

EDITORIAL

What Is Gaza to Jerusalem?

Through its first three quarters, 2023 had already proven to be the deadliest year for Palestinians since 2006. Israel's far-right government oversaw an intensification of state violence – including deadly raids in Jenin, 'Aqabat Jabr, and Nur Shams refugee camps, among other locations, but also the continued blockade of the Gaza Strip – while tolerating or encouraging settler violence, the most striking example being the rampage through Huwara in late February. Across Palestine, there seemed to be a broad consensus that things were getting worse. This steady decline has now become a free fall.

On 7 October 2023, Hamas launched Operation Tufan al-Aqsa (al-Aqsa Flood). Some 1,500 Palestinian fighters demolished parts of the barriers meant to seal Palestinians within the Gaza Strip, crossed to the other side by land, air, and sea, and targeted Israeli military installations, kibbutzim, and communities adjacent to the Gaza Strip and as far north as 'Asqalan. Few if any could have anticipated the scale of the attack and the number of those killed (around 1,200 people) wounded, and abducted by Hamas fighters (about 240 captives); the degree of coordination and planning that allowed so many fighters to advance so deeply into territories that Israel had cordoned off from Gaza decades ago; or the apparent lack of warning by the intelligence or preparation by Israeli military and security forces. The surprise attack, especially the unprecedented number of civilian casualties, sent a shock wave through Israeli society.

In the terrible weeks since, Israel has bombarded the Gaza Strip with more than

twenty-five thousand tons of explosives, and has cut the Gaza population's access to food, water, medicine, electricity, fuel, and other necessities. Medical personnel and infrastructure, schools, journalists, and places of worship have all been directly targeted. After three weeks of uninterrupted bombing, Israeli forces embarked upon a ground invasion of the coastal strip. Communication within Gaza and from Gaza to the outside world has been extremely limited – for thirty-four hours coinciding with the start of the ground invasion, there was an almost total blackout. The scale of suffering is difficult to record, let alone comprehend. One month in, more than ten thousand Palestinian deaths have been reported in Gaza, though with so many destroyed high-rise apartment buildings, the true number is surely higher.

In the West Bank and Jerusalem, movement has been curtailed and fear of military and settler violence is pervasive, confining many to their neighborhoods or within their homes. Israel continues to launch military raids throughout the West Bank, accompanied by air strikes. The number of Palestinian prisoners has swelled, and their conditions harshened, now deprived of food and water access, healthcare, electricity, and communication with family and lawyers, and subjected to overcrowding, solitary confinement, and physical torture. Settler and vigilante violence is surging across historic Palestine, fueled by weapons supplied by the Israeli government and a general sense of impunity. Within a generalized atmosphere of terror, settlers have completely displaced more than a dozen Palestinian communities and taken over their lands.

Many fear that the violence will spread to engulf the region. Israel has launched attacks on Lebanon, Syria, and Egypt – the latter allegedly by mistake. The U.S. government, striking a slightly more cautious tone of late, initially encouraged Israel's genocidal violence in Gaza while sending aircraft carriers to the region and striking sites in Syria to cow regional actors into quiescence. But European and North American states' support for Israel feels increasingly out of step with world opinion. Eight countries in Latin America, Africa, and the Middle East have recalled their ambassadors to Israel, and Bolivia severed diplomatic ties altogether. Millions of demonstrators have taken to the streets around the world, calling for freedom for Palestinians and a stop to Israel's destruction of Gaza. Across Europe and the United States, these calls have been met with censorship, intimidation, harassment, and arrests. Attacks on pro-Palestinian sentiment predated Tufan al-Aqsa, of course, but have reached new levels of intensity in its aftermath. Take, for example, the Palestine Writes festival, reviewed in this issue by Ahmad Abu Ahmad: the festival, which took place on the University of Pennsylvania campus in late September, came under intense pressure from anti-Palestinian groups seeking to prevent or disrupt it; after 7 October, however, Zionist donors withdrew funds from the university and called for the dismissal of its president. In a number of high-profile cases, critics of Israeli policies have been accused of antisemitism and support for terrorism, doxxed, boycotted, denied employment, and fired from their jobs. In a case particularly close to the *Jerusalem Quarterly*, Asher Cohen, the president of the Hebrew University, and Tamir Sheaffer, its rector, publicly released a letter smearing Professor Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian, a contributing editor of *JQ*, and suggesting that she resign her position. In this issue, we republish a response from the Middle East Studies Association of North America's Committee on Academic Freedom decrying Cohen and

Sheafer's letter as "a grievous violation of Professor Shalhoub-Kevorkian's academic freedom and ... an incitement to violence."

A quarterly journal is an imperfect forum for responding to fast-developing and breaking events. Each day brings new horrors. It feels that we are at a turning point, but how will we know when we've rounded the corner? By the time this issue is printed, will Israel have succeeded in displacing millions of Palestinians into the Sinai – a plan that Israeli military insiders identified as the most advantageous possible outcome of the current assault on Gaza? Will states and other actors in the region reach a point where they can no longer remain passive, given the scale of Israel's violence, leading to a larger conflagration? There is always a futility in trying to predict the future, but a number of terrifying possibilities feel closer than ever to being realized.

Yet, as many observers and commentators have made clear, neither Tufan al-Aqsa, nor Israel's bombardment and starvation of Gaza – not to mention the campaign of intimidation and censorship against '48 Palestinians or the intensification of state and settler violence against Palestinian communities in the West Bank – can be disconnected from the century-long Zionist project of colonization in Palestine and Palestinians' resistance to it. In this regard, although most of the contributions to this issue were completed well before Tufan al-Aqsa and Israel's subsequent assault on Palestinian life, they remain relevant to what is happening now and what will unfold in the days, months, and years to come.

It is essential to situate the current moment in the longer context of Israel's efforts to control, displace, and erase the Palestinian people, and the refusal of Palestinians to succumb. Israel pursues these policies through tried and tested methods (divide and rule, miseducation, and the cooptation of local elites, for example), as well as new innovations and technologies (including surveillance cameras, spyware, and online tools of disinformation). The former is treated in Yusri Khaizran's article on the Druze population within the '48 territories, as well as the efforts to cleave the Druze from the Palestinian body politic and the broader Arab and Islamic milieus, and the protest movements they have organized to challenge their dispossession and marginalization. Similarly, Mahmoud Muna, in his essay "Colonial Subjugation, Not Organic Integration," speaks to the ways in which physical infrastructure, precarious legal status, and economic pressure have separated Palestinian Jerusalemites from their compatriots in the West Bank, while fostering connections between Jerusalemites and '48 Palestinians. Shahd Qannam and Jamal Abu Eisheh, meanwhile, turn their attention to the latter in "Settler Colonialism and Digital Tools of Elimination in Palestinian Jerusalem" – a piece that received honorable mention in the 2023 Ibrahim Dakkak Award competition. Qannam and Abu Eisheh explore how forms of surveillance, mapping, and social media are mobilized by Israel to control Palestinian actions, voices, and presence in Jerusalem with the goal of erasing its Palestinian identity. Such efforts have only intensified since 7 October.

The current Israeli assault on Palestinians has also given rise to calls to revive the moribund "peace process" that thirty years ago took shape in the Oslo accords. Some of this is certainly cynical, an attempt to install a comprador authority in what remains of Gaza after Israel "destroys Hamas" – the stated goal, however empty, of its bombardment and invasion. For others it is an acknowledgement that there is no military solution to a

political problem, and that Tufan al-Aqsa, Hamas's popularity, and the inhumane conditions under which more than two million Palestinians live in Gaza (to say nothing of Jerusalem and the rest of the West Bank) are themselves the product of Oslo's failure. In this issue, Mick Dumper reflects on his own role in the "Middle East Peace Process," specifically in Track Two diplomacy efforts. It is a critical account of how this process came to take on a momentum of its own, in many ways divorced from the deteriorating conditions on the ground – the mushrooming carceral structures that locked Palestinians behind walls, fences, and checkpoints, and within mangled political structures and discourses.

Gaza is often referred to as the world's largest open-air prison. It thus serves as a symbol of Israel's project of confining the maximum number of Palestinians in the minimum amount of territory – the corollary to the Zionist ambition to absorb the maximum amount of Palestinian land with the minimum number of Palestinians. Its majority refugee population is a testament to the enormous disruption of the 1948 Nakba. It is a specter of both past and future, a reminder of prior Palestinian traumas and a grim vision of Israel's plan for Palestine. At the same time, it is the pit that sticks in the throat of Zionist attempts over seven decades to consume the fruit of Palestine – where the All-Palestine Government was established and the founders of Fatah were nurtured, where Hamas was born and where the first intifada ignited, where 'Arafat returned to Palestinian soil after Oslo, and where Israel evacuated its settlements after the second intifada. Despite Israeli efforts to sever Gaza and cordon it off from the rest of Palestine, it has been and remains an essential part of Palestine's past, present, and future.

It is important not to lose sight of Gaza's past. As a crossroads linking Africa and Asia, a Mediterranean port linked to trade routes extending east and south to the Indian Ocean, Gaza has been a city defined by movement of goods, people, and knowledge. In two Letters from Jerusalem, Khalid Bshara and Chris Whitman-Abdelkarim profile efforts to preserve Gaza's past, the precious material and documentary remains of its rich history and culture, despite the multiple threats arrayed against it. Bshara reflects on his experience working with local architects, engineers, artisans, laborers, and students in the restoration of historic buildings in the Gaza Strip, including the al-Saqqa mansion, Dayr al-Khadr or the Monastery of Saint George in Dayr al-Balah, and Dar al-Ghusayn. Whitman-Abdelkarim describes the personal efforts of Salim al-Rayyes to collect and protect artifacts and documents for his antique shop in Gaza City. Ultimately, of course, the value of the items is not intrinsic, but linked to the individual lives and social worlds that birthed them. Indeed, it is not difficult to imagine Shaykh Khalil al-Khalidi, profiled in this issue by Khader Salameh, stopping in Gaza during his many travels back and forth between Cairo and Jerusalem, visiting its mosques and libraries to meet with its scholars and notables.

In the realm of real and imagined journeys, existence, and mortality, Eibhlín Priestley's review of Jacob Norris's opus *The Lives and Deaths of Jubrail Dabdoub* is elegantly encapsulated by the title "Chasing Miracles." In a world shadowed by adversity, it is not a single miracle, but a profusion of them, that one yearns for in these trying times. As we witness Israel's ongoing attempts to obliterate the individual lives and social worlds of Palestinians in Gaza and beyond, it is imperative that we not reduce Gaza to a site of incarceration, impoverishment, destruction, and death. It has been and must continue to be, as Bshara writes, "a testament to an unbending human spirit that defies oppression and seeks freedom."