

From the Editors



AS THIS ISSUE GOES TO PRINT, much of the world is still under lockdown. The seismic shift resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic parallels the rupture of World War I. The “new normal” may render the prior period our own belle époque. At this writing, the outcome remains uncertain, the duration indefinite, and the losses incalculable.

Such conditions of precarity, temporal suspension, and persistent loss have been a way of life for Palestinians since the early twentieth century, when British colonial rule entrenched Zionist settlement. Uncertainty about time and space became a staple of everyday life after these forces combined to bring about the death of contiguous Palestine and the birth of the Palestinian refugee condition in 1948. Curfew, military rule, and confinement have ranged from Israel’s incarceration of nearly two million Palestinians in the Gaza Strip since 2007, to its now fifty-three-year occupation of the West Bank and Jerusalem. The history of such closures also runs deep. In response to the national boycott and armed revolt of 1936–39, British colonial officials instituted the forms of collective punishment that Palestinians have become all too familiar with: house demolitions, targeted assassinations, torture, detention, deportation, and exile. British emergency regulations would have a long life: reimposed in 1945, they were subsequently deployed by Israel to enforce a regime of military rule on Palestinian citizens from 1948 until 1966. Repeated sieges such as those of the Palestinian refugee camps of Tal al-Za’tar and Burj al-Barajneh in Beirut, Israel’s invasion of Lebanon in 1982, the 2002 Jenin invasion, the repeated hellfire of Israel’s assaults on Gaza, and the more recent blockade of Yarmouk camp outside Damascus have all honed our individual and collective understandings of lockdown.

We are hopeful that this invisible pathogen and the mass trauma it has produced may inspire social change. Yet, like many around us, we fear what the future may hold. The unprecedented health and economic crises of this moment have shed a glaring light on the cost of social structures rooted in the logics of “profit before people.” As with all emergencies, the poor and oppressed will suffer the most. There is also a sliver of possibility, as popular movements often mobilize in post-crisis moments. The battle will be long and hard. We know that political and economic elites have already profited from disaster capitalism and the corpses and broken lives it leaves in its wake.

Ongoing catastrophe as a lucrative opportunity for governments and corporations alike is another pattern Palestinians know far too much about; meanwhile, the pandemic-induced global crisis has escalated their collective incarceration. In the last two weeks of March, armed Israeli settlers’ attacks on unarmed, confined Palestinian villagers rose by 78 percent, according to United Nations sources.¹ In the meantime, Israel has intensified intelligence and security tracking of citizens and those in the occupied Palestinian territories alike. The pandemic has expanded state incursions into Palestinian spaces, bodies, and futures.

Of course, the Palestinians are not alone in sustaining ongoing, indeed escalating, catastrophe. Famine and war continue to ravage Yemenis, just as conflict and displacement bear down on Libyans and Syrians. When the “invisible enemy” that is Covid-19 subsides, war, military occupation, poverty,

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and dispossession will remain, in the Middle East and beyond. So too will the question of Palestine, in spite of momentous efforts to erase it.

We prepared the content of the *Journal* before the onset of the global lockdown in the spring of 2020. One indication of how deeply this moment speaks to our pasts and our futures is Gary Fields's prescient article, "Lockdown: Gaza through a Camera Lens and Historical Mirror." Fields links the extraordinary status of the Gaza Strip to historical carceral sites such as Algeria under French settler colonialism, the antebellum South in the United States, and plague-stricken European towns. He highlights both Palestine's specificity and its parallels with other times and places. Gaza, and we would suggest Palestine writ large, can best be understood as part of what Fields calls a "broader historical lineage of confinement landscapes."

In addition to the usual mix of articles, essays, and special sections, the next issue of the *Journal* will feature a special dossier on the impact of the global pandemic on Palestine and the Palestinians.

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ENDNOTE

- 1 United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Occupied Palestinian Territory, *Protection of Civilians Report, 17–30 March 2020*, 2 April 2020, <https://www.ochaopt.org/poc/17-30-march-2020>.