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EDITORIAL

## From the Editors

TO WRITE ABOUT PALESTINE IS TO BALANCE DOCUMENTING SETTLER VIOLENCE while moving beyond it. A recent example of this challenge is honoring the life and legacy of beloved journalist Shireen Abu Akleh, who was brutally murdered on May 11, 2022. At the time of this writing, it has been one hundred days since the assassination of the woman who exemplified the necessity and vitality of Palestinian journalists. Israel's campaign of obfuscation regarding the details of her murder has failed. The Palestinian Authority, the United Nations, Al Jazeera,<sup>1</sup> the Washington Post,<sup>2</sup> CNN,<sup>3</sup> and now the Israeli army itself<sup>4</sup> have all concluded that it was an Israeli sniper that shot Abu Akleh while her family, and Palestinians more broadly, continue to demand justice.<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile, the United States enables Israel's impunity, consistently treating the Israeli settler-colonial regime's degradation of the Palestinian social order like a tragedy without a perpetrator. In its report, the Office of the United States Security Coordinator for Israel and the Palestinian Authority concluded that Israeli army gunfire was "likely responsible" but that there was "no reason to believe that this was intentional but rather the result of tragic circumstances during ... [an Israeli military] raid against factions of Palestinian Islamic Jihad ... which followed a series of terrorist attacks in Israel."<sup>6</sup> This circular logic, the use of "tragedy," blames the colonized for their colonization and holds the colonizer innocent.

In the same vein, as the United States and Israel move to build a new US embassy compound in West Jerusalem on waqf properties (Islamic endowments) as well as land owned by Palestinian citizens, another instance of US and Israeli obfuscation took shape. Known as the Allenby Barracks, the site was the military headquarters of an earlier colonial power. Adalah, the Palestinian human rights organization, has evidenced that the British government recognized Palestinian ownership of the site and was paying rent for the properties into the early 1950s. When confronted with this evidence, the US State Department blandly gestured to conducting "due diligence."<sup>7</sup> Like most of the land in the areas incorporated into Israel in 1948 and after 1967, these properties were seized from their Palestinian owners. That some of their rightful owners are US citizens, like Abu Akleh, did not cause their government to qualify its unwavering support for Israel's murder of Palestinians and the theft of their property.

This US strategy is synchronized with Israel's own approach, using both hard and soft violence against the Palestinians. During Israel's most recent war on the people of the embattled and besieged Gaza Strip in August 2022, a large majority of the Palestinians killed were civilians, including seventeen children. We were treated to yet another performance of the Israeli establishment's obfuscation and its blaming of the colonized. Israeli authorities and analysts openly admitted that the attack was preemptive and primarily designed to lift the domestic political fortunes of the interim prime minister, Yair Lapid. The response from the US president and his administration was yet again obfuscation: the United States supported Israel's right to "self-defense" even in a situation where the Israeli government admitted that it had acted unprovoked and murdered dozens of civilians.

Alongside the spectacle of a nuclear power bombarding an occupied people are the smaller daily attacks on quotidian life, already strained to the hilt under the trifecta of occupation,

settler colonialism, and apartheid. In August 2022, seven human rights and civil society organizations withstood further assaults on their existence. The Israeli army forcibly entered, raided, ransacked, and damaged the properties of six Palestinian civil society organizations—Al-Haq, Addameer, the Bisan Center for Research and Development, Defence for Children International–Palestine, the Union of Agricultural Workers Committees, and the Union of Palestinian Women’s Committees—it had already criminalized by association in October 2021, using labels like “terrorist” and “unlawful.” This time, the raids extended to the offices of the Union of Health Work Committees. Israeli soldiers rammed the front doors, seized documents, computers, camera equipment, confidential files, and other property, then welded the entry doors shut and posted military orders for immediate closure.<sup>8</sup> In the words of Al-Haq: “Israel’s unlawful and aggressive incursion poses an existential threat to Palestinian civil society.”<sup>9</sup>

The slow, daily grinding violence of demolitions and evictions in Jerusalem and the West Bank have also not abated: from Silwan, where Palestinian homes are regularly demolished for lack of impossible-to-obtain building permits, to the twenty villages of Masafer Yatta, lined with ancient cave structures, that Israel has designated a military firing zone. The Palestinians of Masafer Yatta, in Area C of the West Bank, have been subject to expulsion since 1999 on the grounds that they are “illegally living in a firing zone.”<sup>10</sup> In Sarura, a village in this endangered area, a group of Palestinians established Youth of Sumud in 2017. They rehabilitate ancient caves and structures, support fellow Palestinians facing settler attacks on both their harvests and their bodies, and take part in continued nonviolent resistance to Israeli occupation. In 2021, Youth of Sumud set up a community center as a gathering place where legal training, photography, and language courses are offered. Earlier this summer, the Israeli army served the community center with a demolition order.<sup>11</sup>

Another center that confronted violence—this time from settlers—was Sakiya, an academy for experimental knowledge production that combines local agrarian practices with contemporary art and ecology. Located in Ein Qiniya, Sakiya foregrounds farmers and craftspeople as central experts alongside artists and scholars. Together, they engage in food production, exhibitions, workshops, and symposia. On August 12, 2022, settlers forcibly entered Sakiya’s premises, ransacked the outdoor kitchen, destroyed the community-designed low-emission wood-burning stove, emptied the rainwater collection barrels, damaged the septic system, and stole handmade farming tools and implements as well as the electric water pump. They dumped out the contents of the fish nursery and several of the center’s livestock are still missing. The settlers also vandalized several research and art projects. Like Masafer Yatta, Sakiya is also in Area C. Illegal settlements occupy the area’s western hilltops, blocking access to land and resources and severing Palestinians’ connections to other villages such as Ein ‘Arik, al-Janiya, Ras Karkar, and al-Mazra’a al-Gharbiya.<sup>12</sup>

The challenge for Palestinians is to remain vigilant on all these fronts and to continue investing in those sinews that maintain the social fabric and keep it thriving. Here, we can follow Shireen Abu Akleh’s lead and attend to both the big events that constitute History and the less visible quotidian ones that are often relegated to the margins, from the theft of Palestinian land to the ransacking of civil society organizations.

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## Endnotes

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