. 3 (March 2019): 131–148.

15. J. Kehaulani Kauanui, "'A Structure, Not an Event': Settler Colonialism and Enduring Indigeneity," *Lateral* 5.1 (Spring 2016).

16. Huberman and Nasser, "Pacification, Capital Accumulation, and Resistance in Settler Colonial Cities: The Cases of Jerusalem and Rio de Janeiro."

17. Singer, "Pathogens Gone Wild? Medical Anthropology and the 'Swine Flu' Pandemic," pp. 199–206, p. 202.

“Reading settler colonialism as a structure exposes that it cannot be relegated to the past and that the present pandemic must be historicized.”

be seen in Israel's selective dismissal and rewriting of international law. Colonel Daniel Reisner, the former head of the international law department of the Israeli army, stated, “The whole of international law is now based on the notion that an act that is forbidden today becomes permissible if executed by enough countries. . . International

law progresses through violations.”¹⁸ In the meantime, anthropologist Deborah Bird Rose once noted that, to get in the way of settler colonization, all the native has to do is stay home.¹⁹ This essay is based on the premise that the structural continuity of settler colonialism has predetermined the future.

Titration Life: The Siege of Gaza

On 15 August 2005, Israel began its withdrawal from the land mass of the Gaza Strip, which it had occupied since the 1967 war. Over the course of 38 years, Israel had established some twenty-one settlements across the coastal enclave and transferred approximately 9,000 settlers into its territory. By the end of 2007, Israel had completely sealed Gaza's borders²⁰ and began what Nurhan Abujidi called a “State of Urbicide that presents the extreme condition of the State of Siege”²¹— a permanent state of invasion, destruction, and extreme strangulation²² in a landmass designated as a “geography of dispossession” that is marked by the violent practices of enforced displacement and expropriation.²³ As was fundamental to all its decisions during the Oslo process, Israel did what all colonialist projects have done throughout history. It chose dominion, which inhered in European sovereigns alone, over occupancy, which entitled natives to pragmatic use of the land.²⁴ This allowed the Israeli state to retain the ultimate expression of sovereignty, the power and the capacity to dictate who may live and who must die.²⁵

The siege of Gaza is best understood in terms of a chemical titration reaction, wherein the experiment's two components are life and death. In chemical titration reactions, two reagents are mixed until they produce a third reactant of a required acidity. For Palestinian lives, the target of this titration reaction lies between Martha Nussbaum's “two distinct thresholds.” One of “capability to function beneath which

18. Atef Abu Saif, *Sleepless in Gaza: Israeli Drone War on the Gaza Strip* (Rosa Luxembourg Stiftung Regional Office Palestine: March 2014).

19. Deborah Bird Rose, *Hidden Histories: Black Stories from Victoria River Downs, Humbert River and Wave Hill Stations* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1991), p. 46.

20. Rebecca Stead, “Remembering Israel's ‘Disengagement’ from Gaza,” *Middle East Monitor*, 15 August 2019, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20190815-remembering-israels-disengagement-from-gaza/>.

21. Nurhan Abujidi, “The Palestinian States of Exception and Agamben,” *Contemporary Arab Affairs* 2, no. 2 (April 2009): pp. 272–91.

22. Nurhan Abujidi, “The Palestinian States of Exception and Agamben,” *Contemporary Arab Affairs* 2, no. 2 (2019): pp. 272–291.

23. Joseph Pugliese, “Technologies of Extraterritorialisation, Statist Visuality and Irregular Migrants and Refugees,” *Griffith Law Review* 22 (2019): pp. 571–597.

24. Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” pp. 387–409.

25. Achille Mbembe and Libby Mjeintjes, “Necropolitics,” *Public Culture* 15, no. 1 (Winter 2003): pp. 11–40.

a life will be so impoverished that it will not be human at all; and a somewhat higher threshold, beneath which those characteristic functions are available in such a reduced way that, though we may judge the form of life a human one, we will not think it a *good* human life.” The siege aims to condemn the inhabitants of Gaza to “a kind of premature death, the death of a form of flourishing.”²⁶ As far back as 1959, Frantz Fanon described how “this gnawing at the existence of the colonized tends to make of life . . . an incomplete death.”²⁷ For this reason, Jasbir Puar’s conception of a bio-necro collaboration is an appropriate analytic to examine Israel’s past and present management of the siege as well as its future actions.

Sieges are a form of low-intensity warfare based on persistent pressure.²⁸ Gaza’s small size, population density, and time elapsed under the blockade are weaponized to produce a baseline of spatial violence²⁹ onto which different policies can be added to properly titrate people’s existence in Gaza between life and death. But even this baseline itself varies. Siege is a dynamic process that shifts in severity and practice monthly and daily.³⁰ By adjusting the depth of the “buffer zone” that runs along the internal perimeter of Gaza and by varying Gaza’s maritime boundary, the spatial violence of the siege can be ratcheted up.³¹ Both buffer zone and maritime border have the added value of restricting access to farmland and fishing grounds,³² giving this fine-tuning mechanism a nutritional and economic dimension.

In addition to these spatial or territorial strategies,³³ nutrition has also been weaponized in this titration reaction. From 2006–10, Israel severely curbed imports of foodstuffs yet claimed to restrict only goods “not vital for the survival of the civilian population.”³⁴ Released in October 2010, the “Red Lines” document revealed how the Israeli government conducted surveys to calculate a “minimal subsistence basket” for Gaza—that is, a basket of consumer products just shy of producing malnutrition.³⁵ From that minimum, it inferred the maximum number of food trucks to be allowed through the siege every day.³⁶ The result is that about

26. Martha Nussbaum, “Human Capabilities, Female Human Beings,” in Nussbaum and Jonathan Glover, eds., *Women, Culture and Development: A Study of Human Capabilities* (Oxford: Clarendon Press Oxford, 1995), p. 81.

27. Frantz Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism* (Boston: Grove Atlantic, 1994), p. 128.

28. Yves Winter, “The Siege of Gaza: Spatial Violence, Humanitarian Strategies, and the Biopolitics of Punishment,” *Constellations* 23, no. 2 (2016): p. 308–319.

29. Winter, “The Siege of Gaza: Spatial Violence, Humanitarian Strategies, and the Biopolitics of Punishment.”

30. R.J. Smith, “Graduated Incarceration: The Israeli Occupation in Subaltern Geopolitical Perspective,” *Geoforum* 42 (2011): pp. 316–328.

31. Francesco Segregondi, “The Zone in Reverse: Logistical Power and the Gaza Blockade,” *The Architecture of Logistics* (Autumn/Winter 2018): pp. 37–52.

32. Maureen Clare Murphy, “Israel Shot at Gaza Fishers 347 Times in 2019,” *The Electronic Intifada*, 10 January 2020, <https://electronicintifada.net/blogs/maureen-clare-murphy/israel-shot-gaza-fishers-347-times-2019>.

33. Robert David Sack, *Human Territoriality: Its Theory and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

34. Conal Urquhart, “Gaza on Brink of Implosion as Aid Cut-off Starts to Bite,” *The Guardian*, 15 April 2006, accessed 7 June 2012, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2006/apr/16/israel>.

35. See Gisha’s unofficial translation of the Israeli Ministry of Defense, Coordination of Government Activities in the Territories’s Order no. 605, “Procedure for monitoring and assessing inventories in the Gaza Strip,” within “Re: Administrative Petition 2744/09 Gisha v. Ministry of Defense – Transfer of Documents Requested in the Petition,” 13 October 2010, <https://www.gisha.org/UserFiles/File/HiddenMessages/DefenseMinistryDocumentsRevealedFOIAPetition.pdf>

36. Amira Hass, “2,279 Calories per Person: How Israel Made Sure Gaza Didn’t Starve,” *Haaretz*, 17 October 2012, <https://www.haaretz.com/.premium-israel-s-gaza-quota-2-279-calories-a-day-1.5193157>.

two-thirds of the people living in Gaza are food insecure today.³⁷ As Dov Weisglass, a senior advisor to the Israeli cabinet, said in 2006, they are “on a diet” but are not going to “die of hunger.”³⁸

The same policy applies to other basic needs of the Palestinians in Gaza like electricity, fuel, water, and cement. Power and fuel shortages in turn cripple critical infrastructure, including emergency medical services, garbage collection, and sewage and water treatment. Over time, the technical apparatus employed to channel the circulation of such indispensable supplies has undergone significant upgrades. Then vice prime minister Haim Ramon coined the term “infrastructural oxygen” to describe his new doctrine of cutting off Gaza’s electricity, fuel, and water supply.³⁹ In the aftermath of the 2014 war, the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism, a data-driven logistical framework regulating the inflow of construction materials, was set up.⁴⁰ Nothing escapes the burette of this titration reaction. In 2017, only 54 percent of patients from Gaza received a permit in time for their hospital appointment,⁴¹ while in January 2020, some 2 percent of Gaza patient applicants who were denied an Israeli permit to get treatment in Jerusalem, the West Bank, or Israeli hospitals had appointments for cancer care.⁴² Israel’s continuous use of drone strikes allows it to continually top off the titration solution with the necessary level of violence.⁴³

Yet, unlike a carefully executed chemical reaction, this biopolitical experiment still has irregularities that require cyclical resetting. Every few years the system is reset by what Israeli military leaders call “mowing the lawn.”⁴⁴ Repeated air raids and incursions in addition to the three wars waged on the Gaza Strip are an integral part of the siege system rather than an abdication of its logic. Lori Allen has warned that acute increases in violence over a short period of time have the “paradoxical effect of calling attention to only certain forms and levels of violence in Gaza, while obfuscating and normalizing the ‘everyday’ violence of Israel’s military occupation.”⁴⁵ By focusing world attention to Gaza for that limited period of time, Israel historically and spatially decontextualizes⁴⁶ the violence, and creates

37. “Monthly Humanitarian Bulletin: May 2018,” UN OCHA OPT, 5 June 2018, <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/monthly-humanitarian-bulletin-may-2018>.

38. Urquhart, “Gaza on Brink of Implosion as Aid Cut-off Starts to Bite.”

39. Gideon Levy, “This Is How the Moderates Look,” *Haaretz*, 8 September 2007, <https://www.haaretz.com/1.4972850>.

40. Francesco Sebreghondi, “The Smart City of Gaza,” *Volume 49* (September 2016): pp. 81–84.

41. See World Health Organization (WHO), *Monthly Report: May 2020; Health Access Barriers for Patients in the Occupied Palestinian Territory*, 23 June 2020, http://www.emro.who.int/images/stories/palestine/documents/WHO_June_2020_Monthly_Report.pdf?ua=1.

42. Days of Palestine, “WHO: Quarter of Patients Denied Israeli Permit to Get Medical Care Outside Gaza Were for Cancer,” *Crimes against Humanity*, 2 March 2020, <https://daysofpalestine.com/post/13789/WHO-Quarter-of-patients-denied-Israeli-permit-to-get-medical-care-outside-Gaza-were-for-cancer>.

43. David Blair, “Israeli Drone Commander: ‘The Life and Death Decisions I Took in Gaza,’” *The Telegraph*, 19 November 2014, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/israel/11234240/Israeli-drone-commander-The-life-and-death-decisions-I-took-in-Gaza.html>.

44. Christa Case Bryan, “Israelis Ponder Alternatives to ‘Mowing the Lawn’ in Gaza,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, 20 November 2012, <https://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2012/1120/Israelis-ponder-alternatives-to-mowing-the-lawn-in-Gaza>.

45. Lori Allen, “Getting by the Occupation: How Violence Became Normal During the Second Palestinian Intifada,” *Cultural Anthropology* 23, no. 3 (2008): pp. 453–487.

46. Lori Allen, “The Scales of Occupation: ‘Operation Cast Lead’ and the Targeting of the Gaza Strip,” *Critique of Anthropology* 32, no. 3 (2020): pp. 261–284.

“By focusing world attention to Gaza for that limited period of time, Israel historically and spatially decontextualizes the violence, and creates the impression that it represents a departure from the nonviolent norm.”

the impression that it represents a departure from the nonviolent norm. These actions are representative of a form of “scalar politics” that have been a key dynamic of the conflict from the beginning.⁴⁷

In “Necropolitics,” Achille Mbembe writes of asymmetric war entailed in infrastructural war, or the “war on life support.”⁴⁸ The destruction of Gaza’s infrastructural networks (water treatment plants and electricity generators) during these attacks is an added component of this titration that aims at regulating

the siege. Infrastructure is weaponized because of the ways it connects, binds, and enables life.⁴⁹ Its destruction ensures that Ramon’s “infrastructural oxygen” doctrine would be better titrated during the siege. Leading up to the 2014 war on Gaza, the deterioration of water infrastructure resulted in households receiving only six to eight hours of running water, with 25% having access on a daily basis, 40% every other day, 20% every three days, and the remaining 15% only one day out of four.⁵⁰ Attacks during the war led to the total collapse of Gaza’s water system and waste treatment services, leaving raw sewage spewing into streets.⁵¹

Attacks on Gaza during these onslaughts have the added value of reducing Gaza’s livable space “by bomb and bulldozer,”⁵² thus raising the baseline spatial violence of the siege. During the 2014 war, 18,000 residential units were either completely destroyed or heavily damaged, leaving more than 100,000 Palestinians (17,000 families) homeless. Over four years later, 13,000 were still homeless.⁵³ After twelve years of siege, time itself is weaponized. Puar argues how the inability to control time prevents its organization and undermines an individual’s and society’s sense of being.⁵⁴ It is the absence of temporality. Whole lives have known nothing but an existence under siege, as Puar puts it, which keeps Palestinians in perpetual temporariness as they live through their annihilation. Cruelty itself, which I define as the deliberate injection of nonutilitarian pain, is also a component of this titration

47. Erik Swyngedouw, “Technonatural Revolutions: The Scalar Politics of Franco’s Hydrosocial Dream for Spain, 1939–1975,” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 32, no. 1 (January 2007): pp. 9–28. 48. Mbembe, “Necropolitics,” pp. 11–40.

49. Stephen Graham, “Switching Cities Off: Urban Infrastructure and U.S. Air Power,” *City* 9.2 (2005): pp. 169–92.

50. Ala Qandil, “Gaza Faces Imminent Water Crisis,” *Al Jazeera*, 17 July 2014, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/07/gaza-faces-imminent-water-crisis-201471755035576420.html>.

51. Amira Haas and Ido Efrati, “Gaza’s Water System Collapsing Due to IDF Strikes, Says Red Cross,” *Haaretz*, 16 July 2014, <http://www.haaretz.com/news/middle-east/.premium-1.605332>.

52. Omar Jabary Salamanca, “Unplug and Play: Manufacturing Collapse in Gaza,” *Human Geography* 4, no. 1 (2011): pp. 22–37.

53. B’Tselem – The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, “4.5 Years After Israel Destroyed Thousands of Homes in Operation Protective Edge: 13,000 Gazans Still Homeless,” B’Tselem, http://www.btselem.org/gaza_strip/20190303_13000_gazans_homeless_since_2014_war.

54. Jasbir K. Puar, “The ‘Right’ to Maim: Disablement and Inhumanist Biopolitics in Palestine,” *Borderlands* 14, no. 1 (2015).

reaction. Acts ranging from sending a ten-year-old cancer patient for treatment in the West Bank while denying her parents permission to accompany her,⁵⁵ to the tactic of “roof knocking,” wherein the Israeli military uses cell phone calls and small “warning rockets”—usually sent from drones—to tell people that their homes are about to be bombed,⁵⁶ emphasize and “indulge” Israel’s “taste for omnipotence.”⁵⁷

The Aim of the Siege

“The town belonging to the colonized people . . . is a place of ill fame, peopled by men of evil repute. They are born there, it matters little where or how; they die there, it matters not where, nor how. It is a world without spaciousness; men live there on top of each other. The native town is a hungry town, starved of bread, of meat, of shoes, of coal, of light. The native town is a crouching village, a town on its knees.”

The Wretched of the Earth, Frantz Fanon

In 1961, Frantz Fanon described the spatialization of colonial occupation in vivid terms. For Fanon, the essence of colonial occupation entails a division of space into compartments. This compartmentalization becomes a conduit through which necropower operates, mediated by various modes of confinement, closure, sequestration, and obstruction.⁵⁸ For the settler, sovereignty over the besieged space means the capacity to define who matters and who does not, who is *disposable* and who is not.⁵⁹ To this end, sieges deploy indirect and spatial forms of violence.

An enduring aspect of colonialism is the efficacy with which it disciplines bodies to make better use of them: Docility and productivity have always gone hand in hand. The magnitude of the power colonialism exerts and the ostentatiousness of its display depend on that increase in productivity.⁶⁰ Unlike African labor, which was indispensable to apartheid in South Africa,⁶¹ two million Palestinians in Gaza serve no apparent purpose to the Israeli government, and the territory of Gaza itself appears to be of no strategic value to the Israelis. Indeed, if we take the principle of *Avoda Ivrit*, or “Hebrew labor,”⁶² as a constitutive principle of Israeli society, then the siege is a result of the brutal logic of Israel’s categorization of Gaza as a hostile surplus population.⁶³ As Palestinian labor becomes increasingly dispensable, Gaza

55. Gideon Levy and Alex Levac, “Gazan Girl Fights Cancer Alone at West Bank Hospital, Israel Won’t Let Her Parents Join,” *Haaretz*, 22 December 2019, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-israel-won-t-let-this-gaza-girl-s-parents-visit-in-hospital-where-she-fights-cancer-1.8292205>.

56. Adam Taylor, “Roof knocking: The Israeli Military’s Tactic of Phoning Palestinians It Is About to Bomb,” *The Washington Post*, 9 July 2014, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2014/07/09/roof-knocking-the-israeli-militarys-tactic-of-phonng-palestinians-it-is-about-to-bomb/>.

57. Paul Gaston Aaron, “The Idolatry of Force (Part II): Militarism in Israel’s Garrison State,” *JPS* 48, no. 2 (Winter 2019): p. 58.

58. Ron J. Smith, “Isolation Through Humanitarianism: Subaltern Geopolitics of the Siege on Gaza,” *Antipode* 48, no. 3 (2016): 750–769.

59. Leila Stockmarr, “Beyond the Laboratory Thesis: Gaza as Transmission Belt for War and Security Technology,” in *The Global Making of Policing: Postcolonial Perspectives*, eds. Jana Hönke, Markus-Michael Müller (London: Routledge, 2016).

60. Achille Mbembe, “Provisional Notes on the Postcolony Author,” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 62, no. 1 (1992): pp. 3–37.

61. Colin Martin Tatz, *With Intent to Destroy* (London: Verso, 2003), p. 181.

62. David Lloyd, “Settler Colonialism and the State of Exception: The Example of Palestine/Israel,” *Settler Colonial Studies* 2, no. 1 (2012): pp. 59–80.

63. Ron J. Smith, “Healthcare Under Siege: Geopolitics of Medical Service Provision in the Gaza Strip,” *Social Science & Medicine* 146 (2015): pp. 332–340.

“After twelve years of siege, time itself is weaponized.”

has to become less like a Bantustan and more like a reservation, and other mechanisms of profit generation need to be devised. Israel imposes siege as a long-term means of isolating and managing a surplus population.⁶⁴ By

reducing the inflow of life-sustaining resources to a bare minimum, it created “a structure of subjugation that is unparalleled around the world.”⁶⁵ J.A. Tyner suggests that the origins of the notion of surplus population can be traced to Marx’s critique of Malthusian population control in *Capital: Volume I*,⁶⁶ wherein Marx states that capitalism makes certain populations’ labor redundant through the separation of workers from their labor.⁶⁷ Fanon noted that when this is done under colonization, the basic functions of life—eating and breathing—become occupied. As a consequence, life’s sole task is to not die.⁶⁸

In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon describes the life of the colonized as stripped down: “[L]iving does not mean embodying a set of values, does not mean integrating oneself into the coherent, constructive development of a world. To live simply means not to die.” The mere fact of life is a victory, one that is difficult to maintain. Fanon continues, “Every date grown is a victory. . . . The sole obsession is the need to fill that ever -shrinking stomach, however little it demands.”⁶⁹ The siege’s target is not the existence of the population but the quality of that existence and the degree to which it can be denuded without being extinguished. The aim, in the words of Israeli officials, is to keep Gaza’s economy “on the brink of collapse.” According to U.S. diplomatic cables released by WikiLeaks, “Israeli officials have confirmed to [U.S. embassy economic officers] on multiple occasions that they intend to keep the Gazan economy on the brink of collapse without quite pushing it over the edge.” According to a November 2008 cable, Israel wanted the Gaza economy “functioning at the lowest level possible consistent with avoiding a humanitarian crisis.”⁷⁰ This skeletalization is achieved through a strategy of “catastrophization.” Adi Ophir describes the situation in Gaza as akin to a “suspended catastrophe,” where the humanitarian conditions approximate a downright catastrophe. Oscillation between repressive and palliative measures keep the impending threat of disaster alive without quite producing irreversible conditions of famine and mass starvation.⁷¹ Yet, to be effective as a tool of “surplus

64. Lisa Bhungalia, “A Liminal Territory: Gaza, Executive Discretion, and Sanctions Turned Humanitarian,” *GeoJournal* 75 (2009): pp. 347–357.

65. Michael Lynk, “Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in the Palestinian Territories Occupied since 1967,” UN General Assembly, 23 October 2017, <https://reliefweb.int/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/report-special-rapporteur-situation-human-rights-16>.

66. Karl Marx, *Capital Volume I* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1959 [1913]), pp. 590–592, 602–606.

67. James A. Tyner, “Population geography I: Surplus populations,” *Progress in Human Geography* 37 (2013): pp. 701–711.

68. Frantz Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism* (New York: Grove Press, 1965).

69. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 2004), p. 232.

70. “Israel Said Would Keep Gaza Near Collapse: WikiLeaks,” *Reuters*, 5 January 2011, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/01/05/us-palestiniansisrael-wikileaks-idUSTRE7041GH20110105>.

71. Adi Ophir, “The Politics of Catastrophization: Emergency and Exception,” in *Contemporary States of Emergency: The Politics of Military and Humanitarian Intervention*, eds. Didier Fassin and Mariella Pandolfi (New York: Zone Books, 2010).

population management,” as Lisa Bhungalia argues, “death is not ‘something to be hidden away’ but something to be strategically exposed. The spectacle of death is a critical reminder of the stakes involved.”⁷² For Fanon, colonial occupation entails first and foremost the division of space into compartments. They provide the raw material of sovereignty and the violence it carries with it.⁷³ For him, colonial violence is made up of “multiple, diverse, repeated, and cumulative violence” which, in the case of Palestinians in Gaza, forces them to see their lives as a “permanent battle against atmospheric death” and gives it the semblance of “incomplete death.”⁷⁴

The siege of Gaza exemplifies how elimination and exploitation not only coexist in tension; they also co-define each other.⁷⁵ Through its siege on Gaza, Israel extracts political value and accumulates capital from this society of surplus labor, as explained below. By maintaining Gaza at the edge of a humanitarian precipice, Israel has incorporated a moral economy, namely a humanitarian rationality, that prevents catastrophic conditions such as mass starvation and disease.⁷⁶ The humanitarian response to the siege has to be understood as part of its logic; humanitarianism is part of its functioning mechanism, not a direct challenge to it. Humanitarian interventions are constituted as the opposite of political ones.⁷⁷ The siege allows Israel to shift the discourse around Gaza from one of national liberation, occupation, and self-determination to the balance sheet of humanitarian aid: the numbers of trucks allowed in, hours of electricity, the amount of medical supplies, and the number of patients allowed out for treatment.⁷⁸ The exigency of redressing human suffering bypasses questions of political responsibility by prioritizing the logistical and seemingly apolitical problem of how to alleviate the victims’ suffering.⁷⁹ After every war on Gaza, donor conferences raise billions of dollars to rebuild infrastructure. Despite the inevitability that Israel will destroy Gaza again, the “donors will pay up because it is far easier than addressing the underlying causes of and possible solutions to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.”⁸⁰ The status of Palestinians in Gaza is therefore transformed from the political category of the refugee to the humanitarian category of the victim, generating political value for Israeli colonizers. Humanitarianism dehistoricizes and depoliticizes the conflict by reducing it to balance sheets of human suffering.⁸¹ The siege becomes a mechanism

72. Lisa Bhungalia, “Quarantining of Gaza: International Law, Subhumanity, and the Civilian Turned Combatant.” Paper read at Annual Meeting of the Association of American Geographers, Boston, MA, 16 April 2008.

73. Fanon, “Concerning Violence,” in *The Wretched of the Earth*.

74. Fanon, “Concerning Violence,” in *The Wretched of the Earth*.

75. Catherine Kellogg, “You Be My Body for Me’: Dispossession in Two Valences,” *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 43, no. 1 (2017): pp. 83–95.

76. Ron J. Smith, “Isolation Through Humanitarianism: Subaltern Geopolitics of the Siege on Gaza.”

77. Aristide Zolberg, *Escape from Violence: Conflict and the Refugee Crisis in the Developing World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

78. Liisa H. Malkki, “Speechless Emissaries: Refugees, Humanitarianism, and Dehistoricization,” *Cultural Anthropology* 11 (1996): pp. 377–404.

79. Hagar Kotef, “Objects of Security: Gendered Violence and Securitized Humanitarianism in Occupied Gaza,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 30 (2010): pp. 179–91.

80. Dan Cohen, “In the Last Days of ‘Operation Protective Edge’ Israel Focused on its Final Goal—The Destruction of Gaza’s Professional Class,” *Mondoweiss*, 13 October 2014, <http://mondoweiss.net/2014/10/protective-destruction-professional>.

81. Malkki, “Speechless Emissaries: Refugees, Humanitarianism, and Dehistoricization,” pp. 377–404.

for exchanging negative political value, or political liability with positive value or political assets. In *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, Arjun Appadurai invites us to understand the notion of value (in this case political) as a product of such interactions inscribed in power relations.⁸² Ilana Feldman calls for breaking open the obscuring frame of humanitarianism and disrupting the cycle of destruction and rebuilding that ultimately regenerates the colonial situation.⁸³

Through a fruitful marriage of science and colonialism (scientific colonialism),⁸⁴ Israel has also harnessed the siege to accumulate capital by commodifying its siege policies^{85,86} and technologies.⁸⁷ By turning the West Bank and Gaza into a “laboratory,” as architect and theorist Eyal Weizman puts it, a “territorial and urban conflict that can take place in other places,” Israel was able to sell the “siege.”⁸⁸ For Naomi Klein, this is how Israel promulgates a “generalized state of exception,” furnishing the model of “the cutting-edge homeland security state” globally.⁸⁹ In 2012, according to the Israeli Ministry of Defense’s conservative estimate, Israel exported 76% of the arms it produced, amounting to around \$7 billion.⁹⁰ Joseph Pugliese documented that Elbit, the company whose drones were tested during Israel’s assault, recorded a 6% increase in profits during the first month of Operation Protective Edge.⁹¹ Israel is the “world’s single largest exporter of drones.”⁹² Israeli arms companies and officials frequently state that Israel’s weapons are “field tested” in “real time”—meaning, they are tested on a captive Palestinian population.⁹³ Avner Benzaken, the head of the Israeli army’s technology and logistics division, underscores the significance of Gaza as Israel’s weapons testing laboratory: “If I develop a product and want to test it in the field, I only have to go five or ten kilometres from my base and I can look and see what’s happening with equipment. . . I get feedback, so it makes the development process faster and much more efficient.”⁹⁴

The continuity between historical settler colonialism and the present-day neoliberal world order resides in the exigencies of managing surplus populations and

82. Arjun Appadurai, ed., *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

83. Ilana Feldman, “Gaza’s Humanitarianism Problem,” *JPS* 38, no. 3 (April 2009): pp. 22–37.

84. Sebastian Conrad, *German Colonialism: A Short History* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

85. Louise Amoore and Marieke De Goede, “Governance, Risk and Dataveillance in the War on Terror” in *Crime, Law and Social Change* 43 (2005): pp. 149–173.

86. Louise Amoore and Marieke De Goede, *Risk and the War on Terror* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008).

87. Stockmarr, “Beyond the Laboratory Thesis: Gaza as Transmission Belt for War and Security Technology.”

88. Eyal Weizman, Chapters 4 and 5, in *Hollow Land: Israel’s Architecture of Occupation* (London: Verso, 2012).

89. Naomi Klein, “Losing the Peace Incentive,” *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2010).

90. Oren Barak and Gabriel Sheffer, “Israel’s ‘Security Network’ and Its Impact: An Exploration of a New Approach,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 38 (May 2006): pp. 235–261.

91. Joseph Pugliese, “Forensic Ecologies of Occupied Zones and Geographies of Dispossession: Gaza and Occupied East Jerusalem,” *Borderlands* 14, no. 1 (2015).

92. Harriet Sherwood, “Israel Is World’s Largest Drone Exporter,” *The Guardian*, 20 May 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/may/20/israel-worlds-largest-drone-exporter>.

93. Ali Abunimah, “New UK Drones ‘Field Tested’ on Captive Palestinians,” *Electronic Intifada*, 13 December 2013, <http://electronicintifada.net/blogs/ali-abunimah/new-uk-dronesfield-tested-captive-palestinians>.

94. Rania Khalek, “Israeli Drone Conference Features Weapons Used to Kill Gaza’s Children,” *Electronic Intifada*, 18 September 2014, <https://electronicintifada.net/blogs/rania-khalek/israeli-drone-conference-features-weapons-used-kill-gazas-children>.

encouraging the spatial confinement of populations targeted for repression. State strategies for managing the warehoused surplus populations evince characteristics that are distinctly settler colonialist.⁹⁵ Systemic harmony between military siege as a manifestation of colonial intervention and the formations and practices of the neoliberal state have emerged to regulate and promote a new regime of capital accumulation worldwide. David Harvey has described “accumulation by dispossession” as designating a more rigorous understanding of the process, which sees the settler-colonial logics of law and violence as the means to advance and safeguard the neoliberal economic regime.⁹⁶

Biopolitics of Siege

The essence of Foucault’s work is that the living body lies at the epicenter of all politics. Foucault used the notion of biopolitics to speak of the relationship that power establishes with the social body. The siege of Gaza is an exemplar of the way settler colonialism performs biopower in deeply historical and fully contemporary ways.⁹⁷ The biopolitics of Israel’s siege of the Gaza Strip ensures its longevity as a settler state. We must interpret its activities as enacting settler colonialism. We must challenge ahistoricity in accounts of the coloniality of biopower in Gaza’s siege that accept narratives of securitization. To temporalize such narratives that depict the situation as having advanced beyond colonialism is to naturalize how settler colonialism continuously acts within them. Telling the truth as an event is a malicious act of denying it as structure.

In accordance with Giorgio Agamben’s thinking, Israel’s retention of sovereignty (or dominion) over the Gaza Strip after its 2005 withdrawal afforded it the power to designate Palestinians as *homo sacer*: the sacred man who may be killed without being sacrificed or made subject to homicide. The sacred man enters a “state of exception” to the law that simultaneously reinforces its rule. Agamben defines the exception by reference to the camp as “the political space itself of modernity,” which, by forming a permanent “space (bare) life” creates a “materialization of the state of exception” as “the rule.”⁹⁸ He describes the structure of the state of exception as representing inclusion and capture of a space that is neither inside nor outside. Even though this state of exception is a hallmark of settler colonies,⁹⁹ Agamben ignores the absolute normality of the state of exception under colonial regimes.¹⁰⁰ Ilan Pappé fervently refutes the notion that Agamben’s work is applicable to Israel. He notes that the state of exception in Europe constitutes a “treacherous disequilibrium that needs to be rectified,”¹⁰¹ whereas with Israel as an active settler-colonial state, the malady is in the design. Oren Yichtafel has

95. Audrey Roy, “Sovereignty and Decolonization: Realizing Indigenous Self-Determination at the United Nations and in Canada,” (M.A. diss., University of Victoria, Canada, 2001).

96. David Harvey, “The ‘New’ Imperialism: Accumulation by Dispossession,” *Socialist Register* (2004).

97. Scott Lauria Morgensen, “The Biopolitics of Settler Colonialism: Right Here, Right Now,” *Settler Colonial Studies* 1, no. 1 (2013): pp. 52–76.

98. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

99. Lloyd, “Settler Colonialism and the State of Exception: The Example of Palestine/Israel,” pp. 59–80.

100. Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), p. 35.

101. Ilan Pappé, “The Mukhabarat State of Israel,” in *Thinking Palestine*, ed. Ronit Lentin (London: Zed Books, 2008), pp. 148–70.

“Whole lives have known nothing but an existence under siege, as Puar puts it, which keeps Palestinians in perpetual temporariness as they live through their annihilation.”

shown that any pretense by liberal Zionists of opposing “exception” is posturing inherent to what he terms Israel’s ethnocracy.¹⁰² Positing that “exception” is intrinsic to the state’s “history, composition, and aspirations,” Marcelo Svirsky notes that it is “exemption” rather than “exception” that better explains Israel’s constitutive nature.¹⁰³

The declaration of emergency is the means by which settler-colonial states justify their invocation of an

all-encapsulating and permanent state of exception, which is characterized by a multitude of laws and directives tailored for its regulation. Propelled by its urgent need to normalize the exceptional status of its regime of occupation in accord with law, Israel makes “temporariness,” which grants it “the license of the state of emergency,” the permanent state of the occupation, allowing it to become “an unrestrained, almost boundless sovereign, because when everything is temporary almost anything—any crime, any form of violence—is acceptable.”¹⁰⁴ Mbembe goes further by reading the colony *as* exception.¹⁰⁵ He insists that following his experience of the war, Fanon had become convinced that colonialism was a “necropolitical force animated at its core by a genocidal drive.”¹⁰⁶ Mbembe reads necropolitics as the logic of the colony as exception, and argues that the past of necropolitics informs the present when it recurs in “late modern colonial occupation.”¹⁰⁷ With around 18,500 Palestinians wounded during Israel’s 2008, 2012, and 2014 wars on Gaza,¹⁰⁸ and another 8,000 shot by snipers during the Great March of Return protests in 2018–19,¹⁰⁹ Puar tracks the biopolitical dimensions of this structured violence in her conceptualization of the “right to maim” as exercised by the Israeli state. She defines this maiming of bodies, lives, and infrastructure as an intentional practice that “expands biopolitics beyond simply the question of ‘right of death and power of life’; maiming becomes a primary vector through which biopolitical control is operated in colonized space and hence not easily demarcated necro as it is mapped in Mbembe’s reworking of biopolitics.”¹¹⁰ The aim of maiming is not only the “infliction of harm” but also “the attrition of the life support systems that might

102. Oren Yiftachel, *Ethnocracy: Land and Identity Politics in Israel/Palestine* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006).

103. Marcelo Svirsky, “The Cultural Politics of Exception,” in *Agamben and Colonialism*, ed. Marcelo Svirsky and Simone Bignall (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), p. 54.

104. Adi Ophir, “A time of Occupation,” in *The Other Israel: Voices of Refusal and Dissent*, ed. Roane Carey and Jonathan Shainin (New York: The New Press, 2002), pp. 51–66.

105. Mbembe, “Necropolitics,” pp. 11–40.

106. Achille Mbembe, “Metamorphic Thought: The Works of Frantz Fanon,” *African Studies* 71, no. 1 (2012): pp. 19–28.

107. Mbembe, “Necropolitics,” p. 25.

108. Marwan Mosleh, Koustuv Dalal, Yousef Aljeesh & Leif Svanström, “The Nurden of War-Injury in the Palestinian Health Care Sector in Gaza Strip,” *BMC International Health and Human Rights* 18 (2018).

109. “Great March of Return: Shattered Limbs, Shattered Lives,” Médecins Sans Frontières, <https://www.msf.org/great-march-return-depth>.

110. Puar, “The ‘Right’ to Maim: Disablement and Inhumanist Biopolitics in Palestine.”

allow populations to heal from this harm.”¹¹¹

Albert Memmi's pioneering work on settler colonialism suggests that subordinating the indigenous population requires the assumption of a racial hierarchy. The prestige and the legitimacy of the settlers depend on the conviction of their superiority to the indigenous, whether in terms of the higher development of their culture and moral values or in terms of material civilization. The settler state reiterates to the population it has dispossessed the settler colony's claim to superiority, both in its system of governance and in its social and moral values, casting itself as a representative of so-called civilized values in a “backward region.”¹¹² Historian David Lloyd notes that what in Memmi's terms is the constant reference to the “mother country” becomes in Israel's case the reference to a more diffuse but no less potent “Western civilization” of which Zionism has believed itself representative since the earliest days of the colonization of Palestine.¹¹³ The brutality and cruelty Israel visits on the Palestinians on a daily basis find their legitimization in an institutionalized racism that belies Israel's faith in its legality, democracy, and civic virtues. Geopolitically describing Gaza as a “hostile entity” is an expression of classic Orientalist posturing of “Self” against “Other” in colonial exchange.¹¹⁴ Gaza becomes a manifestation of Thomas Barnett's strategic “threat environment,” and is set against the normalized, civilized space of Israel.¹¹⁵

The Virus and the Settler

The pandemic arrived to find Israeli settler colonialism, the siege of Gaza, and the Palestinians at two biopolitical landmarks. The first is a March 2020 interview in *Haaretz* with the Israeli army snipers who had taken part in the intentional and intimate disablement of 8,000 Palestinian demonstrators in Gaza during the Great March of Return protests. There was practically no outrage on the part of the Israeli public over the descriptions of this act of maiming and the use of sports analogies by the soldiers as they bragged about their achievements. “I brought in seven-eight knees in one day. Within a few hours, I almost broke his record. . . . He got around 28 knees. . . [O]bviously there's joy at the hit. . . .’ The arena of the disturbances is like a sports arena, a situation you can sell tickets for. Group versus group, with a line down the middle and an audience of fans on both sides. You can totally tell a story of a sports encounter here.” These excerpts show that the Palestinian *homo sacer*, whose killing does not constitute homicide, has become a *noxii*: an enemy of the state whose punitive killing is an entertainment spectacle, a *summa supplicia* (execution by exposure to wild beasts, crucifixion, and burning alive).¹¹⁶ The second landmark is a February 2020 statement from Agamben, in which he accuses governments of using the pandemic to normalize the state of exception.¹¹⁷

111. Puar, “The ‘Right’ to Maim.”

112. Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), pp. 70, 74.

113. Lloyd, “Settler Colonialism and the State of Exception: The Example of Palestine/Israel,” pp. 59–80.

114. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books, 1978).

115. Thomas P.M. Barnett, *The Pentagon's New Map: War and Peace in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Berkley, 2003), pp. 174–175, 227–228.

116. Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), pp. 359–60.

117. Joseph Owen, “States of Emergency, Metaphors of Virus, and COVID-19,” *Verso blog*, 31 March 2020, <https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/4636-states-of-emergency-metaphors-of-virus-and-covid-19>.

In a prophetic note written in 2010, historian Lloyd observed that since a key part of any colonialism is memory and narration, it becomes the major challenge for the settler colonialist, who is plagued by the insecurity of a never-quite-legitimate possession.¹¹⁸ During the pandemic, this insecurity has manifested itself as neurotic compulsion by the Israelis to repeatedly (and thus far falsely) announce that they are on the cusp of discovering a vaccine for COVID-19. As early as 28 February 2020, Israel announced that it was weeks away from developing a vaccine that would “provide a needed response to the grave global COVID-19 threat.”¹¹⁹ When the promised vaccine failed to materialize by 18 March, the Israel Institute for Biological Research (IIBR) stated that its scientists “expected to announce in the coming days that they have completed development of a vaccine.”¹²⁰ Among IIBR’s previous inventions was the poison injected into Hamas leader Khalid Mishal in Jordan in 1997 by two Mossad agents, and the one used by a Mossad hit team to assassinate Hamas operative Mahmoud al-Mabhouh in Dubai in 2010.¹²¹

IIBR then announced on 2 April that it had tested a COVID-19 vaccine prototype on rodents at its biochemical defense laboratory.¹²² By 20 April, still with no vaccine, scientists at Tel Aviv University announced they were “two-thirds of the way into developing a vaccine for COVID-19.”¹²³ Israeli settlers’ obsession with discovering the vaccine has exposed how, in the words of Memmi, the Tunisian anticolonial writer turned Zionist, “his disquiet and resulting thirst for justification require the usurper to extol himself to the skies and to drive the usurped below the ground at the same time.”¹²⁴

The Virus and the Native

During the pandemic, Palestinian health professionals inside the Green Line were to receive a substantial surprise. Constituting 17% of the Israeli state’s doctors, 24% of its nurses, and 48% of its pharmacists, these Palestinian medical personnel found themselves overnight “essential foot soldiers and field commanders in the country’s struggle against the virus.”¹²⁵ By virtue of the pandemic they went from being the victims of a “malicious shell-game of holding formal citizenship (*ezrahut*) while being denied the right to nationality (*le’om*), which is reserved for Jews only and which grants the most substantial rights,”¹²⁶ to being feted by the Israeli

118. David Lloyd and Laura Pulido, “In the Long Shadow of the Settler: On Israeli and U.S. Colonialisms,” *American Quarterly* 62, no. 4 (December 2010): pp. 795–809.

119. Mike Moffitt, “Israel Says COVID-19 Vaccine Is Only Weeks Away,” 28 February 2020, <https://www.sfgate.com/science/article/COVID-19-coronavirus-vaccine-Israel-15093659.php>.

120. Ido Efrati and Chaim Levinson, “Israeli Research Center to Announce it Developed Coronavirus Vaccine, Sources Say,” 18 March 2020, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/premium-coronavirus-vaccine-israel-biological-research-institute-developed-1.8665074>.

121. Yossi Melman, “What Goes on Behind the Walls of Israel’s Institute for Biological Research?” *Haaretz*, 11 May 2011, <https://www.haaretz.com/1.5011051>.

122. Aaron Reich, “Novel Coronavirus Vaccine Being Tested on Rodents in Israel,” *Reuters*, 2 April 2020, <https://www.jpost.com/health-science/israeli-researchers-made-significant-progress-in-coronavirus-vaccine-623133>.

123. “COVID-19 Vaccine Two-third Ready, Claims Israeli Scientist,” *The Week*, 20 April 2020, <https://www.theweek.in/news/health/2020/04/20/COVID-19-vaccine-two-third-ready-claims-Israeli-scientist.html>.

124. Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, p. 53.

125. Joshua Mitnick, “In Israeli War on Coronavirus, Arab Doctors Rush to the Front,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, 16 April 2020, <https://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2020/0416/In-Israeli-war-on-coronavirus-Arab-doctors-rush-to-the-front>.

126. Lloyd, “Settler Colonialism and the State of Exception: The Example of Palestine/Israel,” pp. 59–80.

establishment.¹²⁷ In the words of journalist Gideon Levy, “[S]uddenly there are Arabs on the front page of the *Yedioth Ahronoth* daily—and they’re not terrorists.”¹²⁸

Noting that the fight to save lives would be “fatally compromised” without Arab professionals, a policy brief by the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), a Tel Aviv University think tank led by former military officers, urged the government to create a “positive basis” for “full integration” of Arabs in Israeli society and for “an end to exclusionary and racist discourse and statements that call into question Arab loyalty.”¹²⁹ As Wolfe notes, settler colonialism’s strategies of elimination may change from genocide and ethnic cleansing to brute exclusion and controlled inclusion, but, when necessary, assimilation can reflect the ideological requirements of settler-colonial societies, which “characteristically cite native advancement to establish their egalitarian credentials.”¹³⁰ In the “Israeli war on coronavirus,” the native Palestinian doctors become soldiers who “rush to the front.”¹³¹ Unlike Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, these health professionals are now portrayed by the Israeli press as three-dimensional personalities who have names, whose children have names, and one of whom even had a birthday that she missed, “without a hug from her parents,” because of their work in the hospital.¹³² The Majadlas, a Palestinian family of five doctors celebrated by *Haaretz* for “batling to save lives, Jewish and Arab,” during the pandemic, became a household name.¹³³ In his book *Final Promise*, Frederick Hoxie notes that “assimilated natives would be proof positive” of “an open society, where obedience and accommodation to the wishes of the majority would be rewarded with social equality.”¹³⁴ The Israeli press’s calls for an end to “discrimination” become a tactic to maintain settler authorities’ suppressing of Palestinian specificity into the so-called post-racist era, depoliticizing their otherness by rendering it a technical problem for civic administration.¹³⁵ Needless to say, this newfound love for its Palestinian health professionals does not extend to the rest of the Palestinian community, for which Israel refuses to provide testing, and whose protests it meets with the usual brutality.¹³⁶

From the beginning, Israel’s reading of the challenges posed by the pandemic was tainted by its “idolatry of force,” which normalizes aggressive militarism.¹³⁷

127. Gideon Levy, “Israel After Coronavirus: One Crisis, One State—and That Includes the Palestinians Gideon,” *Haaretz*, 6 May 2020, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-israel-after-coronavirus-one-crisis-one-state-including-the-palestinians-1.8819039>.

128. Levy, “Israel After Coronavirus: One Crisis, One State—and That Includes the Palestinians.”

129. Ephraim Lavie, Meir Elran, Khader Sawaed, Morsi Abu Mokh, Maisalon Dallashi, “Israel’s Arab Society and the Coronavirus Challenge,” *INSS Insight* 1288 (March 2020).

130. Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” pp. 387–409.

131. Mitnick, “In Israeli War on Coronavirus, Arab Doctors Rush to the Front.”

132. Mitnick, “In Israeli War on Coronavirus, Arab Doctors Rush to the Front.” 133. Dina Craft, “Meet the Majadlas: An Arab Family of Doctors on Israel’s Coronavirus Front Lines,” *Haaretz*, 21 April 2020, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-an-arab-family-of-doctors-on-israel-s-coronavirus-front-lines-1.8786492>.

134. Frederick E. Hoxie, *A Final Promise: The Campaign to Assimilate the Indians, 1880–1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

135. Patrick Wolfe, “Recuperating Binarism: A Heretical Introduction,” *Settler Colonial Studies* 3, no. 4 (2013): pp. 257–279.

136. Nihaya Daoud, “The Reluctance to Test Israeli Arabs for COVID-19 Is a Ticking Time-bomb,” *Haaretz*, 31 March 2020, <https://www.haaretz.com/opinion/.premium-israel-pays-a-price-for-ignoring-the-arab-community-in-its-coronavirus-response-1.8729117>.

137. Paul Gaston Aaron, “The Idolatry of Force (Part II): Militarism in Israel’s Garrison State,” *JPS* 48, no. 2 (2018/2019): p. 58.

On the home front, an administrative order allowed its internal security agency, Shin Bet, to track Israelis through their phones,¹³⁸ as it routinely does with Palestinians,¹³⁹ to ensure their compliance with social distancing measures. On 16 March, the Knesset intelligence committee approved the use of a hitherto secret national database, codenamed “The Tool,” compiled by the Shin Bet since 2002. The database contains the names, addresses, and phone numbers of every Israeli citizen; it also records every phone call made and the recipient of these calls. It uses geolocation to track where one travels within the country, and maintains records of all online activity, including internet searches.¹⁴⁰ While many Israelis were surprised to find out that Shin Bet had been collecting their cell phone data since 2002, liberal Zionists were offended at being subjected to the same software as Palestinians. Tehilla Shwartz Altshuler of the Israel Democracy Institute argued, “This is not war or an intifada. It’s a civilian event and should be treated like one.”¹⁴¹

Abroad, Israel went to great lengths to advertise how it had assigned the procurement of medical goods to its intelligence agency, the Mossad,¹⁴² rather than to health departments. In an interview broadcast by Channel 12, the head of the Mossad’s technology department described to a grateful nation how its covert teams had secured masks, testing kits, and ventilators.¹⁴³ In what can only be described as a celebratory piece, the *New York Times*’s Ronen Bergman quotes an Israeli health official bursting with pride, “It is only in Israel that the Sheba hospital could have enlisted the help of the Mossad. Can you imagine Mount Sinai Hospital going to the C.I.A. for help?”¹⁴⁴ Hundreds of Israeli soldiers were sent on patrol to enforce the lockdown of Israeli citizens¹⁴⁵ while for the first time the Border Police, whose main mission is to enforce the occupation by preventing West Bank Palestinians from entering Israel as illegal workers, enforced the blockade on the ultra-Orthodox (*Haredi*) city of Bnei Brak.¹⁴⁶

Israel’s verbose publicizing of its cybersecurity software was not only for political consumption. The pandemic has opened up such software, tried and tested on the Palestinians, to potential uses in the realm of biosecurity and public health

138. Jonathan Lis, “Netanyahu Mulls End to Shin Bet Tracking of Coronavirus Patients, Official Says,” *Haaretz*, 30 April 2020, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-netanyahu-mulls-end-to-shin-bet-tracking-of-coronavirus-patients-official-says-1.8809596>.

139. Gedaliah Afterman and Maya Shabi, “What Asian States Can Teach Israel About Coronavirus Surveillance Tech,” *Haaretz*, 13 April 2020, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-what-asian-states-can-teach-israel-about-coronavirus-surveillance-tech-1.8761539>.

140. Richard Silverstein, “Israel Is Militarizing and Monetizing the COVID-19 Pandemic,” *Jacobin*, 16 April 2020, <https://jacobinmag.com/2020/4/israel-military-surveillance-coronavirus-covid-netanyahu>.

141. David M. Halbfinger, Isabel Kershner and Ronen Bergman, “To Track Coronavirus, Israel Moves to Tap Secret Trove of Cellphone Data,” *New York Times*, 16 March 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/16/world/middleeast/israel-coronavirus-cellphone-tracking.html>. 142. Ronen Bergman, “Israel’s Not-So-Secret Weapon in Coronavirus Fight: The Spies of Mossad,” *New York Times*, 12 April 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/12/world/middleeast/coronavirus-israel-mossad.html>.

143. Michael Bachner, “Mossad Officer Describes Covert Global Battle to Obtain Ventilators at All Costs,” *Times of Israel*, 1 April 2020, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/mossad-officer-describes-covert-global-battle-to-obtain-ventilators-at-all-costs/>.

144. Bergman, “Israel’s Not-So-Secret Weapon in Coronavirus Fight: The Spies of Mossad.”

145. Refaella Goichman, “Israel Is the Only Democracy Using Its Security Services to Track Coronavirus Victims,” *Haaretz*, 26 March 2020, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-israel-is-the-only-democracy-using-its-security-services-to-track-virus-victims-1.8712554>.

146. “IDF Unit Preparing to Enforce Bnei Brak Closure, 4,500 Elderly Bnei Brak Residents to Be Evacuated to Hotels,” *Yeshiva News*, 2 April 2020, <https://www.theyeshivaworld.com/news/headlines-breaking-stories/1846253/idf-unit-preparing-to-enforce-bnei-brak-closure-4500-elderly-bnei-brak-residents-to-be-evacuated-to-hotels.html>.

population management.¹⁴⁷ Tal Dilian, a former Israeli intelligence officer and now a co-CEO of Intellexa, a cybersurveillance firm that works with intelligence agencies in Southeast Asia and Europe, could not hide his excitement: “I really believe this industry is doing more good than bad. . . . Now is a good time to show that to the world.” Many other Israeli companies are also rebranding their data-tracking tools as biosecurity tools critical to pandemic response,

including cell phone location information and facial recognition software.¹⁴⁸ In April, the Israeli company Cellebrite was busy marketing the same capability to help authorities learn whether a person infected with the coronavirus had transmitted it to others. In an email pitch, the Delhi police force was promised that “when someone tests positive,” authorities can siphon up the patient’s location data and contacts, making it easy to “quarantine the right people.” Intellexa’s Dilian said his company’s platform will cost between \$9 million and \$16 million for countries with large populations. He believes COVID-19 tracking is only the beginning. Once the pandemic ends, he hopes countries that invested in his mass surveillance tools will adapt them for espionage and security. “We want to enable them to upgrade,” he said.¹⁴⁹ Start-Up Nation Central, an Israeli NGO, has compiled a directory of some 150 Israeli technology companies trying to cash in on the pandemic. In late March 2020, the Israeli Ministry of Health launched the app HaMagen, Hebrew for “the shield,” which uses geolocation technology to inform users about points of contact with known COVID-19 cases.¹⁵⁰ The Defense Ministry, meanwhile, has offered support to an Israeli start-up called Vocalis Health, which is developing an app capable of diagnosing COVID-19 based on the sound of someone’s voice.¹⁵¹ AnyVision, a surveillance and facial recognition company that scans faces at military checkpoints, claims that its computer-vision and deep-learning technology can pick out an infected person on a watch list in a crowded stadium. At Sheba Medical Center, AnyVision’s system was plugged into a network of about 600

“The siege’s target is not the existence of the population but the quality of that existence and the degree to which it can be denuded without being extinguished.”

147. Sean Lawson, “Coronavirus Lessons for National Cybersecurity. It’s the Boring Stuff, Stupid,” *Forbes*, 28 April 2020, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/seanlawson/2020/04/28/coronavirus-lessons-for-national-cybersecurity-its-the-boring-stuff-stupid/#b9d927d45426>.

148. Joseph Marks, “The Cybersecurity 202: Privacy Experts Fear a Boom in Coronavirus Surveillance,” *The Washington Post*, 14 April 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/powerpost/paloma/the-cybersecurity-202/2020/04/14/the-cybersecurity-202-privacy-experts-fear-a-boom-in-coronavirus-surveillance/5e94901988e0fa101a7615be/>.

149. Joel Schectman, Christopher Bing, and Jack Stubbs, “Israeli Cyber-intel Firms Pitch Governments on Spy Tools to Trace the Coronavirus,” *Reuters*, 2 May 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-spy-specialreport/special-report-cyber-intel-firms-pitch-governments-on-spy-tools-to-trace-coronavirus-idUSKCN22A2G1>.

150. Stuart Winer, “Health Ministry Launches Phone App to Help Prevent Spread of Coronavirus,” *Times of Israel*, 23 March 2020, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/health-ministry-launches-phone-app-to-help-prevent-spread-of-coronavirus/>.

151. Guillaume Lavalée and Jonah Mandel, “The Sound of Coronavirus: Israeli Apps Helping Contain Pandemic,” *Agence France-Presse*, 30 March 2020, <https://www.thejakartapost.com/life/2020/03/31/the-sound-of-coronavirus-israeli-apps-helping-contain-pandemic.html>.

surveillance cameras in public areas, setting off alarms when someone entered a department without wearing a mask or letting management instantly determine who needed to be quarantined when a hospital worker tested positive.¹⁵²

In the field of population management, an artificial intelligence triage platform developed by Israel's Diagnostic Robotics—a security company that was adapted to tackle the current pandemic—produces risk assessment and predictive models to provide public health officials with continuous monitoring of the patterns by which the virus spreads.¹⁵³ Unable to contain his excitement, *New York Times* journalist David Halbfinger exalted the Israeli Defense Ministry's research and development arm, "best known for pioneering cutting-edge ways to kill people and blow things up," for its latest "lifesaving" mission, as it has been "spearheading a sprawling, high-speed effort to unleash some of the country's most advanced technologies against an enemy of another kind: Covid-19."¹⁵⁴

Throughout its history, Zionism was an international movement that intentionally avoided the restraints of a single metropole in favor of what Maxime Rodinson called the "collective mother country."¹⁵⁵ Yet during this pandemic it has become apparent that some metropolises are more equal than others.¹⁵⁶ U.S. health professionals have been treating patients without proper protective gear,¹⁵⁷ and Italy, a NATO founding ally, had to triage patients in need of ventilators.¹⁵⁸ But the U.S. government sent one million masks¹⁵⁹ and a hundred ventilators¹⁶⁰ to the Israeli army. The same altruism was not on display when Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu rejected a request from Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab to allow ventilators to be exported from Israel to the United Kingdom.¹⁶¹ This unique relationship with the United States as the metropole of choice was further emphasized by a study published by the University of Tel Aviv's School of Molecular Cell Biology and Biotechnology. The study found that more than 70% of Israeli patients were infected by a virus that genetically originated in the United States, meaning that the original carriers caught it there and then brought it to Israel. In most of the remaining patients, the virus originated somewhere in Europe, namely

152. David M. Halbfinger, "Israeli Army's Idea Lab Aims at a New Target: Saving Lives," *New York Times*, 7 May 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/07/world/middleeast/coronavirus-israel.html>.

153. Wendy Singer, "Israeli Innovators Harness Artificial Intelligence Technologies to Curb The Global COVID-19 Pandemic," *Forbes*, 13 April 2020, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/startupnationcentral/2020/04/13/israeli-startups-artificial-intelligence-covid19-coronavirus/#3d4e71564567>.

154. David M. Halbfinger, "Israeli Army's Idea Lab Aims at a New Target: Saving Lives," *New York Times*, 7 May 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/07/world/middleeast/coronavirus-israel.html>.

155. Maxime Rodinson, *Israel: A Colonial-Settler State?* (New York, Monad Press, 1973), p. 76.

156. David M. Halbfinger, "Israeli Army's Idea Lab Aims at a New Target: Saving Lives."

157. Ben Elgin and John Tozzi, "Dire Shortage Forces Hospital Staff to Make Do-It-Yourself Masks," *Bloomberg*, 17 March 2020, <https://blinks.bloomberg.com/news/stories/Q7E3F4T0AFB6>.

158. Lisa Rosenbaum, "Perspective Facing Covid-19 in Italy—Ethics, Logistics, and Therapeutics on the Epidemic's Front Line," *New England Journal of Medicine* (March 2020).

159. Ali Abunimah, "Did the U.S. Just Supply a Million Face Masks to the Israeli Army?" *Electronic Intifada*, 8 April 2020, <https://electronicintifada.net/blogs/ali-abunimah/did-us-just-supply-million-face-masks-israeli-army>.

160. "100 ventilators arrive to Israel from the U.S.," *Jerusalem Post*, 15 April 2020, <https://www.jpost.com/breaking-news/100-ventilators-arrive-to-israel-from-the-us-624718>.

161. Barak Ravid, "Scoop: Netanyahu Rejected U.K. Plea for Ventilators," *Axios*, 15 April 2020, <https://www.axios.com/israel-ventilator-export-uk-coronavirus-outbreak-a5ea85f5-0dd8-46ee-8bb9-edd986f9b9f3.html>.

Belgium (8%), France (6%), the United Kingdom (5%), Spain (3%), or Italy (2%).¹⁶²

Israel has always sought to be accepted among the community of advanced democracies while also demanding to be excepted from the norms of international law and human rights conventions on the basis of its peculiar destiny as a state that enshrines ethnic nationalism and religious prophecy. Unlike the European secular nationalisms it was modeled on, Zionism is also imbued with traditions of messianism. A belief not only in the historical destiny of the Jews to return from the diaspora to Zion but also in the association of that return with the return of the Messiah and the inauguration of the end times.¹⁶³ Even secular Zionism is haunted by the concepts of messianic redemption, such that “we can fairly ask whether the affinity between Zionism and messianism is too intimate and powerful to have ever been anything other than partially—and finally unsuccessfully—repressed.”¹⁶⁴ This tension between the vaccine-inventing, ventilator-manufacturing,¹⁶⁵ software-designing modern state and a nation waiting for the Messiah exploded spectacularly during the pandemic. Israel’s 71-year-old Minister of Health Yaakov Litzman, who also leads the ultra-Orthodox United Torah Judaism party, sought to allay the fears of Israelis worried about the pandemic because he was sure “that the Messiah will come and bring us out as [God] brought us out of Egypt.”¹⁶⁶ When the Messiah failed to show, the health minister claimed that the outbreak of COVID-19 was divine punishment from God because of LGBT pride parades,¹⁶⁷ undoing decades of careful Israeli pink-washing by liberal Zionists.¹⁶⁸ Two weeks later, the minister and his wife contracted the coronavirus.¹⁶⁹

The Virus and the Siege

On 9 March 1918, Marcel Proust described the effect that living through World War I had on him: “Just as people used to live in God, so I live in the war.”¹⁷⁰ Palestinians in Gaza, in turn, live in the siege. In the words of Gideon Levy, “[I]n Israel, where the coronavirus has turned everything upside down, only one thing remains as it was, cruel and hermetic: the Gaza blockade. The entire world has changed except for the biggest prison of all.”¹⁷¹ To predict Israel’s actions in the

162. Ido Efrati, “Study: Israel Far From COVID-19 Herd Immunity, 70% of Cases Originate in U.S.” *Haaretz*, 18 May 2020, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-study-israel-far-from-covid-19-herd-immunity-70-of-cases-originate-in-u-s-1.8855725>.

163. Lloyd, “Settler Colonialism and the State of Exception: The Example of Palestine/Israel,” pp. 59–80.

164. Jacqueline Rose, *The Question of Zion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), pp. 33, 42–43.

165. Noa Shpigel, “Missiles Out, Ventilators In: Israeli Defense Contractors Answer the Coronavirus Call,” *Haaretz*, 15 April 2020, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-missiles-to-ventilators-israeli-defense-contractors-answer-the-coronavirus-call-1.8766154>.

166. Netta Ahituv, “Israeli Health Minister’s Cure for COVID-19? The Messiah,” *Haaretz*, 26 March 2020, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-israel-coronavirus-health-cure-1.8703719>.

167. Netta Ahituv, “Israeli Health Minister’s Cure for COVID-19? The Messiah,” *Haaretz*, 26 March 2020, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-israel-coronavirus-health-cure-1.8703719>.

168. Haneen Maikay and Hilary Aked, “Eurovision Has Turned Into a ‘Pinkwashing’ Opportunity for Israel,” *The Independent*, 3 March 2019, <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/eurovision-israel-lgbt-rights-pinkwashing-palestine-a8804851.html>.

169. “Israel’s Health Minister Gets Coronavirus; Top Officials Isolate,” *Al Jazeera*, 2 April 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/04/israel-health-minister-coronavirus-top-officials-isolate-200402110043764.html>.

170. Gian Balsamo, *Proust and His Banker: In Search of Time Squandered* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2017).

171. Gideon Levy, “Israel Trading in Ventilators for Helpless Gazans Is Inhumane,” *Haaretz*, 15 April 2020, <https://www.haaretz.com/opinion/.premium-israel-trading-in-ventilators-for-helpless-gazans-is-inhumane-1.8768709>.

Gaza Strip during this pandemic, we must solve a riddle: What happens during times of “normalized exception”¹⁷² in a “space of exception” that already lives in a permanent “state of exception”?¹⁷³ What is the fate of the Palestinian *homo sacer*, whose inconsequential murder became so mundane that to ensure its continuity it had to become entertaining? And how can the Israeli state turn a pandemic, which the World Health Organization director called an “enemy of humanity,” into being only an enemy of the Palestinians?¹⁷⁴

When trying to predict Israel’s policies during the pandemic, it is easier to start with what it does not want. On 5 April 2020, a war game was held at the INSS, simulating a large-scale outbreak of the coronavirus in the Gaza Strip that resulted in hundreds of fatalities. It concluded that the greatest risk, to be prevented at all costs, was that an “infection [would] spill over into its own territory.”¹⁷⁵ Short of that, Israel will attempt to weaponize the pandemic and use it as another additive in its titration reaction of life and death in Gaza—or, as the INSS put it, the “corona crisis may prove to be an opportunity for Israel.”¹⁷⁶ According to the Palestinian Ministry of Health, Israel insisted that the first testing kits allowed into Gaza were to be used to test Gaza’s sewage outflow. Since then, Israel has severely restricted the delivery of testing kits into Gaza, to the point that testing had to be suspended on several occasions.¹⁷⁷ It has prevented international agencies from donating ventilators¹⁷⁸ (Gaza currently has 65) and has prevented the importation of personal protective equipment (PPE) by the Ministry of Health in Gaza.

By employing draconian quarantine measures to compensate for the lack of testing capacity, the authorities in Gaza have so far been able to control the pandemic. Like a water-boarding torture victim who holds their own breath so as not to drown, Palestinians in Gaza employ a strict quarantine process. They established 28 quarantine centers in hotels and schools and 1,000 quarantine units in Rafah, in the south, and Beit Hanoun, in the north of Gaza.¹⁷⁹ The decision to put all Palestinians who returned to Gaza into isolation in these centers for a month proved to be the most effective way to prevent the spread of the disease. As one Palestinian official said, “From the beginning we knew that in case of an outbreak, the medical system would collapse, so the method of immediate isolation for everyone who entered the Gaza Strip was the best.”¹⁸⁰ By mid-July, over 6,500

172. Owen, “States of Emergency, Metaphors of Virus, and COVID-19.”

173. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer*.

174. “WHO Chief Calls COVID-19 ‘Enemy Against Humanity,’” *Channel News Asia*, 19 March 2020, <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/world/coronavirus-covid-19-who-enemy-against-humanity-12554256>.

175. Noa Shusterman, Udi Dekel, “The Coronavirus in Gaza: Insights from a War Game,” Institute for National Security Studies, Special Publication, 13 April 2020, <https://www.inss.org.il/publication/coronavirus-and-gaza/>.

176. Yohanan Tzoreff and Kobi Michael, “The Corona Pandemic and the Palestinian Arena: Significance for Israel,” *INSS Insight* 1295 (April 2020).

177. Tamara Nassar, “Gaza Has Barely Any Coronavirus Test Kits,” *Electronic Intifada*, 14 April 2020, <https://electronicintifada.net/blogs/tamara-nassar/gaza-has-barely-any-coronavirus-test-kits>.

178. Levy, “Israel Trading in Ventilators for Helpless Gazans Is Inhumane.”

179. Michael Herzog and Ghaith al-Omari, “Coronavirus on the Israeli-Palestinian Scene (Part 2): The Gaza Strip,” *PolicyWatch* 3311, The Washington Institute, 21 July 2020, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/coronavirus-on-the-israeli-palestinian-scene-part-2-the-gaza-strip>.

180. Jack Khoury, “The Economy Is at a Standstill, and Residents Now Have to Think About Putting Food on the Table After Major Outbreak Apparently Averted,” *Haaretz*, 7 May 2020, <https://www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/palestinians/-premium-with-coronavirus-in-check-gaza-worries-about-economic-fallout-1.8828968>.

people had been quarantined,¹⁸¹ and as a result of stringent quarantine measures the total number of reported COVID-19 cases in Gaza totaled 72, with all identified cases being returnees from outside Gaza, including the only fatality (a 75-year-old woman suffering from chronic conditions).¹⁸²

But this lockdown came at a high price. According to HelpAge International, an NGO working in Gaza, 73 people died due to lack of health care during the pandemic lockdown; 850 oxygen gas cylinders had to be redistributed to COVID-19 patients from people who needed them for other health conditions; and 1,200 patients were unable to access life-saving medical care. The European Hospital effectively closed its doors to all but COVID-19 patients, and 3,500 patients who depended on it for health care had to seek treatment elsewhere.¹⁸³ The severe lockdown has also precipitated an economic downturn in an already crippled economy.¹⁸⁴

Throughout this pandemic, binarism has remained at the heart of the settler-native relationship. As a result of their agency, Palestinians have remained distinct as the only possible bearers of sovereignties, exceeding the monistic version imposed by the Israeli settler. By attempting to relegate its relationship with those Palestinians who became its citizens into a “post-racist era” while rebranding the fruits of its “industry of oppression” as potential salvation for humanity during the pandemic, Israel deliberately attempts to dilute this binarism as an instrument of conquest. So long as these uncontained alternative sovereignties and areas of structural incompleteness persist within the bounds of the settler polity, Israel’s policies are doomed to fail.¹⁸⁵ Of all Western thinkers, Agamben has been the most foreboding about the pandemic’s consequences. As early as 25 February 2020, the renowned philosopher Giorgio Agamben published a piece titled “Lo stato d’eccezione provocato de un’emergenza immotivata” (The state of exception provoked by an unmotivated emergency) in *Il Manifesto* in which he criticized the measures Italy had started implementing to stop the spread of the virus.¹⁸⁶ He warned against accepting measures that severely restrict freedom in the name of security, arguing that the coronavirus response demonstrated a “tendency to use the state of exception as a normal governing paradigm.” It was almost as if “once terrorism was exhausted as a justification for exceptional measures, the invention of an epidemic could offer the ideal pretext for broadening such measures beyond any limitation.”¹⁸⁷ Agamben

181. Shoroq Hamad, Eman Abu Hamra, Riyad Diab, Bassam Abu Hamad, Nicola Jones, and Agnieszka Malachowska, “Exploring the Impacts of Covid-19 on Adolescents in the Gaza Strip,” ODI, June 2020, <https://www.odi.org/publications/17036-exploring-impact-covid-19-adolescents-gaza-strip>.

182. “Occupied Palestinian Territory (oPt): COVID-19 Emergency Situation Report No.13,” United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA, 1–14 July 2020), <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/covid-19-emergency-situation-report-13>.

183. “Gaza: Thousands of Lives of Chronic Disease Patients at Risk during COVID-19 Pandemic,” Help Age International, 23 June 2020, accessed July 20, 2020, <https://www.helpage.org/newsroom/latest-news/gaza-thousands-of-lives-of-chronic-disease-patients-at-risk-during-covid19-pandemic/>.

184. Hugh Lovatt, “Defeating Covid-19 in Gaza: Is It Enough?” European Council on Foreign Relations, https://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_defeating_covid_19_in_gaza_is_it_enough1.

185. Patrick Wolfe, “Recuperating Binarism: A Heretical Introduction,” *Settler Colonial Studies* 3 (2013): pp. 257–279.

186. Giorgio Agamben, “Lo stato d’eccezione provocato de un’emergenza immotivata,” *Il Manifesto*, 26 February 2020, <https://ilmanifesto.it/lo-stato-deccezione-provocato-da-unemergenza-immotivata/>.

187. Giorgio Agamben, “The State of Exception Provoked by an Unmotivated Emergency,” *Positions Politics*, 26 February 2020, <http://positionswebsite.org/giorgio-agamben-the-state-of-exception-provoked-by-an-unmotivated-emergency/>.

reiterated these ideas in two other texts that appeared on the website of the Italian publishing house Quodlibet in mid-March.¹⁸⁸ Evidently, Agamben has been proven wrong in stating that COVID-19 is “invented,” or is hardly different from the normal flu. Whereas patients suffering from flu die in around 0.1% of the cases, the mortality rate for COVID-19 is much higher, with recent estimates ranging from 1%–4%.¹⁸⁹ Yet even those who disagreed with Agamben’s analysis from the start admit that by the end of this crisis the surveillance powers of governments will have increased tenfold.¹⁹⁰ Security—the freedom from fear or risk—always suggests an absolute demand. Security has, as Foucault wrote, no principle of limitation.¹⁹¹

It is obvious that Agamben’s dystopian permanent state of exception, in which digital control and bio-surveillance are normalized, closely resembles the regime inflicted on the Palestinians. As Stephen Collier and Andrew Lakoff point out, “there are different kinds of biosecurity” that entail different technical understandings of threats and “different underlying values” that transcend and even shape matters of technical disagreement.¹⁹¹ Israel’s embrace of the opportunities offered by such a world results from its ability to furnish that world with the technologies and strategies it needs to flourish. However, these technologies will come with their founding values of settler colonialism and oppression, and will therefore shape the future of global biosecurity in terms of those deleterious values.

188. Agamben’s *il manifesto* article, and the following discussion in the Italian online journal *antinomie*, with contributions by Jean-Luc Nancy, Sergio Benvenuto, and Roberto Esposito, among others, are collected on the website of the *European Journal of Psychoanalysis*. Further interventions include Alain Badiou, “On the Pandemic Situation,” *MicroMega*, 25 March 2020, and Paolo Flores d’Arcais, “Philosophy and the Virus: Giorgio Agamben’s Ravings,” *MicroMega*, 16 March 2020.

189. See the World Health Organization’s statistics at www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019.

190. Marco D’Eramo, “The Philosopher’s Epidemic,” *New Left Review* 122 (March/April 2020).

191. Michel Foucault, “The Risks of Security,” in *Power: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954–1984*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: The New Press, 2000), pp. 365–382.

THE VIRUS, THE SETTLER, AND THE SIEGE GAZA IN THE AGE OF CORONA

DR. G. S. ABU-SITTAH

THIS FIFTH INSTALLMENT of the Current Issues in Depth series by Dr. Ghassan Soleiman Abu-Sittah analyzes Israel's siege on Gaza in light of the emergence of Covid-19. As Abu-Sittah shows, the drive towards elimination of the virus and the increasingly restrictive enclosure of the indigenous population that is the essential dynamic of settler colonialism provides the best explanation of what Israel is doing in, and to, Gaza. He expands on this insight, laying bare the cold logic behind Israel's policies towards the Gaza Strip in particular, and the whole of Palestine in general, during the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

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