

Genocide in Gaza: Physical Destruction and Beyond

By

Mohammed Nijim

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*To my cousin **Aisha** who fell with her husband and unborn baby in the 2014
aggression on Gaza.*

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Abstract

After the ascendancy of Hamas to power in 2006, Israel imposed a strangling siege on the Gaza Strip. The blockade through the air, water, and ground marks a new episode of Palestinian suffering as it dictates the day-to-day reality for Gaza where Israel is in control of everything. Recently, the United Nations has warned of the implications of the Israeli siege and emphasized that Gaza could soon be unlivable. Using data collected through semi-structured interviews with six Palestinian students from Gaza who are currently studying in the US, the present study adopts a sociological perspective to examine whether Israel is committing a slow-motion genocide in Gaza. The findings indicate that Israel uses direct but more often indirect methods to inflict the utmost destruction upon Gazans as a social group. The findings reveal that all Gazans are entrapped in a vicious circle of violence that starts from childhood and continues until it either causes physical or mental destruction or leads them to emigrate. The findings also reveal that the Israeli punitive measures caused the rise of many social problems that led to weaker relations among individuals and declining social vitality.

Chapter: Introduction

The Jewish-Arab conflict has been scholarly and politically contentious and sensitive. So far, many studies have been done about Palestine: some criticizing Israel and exposing its brutality against Palestinians, and others siding with Israel and putting the blame on Palestinians for their continued misery. This topic is sensitive because the perpetrator here was the victim of one of humanity's most heinous crimes – the Holocaust. In this thesis, I argue that Israeli policies against Palestinians in Gaza amount to genocide; however, most intellectuals, media outlets, and politicians are so cautious with using the concept of genocide. Criticisms of Israel are usually too costly because of the latter's significant influence in political centers around the globe. Mearsheimer and Stephen (2006) demonstrate the role of Jewish lobby groups – especially the American-Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) – and its impact on US foreign policy. They illustrate how these pressure groups receive massive support and shape US foreign policy in the Middle East. The ongoing neglect makes Gaza a particularly morally problematic case of genocide because the international community watches this ugly spectacle unfold while some of its influential members actively assist Israel in its approach to Gaza (see Falk, 2010). Israel consistently reminds the world, especially the West, of its historical victimhood and the atrocities committed against world Jewry during the Holocaust. Therefore, the US, being Israel's closest ally, and Europe, which still feels a great guilt because of the Holocaust, both turn a blind eye to Israel's crimes and the need for accountability.

Those who decry Israel in their studies and publicly on media outlets mostly use “less criminal sounding terms” such as mass killing, ethnic cleansing, and massacres. The use of these terms usually mitigates the magnitude and the brutality of Israeli crimes and emboldens the latter to commit more violations. Therefore, out of intellectual responsibility that requires bravery and consistency, scholars must employ the right terminology when referring to certain crimes, no

matter what the consequences. How would it feel if we refer to the Holocaust as a massacre, ethnic cleansing or perhaps the Final Solution? Using the right term is necessary to do justice to the victims. Although the term genocide is contested (as shown later), I adopt a sociological perspective throughout the study and follow in the footsteps of Raphael Lemkin, Helen Fein, Daniel Feierstein and other sociologists to demonstrate that Palestinians in Gaza, as a group, are facing attempted destruction by the state of Israel.

Regardless of the pressure of these lobby groups, there are several scholars, intellectuals and media outlets that refer to the situation in Gaza as genocide. For instance, the prominent international law scholar Richard Falk describes the siege in Gaza as a prelude to genocide that “should remind the world of the famous post-Nazi pledge of ‘never again’” (2010). Falk argues that the persistence of the Israeli siege and other punitive measures is indeed genocidal, and risks destroying an entire Palestinian community that is an integral part of the Palestinian ethnic whole. This pushed Falk to warn of a Palestinian holocaust in the making. These remarks were made in 2010 when the punitive measures against Gaza were less strict. One expects Falk would be firmer and more confident with using the term genocide now given the wholesale destruction inflicted on Gaza since that time, as evidenced by the examples presented in this study. Similarly, the Israeli historian Ilan Pappé defines the Israeli policies and the prolonged occupation as “incremental genocide.” Pappé stresses the need to locate Israel’s barbaric actions in Gaza – then and now – within a wider historical context (2014). He used the terminology first in 2006 when Gaza was attacked and again in 2014 during the vicious Israeli assault that lasted 51 days. The same terminology of incremental genocide was also used by the late human rights lawyer and Center for Constitutional Rights Board president Michael Ratner as part of his denunciation of the Israeli policies in Gaza (CCR, 2016). Other critics who use the term genocide include Nicaragua’s foreign

minister Miguel D'Escoto Brockmann, as well as the late Turkish columnist and author Oktay Akbal (see Chomsky & Papp, 2013: 191-2). These critical denunciations and studies are mostly met by Israel as racist and anti-Semitic.

Chapter overview

This qualitative study examines the situation in Gaza from a sociological perspective and evaluates whether the use of genocide terminology is valid. Not all genocides are high-intensity episodes of mass murder; the destruction of the group can also be achieved through slow-motion genocides characterized by limited killing and gradual destruction (see Rosenberg, 2012). This study includes six chapters in which I develop my argument. Chapter One provides historical context and the background to the conflict. I begin with the frequent attempts of Jews to purchase land during the Ottoman time, especially with the emergence of Zionism as a colonial movement seeking to bring Jews back to their perceived historical home. When that failed, Jews entered Ottoman Palestine through illegal ways and mostly resided in the holy city of Jerusalem. I also demonstrate the role of different Israeli organizations that were an essential part of the colonial project, including Jewish National Funds and the Jewish Agency. Then I discuss the occupation of Palestine by colonial Britain after the defeat of the Ottomans in World War One. Britain, which was known for its colonial ventures across the globe coupled with heinous genocides committed against Indigenous populations in the hinterlands, lent a hand to Jews to build a homeland upon the corpses of Palestinians. British colonists as well as Jewish paramilitaries crushed all forms of Palestinian resistance and paved the road to the establishment of Israel in 1948. After occupying the majority of the land, Israel also occupied the rest of the Palestinian territories in 1967, including the Gaza Strip. In 2005, Israel pulled out its settlers from Gaza but then imposed a full-blown siege

that impacted all aspects of life. This historical background is crucial because the Israeli siege is part of the prolonged colonial project that started at the beginning of the 20th century.

Chapter Two explores four theories that are indispensable for my overall argument. I first discuss the need for a sociological perspective to better understand genocide. I rely on sociological definitions drawn from Raphael Lemkin, Daniel Feierstein (2014: 32), and Helen Fein (1990). Then I examine the relationship between settler-colonialism and genocide. Lemkin emphasizes in his writings that colonial practices are intimately related to those of genocide (1944: 79). How can one imagine the establishment of a new settler society without removing indigenous populations? I also argue that Zionism as a colonial movement relies heavily on racialization to build a pure Jewish society at the expense of colonized Palestinians. Through demonization, Palestinians are reduced to “bare life” divested of their fundamental rights. The notions of bare life and the state of exception make up the third theory that is used to enhance my argument. Finally, I harness the theory of social death as developed by Claudia Card. Card was influenced by Orlando Patterson, who studied the social death experienced by slaves (Card, 2010: 262-3). Card views genocide as an assault on social vitality and the relationships between group members, an aspect that is neglected in the United Nations Genocide Convention (UNGC) (Card, 2010: 237). Aspects of social and cultural destruction are discussed by other scholars, including Lemkin, Dirk Moses (2008; 2010), and Tony Barta (1987; 2013).

Chapter Three discusses the methods used in this research. The chapter elaborates on the utility of using semi-structured interviews to conduct research with survivors of the Israeli siege. The chapter looks at the use of multi-sampling, the primary tool used to identify research subjects for this study. I discuss why I relied on purposive sampling and snowball methodologies to select

my samples. Finally, the chapter discusses how the data was transcribed, coded and analyzed for this study, as well as issues pertaining to the security of the subjects.

Chapter Four explores the responses of participants regarding their experiences in Gaza and the status quo there. I mainly examine various destructive techniques used by Israel to inflict the utmost tangible and intangible damage on Gazans. These methods are direct such as recurrent Israeli assaults and mass killing, while indirect techniques include economic warfare, social erosion, and forced migration. Participants described the main features of their formative years throughout the many tragic events unfolding around them. Finally, I discuss the key findings that emerged from the analyzed data.

Chapter Five is intimately connected to the fourth chapter. It is a discussion of thorny issues that emerged while analyzing the data. These issues include sovereignty, inequality, and the relationship with the land. The findings explored and discussed reveal the deep-seated colonial structure in Palestine that prevents natives from exercising their very basic rights. The chapter also navigates through participants' opinions on the disparities between the colonizer and the colonized sectors. Although some of these responses about inequality were shocking, they seemed natural for me as a researcher given that Israel as a colonial project is no different than other enterprises.

Chapter Six concludes the thesis and discusses research limitations and suggestions for future studies. If conducted, these studies could lead to a more comprehensive understanding of the slow-motion genocide Israeli has conducted against native Palestinians since 1948.

Conclusion

In summation, this thesis adopts a sociological perspective to show the profound destruction caused in different aspects of life in Gaza as well as the techniques Israel employs to achieve that.

To do so, I apply different theories to prove with evidence that Israel is advancing a slow-motion genocide against Gazans. I argue that genocide is manifested in the Israeli siege and other crises that unfolded after. Yet one should start with the origins of the conflict and other relevant historical events. This is the subject of my first chapter.

Chapter One: Historical Context

This chapter provides the reader with historical context and background for the Jewish-Arab conflict in Palestine. Without reviewing past events, it is not possible for the reader to comprehend the current status of Gaza. I begin with a brief history of Palestine under the Ottoman Empire, including the purchase of land and other Jewish attempts to implement Zionism in Ottoman Palestine. The second section demonstrates the role of colonial Britain in helping Jews construct a national home in Palestine. It further illustrates the reactions and revolts of native Palestinians who refused the establishment of a Zionist state at their expense. Third, I explain significant political changes in the region, such as the establishment of Israel in 1948, Israel's aggression against Arabs in 1956 and 1967, both of which changed the trajectory of the Palestinian question. The fourth part discusses the outbreak of the First Intifada in 1987, the signing and failure of the Oslo Accords, and the outbreak of the second Intifada as a result. Finally, I delineate the current situation in Gaza, the Israeli siege, and its implications on Gazans.

Late Ottoman Palestine: Old Conflict

Nobody can deny the fact that Jews around the world lived a deplorable life overly characterized by exile, persecution, and displacement. They were denied entry to and were unwelcome in many kingdoms and nations, including Eastern Europe and Russia. Jews were often accused of ongoing evils, conspiracies, and tumults that occurred in many places. For instance, anti-Semitism against Jews in Russia increased with the assassination of the Russian Tsar Alexander II in 1881 when an accusing finger was directed at them. This triggered revenge and retaliation by enraged Russian Christians who vandalized Jewish properties, committed pogroms, and displaced more than 140,000 Jews (see Klier, 2001). Another instance of displacement is the Inquisition Tribunals that

emerged with the rise of the Spanish Empire in 1492. Catholic Monarchs of Spain issued the Alhambra decree which precipitated the expulsion of Jews and Muslims who refused to convert to Catholicism. Thousands of Jews who refused to convert were exiled and scattered across the globe (see Mocatta, 2012). These instances and others indicate that xenophobia and anti-Semitism of Jews indeed originated in Europe and Russia where their identity was abhorred.

The displacement of Jews in Europe and Russia propelled many to emigrate to different countries, including Canada, South Africa, the US, and the Ottoman Empire. The hospitality of and fair treatment from the Ottomans encouraged other Western Jews (Ashkenazi) to join their peers. The Ottoman Empire was hosting few Eastern Jews (Sephardi) who had lived in the Middle East for a long time. Jews lived reasonably comfortably alongside other groups, including Muslims. Most of them spoke Arabic along with their native language and had norms similar to Muslim Arabs (see Khalidi, 2020: 19). Ottomans granted Jews the freedom to choose their areas of residence so long as they respected the rules. Jews lived in cities like Jerusalem, Istanbul, Edirne, and Salonika. They had a major synagogue in Izmir, which indicates that they were able to practice their religion.

Jews saw themselves as integral to the Arab society in the region and had no aspiration or plans to establish a national home in the beginning. The notion of a national home arose with the rise of Zionism, a nationalist Jewish movement that called for the re-establishment of Eretz Israel in Palestine (see Mazur 2012: 8-35; Krämer 2008: 107-10; Kayyali 1985: 25-9). Jewish immigration intensified particularly during the reign of Sultan Abdul Hamid II (1876 – 1908) as their numbers peaked to 20,000 in 1881 (Reviv, 1973, 10). At the time, Palestine was part of the so-called Greater Syria, which was made up of present-day Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine or Israel and Syria. The first wave, or First *Aliyah* as it is called in Hebrew, arrived in Palestine in 1882,

most of whom came from Eastern Europe and Yemen (see Krämer 2008: 106). First Jews constructed many settlements including *Rishon LeZion*, meaning the first Zion or Jewish National Home, *Zikhron Ya'akov*, *Rosha Pinna*, and *Petah Tikvah* (see Krämer 2008: 106; Reviv 1973: 12). Jews were concentrated in cities that hosted religious sites such as Jerusalem and Hebron, or ones that had strategic and fertile lands such as the Galilee. The expansion of Jews in Palestine, especially in Jerusalem, was alarming for Ottomans who had sought to preserve an Islamic Identity in the Old City and keep a numerical superiority in favor of Muslims. This led Ottomans to take pre-emptive measures to regulate and reduce illegal migration into the Ottoman territories. However, these measures were of less importance for Jews who looked for other avenues, such as bribing official employees, to infiltrate to the Ottoman-ruled Palestine (see Krämer 2008: 121-2).

Jews encountered numerous problems pertinent to adaptation and adjustment in Palestine. They were unfamiliar with the land and inexperienced in agriculture, which was one of the main sources of sustenance in the region. Jews received great help from Arabs who taught them how to plant the land; however, many of those Jews perished due to the spread of epidemics among them, such as malaria. Jews were on the brink of economic collapse, but danger was averted by the philanthropic aid of Jewish businessmen such as Edmond de Rothschild and Baron Maurice de Hirsch, both of whom offered substantial aid to the plagued Jewish settlements. Other organizations that offered Jews consistent support include Hovevei Zion, and the Beni Moshe Alliance as well as the Anglo-Palestine Corporation (see Reviv 1973: 4).

With the emergence of Zionism in the second half of the 19th century, Theodor Herzl, who dedicated his life to establish a Jewish national home and unite Jews, negotiated the Zionist enterprise with Abdul Hamid II. Herzl proposed to help polish the image of the Ottoman Empire in Europe and clear all its debts, and in return Abdul Hamid II was to facilitate Jewish immigration

to Palestine; however, the latter rejected the proposal (see Shimoni 1995: 88-99; Herzl 1997: 43). Herzl did not capitulate and instead sought other channels to gain access to Palestine. In 1897, he organized the First Zionist Congress in Basel, Switzerland to discuss the Zionist project. More than 250 influential Jews turned up and demonstrated unmistakable support for Zionism. The main aim of the congress was to provide Zionism with a structure, visibility, and respectability that it had previously lacked. Members of the congress agreed to establish the World Zionist Organization, which later became one of the key players in establishing a national home for Jews (see Ayyad 1999:29; Ikan & Nakach 1997). In the sixth version of the congress in 1903, members of the World Zionist Organization founded the Jewish National Fund, whose main purpose is to provide essential support for migration and settlement activities (see Khalidi 2020: 63; Lehn & Davis 1988). The persistence of Jews combined with enormous support enabled them to purchase more land and construct more settlements in Palestine.

The number of Jews was estimated at 70,000 in 1908 and became 85,000 prior to World War One (Reviv 1973: 17). A large number of Jews betrayed the Ottomans, who refused to grant them a national home in Palestine and sided with Britain during the war. Britain, France, and Russia had always sought to lay a foothold in the wealthy empire. Britain was known for its particular support of minority groups and national separatist movements to weaken the empire and gain the allegiance of these groups. Britain made promises to both Jews and Arabs of independent national states after defeating the Ottomans. The Sharif of Mecca – one of the first Arab leaders who called for independence from the Ottoman Empire – allied with Britain by mobilizing many Arabs against the Ottomans (see Krämer, 2008: 143-7). Britain, however, did not fulfill its promise to the Sharif and instead it divided the Arab world into tiny nation-states and colonized them (see Khalidi 2020: 25).

Balfour Declaration and Introduction to Colonialism.

On November 2, 1917, on behalf of the British cabinet, the secretary of state for foreign affairs Arthur James Balfour, dispatched a letter to Lord Rothschild, a wealthy Jewish businessman known for his never-ending support for the Zionist enterprise in Palestine, informing him about the British consent and support for the establishment of a national home for Jews in Palestine (see Khalidi 2020: 23-4; Schneer 2010: 333-347; Reviv 1973: 38-9). The core of the declaration was as follows:

His Majesty's government view with favor the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavors to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in other countries.

The deceptive language of diplomacy used in this declaration indexes that Britain had signaled the green light to world Jewry to immigrate to Mandatory Palestine or what they refer to as Eretz Israel to establish a Jewish national home. The declaration did not make any mention of the political or religious rights of the Arab majority, which represented a flagrant violation of their basic rights. By 1922, the number of Jews was around 84,000 whereas Arabs were 670,000 (McCarthy, 1990: 35; Reviv 1973: 50). Palestine was strategic for British colonists whose policies of free trade rested on naval control and industrial superiority. Palestine was an important route for trade, for it bordered Egypt, which was a British colony, and contained the Suez Canal vital on the route to India as well as access to crucial Palestinian seaports such as Haifa and Acre. This is reiterated by the Palestinian historian Rashid Khalidi, who argues that Britain did not support the Zionist project in Palestine as part of its global humanitarian mission but mainly for serving its imperialist interests in the region. Khalidi notes:

Britain primarily desired control over Palestine for geopolitical strategic reasons that antedated World War I and that had only been informed during wartime events. However

important other motivations may have been, this was the central one: the British Empire was never motivated by altruism. Britain's strategic interests were perfectly served by its sponsorship of the Zionist project, just as they were served by a range of regional wartime undertakings (Khalid 2020: 24-25).

In 1916, after the defeat of the Ottoman Empire at the hands of the allies in WWI, France, Britain, and Russia signed the secret treaty of Sykes-Picot that partitioned the empire into tiny states. Russia withdrew from the treaty due to the March Revolution of 1917, which marked the end of Tsarist autocracy and the rise of the Soviet Union (Katkov, 1967). Based on the treaty, France occupied Syria and Lebanon while Palestine and Jordan were colonized by Britain (see Khalidi 2020: 25-38; Khalidi 1997: 160-7 Kramer 2008: 147-8; McTague 1982). The treaty holds historical significance, for it drew the borders between emerging Arab nation-states without considering demographic compositions, languages, traditions, and other factors. The treaty was recognized by the League of Nations in 1922.

Herbert Samuel, a Zionist and a former cabinet minister who laid early governmental foundations for much of what followed, was appointed as the high commissioner for Mandatory Palestine. Samuel was known for his advocacy and endless endeavours in the British polity towards the establishment of a Jewish national home in Palestine (see Khalidi 2020: 32; Weizmann 1972: 184, 254). After all these developments, the Zionist movement felt considerably empowered and backed by a hegemonic power at that time. The British fulfillment of its promise was evident through the newly enacted regulations and facilities pertaining to Jewish immigration, settlements, constructions, and landgrabs. This was executed in cooperation with the Jewish Agency that was created in Palestine for promoting Jewish immigration (see Khalidi 2020: 35-6; Morris 1987: 10-26). The agency worked closely with the British mandate and served as a consultant body. This made Jews stronger and encouraged them to slowly build other facilities such as Jewish organizations, businesses, and schools as part of the Zionist state-building project. In line with this,

Britain implemented its commercial activities smoothly among its colonies in the region and made substantial profits by introducing tariffs and taxes.

Colonial Britain assisted Jews to form their armed forces and offered them critical military support. One should not forget the fact that many of these Jews fought alongside Britain in WWI. This ushered in the formation of Jewish paramilitaries that launched regular attacks against Palestinians. The first of these irregular groups was the Haganah, which came into being in 1921. Others include Irgun, Palmach, and Stern that were founded in 1931, 1941, and 1940 respectively (see Chomsky, 1983: 184-5). The rapid expansion of Jews with Britain's help aroused anger and elicited protests among Palestinians, who expressed disagreement with Zionist objectives.

Around this time, a Palestinian identity was strengthened around the love of the country, a desire to improve society, religious attachment to Palestine, and opposition to Western control. Palestinians began to organize themselves politically in opposition both to British rule and to the imposition of the Zionist movement as a privileged interlocutor of the British (Khalidi 2020: 29-31). In 1929, the Al-Buraq uprising, which refers to the Wailing Wall that is visited by Jews for worship, erupted when news circulated about Jews intent to take over the Wailing Wall. The wall was part of the Al-Aqsa Mosque, *Haram Al-Sharif*, which is regularly visited by millions of Muslims and concurrently holds religious significance for Jews as being part of the Solomon Temple that was allegedly built by the Prophet Solomon a long time ago. Over the years, Jews made many attempts to Judaize and annex the remaining wall where they perform Talmudic rituals. This was the main cause for the outbreak of revolt and resentment among Muslim Arabs. On August 23, 1929, Palestinians from different corners journeyed in large numbers towards Haram Al-Sharif armed with rudimentary weapons such as sticks and batons to perform the Friday prayer and protect the mosque and the wall. Palestinians later came in direct confrontation with Jews and

the British army that supported them. The religiously motivated uprising escalated quickly and spread to other Arabic cities such as Hebron, Nablus, Haifa, and Safad, and almost lasted for a year. Many Jewish settlements, as well as British police stations, were attacked (Kayyali 1985: 198-201; Kramer, 2006: 216-238). The uprising led to the killing of 166 Arabs, around 230 wounded and 900 arrested, twenty-seven of whom were sentenced with the death penalty. On the Jewish side, 133 were killed and 340 were wounded.

The other revolt took place between 1936 and 1939 and was called the Great Revolt of 1936. It was sparked after the assassination of two Jews by an unidentified armed group, and later the revenge of Jews who killed two Arabs in response. This stirred up Palestinians and triggered skirmishes with Jews and British forces. Jews were fairly powerful at that time, as their paramilitary groups were equipped with advanced weapons and training by the British. On the eve of the revolt, tens of shops and houses were set on fire and many central roads were blocked by the revolutionaries. The British troops intervened immediately, introducing a nationwide curfew and declaring a state of emergency due to the intensity of clashes. On the other hand, Palestinians called for a comprehensive strike that prevailed in several cities. This was followed by civil disobedience as Palestinians refrained from paying taxes to British governors (see Khalidi 2020: 42; Kanafani 1972: 35-60; Qumsiyeh 2001: 77-90; Chomsky 1983: 178-9). In the meantime, notables and clan leaders from different villages came together to discuss the ongoing turmoil. This resulted in the formation of the Arab Higher Committee chaired by Haj Amin al-Husayni, the grand mufti of Jerusalem (Khalidi 2020: 43). The committee led the revolt and mobilized the public to maintain the strikes and riots until colonial Britain altered its policies to stop Jewish immigration. After the British refused to do so, the committee was outlawed. Its former members established the Central Committee for National Jihad, which adopted armed resistance against

Jews and the British. These forces consisted of all spectra of Palestinian society as they were adamantly determined to resolve their issue this time. These groups launched attacks at military zones, police stations, and Jewish colonies. They also targeted commercial convoys, blocked roads, and destroyed bridges and railways, which in turn threatened the British interests in the region.

The British troops were not able to control the sweeping numbers of enraged Palestinians, and therefore sought mediation from Arab rulers in Iraq and Saudi Arabia (Qumsiyeh 2001: 87; Khalidi 2020: 43). Concurrently, they requested military reinforcements from neighboring colonies in Egypt and Jordan. At the end of the 1930s, the revolution dimmed due to the outbreak of World War Two, massive use of force by Britain as well as the mediation of Arab rulers. Many revolt leaders were either killed, arrested or exiled. The revolt holds historical significance, for it started spontaneously at the grassroots levels and then developed into a more sophisticated organization. It also saw many volunteers from neighboring Arab countries joining to support their brethren Arabs. Britain's existence and its colonial interests were threatened as entire sectors such as agriculture, education, and economy were paralyzed. This revolt demonstrates that Palestinians resisted Jewish attempts at land annexation and sought independence from Britain to establish a nation-state.

In parallel, Germany which was defeated alongside the Ottoman Empire, was still rebuilding its power and recovering from the repercussions of WWI. In 1933, Hitler, a nationalist Nazi leader known for his antipathy and antagonistic attitude towards minority groups, including Jews, as well as his aspirations for building a pure German empire, ascended to power. This led to the flight of tens of thousands of Jews, many of whom came to Palestine. The number of immigrating Jews increased with the introduction of the Nuremberg Laws in 1935, which

disenfranchised Jews and barred them from working at state institutions. These laws led to heightened levels of discrimination against non-Germans. Later, the Nazis established the concentration and death camps to liquidate those who remained in German lands as part of the final solution (see Elkin & Pedersen 2005: 41-2). These actions against minority groups such as Jews, homosexuals, liberals, Slavs, and people living with disabilities resulted in the perpetration of the Holocaust – one of the most hideous crimes in modern history. Millions of people were killed in heinous ways in these camps. The number of those who immigrated to Palestine was more than 150,000 Jews, causing an increase of 28 percent in the total number of Jews (Khalidi 2020: 8, 40; Black 1999). Although the Holocaust was devastating, it legitimized the Zionist project of establishing a national home in Palestine. This project was hailed by the West, which sought to reward Jews for the oppression and anti-Semitism that originated in continental Europe. The Holocaust and the historical victimhood of Jews have been systematically employed to empower the Jewish narrative at the expense of the indigenous Arabs who were marginalized and forsaken. In the language of Salim Tamari, a renowned Palestinian sociologist: “The country devolved from a province in the Ottoman Empire to a colonial mandate, to a segmented society under Jewish control” (2008: 21).

As time progressed, notions of partitioning Palestine between Arabs and Jews started to surface. During the 1936-Great Revolt, the first proposition was made by the Peel Commission that was formed by colonial Britain to discuss the repercussions of the revolt and Palestinian demands. After deliberation with Palestinians and Jews, the commission recommended the partition of Palestine into two states (see Sinanoglou, 2019: 65-106; Qumsiyeh 2011: 64; Khalidi 2020: 41-6). The project was criticized by Palestinians, who were ordered to empty some lands that accommodated around 300,000 Palestinians. The proposal offered Jews the fertile and

strategic lands (see Pappé, 2007: 289). Although this blueprint was declined, its principles became the departure point for future partition plans. In 1947, the United Nation's General Assembly suggested a major partition plan to end the Jewish-Arab conflict. According to the new plan, Jews who only had seven percent of the land would obtain 55 percent of Palestine while Palestinians would get 42 percent (see Pappé, 2007: 292). Many Jews were content with the UN outcome; however, the resolution was still opposed by some hardliners such as Menachem Begin who led the Irgun paramilitaries. The resolution was a slap on the face for Palestinians who were discontented with the resolution that legitimated the Zionist project in Palestine. The resolution was also declined and condemned by the Arab League, which decreed the formation of the Arab Liberation Army to defy the UN plan. The army, led by Fawzi al-Qawuqji, a Syrian officer who was involved in many battles against the British and Jews, was poorly equipped and armed (see Parsons, 2016). Jews, on the other hand, were well-equipped; they had received continual support from Britain, the Soviet Union, as well as the US which emerged as a superpower after WWII (Pappé, 2007: 44-5). Clashes between Qawuqji and Jews ensued; however, battles did not last long due to the military and numerical superiority of Jews.

The defeat of Arabs and their inability to offer sufficient help to Palestinians emboldened Jews and encouraged them to harness new methods of terror and intimidation to dispossess Arabs. One example is the use of psychological warfare against Arab villages and towns. Jewish irregulars employed megaphones to spread lies and rumors about alleged massacres happening in nearby villages to sow fear and panic among Palestinian Arabs. Megaphone records included forged wailing and screaming of women, the sound of sirens and words urging them to flee before the arrival of Jewish irregulars who would ruthlessly slaughter them. Other techniques of mass killing were employed against those who were not compelled by the psychological means.

One example of the Jewish terror was the Deir Yassin pogrom that took place on April 8, 1948. Prior to the massacre, the village signed a nonbelligerency agreement with neighboring Jewish settlements to avoid any abrupt attack (see Khalidi 1999). In addition, the village refused involvement in the resistance activities led by Abd al-Qadir al-Husseini and preferred to stay neutral. Nevertheless, the village that was located in West Jerusalem was caught by surprise when it was invaded by 130 Jewish irregulars before dawn while most villagers were asleep. These troops advanced from house to house, clearing them with grenades, rifles, and explosives. Whole families were exterminated both inside their homes and outside while escaping in the alleyways. Houses were pillaged and corpses were stripped of money and jewelry. Some of the corpses were burned, others along with some survivors were loaded onto trucks and driven around Jerusalem to be jeered at and spat upon. The massacre resulted in 250 non-combatants killed and a huge number wounded. Deir Yassin has become one of the dark episodes in Palestinian history and a wound that never healed. Nearby villages that heard of the massacre evacuated immediately fearing to face the same fate. Deir Yassin became synonymous with Nakba, the day that marks the founding of Israel, meaning catastrophe in Arabic. It also served as a symbol and battle cry for many Palestinian generations, even among the moderates and intellectuals (see Khalidi 1999; Pape 2007: 90-91; Morris 2005).

On May 14, 1948, Britain pulled out its troops from Palestine and, on the same day, Jews who were acting as a parastate during the mandate declared the establishment of Israel. The Jewish state had sophisticated state institutions since many were operational during the British Mandate. It also formed a robust army that primarily consisted of Jewish paramilitaries. The Nakba was followed by intensified terror and intimidation against Arabs in an attempt to purge the land of native inhabitants. The Palestinian villages that had been crushed and weakened by colonial Britain

fell quickly into the hands of the organized Israeli military. Israeli operations resulted in the razing of around 500 Arab villages and the displacement of 80 percent of native Arabs. In other words, 720,000 of the 1,300,000 Palestinians were uprooted from their land and became refugees (see Khalidi, 1992).

These events were accompanied by another series of massacres, most notably in *Tantura*, a coastal village located in southern Haifa. On May 23, 1948, and after the fall of the city of Haifa, troops of the Alexandroni brigade, attacked the village from various axis including the sea. The invading forces opened fire randomly, killing scores of villagers. Although the villagers raised the white flag over the village mosque indicating surrender, attacks continued. According to the testimonies of the survivors, corpses of compatriots were seen piled on the sides of the road. Israeli troops had a list of names of those involved in past clashes, riots, strikes or confrontations against Jews. Some were killed and others were arrested. The Tantura inhabitants were ordered to accompany Israeli troops to the seashore where men were separated from women and children. Most men were slaughtered, and a few were taken hostages. The death toll amounted to 200, among whom were kids and women. Those who survived were dispersed and displaced in nearby villages; however, the majority fled to the diaspora to avoid more tragedies (see Pappé, 2007: 133-138; Pappé, 2001; Esmeir, 1948; Morris; 2004). This massacre and others clearly indicate that Israel followed policies of ethnic cleansing to empty the land of native Arabs. The Nakba destroyed the Palestinians' national life nearly in every aspect. The dispersion of Palestinians – ten percent going to the East Bank of Jordan, 39 Percent to the West Bank, 26 percent to the Gaza Strip, 14 percent to Lebanon, ten percent to Syrian, and one percent to Egypt – left Palestinians a diasporic nation (Pearlman, 2011: 62; Kossaiifi, 1989).

Political Changes: 1948-1967

After the Nakba, the Gaza Strip came under Egyptian control while Jordan proclaimed control over the West Bank (see Bar-On, 1994: 171). Arab countries involved in the 1948 war, including Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan, signed armistice agreements with Israel under the aegis of the United Nations in Rhodes, Greece (see Khalidi, 2020: 136; Caplan, 1992). This led to the cessation of armed activities as well as the dismantling of the Arab Liberation Army founded in 1947 (Tal, 2004: 163-4). Consequently, Arab resistance in Palestine diminished due to pressure from Arab leaders coupled with the exile of many national leaders. On the other hand, Israel did not respect the agreements and continued encroachments, landgrabs, and settlement construction. The surrender of Arabs and their complicity with Britain impelled the Palestinians to form the Movement of Arab Nationalists – *Harakat Al-Qawmiyyin al-Arab* – in 1951 (see AbuKhalil, 1999; Sayigh, 1997: 71-3). The movement mobilized many young Palestinians and Arabs from the neighbouring countries who sought to revive resistance against Jewish colonists (see Pearlman, 2011: 62-93; Kramer, 2006: 101-128).

In 1952, Gamal Abdel Nasser, a military national leader known for his anti-imperialist attitude and disagreement with colonial forces, came to power in Egypt. Nasser supported Arab nationalism in Egypt and elsewhere in the Arab World. He was particularly provoked by the regular hostile actions of Israel in the Sinai Peninsula and in the Egyptian-ruled Gaza. The rise of Arab nationalism in the region supported by Nasser alarmed Israel, which was struggling to secure its borders with neighbouring Arab states. Simultaneously, Palestinians who were dispossessed from their lands and relocated to neighbouring Arab states were launching attacks at Israel from time-to-time, especially from Syria and Lebanon, both of which hosted the largest numbers of Palestinian refugees.

On July 26, 1956, Britain, France, and Israel declared war against Nasser's Egypt due to his nationalization of the Suez Canal. This decision by Nasser caused enormous harm to the French and British imperial interests in the region and impacted the transportation of goods. Israel entered the war because Nasser entirely restricted its vessels from using the canal, a move that threatened its economy (see Morris, 1997; Chomsky, 1983: 65; Finkelstein, 2018, 4). In addition, Israel sought more support and legitimacy from these powers. The aggression did not last long due to intense diplomatic pressure from the US and the Soviet Union (Chomsky, 1983: 65). Britain and France failed to regain control of the Canal and withdrew their troops on December 23, 1956. Israel retreated after three months from Sinai and the Gaza Strip after promises by Egypt to allow the former to use the canal and to decrease the armament of national movements in Palestine. An international emergency force was later deployed in Egypt to inhibit the renewal of hostilities.

This invasion was markedly important in the historiography of the Jewish-Arab conflict as Israel utilized it cannily to elicit further military support from imperialist powers and gain more legitimacy in the region. For instance, France approved the sale of many advanced military jets to Israel and worked closely with the latter in manufacturing AMX-13 tanks (Levey, 1993; Tal, 2014; 6). Israel had been used as the vanguard in 1956 against Egypt by France and Britain to dismantle Arab nationalism and overthrow Nasser. The failure of Britain and France to bring down Nasser marked the demise of their hegemony and the rise of the US as a new power with similar imperialist interests in the Middle East. The US has provided Israel with unconditional support as the latter became the US's closest ally in the region, and one of the key political players that serves US interests in the Middle East.

Resistance and national movements were revitalized through the formation of political groups that started cross-border operations against Israel from the neighbouring countries.

Palestinians eventually came together and established the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) in 1964, which aimed to be the organizational structure for the Palestinian struggle with Zionism (see Said 1992: 157-169; Becker, 2014: 41-49). This was accompanied by an army called the Palestine Liberation Army (PLA) (see Pearlman, 2011: 63-66). The same period saw the rise of the Fatah National Movement, led by Arafat, who initiated multiple sabotage attacks against Israeli targets (see Migdal & Kimmerling, 1993; Becker 2014: 49-58). Fatah gained more credit than the sluggish PLA and received enormous support from Arabs, especially after the 1967 humiliating defeat of Arabs by Israel. After the shocking defeat, Palestinians became certain that Arabs combined would not be able to liberate Palestine, and that armed resistance is the only solution. After the end of the war, Fatah and other movements joined the PLO and Arafat was elected as chairman. Since that time, the PLO has been dominated by Fatah. The PLO stood as a source of leadership and institutions, as well as a focal point for the collective purpose of the Palestinians (Pearlman, 2011: 70). Most affiliates of the PLO and other resistance groups were refugees who had been removed from their villages and dispersed in the neighbouring Arab countries. They endured tough living conditions and poverty after they were forcibly displaced. Military operations against Israel intensified in 1966 and 1967, especially led by Fatah and George Habash's Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine – a leftist party that called for fighting Israel and imperialism everywhere (see Becker, 2014: 71-84).

In 1967, Nasser requested the withdrawal of the UN emergency force from Sinai that was deployed to maintain peace after 1956 and replaced them by Egyptian troops, an act that alarmed Israel, which saw that as a *casus belli* to attack Egypt (Khalidi, 2020: 98). On July 5, 1967, Israel caught Arabs by surprise and wiped out their military jet fleets in a few hours (Becker 2014: 67-71). This made Israel's movement and advance on the ground easier, and enabled it to end the war

within six days. The war resulted in the fall of Sinai, the Golan Heights, the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Gaza into Israel's hands. Israel's main objective in this aggression was to deter Arabs and stop their threats, as well as to secure its borders and prevent infiltrations by Palestinian paramilitaries. In the occupied Palestinian territories, Israel erected tens of settlements, military outposts, and installed dozens of checkpoints. This particular war was a catalyst for the Palestinians to solely rely on and reorganize themselves for any future battle with Israel.

Nasser, who died of a heart attack, was succeeded by Anwar el-Sadat in 1970. Egypt and Syria quickly reorganized their powers and reinforced their military before launching an attack against Israeli troops in 1973. The principal aim of this confrontation was to recapture the territories occupied by Israel in 1967. The war that persisted for many weeks came to an end after a diplomatic intervention by the US. Syria's meager performance led to its early defeat and exclusion from the peace talks (see Siniver, 2013; Haykal, 1994: 293-320; 1975: 1-11; Baxter, 1994). In 1978, Israel and Egypt signed the Camp David Accord that entailed Israel's withdrawal from Egypt's Sinai only. In return, Egypt pledged to end all its hostilities with Israel and to resort to negotiations as the only way for peace. Sadat sought Egypt's self-interests and disregarded the liberation of other Arab territories occupied by Israel in 1967 (see Malley & Agha, 2001; Telhami, 1990; Qunadt, 1986). The war was a watershed in the Jewish-Arab conflict as Egypt abandoned its Arab allies and would no longer join future battles with Israel. Palestinians were acutely disappointed because Egypt was the bulwark of Arab nationalism and armed resistance against Israel. The agreement concluded its commitments towards Arabs in general and Palestinians in particular. Israel's mission became much easier with the diminishment of Egyptian influence.

The Isolation of the PLO

After securing its borders in the south, Israel was looking to fortify its northern borders, especially with Lebanon and Syria, both of which hosted large numbers of Palestinian refugees. In 1982, a US backed-Israel invaded Lebanon, which was hosting the Beirut-Based PLO (see Khalidi 2020: 139-168; Chomsky 1983, 19-31). The massive ground invasion was preceded by intensive air raids that flattened tens of buildings on June 4, 1982. The offensive, which was directed at the PLO offices in Beirut, culminated in a seven-week siege of western Beirut where the PLO existed (Gawrych, 2003; Fisk, 2001: 199-24; Khalidi, 2013: 43-67). Israel used most of its military power, more than 120,000 troops, to eradicate the PLO elements. The elimination of the PLO from Lebanon meant a decline in Palestinian nationalism and resistance activities in the northern front as well as in the occupied Palestinian territories. The offensive was planned and led by Ariel Sharon, who later served as Israel's prime minister between 2001 and 2006 (see Finkelstein, 2005: 63-73). The first few weeks saw fierce battles between Israeli forces and Palestinians who were backed by Lebanese and Syrian fighters. On June 26, 1982, Syria decided to suddenly withdraw its two-fighting divisions and signed a unilateral ceasefire with Israel, leaving the PLO alone on the battlefield. During the weeks of fighting, more than 20,000 Palestinians and Lebanese, mostly civilians, were killed and more than 30,000 were wounded (Khalidi, 2020: 143). Many Beirut neighborhoods were turned into piles of rubble due to indiscriminate and intense bombing by the Israeli air force. The siege that started on June 13 was broken after seven weeks when Israel reached a settlement with the Palestinian fighters. The PLO agreed to evacuate Beirut under pressure from Israel, the US and other Lebanese allies, who were fed up with the destruction for which the PLO was the main cause. Israel demanded complete and almost unconditional PLO

withdrawal from Lebanon, a request that was fully endorsed by the US (Khalidi, 2020: 149). The US support of Israel during that war was estimated at \$1.4 billion (Khalidi, 2020: 149).

Many Lebanese movements were resentful of the destruction caused in part due to the PLO's recurrent battles with Israel. In addition, the PLO acted as a mini-state inside Lebanon without a concrete accountability for its actions (Brynen, 1989). This engendered hostilities between the PLO and many Lebanese and gradually led to the erosion of the PLO power in Lebanon. The PLO presented an eleven-point proposal to withdraw from the war-ridden city and leave what remained unharmed (Khalidi, 2013: 183-4). The PLO requested the deployment of an international force to protect non-combatants; however, the US rejected that condition. Instead, the American envoy to the Middle East, Philip Habib, typed pledges on a plain paper without letterhead or signature to shield the civilian refugees in West Beirut (Khalidi, 2020: 155).

Israel had built alliances with some Lebanese forces that opposed the existence of the PLO in Lebanon, such as the Lebanese Phalanges party and the Maronites, who were backed by Israel to execute pogroms against Palestinians who remained in Beirut (see Fisk, 2001: 359-400). For instance, in August 1982, the Phalanges slaughtered more than two thousand defenseless Palestinians in *Tal al-Za'atar* refugee camp (see Shahid, 2002). This was followed by the notorious carnage of *Sabra and Shatila*, which was committed at the hands of Colonel Haddad and the Phalanges and Maronites backed by Israel. Israel was accused of violating the evacuation terms and of supporting the Lebanese forces with military aid worth \$118.5 million (Khalidi, 2020: 131; Al-Shaikh, 1984). This war, which claimed thousands of souls and caused massive damage in Lebanon, was a clear message to all Arab countries that embraced the PLO fighters. Israel succeeded in securing its borders and managed to push the danger far away. The PLO was scattered

across the Arab World, the majority resettled in Tunisia while some went to Syria. The war brought relative peace to Israel until the outbreak of the First Intifada in 1987.

From Intifada to Oslo.

The Intifada – or shake-off in Arabic – was sparked on December 8, 1987 after the deterioration of socioeconomic conditions, and the absence of political prospects of a lasting resolution (see Pappé, 2017: 173-198; Pearlman, 2011: 94-124; Sayigh, 1997: 607-638). Palestinians were fed up with the political uncertainty as well as the colonial discriminatory policies implemented by Israel. Palestinians did not have a state, nor did they have equal citizenship rights or legitimate borders or international recognition of their misery. The main catalyst for the eruption of the Intifada was the killing of four Palestinian workers by an Israeli truck that ran them over (Khalidi, 2020: 168; Pappé, 2017: 173; Finkelstein, 2018: 6). The incident took place in the *Jabaliya* camp in Gaza, which became the basis for protests and stone-throwing. Palestinians also burned tires to protest Israeli colonial policies. The protests that were expected to be controlled, continued for months and years without any retreat. Palestinians from different age groups participated in these protests to express their displeasure with the uncertain reality and the disregard of their political will. The Intifada called for the end of Israeli occupation and a halt to the spread of colonial settlements as well as a resolution for this conflict. Along with the protests, the uprising involved tactics ranging from boycotts, strikes, and withholding taxes to other forms of civil disobedience. In response, Israel suspended electricity, water, and telephone service to hamper communications between protesters. One should note that Hamas, a Palestinian political and military movement that holds strict beliefs pertinent to the existence of Israel, emerged during the Intifada in 1987 and declared armed resistance against Israel (see Maqdsi, 1993; Abu-Amr, 1993).

The Intifada that continued for five years was discontinued upon the signing of the Oslo Accords between the PLO and Israel in 1993 (see Zartman, 1997). Over a thousand Palestinians were killed and many thousands wounded. The Intifada was a crucial historical juncture in the conflict because it followed a nonviolent approach and succeeded to draw the world's attention to the Israeli oppression against Palestinians (see Alimi, 2007). International media shed light on the Israeli brutality and demonstrated the callous practices against protesters, which included the smashing of legs and hands.

In parallel, clandestine peace talks in Oslo between the PLO and Israel were taking place. The parleys that lasted for a few years resulted in the signing of Oslo Accords on December 13, 1993 on the White House lawn in Washington (see Pearlman, 2011: 124-150; Pundak, 2001; Shlaim, 1994; Finkelstein, 2018: 6). The whole world saw the historic handshake between Yitzhak Rabin and Yasir Arafat. The main principles of the agreement were: first, the PLO should recognize the legitimate existence of Israel as a Jewish state. Second, Israel must in return recognize the PLO as the sole *representative* of Palestinians, noting that that does not entail a recognition of sovereign state or a political will. Third, the PLO must cease its attacks and operations against Israel and rely on peaceful negotiations instead. Fourth, the PLO should put an end to the armed resistance in the occupied Palestinian territories (oPt) and consolidate security coordination with Israel to fight terrorism. Fifth, Israel would gradually withdraw from *some* lands in Gaza and the West Bank and grant Palestinians self-rule over the oPt (Shlaim, 1994; King, 1994: 2018-217). Other complex issues such as the right of return, Palestinian refugees, East Jerusalem, Israeli settlements, borders, and other arrangements were to be discussed after three years from signing the agreement. However, none of these issues have been resolved to this very day. The agreement did not change anything but rather introduced a new apartheid system in Palestine. The

West Bank was divided into three zones A, B, and C. Zone A was under the full control of the PA and constituted less than five percent of the West Bank. Zone B, controlled jointly by Israelis and Palestinians represented around 30 percent of the West Bank. Ultimately, Zone C went under the full control of Israel and represented over 60 percent of the total land of the West Bank (see Shearer, 2006). One can clearly tell that this was a colonial ploy aiming to annex more land as 65 percent of the West Bank today has been annexed to Israel. The oPt have become filled with checkpoints that are used to humiliate Palestinians on a daily basis. In this situation, the PA was still committing to Oslo, and thwarted hundreds of activities against Israel since it was responsible for maintaining security in some areas. The Oslo agreement and the cooperation between the PA apparatuses made the colonization of Palestine perhaps the cheapest in modern history. The PA receives aid from funding states (the US, the EU, and some Arab countries) once they fulfill their commitments and maintain security in the oPt. On the other hand, Israel keeps annexing more land without paying for this occupation. The Palestinian Authority (PA) and the funding states work as proxies for Israel to facilitate its mission. Shlomo Gazit, the head of the Israeli intelligence services at the time, expressed his contentment with Oslo and described the occupation as “deluxe” (Catignani 2008: 75).

The reality in Gaza was no less tragic. At the time of Oslo, Israel was occupying around 30 percent of the land while the rest was handed over to the PA to practice self-rule (see Schnell & Mishal, 2008). The PLO, which used to embrace Palestinian fighters, gave up on liberation ambitions and became guardians for the Zionist project in Palestine. Most Palestinians, especially those who lost some relatives or had their legs smashed, were outraged and felt stabbed in the back by what Arafat did. The uprising was about to achieve what the armed resistance failed to fulfill for decades. Salim Tamari comments on the transformation in the PLO as follows “the quest of

nationhood altered the movement's ideological direction, from the 'cult of return' to the quest of sovereignty, from total liberation to limited statehood" (2008: 15). Moreover, Oslo was not representative of all Palestine forces, it was declined by the PFLP, DFPL, Hamas, and others. The Fatah-dominated PLO approved of the deal on behalf of all Palestinians. The terms of this agreement were precisely implemented by the PA, whereas Israel ignored its obligations and carried on its expansionist policies in the oPt.

The failure of Oslo to grant Palestinians an unconditional political will and an independent and sovereign Palestinian state caused the outbreak of a second Intifada around September 2000 (see Pressman, 2003; Bishara 2001: 11-24). The uprising was sparked after the visit of Ariel Sharon and dozens of his security personnel to *Al-Aqsa* mosque as part of his election campaign (see Pearlman, 2011: 150). Sharon's provocative visit sparked widespread demonstrations and strikes across the oPt. The Second Intifada was more intense, for it witnessed a wave of suicide bombings executed mainly by Hamas against Israeli targets (see Brym & Araj, 2006). The increased use of live ammunition by the Israeli forces caused a shocking number of casualties among Palestinians. Israel later used tanks, helicopters, and artillery to suppress protesters. More than six thousand Palestinians were reportedly killed, and many others were either wounded or arrested. The PA, which was profiting from Oslo configurations, had to take actions to maintain its commitment to Oslo and thus imprisoned hundreds of Hamas members and employed various sorts of torture to deter them. Israel, on the other hand, reoccupied parts of Gaza and the West Bank to regain control of the situation. In 2002, Israeli forces laid siege to Yasser Arafat's Ramallah headquarter where he fell mortally ill (Khalidi, 2020: 214). The Palestinian leader died in Paris in November 2004 and was replaced by Mahmoud Abbas in 2005, the genuine architect

of the Oslo Accords and America's best man in the PA. Ever since, no elections have been held as Abbas remains the president without a democratic mandate.

The Biggest Prison on Earth: 2005 – Present.

In 2005, Israel unilaterally decided to withdraw all its troops and settlers from Gaza, a move that initially confused experts. Yet, the surprising disengagement from Gaza later became a pretext for Israeli crimes and attacks in the Strip. It was an attempt from Israel to polish its tarnished image after the two Intifadas and to give an impression of goodwill and serious intent to negotiate with Palestinians. The withdrawal was figurative as Palestinians still have no control over their territories whatsoever, nor do they have control over their basic rights, including sovereignty and free political will. Israel is the sole power that dictates how Gazans can live. The disengagement gives Israel moral impunity and exempts it from any responsibility toward the uncertain future of Gaza that lives under an Israeli siege since 2006.

In 2006, Hamas, which campaigned for “change and reform” instead of violence, won the legislative election against its traditional rival, Fatah (Hroub, 2006). Hamas's victory proved that people were disgusted by the PA's long years of corruption and fruitless negotiations with Israel. Hamas sought to form a coalition government with Fatah; however, it repeatedly failed. The US and Israel exerted intense pressure on Fatah to decline a coalition with Hamas due to the latter's hostile attitude towards Israel (Chomsky & Pappé, 2013: 116-117). Simultaneously, Hamas was asked to amend its armed resistance-based charter and recognize Oslo as a departure point for negotiations with Israel. Hamas's rejection to do so led to the suspension of the PA funds coming from the donor states. Meanwhile, the Fatah-dominated PA, which received intensive military training in the US, attempted to overthrow Hamas through a failed military coup in 2006.

Unpredictably, Hamas managed to overthrow Fatah in a terrible civil war that lasted for weeks (see Sayigh 2010; Brown 2010). After seizing control of the PA facilities and their US-made weapons, Hamas became the only ruler in Gaza.

After Hamas control in Gaza, Israel declared the coastal enclave a hostile entity and imposed a full-blown siege on air, ground, and water. This step was seen by many as a grave violation of international law and collective punishment for all Gazans who voted “the wrong way” for Hamas (HRW, 2009; PCHR, 2010). Israel closed all crossings that connect Gaza with the external world, rendering Gaza entirely isolated. Goods that enter through these crossings as agreed in the Paris Trade Protocol, one of Oslo’s outcomes, were reduced to the bare minimum and exports from Gaza were ceased. According to this protocol, all Palestinian territories must be economically connected to Israel. It has made Palestinians completely reliant on Israel which uses this fact as a means of political extortion (see Samhuri, 2016).

The Israeli siege led to exacerbated humanitarian crises, ranging from the closure of most businesses to an unprecedented rise in unemployment among Gazans to the cut-off of public utilities including water, electricity and natural gas. Unemployment rates today amount to more than 55 percent, with higher rates among women and youth (see World Bank, 2019). The political instability coupled with economic collapse caused the prevalence of different social ills such as suicide, divorce, and domestic violence among Gazans (see The Guardian, 2018). The reduced amount of electricity and water caused the suspension of services in many hospitals and other public facilities, threatening a full paralysis of life.

Egypt is perceived as a partner in this siege as it maintains the closure of the *Rafah* crossing that is used for individual movement. The closure of Rafah was tightened with the military coup designed by dissidents from the army who have close ties with Israel and the US. The persistent

closure caused a dire crisis among students, businessmen, and patients who seek travel for varying purposes. The re-aggravation of Rafah crisis has denied thousands of Palestinians the freedom of movement. The Rafah crisis came to the fore in 2001 after the destruction of Gaza airport that was built in 1998 as part of the Oslo understandings. The amounts of waiting time needed to cross to the Egyptian side from Gaza are extremely long as some wait for several months, if not years. Thereby, the multi-closures in Gaza turned the 142-square-mile enclave into an open-air prison as described by David Cameron, a former British prime minister (Watt & Sherwood, 2010).

All attempts to overcome the siege were impeded by Israel or Egypt, backed up by other international partners. For instance, Gazans created a tunnel economy by digging tunnels across the border with Egypt; however, that was immediately halted by Egypt. With the help of the US and Israel, Egypt constructed a metal wall with pumps connected to the Mediterranean water, aiming to drown any existing tunnel (see Shay, 2011; Helfont, 2010). Other attempts were made by international activists who sailed towards Gaza on ships loaded with aid. Most of these flotillas were brutally stopped, attacked and the cargo was confiscated by the Israeli navy. An instance of that was the attack on *Mavi Marmara*, which was carrying activists and aid to Gaza in 2009. The flotilla was intercepted by the Israeli navy, which killed 10 activists who used sticks for self-defence. The incidence was denounced by many countries, but a resolution by the UN security council was not taken due to the US veto as well as Israeli propaganda (see Finkelstein, 2018: 141-8). Israel was not held to account for its piracy crimes in the Mediterranean, and proceeded to implement more violent policies against Gaza.

The ineffectiveness of the international community combined with the continuous support of the US, emboldened Israel to further strangle Gaza and commit more crimes against its inhabitants. Israel launched more than five major attacks on Gaza between 2005 and 2014, causing

enormous human and physical losses. More than four thousand Gazans were killed and tens of thousands were wounded. In addition, thousands of buildings were leveled and pounded to dust, including civilian apartment buildings, universities, UN schools, and governmental facilities (HRW, 2014). The damage inflicted on the infrastructure is immense, and the reconstruction is going extremely slow due to the unavailability of construction materials in Gaza (see Hochberg, 2016). UN officials estimated that under Israeli restrictions still in place, it would take “75 years” to rebuild Gaza (PCHR, 2010). Gazans who are imprisoned, have nowhere to escape during these attacks as all gates are closed. Israel is accused of using internationally prohibited weapons to inflict extensive damage on Palestinians. In the 2014 assault alone, Israel launched more than 6,000 air raids while its navy and artillery launched approximately 50,000 shells on different parts of Gaza (see Khalidi, 2020: 223; Finkelstein, 2018: 215-6). An example of the Israeli sadism in 2014 was the intense shelling of the Shujayea neighborhood for 24 hours. The Israeli forces fired more than 7,000 shells on the densely populated area, causing thousands of casualties and enormous destruction. The footage of the damage taken after the assault was horrific and unimaginable. In the testimonies of one of the soldiers who commented on the operation, “when we left after the operation, it was just a barren stretch of desert ... it’s nothing but desert now” (see *Breaking the Silence*, 2014: 57). The Israeli attack caused a mass displacement among the Shujayea residents who relocated to other parts, thinking it would be safer; however, everyone in Gaza was a target. “Soldiers had orders to target anything that moves inside the Strip” noted one of the Israeli soldiers (*Breaking the Silence*, 2014: 102). The Shujayea model was repeated in other parts of Gaza in 2014 such as Khuza’a and Rafah, both of which were reduced to piles of rubble (see Amnesty International, 2015).

Sara Roy, a senior researcher at Harvard's Middle East Studies Center, calls what is happening in Gaza a slow death (cited by Finkelstein, 2018: 236). Others such as Ilan Pappé, a renowned Israeli historian, describe the Israeli crimes in Gaza as incremental genocide (2017: 214). The siege which started in 2006, is still ongoing with harsher policies taking shape. Today, Gazans live with more than 10 hours of electricity blackouts every day, more than 90 percent of the water is unfit for human consumption, and other social problems such as unemployment and suicide are on the rise. Due to the lack of life prospects and the likelihood of not having a better future, thousands of Gazans have left the Strip for Western countries, risking their lives as many died en route. Many families have been torn asunder due to the siege that caused numerous social ills as well as an economic collapse. This research examines the techniques used by Israel to execute a slow-motion genocide as well as look into how the crimes committed amount to genocide.

Conclusion

One can clearly say that the main motive for this lengthy conflict between Jews and Arabs is the land. The Zionist enterprise is based on beliefs of occupying Palestine entirely as it claims it is the land of their ancestors. This chapter demonstrates how Zionists succeeded in achieving a major part of their goal by occupying most of Palestine through various means. It also shows that Israel does not seek a mutual resolution with the Palestinians, for it could have done so after Oslo. However, today and after 27 years of Oslo, one can certainly say that the situation is much worse, and prospects for settlement have declined. Palestinians have tried both violent and nonviolent approaches to reach a settlement, but all attempts thus far have failed, mainly due to Israeli intransigence and indifference. The chapters that follow discuss the different techniques that are

being employed to get hold of the rest of the land, with a particular focus on Gaza. I also discuss how these techniques have led to the perpetration of a slow-motion genocide there.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

What is Genocide?

Before discussing theories of genocide, a review of genocide definitions is required to inform the reader about the history of the terms, and the forces that influenced its current legal shape. I also look at the limitations of the UN legal definition and stress the need for a sociological perspective on genocide.

Since the development of genocide studies as an independent field of study in the 1970s, scholars have struggled with devising a comprehensive and satisfactory definition for genocide. The concept was first developed and propounded by the Polish Jewish jurist Raphael Lemkin in the face of the Holocaust in his seminal work *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe* (1944). The concept, which is derived from the Greek term *genos* (group) and the Latin term *cide* (to kill), came to Lemkin in 1942, after he previously toyed with the twin concepts of barbarism (physical destruction) and vandalism (cultural destruction) to describe the phenomenon (Woolford, 2015; Irvin-Erickson, 2016; Powell, 2007; Card, 2010: 242). Lemkin, who was a survivor of the Holocaust, dedicated the last years of his life to gain recognition of genocide as an international crime, and was rewarded for his efforts when it was incorporated into the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (UNGC) (see Bartrop & Totten, 2007: 73). The UNGC was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1948 and entered into force in 1951. According to the UNGC:

Genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group as such:

- a. Killing members of the group;
- b. Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;

- c. Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- d. Imposing measures intended to prevent births within group;
- e. Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

In earlier drafts of the convention, Lemkin was cognizant of the importance of cultural and political elements in genocide as he believed, in addition to mass killing, destruction can target the unique aspects of a social group, or the “the essential foundations of a national group” (Lemkin, 1944: 79; Irvin-Erickson, 2016: 84). Countries with colonial histories, amongst others, opposed Lemkin’s inclusion of cultural genocide and it was excised from the UNGC. For this reason, the definition is considered by some to be too biased and politicized, since it was forged through a political process heavily influenced by the interests of some countries. Put differently, these countries sought to “narrow the convention’s definitional parameters of genocide in such ways as were necessary to exclude many of their own past, present and anticipated policies and practices from being formally codified as crimes against humanity in international law” (Churchill, 1997: 410). This led many scholars such as Claudia Card (2013: 255), Helen Fein (1990) and Leo Kuper (1981: 39) to criticize the definition for its omission of political, cultural, and minority groups such as homosexuals and the physically and mentally challenged.

In this thesis, I do not base my arguments on the UNGC since it arbitrarily recognizes certain groups and neglects others. The UNGC is non-egalitarian as it confines the definition to four groups whose lives are perceived to be more important than others (Feierstein, 2014: 17). The omission of crucial types of destruction, including social, cultural and political, could put the lives of many groups at risk of extermination. These limitations allow many parties to manipulatively commit group destruction without being held to account under the terms of the UNGC. For all of

these reasons, I believe that a sociological definition provides a more comprehensive understanding of genocide and thus it is a better tool for analysis of the current situation in Gaza.

Daniel Feierstein, an Argentine sociologist, argues that genocide should be seen as a social practice rather than physical annihilation and mere mass killing of a group of people (2014:1-2). According to Feierstein, genocide is a technology of power, a form of social engineering that creates, destroys, or reorganizes relationships within society (2014: 32). Genocide is thereby an effective tool that is utilized to socially reorganize the targeted social group and replace its national identity with another imposed by the oppressor (Lemkin, 1944: 79). A similar definition was given by Helen Fein, a renowned American sociologist. Fein (1993: 24) defined genocide as “sustained purposeful action by a perpetrator to physically destroy a collectivity, directly or indirectly, through the interdiction of the biological and social reproduction of group members, sustained regardless of the surrender or lack of threat offered by the victim.” Fein’s contribution is critical because she considers aspects that were disregarded in the UN definition. Fein affirms the pre-existing intent of destroying a collectivity in whole or part. She points out that one of the main problems in the UN definition is the notion of “intent to destroy” which has led many scholars to conflate “motive” with “intent.” The words of “as such” in the UN convention are partly to blame for this confusion as they require groups to be intentionally targeted because of who they are and not for other reasons (Short, 2016: 16; Woolford, 2015: 37). While some argue that genocide ought to involve clear, intended action by a coherent agent(s) (Fein, 1993; Simon 1996), others suggest that discerning intent is a logical deduction that flows from the evidence of the material facts or the creation of group-threatening conditions (see Shaw, 2015; Schabas, 2000: 172-7). Andrew Woolford, a Canadian sociologist (2015: 37), contends that scholars should move toward a processual and relational approach to better grasp how intent develops in practice. He reports that

intent is seldom reducible to the thoughts or practices of a single actor because it is negotiated under structural and discursive conditions. These conditions give shape to a collective action that is both the product of social interactions and a force conditioning social interactions. Woolford (2015:37-38) notes:

Sociologically speaking, then, intention in genocide is often more “generalized” (rather than simply “general” or unspecified), since collective action bent on the destruction of another group is made possible through a combination of broad social pressures and widely circulating discourses, as well as immediate situational factors, such as the institutional organization of destruction, patterns of fear of the other, desire for the land or resources possessed by the other, and multiple other interests or concerns ... this generalized intent can have a momentum of its own and carry along with it actors not fully conscious of their roles in genocide.

For Fein (1997), the destruction of a group could be crystalized directly, through mass killing, selective murder, starvation or deprivation of water, or indirectly, which often happens in the long term, such as through the decline of birth rates, destruction of social relations between members, and dissemination of social ills such as suicide, homicide, drug addiction, and divorce. This was also emphasized in Lemkin’s later writings, where he suggests that genocide could be realized through different forms and techniques. Lemkin noted (1944: 79):

Genocide is intended rather to signify a coordinated plan of different actions aiming at the destruction of essential foundations of the life of national groups, with the aim of annihilating the groups themselves. The objectives of such a plan would be the disintegration of the political and social institutions, of culture, language, national feelings, religion, and the economic existence of national groups, and the destruction of the personal security, liberty, health, dignity, and even the lives of the individuals’ belongings to such groups.

Dirk Moses, an Australian historian, argues that Lemkin was more concerned with the destruction of culture than the loss of life (2008: 12). For Lemkin, culture is the unity of collective memory, whereby the legacies of the dead can stay alive and each group has its unique “genius” that deserves to be protected because it is an essential part of the world culture (See Jones, 2016: 13; Woolford, 2015: 26; Short, 2016: 18-19). Damien Short, a human rights scholar, also contends

that Lemkin viewed physical, cultural, and biological genocide as part of a single process that is materialized through a variety of means (2016: 20). Genocide is a process, a collective cataclysm that relies more heavily, than currently appreciated, on indirect methods of destruction (Rosenberg, 2012). Therefore, my research looks at genocide as a fluid and complex process. Not only does my research look at high-intensity killing, but it also explores the cultural and social aspects of destruction in Gaza implemented by a large colonial structure.

Finally, I believe that Fein's conception of "genocide by attrition" is useful for my study. Fein uses the term to describe genocidal crimes that happened at the Warsaw Ghetto (1939-1943), in democratic Kampuchea (1975-1979) and Sudan (1983-1993). She argues that genocide by attrition occurs when a group is stripped of its political, civil, economic, and human rights. This results in the deprivation of conditions essential for maintaining health, thereby producing mass death. The methods of genocide by attrition describes official or non-official policies and practices that deprive humans of basic rights, which in turn cause the slow protracted death of individuals and the annihilation of the larger social group (Rosenberg, 2012). For instance, in the Holocaust, about 13.7 percent of Jews who were killed, perished due to hunger and diseases attributable to starvation and poor living conditions in ghettos (Fein, 1997). I examine whether or not this concept applies to what is happening in Gaza. In the next section, I look into settler-colonialism in Palestine, and its linkages with the status quo there.

Settler-colonialism

In any conflict where genocide is suspected, tracking historical events and other turning points can inform the reader more about the nature of the crimes and what caused them. Genocides are oftentimes preceded by racial categorization through which colonists create racial patterns that

later facilitate the extermination of a people. That was evident in Nazi Germany against Jews as well as in Rwanda against the Tutsi. Similarly, settler-colonialism in Palestine was the motivating driver behind the elimination of indigenous populations as well as the obliteration of their villages. Native Arabs were substituted with Jewish settlers who came from different corners of the world with new norms and cultures (Wolfe, 2006). Lemkin argued that colonial practices are intimately related to those of genocide. He wrote, “genocide consists of two phases: one, destruction of the national pattern of the oppressed; the other, the imposition of the national pattern of the oppressor” (Lemkin, 1944: 79). This imposition may be made upon the victim society, which is permitted to remain, or upon the territory alone, after the removal of indigenous inhabitants.

The colonists exert tireless efforts to shape and reshape the colonized through all means possible, including violent means (Fanon, 1961: 41). This was particularly stressed by Wolfe, who argued that settler-colonialism should be viewed as a transformative social process aiming to socially engineer the victim society, and recreate social relations among individuals in a way that secures the settler society’s imperial interests (2006). Also, settler-colonialism designs new racial categorizations based on colour, productivity, and worthiness. These classifications aim to divide those who are worthy of living and others who are perceived as useless eaters and mere consumers. According to Elkins and Pedersen (2005: 4), the structurally defining settler-colonial logic typically produces societies marked by “pervasive inequalities, usually codified in law, between settler and indigenous population.” Such divisions between settlers and the indigene are built into the economy, the political system, and the law. These classifications and racial categorizations are evident in many aspects; the colonists occupy fertile lands, strategic plateaus, mountains, and coastlines, whereas the colonized are isolated in lower and arid lands (Fanon, 1961: 36-7). The colonized slums are notorious, backward, characterized by violence, caged within segregation

walls and monitored by military outposts. It is chaotic, governed by no laws or regulations; it is anarchic. Conversely, the colonial city is excessively illuminated, fortified, it enjoys an advanced and solid infrastructure with full services. The colonizer's city is protected by sophisticated weapons, electric borders, and high-tech surveillance systems. It enjoys a universal legal system, a robust army, and state institutions that organize daily affairs (see Mbembe, 2003). This colonial structure is imposed by the colonizer to build a racially pure and socially integrated society while destroying the social structure, relations, and lifestyles of indigenous people that persisted for centuries.

The history of settler-colonialism in Palestine dates back to 1882, which marks the arrival of the first wave of Jewish immigrants (Elkin & Pedersen, 2005: 41). It all began with the appearance of Zionism, a colonial and nationalist movement that encouraged immigration to Palestine. The movement used religious references to catalyze *the chosen people* around the world to return to the land of their ancestors or the *promised land*. Its leaders envisioned Palestine as an empty land without inhabitants. Jewish immigration to Palestine intensified after the xenophobia and racial intolerance against Jews in Europe. Almost every nation in Europe was seeking to purge its lands off from Jews who were perceived to be involved in tax collection activities for governors in different European countries. One can argue that the European hostility towards Jews made it possible for Hitler to find supporters for his efforts to eliminate the Jews or to force them to displace. Jews who had no welcoming place in Europe were intent to establish a national Jewish state, regardless of the maliciousness of the means and techniques. Their intention from the beginning was to occupy the whole land at the expense of native Arabs. This was evident in the words of Menachem Ussishkin, one of the central Eastern European Zionist leaders, who noted:

In order to establish autonomous Jewish community life – or, to be more precise, a Jewish state – in Eretz Israel, it is necessary, first of all, that all or at least most, of Eretz Israel's

land will be the property of the Jewish people. Without the ownership of the land, Eretz Israel will never become Jewish (Elkins & Pedersen, 2005: 41).

This is indicative that settler-colonialism in Palestine is no different than other settler-colonial projects that were built on the remnants of indigenes' corpses. Abdel Wahab el-Messiri (1938-2008), an Egyptian sociologist, argued that Zionism, to a great extent, resembles Nazism in most of its practices. Zionism, like Nazism which believed in the *Volk* or pure German state, believes in the supremacy of one race; the Jewish. Zionists have strong beliefs that they are the chosen people and that other races should work for their service. Zionism created a racial system that classifies those worthy and unworthy of living among Arabs. This system sanctified Jews and dehumanized Palestinian Arabs. Zionism is rested on the destruction of Palestinians and the occupation of land, a norm that existed in Nazism as the Germans occupied many countries in Europe and killed thousands of people for that purpose. In terms of modernity, Messiri also argued that Zionism employed modern means such as science, rationality as well as bureaucracy to achieve its goal by occupying Palestine and killing its native people. Besides, Zionism employed "transfer" plans – such as Plan *Dalet* – to force Palestinians out of the land, and when that failed, they resorted to violence and slaughter (Khalidi, 1988). Zionism used value-free science that transformed both Israelis and Palestinians into objects that are used to achieve materialist goals. Israelis were used as cogs in a machine and Palestinians were dehumanized, and killed without moral concerns (see Messiri, 1997: 25-65).

Although settler-colonial projects in the US, Canada, and Australia were exceptionally brutal, they suggested assimilation plans and compensations. Israel, in contrast, constitutes a more exclusive exercise of the settler logic of elimination as it completely denies the existence of indigenous Palestinians (Wolfe, 2012). This logic was evident in the statement of Theodor Herzl, the founding father of Zionism, who said: "if I wish to substitute a new building for an old one, I

must demolish before I construct” (2018: 38). This statement and others emphasize the dehumanization of the Palestinians. It implies that the Zionist project in Palestine is based on a destroy-remove-construct ideology, which explains the large-scale destruction and massacres carried out upon the establishment of the Jewish state. Abominable massacres include Deir Yassin which took place in April 1948. The number of casualties exceeded 300 non-combatant Palestinians, who had reached a non-aggression pact with the neighbouring Kibbutz (see Morris, 2005; Hogan, 2001; Chomsky, 1999: 184-185). Whole families were killed both inside the buildings and in the alleyways while trying to escape (Morris, 2005). Another epitome of the Jewish brutality in Palestine was the massacre of Tantura – a coastal village near Haifa. On May 22, 1948, the village was attacked at night from the four flanks, which is uncommon, leaving no spot for indigenous villagers to escape. In the first phase (rampage), about 100 were killed while seeking to escape the random gunfire from the attacking forces. In the second phase, men between the age of ten and fifty were separated from women and children and executed in cold blood at the beach. According to eyewitnesses, the death toll was around 200 people (see Pappé, 2007: 133-138; Pappé, 2001; Esmeir, 1948; Morris; 2004). Joel Solnik, a soldier who participated in the massacre, gave his testimony to Teddy Katz, who wrote his thesis on Tantura. Solnik stated: “there were shameful things there, very shameful. It was one of the most shameful battles fought by the IDF ... they did not leave anyone alive” (see Pappé, 2001: np) Katz comments in a lecture given in 2005:

All men of Tantura were taken to the cemetery of the village, and they put them in lines, and they ordered them to begin digging, and every line that finished digging just was shot and fell down to the holes. Which I guess reminds at least a few of you, something that had to do with Germans, three years after the end of the 2nd World War (Ofir, 2016: np).

The nexus between colonialism and genocide is that the latter consists of two phases: one, destruction of the national pattern of the oppressed (Palestinians); the other, the imposition of the

national pattern of the oppressor (Israel) (Lemkin, 1944: 79). The horrid crimes of Deir Yassin and Tantura caused terror and consternation among nearby villages and drove the majority to flee when they received the bad news. The obliteration of these two villages alongside hundreds of others was part of Plan Dalet, which was set by the Israeli paramilitaries in 1947 to uproot Palestinians (Khalidi, 1988). This indicates that the essence of the conflict between Jews and Arabs has always been the land, which is essential for the sustainability of any social group, and the fight over the land is a fight over life (Wolfe, 2006). For Palestinians, the land is not only a resource needed to preserve life, but it is very integral to the collective identity and Arab culture in Palestine. Burrowes argues that the land is the principal means of satisfying people's needs for identity, justice, participation, and control (1996: 140-141). One can then contend that territoriality is Israel's specific irreducible element in its colonial policies in Palestine (Wolfe, 2006). The 1948 events were not merely a loss of land and houses, but also a destruction of normal life, social groups, cultural productions – in short, the brutal extermination of human existence in one's own land (see Shehata, 2010), or what Lemkin called the destruction of the “shrines of the soul of a nation” (1944: 393).

Looking at this history from a colonial perspective is paramount for understanding power dynamics and the entrenched structure of settler-colonialism in Palestine. This history has contributed to the making of the Palestinian and the Israeli but in entirely different ways. The former has become a stateless refugee, and the latter a citizen with full rights. Motivated by its never-complete expansionist aspirations, Israel is still confiscating more land and expanding its settlements in the West Bank. Consecutive Israeli governments are committed to continuing the settlement expansion, which in turn impact the Palestinian life and undermines any opportunity for peace. Similarly, Gaza is still living under a full-blown Israeli siege which began in 2006. All

of this implies that the Israeli practices in Gaza and the West Bank are an extension to its colonial project that began in the early 20th century. Modes of management are among other fundamental strategies recruited by the colonists to control the colonized population. This is the subject of the next part of my discussion.

The State of Exception in Palestine/Gaza

Drawing on Achille Mbembe (2003), Michael Foucault, and Giorgio Agamben, this section discusses necropolitical strategies employed by Israel to further suffocate Palestinians in Gaza and facilitate their extermination. According to Mbembe, the sovereign is the person who proclaims the state of exception or emergency to get rid of a danger which could be real or fictional (2003). This person is the only one who is able to suspend the operation of the legal system to supposedly maintain public order. Since the beginning of the colonial siege, or *Hisar* in Arabic, Gaza has become, using Carl Schmitt's language, a state of exception (2014); it is entirely isolated, and its inhabitants are divested of basic rights. In Agambenian terms, Gazans have been reduced to human objects with no political or citizenship rights: "bare life" (Agamben, 1998: 9-10). These material objects are de-sanctified and are situated outside the realm of moral accountability. Honaida Ghanim, a Palestinian sociologist and anthropologist, argues that the management of population in Palestine is largely based on the ongoing demarcation of spatial and symbolic boundaries or occupation as spaces of exception separate from spaces of rule and normality (2003: 70). This physical demarcation is the material embodiment of symbolic/categorical separation between "the legitimate political subject of the citizen" and the "illegitimate political subject," Ghanim adds. Similarly, Edward Said argued that "imaginative geographies" work by multiplying partitions and enclosures that serve to demarcate the "same" from the "other" (cited by Gregory, 2004: 17). The

state of exception in Palestine is epitomized by the construction of the apartheid wall which separates the “same” from the “other” (Ghanim, 2003, 71). These separations, imaginative as well as real, reinforce the state of exception and facilitate the management of native Palestinians. Gaza is being managed through a full-blown siege imposed by Israel which uses intricate borders, military outposts and various surveillance systems to constantly monitor every move in the coastal enclave (see Mbembe, 2003: 29). Due to this exclusion, the life system in Gaza has been disrupted and violence and anarchism prevailed.

Sari Hanafi (2013: 199), a Palestinian sociologist, argues that the state of exception “is a process of categorizing people and bodies in order to manage, control, and keep them under surveillance and reducing them to ‘bare life’, a life which refers to the body’s mere ‘vegetative’ being, separated from particular qualities, the social, political, and historical attributes that constitute individual subjectivity.” The state of exception in Palestine represents a new form of sovereignty; it is a form of colonial governance where subjects are transformed through biopolitics and extensive use of the state of exception to “bare life” (Hanafi, 2013). Bare life is the condition when people do not have the right to have rights, Hanafi adds. The right of sovereignty in Israel is not only practiced by one person, but also by the military and settlers, who see Palestinians as de-sanctified objects that should be taken out. Therefore, the problem in Palestine does not entirely end with the overthrow of a ruthless sovereign; radical pedagogical and ideological changes in the Jewish mindset are needed.

Michael Foucault, the French philosopher, devised two concepts that explain the transformation of power mechanisms in nation-states and how these powers are being used for population management. What he called biopolitics can be defined as a political rationality which takes the administration of life and populations as its subject “to ensure, sustain, and multiply life,

to put this life in order” (Foucault, 1998: 138). The other concept, biopower, names how biopolitics is put to work in society and involves what Foucault described as “a very profound transformation of the mechanism of power” in the West (1998: 136). Disciplinary power, which was common in Europe until the late 20th century, was focused on targeting the body to ensure the safety of the sovereign; however, biopower is focused on populations to ensure the safety of the society. Thus, the war is no longer waged in the name of the sovereign who must be defended, but in the name of the society that must be defended (Ghanim 2013, 68). The sovereign power was in fact only a power to “take life or let live”, whereas biopower constituted “a power to foster life or disallow it to the point of death” (Foucault, 1998: 138). Honaida Ghanim contends that biopower and biopolitics are inadequate terms for understanding population management under a colonial occupation. Instead, she suggests a new conceptual frame for understanding the management of occupied spaces and subjugated population, namely thanatopower (2003: 67). *Thanato* means death in Greek, so thanatopower means the management of death and destruction. Ghanim argues that the lives of subjects under colonial occupation are expropriated; they are exposed to the continual threat of death that becomes a permanent shadow accompanying them. In her words, “death is just on hold, again and again, from moment to moment.” The delay of killing is a product of economic calculations of cost and benefit and an effort at making the system more efficient. Due to this continuous threat of death, “granting life becomes a tremendous ‘favour’,” Ghanim adds (2003: 67). According to Ghanim, thanatopower is not an independent or unique form of power, but is a supplement of biopower, which is called to action at those “delicate moments of passage from calculating life to calculating death, from managing life to managing death, and from politicization of life to the politicization of death” (Ghanim, 2003: 68). At this moment of transformation from the bio to thanato, the old archetypal form of power to “make die and let live”

reappears under the new form of “giving death and bargaining living,” Ghanim concludes (2013: 68).

These contributions are critical to reflect on how Israel employs a combination of power mechanisms in Palestine in general and Gaza in particular to ensure the acquiescence of individuals. Gaza represents the site where sovereignty operates fundamentally through the exercise of power outside the law and where “peace” is more likely to take on the face of a war without end (Mbembe, 2003: 23). Life there is not organized in a state form; a human world or humane perception of Palestinians is still absent. This makes the waged assaults and other relevant violent practices against Palestinians legitimate – killers are even praised and honoured by the state leaders oftentimes. Both sides reach a deadlock or develop a relationship based on reciprocal exclusivity; they do not recognize the legitimacy of the other, nor one’s right to exist or survive (see Fanon, 1961: 38-39). Conciliation, coexistence or reaching a final settlement becomes impossible as both know that one power should remain, only one.

Employing these contributions in my research is critical in explaining the relationship between the sovereign or the colonist and the colonized. I am able to examine the excessive use of various powers in light of the ongoing Israeli siege that began in 2006. Through these terms, the reader can develop a deeper understanding of the power mechanisms used by Israel to facilitate destruction aimed at slowly removing all Palestinians. This mainly comes from data collected from Gazans who have lived and experienced this destruction first-hand. In addition, the collected data helps me to provide a detailed account of the state of exception and containment powers.

Social Death

This section discusses the conception of social death and its applicability to genocide, drawing mainly on Claudia Card's work (2010). As a concept, social death was first used by Orlando Patterson, a Jamaican sociologist, in his book on slavery and social death (1982). Patterson argued that slaves in the Americas, who descended from kidnapped Africans, were born socially dead, cut off from intergenerational social connections in both directions, past, and future – they were natively alienated (cited by Card, 2010: 262). Natively alienated slaves are without socially supported ties to either parents or children and without “attachment to groups or localities other than those chosen by their masters” (Patterson, 1982: 7-8).

Card borrows this concept to further develop her theory of atrocity which includes genocide. She contends that social death is not necessarily genocide, yet genocide is an extreme version of social death (2010: 237). In other words, the intentional production of social death in a community is the central evil of genocide. Card defined social death as the loss of social vitality. So, the latter is integral for understanding the meaning of social death. Social vitality exists through relationships, contemporary and intergenerational, that create contexts and identities that give meaning and shape to our lives; some of these relations are with kin, friends, and coworkers (2010: 237). These relationships that constitute a people include connection to kinship, citizenship, and cultural and social relationships created by such things as common literature, cuisine, humour, and sharing in the creation and maintenance of laws and traditions (Card, 2010: 247). Therefore, Card stressed the importance of social relations in understanding social death and the materialization of genocide.

Similarly, Christopher Powell (2007) advocates for a relational understanding of genocide, he argued that groups should not be understood as static entities. Andrew Woolford also called for the recruitment of relational sociology; he notes that:

The group, therefore, is to be preserved not as a museum piece set behind glass and observed with passing curiosity but as an ongoing set of interactions and negotiations through which group members make and remake their group. In other words, following this understanding of the group, a set of group relations is observed to exist and possess value that the group offers its members a space for attachment and identity formation. Based on this insight, genocide is important not so much because it targets bodies of group members but because it targets relations that holds the group together as a persistent yet changing entity (2010: 31).

In the same vein, Daniel Feierstein defines genocidal social practices as “a technology of power that is intended to destroy social relations based on autonomy and cooperation by killing a significant portion of society (significant in numbers and influence) and then attempts to create social relations and identity models through terror” (cited by Woolford, 2010: 29). Card argues since the history of the world is one of social groups that maintain their traditions, languages, and cultures, the loss of a social group is a loss to humanity in the destruction of past and future human potential. Therefore, one can see a clear tendency of a relational understanding of genocide between social scientists. Even Raphael Lemkin, who coined the term genocide, discussed in his works the cultural and social aspects of destruction that result from genocide. According to Lemkin, “the destruction of a nation results in the loss of its future contributions to the world” (1944: 91). This emphasizes the need to look at genocide at the *micro*-level and from a perspective of relational sociology. Genocides generally cause the destruction of social vitality which results in the destruction of social structures, relations, and ties that connect group members. Putting social death at the center of genocide takes the focus off the body counts, individual careers cut short, and mourners, and focuses instead on relationships, connections and foundational institutions that create a community and set the context that gives meaning to careers and goals, lives and deaths

(Card, 2010: 238). The special evil of genocide lies in its infliction of not just physical death (when it does that) but social death, producing consequent meaninglessness for one's life and even of its termination (Card, 2003). As Card states, "When a group with its own cultural identity is destroyed, its survivors lose their cultural heritage and may even lose their intergenerational connection" (2003: 73).

The use of social death theory and relational sociology is of vital importance to understand genocide at different levels and from a sociological perspective. The employment of a qualitative research methodology and interviews as a means for data collection enables the participants to provide information about aspects of social and cultural destruction that might have taken place in Gaza. This research examines the impacts of the ongoing siege on the different contributions of Gazans as a social group. "The world represents only so much culture and intellectual vigour as are created by its component national groups. Essentially the idea of a nation signifies constructive cooperation and original contributions, based upon genuine traditions, genuine culture, and well-developed social psychology" (Lemkin, 1944: 91).

Conclusion

This chapter outlined how genocide can be realized. I advocated the need for a sociological understanding of genocide because the latter can be realized not only through mass killing but also through social and cultural destruction. It was Lemkin and later other scholars who argued that non-physical aspects of genocides are more threatening to the sustainability of a social group than physical destruction. Culture is the soul that holds group members together and the destruction of culture, and other social norms would result in the disappearance of a social group. In addition, I illustrated the intimate relationship between genocide and settler-colonialism as the establishment

of a new settler society requires the removal of indigenous inhabitants. Settler-colonialism is racist in nature because it provides the settler society with the utmost wellbeing and resources while destroying indigenous people and deprives them of their basic human needs. Ultimately, the concept of the state of exception for Agamben is crucial because it can be applied to Gaza. After dehumanization, Gazans have been divested of their basic rights and thus they were reduced to “bare life.” The next chapter elaborates on the methods used to collect, code, and analyze data for the purposes of the present research.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

To achieve a better understanding of the situation in Gaza, a qualitative research approach was used to examine the impact of the Israeli siege and other policies against Gazans. Specifically, I used semi-structured interviews to interview the subjects in this study. One of the main challenges I faced before conducting my interviews was the outbreak of COVID-19. I had planned to meet with my subjects face-to-face in the US, but the plan was cancelled for reasons of safety. Therefore, due to these circumstances, all interviews were conducted online through the Skype platform.

Data Sources and Data Collection Strategies

The principal source of data is Palestinians who lived in Gaza between 2006 and the time of the interview. During this time, Israel started its suffocating siege coupled with genocidal policies towards Palestinians living in Gaza. In addition, Israel launched three military operations that resulted in the killing of thousands of civilians and caused irreversible physical, ecological, and social damage. Participants were asked to provide testimonies and critical information about the nature of everyday life in Gaza, including the consequences of the military operations, detailed accounts of Israeli pogroms in Rafah and Shujayea and other massacres that wiped out entire families, and the implications of the ongoing policies of siege. Interviewees offered a variety of experiences, personal stories, and views towards the actions of the Israeli Occupation Forces (IOF) and continuing Israeli siege. (See Appendix A for the interview schedule).

Due to political and security risks that made it difficult for me to enter the Gaza Strip at the time of interviews, I restricted my interviews to Palestinian immigrants who have lived in Gaza any time between 2006 and 2020, and who currently reside in the US. Outreach to participants was facilitated by an anonymous organization, which kindly offered to help me find Gazans who reside

around the Washington DC area. I chose Washington DC because there were almost no Gazans who immigrated recently to Manitoba or Canada, and the number of Gazans in the US outnumbered those in Canada. Interviews with the ten participants were semi-structured comprised of open-ended questions designed to create opportunities for participants to present and interpret their experiences of the Israeli occupation. I asked each person ten questions that were followed up by probing questions when necessary. Interviews took between sixty and ninety minutes to conduct. I ensured that participants were seated in an environment where they felt comfortable. Prior to the interview, participants were provided a consent form that contained necessary information about the study and its purpose. Collected data were digitally recorded and transcribed into written documents directly after the end of each interview to avoid any loss of critical details. In addition, I focused on the non-verbal gestures and facial expressions of the interviewees and observed their reactions to my questions. Notes and notions that popped up during the interview were recorded and were employed in the data analysis. An in-depth interview approach allowed interviewees to provide useful and relevant information about the Israeli practices, which would be otherwise difficult to obtain via other methods. This approach enabled the interviewees and myself to examine the complex nature of life under siege, including the experience of Israeli crimes in Gaza as well as the ensuing social losses and injustices.

Multi-Sampling

Data gathering is the essence of any research as data is meant to contribute to a better understanding of a theoretical and epistemological framework (Bernard, 2017). Due to the nature of my research, I had to employ more than one sampling methodology. I applied purposive sampling, which involved the deliberate selection of participants who possessed certain qualities

and characteristics relevant to the study. Since it was difficult to locate Gazans who have experienced the siege and currently live in North America, I utilized a snowball sampling technique. I initially contacted volunteers, who then encouraged their friends to join the research. This process was repetitive as Gazans kept referring me to other potential informants. A snowball methodology is extensively used where a population is unknown and difficult to locate as is the case for Gazans living in the US (Noy, 2008).

Purposive sampling is a type of non-probability sampling that is most effective, provided that I intended to explore a certain social and cultural domain based on engagement with knowledgeable experts (Tangco, 2007). Key informants (Gazans) were observant, and reflective members of the Palestinian society who had sufficient knowledge about the social structure, culture, and norms that helped the audience understand the situation better.

Given that the focus of my research was Israeli genocidal policies and actions in the Gaza Strip, I had to recruit six Palestinians who have lived in Gaza during the siege. Participants, who were located around Washington DC provided contextualized and subjective reflections on the status quo, the severity of the siege, associated wars, massacres, and the impact of the siege on different levels. Most of the interviewees were students undertaking different programs at American universities.

The sampling process continued until I found six participants who provided adequate data about the situation in the Gaza Strip. Given the nature of my study and its purpose, this number was reasonable. I tried to implement data collection and analysis simultaneously so that I could recognize the quality and quantity of data collected (Coyne, 1997).

Reflexivity

As a researcher, I believe that I was the main instrument of data collection. I did not see myself as someone contaminating or biasing the collected data, but rather I was an active player and co-creator of data with the participants. Reflexivity involved questions like what do I know? How do I know it? Who am I? Who did I become and in what ways did the data change me? How was knowledge acquired, organized and interpreted? (Pillow, 2003). It is important for the reader to know that I took on this research owing to my background as a Palestinian who lived in Gaza for a long time and experienced the Israeli siege and its various ramifications.

The researcher (myself) has survived two destructive assaults on Gaza in 2008 and 2012 in which I was a firsthand eyewitness to horrible crimes and physical as well as social destruction inflicted upon the Gazan people. I made a distinction between my subjectivity, where it starts and ends, and the testimonies and the perspectives of the participants (Peskin, 1988: 17). I tried very hard to understand the research participants, their past, circumstances, suffering and traumatic experiences in order to capture the essence of their reality and develop reciprocity through listening, and creating equal research relations.

I also interacted with the participants' responses and identified commonalities and differences between these and my own. These interactions, as well as the participants' explanations and insights, made me more reflective and reflexive, and some led me to change some of the preconceived thoughts that I took for granted. This empowered me to transcend myself and step out of my comfort zone and adopt alternative thoughts. My reflexivity was aimed at critically representing and improving the situation of the voiceless and oppressed Palestinians in Gaza by letting them speak their truths.

Ethics

The nature of qualitative research necessitates that the researcher interacts with participants is ethically challenging. In qualitative as well as in quantitative research, the protection of human subjects is imperative. Therefore, researchers must ensure the application of appropriate ethical principles such as confidentiality, consent, and harm prevention. Before engaging in this research project, participants were provided with a clear statement that summarized the research, its objectives, and the overall purpose so that they could make an informed decision regarding participation. In addition, before the interview, participants signed an informed consent form that again emphasized the objectives of the research, and stated that the participants had complete freedom to disengage from the research at any stage. Participants were handed a two-page summary of the research, and those who required a copy were provided so. I happily received and evaluated their feedback and provided answers to some of their questions.

I was aware of the vulnerability of my participants and of the nature of the questions that were asked. Participants were asked questions about war, emigration, massacres, family losses, and the social impact of the Israeli siege, which could emotionally disturb them and invoke unpleasant memories. I listened to their stories and showed sympathy and empathy for their hardship, suffering, and the traumas they had endured during their stay in Gaza. For interviewees who could have experienced any sort of distress or psychological breakdown, I took some precautions to help them out. One of the options was to stop the interview and offer the participant help like giving her/him a short break and reminding her/him that participation was voluntary and that s/he were free to withdraw from the study at any time. The other alternative was providing the respondent's with the DC Victim Hotline which provides free, confidential, and around-the-clock information and referrals for victims of all crimes. In terms of confidentiality and protection of the

participants' identities, I requested the participants' permission to use their first names to be included in the research. Those who did not approve were given pseudonyms. This will also apply to possible publications, as participants have the right to see the findings of the research before it gets published. The participants were reassured that the information provided was shared only with my academic advisor, and no one else saw the interview's content. Finally, this study passed the University of Manitoba Research Ethics Board assessment, which aimed to ensure the safety and integrity of the participants.

Rigour

High-quality qualitative research is marked by a rich complexity of abundance, descriptions, and explanations that are detailed, bountifully supplied, generous, and unstinting (Tracy, 2010). Richness is generated through a requisite variety of theoretical constructs, data sources, contexts, and samples. For my research, I ensured that I had participants that met my criteria and the goals of my research. In addition, I took adequate notes that were recorded immediately after the end of each interview. For analysis, I followed a line-by-line thematic analysis that was conducted concurrently with data collection to learn whether I reached saturation and collected enough data that would support my arguments and close the knowledge gap in my research. Rigour was also manifested in the length of the interviews and whether they provide adequate information and answers to the main research question, followed by the process of transcription and other practices taken to ensure accuracy and rigorous scholarship.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is one of the most crucial parts of any research as it provides the reader with clear findings of the study. It is the process of turning the raw data such as interview transcripts and field notes into meaningful findings. Given that my data came mostly from interviews, I employed a line-to-line thematic analysis for understanding the transcribed testimonies and contributions of the participants (see Braun & Clarke, 2012; Attride-Stirling, 2001). I focused on the collected data, thought of it as much as I could, and read it several times to ensure familiarity. Reading the transcripts several times allowed themes to emerge inductively, and enabled me to view the data in new ways that challenged taken-for-granted knowledge. While reading the transcripts, I wrote reflexive memos and logs that helped me capture all information that linked different pieces together. Memos shed light on important analytic pieces I would not be able to capture during coding, including my own interpretations.

Further, I employed other creative analytic strategies such as coding, which was valuable for organizing, segmenting, simplifying, categorizing, and managing the data (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996: 28; Basit, 2003; Chowdhury, 2015). Coding is actually about going beyond the data, thinking creatively with the data, asking questions, and generating theories and frameworks. According to Morse (1994: 25), coding is a process of piecing together data, making the invisible obvious. The data was categorized based on common patterns, and specific labels were given to each category to facilitate revisiting the transcripts. These labels helped me find linkages, commonalities or differences between various categories. According to Jennifer Attride-Stirling (2001) three types of themes emerge throughout the analysis process. First, lower-order premises evident in the texts called ‘Basic Themes’. Second, categories of basic themes together summarize more abstract principles called ‘Organizing Themes’. Ultimately, superordinate themes

encapsulating the principal metaphors called ‘Global Themes’. These themes emerged from both the data and the theoretical framework of the study.

Brief summaries were attached to each category or theme and theoretical questions were raised here. Subsequently, a comparison between overarching themes of different participants was made to find generic themes and new concepts. The general framework that emerged from the data during the coding process is in line with the reviewed literature, and the theoretical framework on slow-motion genocide and the Israeli necropolitics in Gaza. Finally, deductions in the summaries of different themes and relevant theories were brought together to explore significant themes, concepts, patterns, and structures that arose in the text. The aim here was to transform the data into a more abstract form and return to the original research question and the theoretical framework, addressing these with arguments grounded in the themes and patterns that emerged in the exploration of the interview transcripts (Attride-Stirling, 2001).

The Rationale for Qualitative Inquiry

My rationale for selecting a qualitative research methodology was due to the fact that the phenomenon of the genocidal siege is lived and complex, therefore requiring a contextualized robust knowledge from different people to unpack it. A qualitative methodology was effective and led to a decolonized understanding of real-life, practical, concrete situations, and phenomena in particular contexts through the collection of detailed and descriptive data about the Israeli siege and concomitant genocidal policies against Indigenous Gazans (see Tuhiwai Smith, 1999: 183-192). Gazans who are often neglected and marginalized in the international media had the opportunity to speak out and provide a variety of meanings, experiences, symbols, concepts and metaphors that truly describe the Israeli policies and genocidal actions committed against them. A

qualitative approach is valuable because it takes an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter; researchers study things in their natural settings in an attempt to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meaning that people bring to them (Jones, 1995). The qualitative approach humanized Gazan participants by giving them a voice to speak out and express their views, feelings, sufferings, and hardship. It helped them deliver the image of the Israeli occupation, and its implications as it is without manipulation or change.

In addition, a qualitative methodology allowed me to provide rich and multi-dimensional descriptions of the complexity of the Israeli siege by tracking unique or untold stories; illuminate experiences and interpretations of the colonial occupation and consequences by actors with widely different stakes and roles; and conduct initial exploration to develop theories and generate hypotheses that foster a deeper understanding of Gazan sufferings (Sofaer, 1999). A qualitative methodology was an adequate tool because it enabled me to produce contextualized knowledge that research shows to be necessary to allow people to develop from rule-based beginners to virtuous experts (ibid).

Paradigmatic Framework

I chose a critical paradigm because I believe it best suits the purpose of my research since it is modelled on interpretive, psychoanalytic, and Marxist studies that focus on the insights and judgments of participants (Connole, 1995). A critical approach looks at how knowledge is created or firmly grounded within an understanding of social structures, power relations, and the agency of human beings – an engagement with the fact that human beings actively think about their worlds (Collins, et al. 2014: 2016). This approach focuses on broader long-term structural conditions and aims to empower participants who are recognized as rational decisionmakers shaped by

socioeconomic structures. Participants were able to share their thoughts, speak of the injustices, genocidal actions, and freely described the daily life in authentic words of their own. This research paradigm is frequently associated with anti-colonialist, indigenous and Global South perspectives. It challenges the idea that reality is natural and objective because it is shaped by social, political, cultural, colonial, and ethnic forces that exist in and shape the social structure (Leavy, 2014: 90). This approach was followed, for it seeks human emancipation and the disruption of the status quo. Critical theorists claim that reality can only come to be known through a subjective frame and as shaped by values and mediated by power relations that are socially and historically constituted. In other words, it addresses the flaws of social reality, identifies the actors to change it, provide clear norms for criticism, and identify practical goals for social transformation.

This approach was valuable because it served as a source of strength for subjugated and oppressed groups against colonial and elitist powers. It facilitated the exposure of Israeli genocidal crimes and the demystification of oppressive structures and other strategies that are invisibly grounded in the Israeli-sponsored policies. By making the oppressive colonial structure overt and through raising awareness, the world will become more cognizant of the underlying policies that Israel adopts to undermine the unity and the social fabric of Palestinians in Gaza. As such, I hope Palestinians would derive insights and learn new techniques in an attempt to change the status quo and emancipate themselves from the ongoing colonial oppression.

Time and Place

This study was exclusive to Israeli policies and violations in the Gaza Strip. Violations through the Israeli occupation of the West Bank were not addressed in this study. Although this study

provided the broader historical context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it only focuses on the Israeli atrocities and policies in Gaza since the introduction of the siege in 2006 to the present time.

Concluding Remarks

While this was not my first time conducting semi-structural interviews, I came to realize that people need to tell their stories and speak against the injustices, especially Palestinians whose voices are often neglected, silenced, and unheard. These stories could empower not only individuals who narrate these stories but also academics and ordinary people to deconstruct the colonial-adopted discourse and the reinforced stereotypes. Although the sample of six Gazans is not enough to capture thousands of tragic stories, it gives the reader a fair picture of the situation in Gaza.

As a Gazan, I hope that through this thesis the shameful silence of the civilized world will be shattered, and that it could be used to grant Gazans their very basic rights as well as prosecute their killer. The stories that were narrated by these six students, and the themes that emerged from these stories are discussed in the next two chapters.

Chapter 4 – Genocide: A Vicious Circle

The findings that emerged from the interviews with respondents were depressing and disconcerting at the same time. While transcribing, coding, and analyzing the data, I came to realize that the Nakba is a process that started in 1948 and continues its destruction that remains unfinished (Massad, 2018). Regardless of the wholesale destruction that Israel inflicted on the Palestinians, the latter have shown unmistakable resistance to colonial policies. However, we will see that the Israeli siege that has started in 2006 represents a unique and creative form of criminality that aims to wear Gazans out or to kill them slowly, and not necessarily physically. This slow and gradual destruction is examined in seven major themes that are discussed in this chapter and the next. All themes represent the manifestations of genocide in Gaza and the techniques used to bring about different forms of destruction. The present chapter focuses on the vicious circle of recurrent violence in which Gazans are entrapped. The three subthemes of traumatic memories of childhood, the destructiveness of the Israeli siege, and the drastic social changes are all recurrent events that almost every Gazan experiences. The next chapter discusses the outcomes of the siege and other consequences that weakened Gazans' relationship with the land. Sovereignty, inequality, and relationship with the land are three interconnected subthemes or issues that were severely impacted by or resulted from the continuation of the siege and punitive Israeli measures. These two chapters are separated for organizational purposes, yet the matters they address are interconnected parts of a larger whole.

Childhood in Refugee Camps

What is done cannot be undone, but one can prevent it from happening again.
— Anne Frank, *The Diary of a Young Girl*

One of the main questions directed to the participants was about their early life and their experiences under occupation. As you read back into their past, I hope you will carry with you an appreciation of the savagery of a deep-seated colonial system that does not allow humans to be humans or children to have a normal childhood. All respondents laid great emphasis on the unrelenting ordeals, and tribulations they went through during their early years in Gaza.

Gaza, a region of only 140 square miles, has one of the highest population densities in the world with a population of more than two million (UN, 2017). About 70 percent of Gaza residents are Palestinian refugees who were dispossessed and removed from their land after the 1948 conflict with Jewish paramilitaries (PCBS, 2015; 2016: 66). It is estimated that 80 percent of Gazans live in poverty, and the majority lack access to essential needs and services deemed necessary to maintain a basic life. A lot of people have heard about Gaza, but few know what it is like to live there, besieged, impoverished, and hopeless. The ghettoized refugee camps in Gaza are overcrowded, UN schools operate on a double-shift system for classes, basic services such as water and electricity are scarce, the infrastructure is fragile, houses are poorly constructed, and the roads are ill-paved. The dire situation in Gaza and the ensuing deterioration in the quality of life there is, directly or indirectly, the result of the occupation. Keeping Palestinians in houses piled on top of each other in underdeveloped, underprotected, and almost uninhabitable camps consolidates and perpetuates the “we” at the expense of “them.” Like other colonial configurations, Palestinians were destined to remain a pastoralized and desanctified figure of lower rank since the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine. In Agamben’s words, the refugee camps are spaces of exception; they do not belong to the human world where people can have their political and citizenship rights (1998: 170; Ramadan, 2012; Hanafi, 2010).

Growing up in al-Maghazi camp for refugees, which is located in the middle of the Gaza Strip, where 30,000 people are jammed together, Ibrahim questions the nature of life in the refugee camp:

Growing up, the streets of the refugee camp, how tiny they were, the services, the crowdedness, the absence of privacy. I always questioned that, is that kinda the reality of the entire world, like all children of the world living in the same circumstances?¹

These refugees, who are stripped of their political, as well as basic rights, descend from families that fled the Nakba (the “catastrophe”) in 1948. Participants were exposed to systemic and extreme levels of violence, a strangling *hisar* (siege), the sound of war, and involved in frequent protests and uprisings. It is too much for someone to take in at a very young age. One should reiterate that these demonstrations and uprisings are continuous attempts by Palestinians to defy the Israeli negation of their basic rights, and the inhuman conditions of the camp life. The two intifadas (1987 and 2000) were central in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict because they brought back to the fore the Palestinian cause and recast the conflict anew. Despite the nonviolent trajectory adopted by Palestinians in these two uprisings, Israel repressed them using brutal methods such as torture, intimidation, house raids, and beatings to ensure their submission and acquiescence. At the age of four, Adil recalls a raid by a handful of Israeli soldiers on his home while his father was at work:

My early childhood was tough. I remember when three soldiers invaded our house while I was in the bathroom, I went out on the screaming of my Mom and my old sister ... they were crying, and I looked inside the bedroom of my parents, I found three armed soldiers lying on the bed looking into the photo album of my parent’s wedding ... this created, not hatred, but anger over the occupation ... this was my first impression of occupation as a child.

¹ Quotations were not edited; they were written as noted by participants. Some of them might look grammatically incorrect; however, it is my responsibility as a researcher to deliver the voice of my participants as is, without any change.

These frequent raids divest Palestinians of privacy and any feeling of safety. If one cannot be secure in his/her house, where else could they feel safe? By so doing, Israel renders Palestinian homes public places that could be violated and raided at any time. The distinction between public and private fades away here. All participants revealed that their early childhood was largely impacted and shaped by the violent events of the second Intifada (2000-2005). For instance, Ramy remembers that daily Israeli violence in the camp was a normal occurrence during his childhood:

Gunshots at night, the incursions of Israelis all the time, because we had nearby settlements, either incursion to the Nuseirat or Burajj camps [middle Gaza Strip]. People dying all the time ... posters of dead people all over the streets, it is a normal thing. The mosques being used to announce the people who died was a normal thing. That normalization created an environment where death has become glorified.

These incursions and invasions could be seen as continuous attempts that aim to bring back the state of lawlessness and anarchy to the camps and ensure their subordination to colonial Israel. These camps have been transformed into pathologized spaces of exception where violence, death, and war are normal. However, the announcement of dead people by the mosques, pasting their pictures all over the camp, and other activities of veneration constitute an attempt towards an illusory rejection of death that has already occurred (Mbambe, 2003). The normalization of violence and death was echoed by other participants. Regardless of the frequent exposure to Israeli violence and the growth in the toxic milieu of the camp, Hassan said that people adjusted to this “bare” life:

All I am hearing is heavy machine guns firing all night, ambulances, people running, women screaming and shouting, it is a kind of nightmare that lasts the whole night. I wake up in the morning and I go to school like we all do in Palestine.

The Israeli settlements in Gaza, dismantled in 2005, were not only residential areas but fortified military bases frequently used to inflict suffering and humiliation on defenceless Palestinians and to keep them under panoptic scrutiny at all times. “Settlements could be seen as urban optical

devices for surveillance and the exercise of power” (Weizman, 2004, np) Israel manned several checkpoints around these settlements that used to link major areas in the strip. Thus, these “well-built” settlements, as well as the repugnant checkpoints, were a source of daily disturbance for Palestinians as soldiers cruelly humiliated those who passed through. A trip that takes half an hour would take more than two hours due to the frequent delays and closures of the checkpoints. Adam describes this precarious trip:

I witnessed when the Israelis were inside Gaza – unlike now. I witnessed the settlements. I witnessed the checkpoints. I had an aunt that lived up north [Gaza], and every time we planned to visit her, we were checking the status of the checkpoint many times. We get back home because the checkpoint got closed.

Other participants recalled other dimensions of the Israeli occupation during their early childhood. Khaled, for instance, stressed the role of the occupation in reinforcing male-dominance and gender-based violence against females. He stated that this underlying violence manifested in the games he played with other kids. They played Israeli soldiers and Palestinian fighters; boys always presented themselves as strong, and powerful, whereas girls belonged to a subordinate and disempowered team of Arabs. The first thing that kids would do on Eid (two Muslim festivals celebrated every year) was to buy toy guns and shoot at one another:

On reflection today, I realize that most plays that we were playing, in some way, imitating the kind of violence we saw on TV, we heard on the news, or we heard people talk about. For example, the game of Jews and Arabs, throwing rockets, the plastic guns we bought around Eid, once you get the financial gift of Eid, you run to buy a plastic gun. Also, political violence helped perpetuate domestic gender-based violence, not physical, but patriarchal dominance.

The second Intifada was brutally repressed and came to an end in 2005; however, Israeli terror against these camps has never ceased. The situation in the camps has in many ways worsened with the imposition of the Israeli *hisar* on Gaza and the recurrent military operations (*harb*) it waged. This siege and other colonial practices should be seen as modes of control and management, and

the space of exception in Gaza should be viewed as a disciplinary space that aims to ensure submission and obedience. It is a factory that produces and reproduces the subaltern subjectivities and alienated humans who have no agency over their lives whatsoever (see Spivak, 1988; Agamben, 1998). The impact on Gazans in general and children, in particular, is massive, yet for many, Gaza is still the only place they can call home. These children are excluded from the “normal” world that other children enjoy. In the following part, I broadly reflect on the Israeli siege and its consequences in light of the interviews.

The Israeli Siege: Wholesale Destructiveness

We must blow Gaza back to the Middle Ages, destroying all the infrastructure, including roads and water.

- Israel's Deputy Prime Minister Eli Yishai

For Lemkin, genocide does not necessarily mean the immediate destruction of a nation, except when mass killing is applied to annihilate that group. Rather, he stressed that genocide is a “coordinated plan of different actions aiming at the destruction of the essential foundations of a national group” (1944: 79). Since the end of the second Intifada in 2005, Israel began the siege and launched numerous military operations in Gaza. The deadly cruelty of these violations as well as the scale of infrastructural destruction have consistently intensified over time. These military campaigns include Operation Cast Lead (2008), Operation Pillar of Defense (2012), and Operation Protective Edge (2014). In addition, Israel sporadically launches artillery shells, navy attacks, and air raids every now and again to provoke and harass Palestinians. This section shows how the Israel siege created dire living conditions that have eroded the essential foundations of Gazans as a group.

War on Gaza “Hell on Earth”

The Israeli siege is not the only mode of management applied to Gaza, colonial Israel often resorts to more violent techniques to tame Gazans and impose discipline and order. As we will see, Israel relies more on indirect methods of destruction, though this section also addresses the direct methods of war employed by Israel when necessary. All participants emphasized the uniqueness of Israeli barbarity and savagery during the 2014 aggression that lasted for 51 days. Interestingly, Ibrahim, who once lived in the middle part of the Gaza Strip, described the assault as genocide, likening it to the day of judgement due to the intensity of bombardments and the large-scale destruction. This caused people to feel unsafe and insecure as they had nowhere to flee for their lives. Even the border with Egypt remained shut, which raises many question marks about Egypt’s complicity in this crisis:

It was the Israelis’ graduation gift for me. It happened a day after our graduation ceremony in the university, and the university got bombed ... basically it was hell on earth, it was the worst of the worst, it was a literal genocide where you have whole families were bombed while in their homes, entire families, parents, grandparents, kids, they all got wiped out from civil records entirely, to have residential buildings, and apartment complexes completely wiped out, you have markets bombed while people were shopping, it was like the day of judgement ... the most inhumane thing, people were not going anywhere, because no place was safe, they did not even open the border if the people wanna evacuate and come back.

The 2014 assault on beleaguered Gaza was not like any other. The fact that participants describe it as a genocide illustrates the unprecedented destructiveness of this war. Massacring entire families, razing neighbourhoods such as Shujayea and Khuza’a, and deliberately targeting markets and shopping centers, shows intent to exterminate a people. If Israel's intent was solely to target a political group, it would have not committed such crimes against civilians and instead allowed them to evacuate to safer places. Even those who took to UNRWA schools as shelter were purposefully targeted and murdered. Adil described the flight of his family during the Black

Sunday massacre that took place in the Shujayea district, Eastern Gaza city. Adil's family fled to an UNRWA school as a shelter but had to evacuate because it came under Israeli fire:

Suddenly my mom woke me up and she was crying along with my sister. I knew there was a disaster, at the same time I was not scared, I did not care. I was blunt let's say. I rushed to the window to see what no one should ever see. The bodies of kids, women, elderly, were all around the streets, people were leaving their houses in masses heading from border areas to the West of Gaza, they were walking over dead bodies. The trees were burnt, they were black. The streets were cracked as if it was an earthquake, most of the houses were crushed and destroyed.

With the fall of shells every few seconds, the streets of Shujayea were packed with fragmented bodies as residents attempted to flee the inevitable death (see HRW, 2018). People left their houses with nothing but the clothes they wore; it was a mass exodus from Shujayea, which is located near the Eastern border to the West in a region thought to be safer. This exodus reminded Palestinians once again of the Nakba and opened up unhealed wounds of Deir Yassin and Tantoura. The footage of parents holding the hands of their children and running, others carrying the panicked elderly on their shoulders, women grieving the disappearance of their children, was dreadful. No one was immune from the shelling, and many of those who were fleeing perished en route due to the indiscriminate artillery shelling. More than half a million were displaced from conflict-torn areas to other places. The number of Palestinian casualties exceeded 350, most of whom were found under the rubble of Shujayea after it was pounded to dust. Hundreds of families became homeless after this massacre as most of the houses were not rebuilt (see Khalidi, 2020: 222-4). Simultaneously, Israel committed other pogroms that included Black Friday in Rafah, Khuza'a in Khan Younis. In the 2014 offensive, 2,251 Palestinians were killed that include 550 children and 300 women and over 11,000 were wounded, ten percent of whom suffered permanent disability. More than 20,000 housing units were destroyed in whole or part, while 73 medical facilities, 45 ambulances, and 245 schools were damaged. The destruction touched every facility and the effect

was felt by every individual living in Gaza. This wide-scale destruction emphasized that Israel enjoyed impunity throughout the aggression, according to Hassan:

It was clear that the Israeli government and the army were enjoying unlimited impunity, and they can go as far as it would take to destroy the last house or brick in the Gaza Strip. And it was clear with the way they bombed the areas with types of targets they did, with the intensity of bombing ... it was even worse than anything that you would imagine.

According to Lemkin, “genocide is directed against the national group as an entity, and the actions involved are directed against individuals, not in their individual capacity, but as members of the national group” (1944:79). The number of casualties combined with the participants’ responses emphasize that everyone in Gaza was simply killable, regardless of their status, whether civilian or militant. In the words of Agamben, all Gazans are *homo sacer* (a person banned from society and denied all rights), they can be killed by any Israeli without the perpetrator held to account (1998: 1-4). It seems that Israel was following a “logic of elimination” in this war, killing any moving object and destroying entire neighbourhoods (Wolfe, 2006). Based on that, what Israel did in the 2014 offensive is a case of physical destruction within its slow-motion genocide.

On the other hand, Khaled stated that the violent bombing of Gaza for 51 days without any government’s efforts to stop this terror shook his faith in humanity. He felt helpless and frustrated because no actions were taken to salvage his fellow Gazans who were dying before camera lenses. The silence of the international community raises questions about its failure to demand accountability from Israel. Interestingly, Khaled likened the constant state of siege and war in Gaza with the outbreak of Covid-19 and its impacts on the globe. He argued that the state of emergency that the world now experiences has been the daily routine for Gazans since 2006:

The 2014 war shook my faith in humanity ... we were bombed for 51 days; everything was bombed in the most immoral terms ... let’s talk about Corona, when I talk to my doctors, once I talk with them, I quote myself: this feels like wartime Gaza, classes disrupted, meetings cancelled, everything being panic shocked, and nobody is going out in the streets, literally what is happening because of the virus reminds me of wartime Gaza.

However, what is happening in Gaza is worse than the global state of emergency. These countries are still able to connect with the external world, express their sovereignty, and export and import goods, they have political and citizenship rights. Gazans, on the other hand, have almost none of those, and above that, they endure daily Israeli assaults and different forms of harassment. Due to this pandemic, Gaza now experiences multiplied restrictions, added to the Israeli punitive measures.

The outbreak of Covid-19 and the suspension of violence against the Palestinians indicates that the siege and other hostilities can be halted if Israeli politicians are serious about peace. It proved that confinement, wars, destruction, and other consequences are all designed and can be undone. With the waging of these wars, life in ghettoized Gaza and the refugee camps has become infernal. Thousands of houses are still in need of repair, healthcare is shattered, and most sadly people have to cope with the loss of loved ones. This destruction adds upon previous losses and the damage inflicted on Gaza since the start of the occupation is slow destruction leading to inevitable death.

Infrastructural Warfare

In a paper submitted to a Madrid conference in 1933, Lemkin called on the participants to ban the physical and cultural destruction of national groups. He further stressed different aspects of genocide including the physical, cultural, and economic in his seminal text *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe* (1944:79). In this light, since the occupation of the Gaza Strip in 1967, the enclave's infrastructure has been left without concrete development. It is the entrenched disparities in lifestyle and structural inequalities that the colonizer continuously seeks to reinforce. The ongoing hostilities and assaults against Gaza have caused further damage to the infrastructure, widening

the gap of structural and infrastructural inequalities. In the aftermath of the Israeli siege, access to basic infrastructural services such as electricity, water, and communication became extremely limited. People have to put in extensive effort every day to get hold of services that should be available for everyone under normal circumstances. Hassan describes these difficulties:

You should always put your energy into something that is so stupid and simple. Like taking a shower in the morning or brushing your teeth, you would have a very long exhausting day, and you would come back from work, you have to stay up throughout the night because you wanna refill water when the local municipality turns on the water supply for that area, they do it once or twice a week. You stay up all night, you fill the tanks, you go to sleep, and in the morning there is no electricity, so the water is freezing, and then you debate whether you take a freezing shower, or to skip the shower, or heat some water on the stove to take a shower, and one day we discovered that they [Israeli forces] shot the tanks during the night, you turn on the tap and there is no water.

Similarly, Ibrahim emphasized the chronic shortage of these services and the difficulties associated with obtaining them:

It is disastrous for the utilities; I do not remember that we had a week or a month of 24 hours of power or having hot or running water for a month or something. It is always like six hours a day, seven hours a day. And for the fuel, I remember we would line up from time to time at the gas stations to get gas in gallons and store them at home ... the people in Gaza or Palestinians in general, they only care about their day-to-day life, the necessities, not to think about freedom, statehood, rather than putting energy in putting food on the table for their kids, and having water, electricity, jobs, and stuff.

In 2006, Israel bombarded the main power plant that provides electricity to most areas. Now Gaza is mainly reliant on Israel and to a lesser extent on Egypt, which together provided only 120 MW of the 450 MW needed in 2017, meaning that a large portion of Gazans went (and continue to go) without electricity (Gisha, 2010). The electricity deficit also results in frequent power outages that negatively affect all aspects of life in Gaza, including hospitals, schools, wastewater treatment facilities, and households. For instance, Gaza is unable to operate its wastewater facilities and thus disposes of all its wastewater in the sea (see UN, 2019). Power blackouts have serious implications

on hospitals where hundreds of patients are connected to electric devices without which their lives would be in jeopardy.

In a similar vein, Khaled stated that water and electricity have become very costly services. People purchase filtered water from local distributors because 97 percent of the water in Gaza is unfit for human consumption (OCHA, 2018). Likewise, some people subscribe for electricity from local community suppliers who have back-up generators. Khaled notes:

Water has become very unhealthy, and in order for you to get healthy water, you need to spend a lot of money, and spending a lot of money requires to get a job, which you cannot do because unemployment is higher because of the blockade, it is a chain. Electricity is the same, you need to have a generator, and another generator or a subscription with a local community supplier in addition to the mainline from the company.

Those who cannot afford to buy filtered water resort to aid organizations such as UNRWA, which provides free filtered water. Adil stated that he used to go with his brothers to fill up some gallons regularly:

We used to fill 3 or 4 gallons daily at 6 in the morning. We used to go to UN schools since the UN donated huge tanks of drinkable water. We were going early in the morning to line up and fill in our gallons. If we had drinkable water [in Gaza] we would not go through all of that.

One should remember that the Israeli settlements that existed until 2005 stole huge amounts of Gaza's underground water as the settler's quantity per capita was higher than the amount allocated for Palestinians. In addition, Israel established dams and huge wells that obstruct the natural flow of water from places such as the Hebron mountains, which in the long run resulted in the depletion and collapse of the Gaza aquifer (see Attili, 2017).

When I asked participants about health services, they asserted the devastation of healthcare services and facilities in Gaza. Adam, who worked as a nurse in Gaza, stressed the massive shortages of medical supplies. He mentioned that the number of surgeries was reduced to only palliative cases and that most of the urgent cases are referred to hospitals abroad:

I witnessed the shortage of medical supplies, medications, even the number of surgeries, they used to do only the palliative surgeries. Non-urgent or major surgeries, people who needed advanced surgeries, they needed to get abroad to do these surgeries. It was completely devastated. In terms of evacuating the injured, it was hard, the ambulances were prohibited from getting out.

As of 2016, every 1,000 Gazans had 1.42 doctors, 1.58 hospital beds and 1.98 nurses. These figures are a consequence of the continuing attacks on medical facilities and staff (see Pipers, 2017: 22). Not only did Israel turn the life in these camps into hell, it also inflicted irreversible damage to the infrastructure to an extent these places became unfit for living. There is almost a lack of everything: electricity, water, communications, fuel, cooking gas, and imported goods, along with polluted seawater. This acute deprivation of basic human rights prompted many, including doctors, to leave Gaza and search for a better life elsewhere.

Aid Economy

In the aftermath of 1967, most Palestinians started to work in Israel, mainly in construction, agriculture, and services jobs. The Gazan economy attained high growth rates with the expanded income-generating opportunities in Israel. However, according to Sara Roy, a leading Harvard researcher at the Center for Middle Eastern Studies, this growth is oriented and largely shaped by the needs and interests of Israel (1995). This dependency on the Israeli economy was particularly noticeable after the Second Intifada when Israel stopped issuing work permits to Gazans, causing a full paralysis to Gaza's economy. In other words, Israel imposed mechanisms of economic exploitation that profited the colonizer.

Today, with the constant state of war, internal division, and a full-blown siege, Gaza's economy is crippled, and the human suffering is aggravating. The private sector has seen severe damage, especially with the restrictions on movement and the scarcity of public services. Adam,

who lived in the middle part of the Gaza Strip, mentioned that one of the main factories in his area was bombed during the 2014 offensive and no compensation was provided. During the 2014 hostilities, the private sector incurred damages estimated at US\$900 million (Piper, 2017: 17). Ibrahim stated that his father, who embarked on building the Gaza University in 2005, was faced with a strangling siege in 2006:

My father along with a bunch of intellectuals in Gaza they founded Gaza University where I did my undergrad. The university started to be built in 2005, right on the blink of imposing the blockade. The blockade was imposed and everything, the prices of construction materials went high, almost double and triple, or they were not available at times ... it costed them really way more than they thought.

Similarly, Hassan stated that his father, who used to be a businessman working in poultry, went bankrupt after consecutive bad seasons. He eventually depleted his funds and ended up with significant amounts of debts that he found hard to pay off. Subsequently, he was reported to the police.

My father used to be a farmer, the way farming work, you get one good year and then another bad year, so he got one bad year, and he thought, "Oh, this is the bad year, I should not stop." He used to raise chickens ... he did another season then he lost, then he was "no way it is gonna be three bad seasons in a row"He went for a third season then he was broken so bad, ended up with so much debt he could not pay, and people were reporting that to the police on us, and from my entire life my father has been successful businessman, and he has been able to support people in my family, in my neighbourhood We have never had something like that in our entire life, our family we would sit around lunch and we would not talk to each other, we would look at each other's eyes. It is just devastating and embarrassing that you cannot even have words to describe.

In a similar vein, Khaled who studies business incubators and accelerators in Gaza asserted that Gazans have great potential to prosper and thrive economically; however, the severe restrictions imposed by the occupation have undermined any prospects for economic development. Khaled stated that the blockade has deprived Gazans of much foreign investment and support, along with access to international markets and financing in the coastal enclave. Khaled notes the following in his narrative:

I have been following research and stories on start-ups in Gaza, and the potential is always sealed and severely limited because of the blockade, whether it is access to foreign markets, access to cash flow, quality mentors coming from abroad, whether trying to market your ideas for potential investors ... the blockade keeps this potential very limited.

As a result of these economic failures that stem from the blockade, unemployment in Gaza has risen sharply to become one of the highest in the world. It averaged over 45 percent in 2019, with shockingly higher rates among female and recent graduates (see PSBS, 2016). Adil, for instance, stated that all his siblings are recent university graduates, yet no one is able to find a job. His father used to have a barbershop that he closed due to the lack of electricity supply as well as people's inability to afford a haircut. His father, who provides for eight children, was making twenty NIS a day (around six USD).

Gaza's real GDP per capita was \$1,096 in 2006 and became \$1,038 in 2016 (Ibid). When I asked participants about how people meet their basic needs, they all agreed that Gazans heavily rely on international aid. The number of people relying on UNRWA food assistance in Gaza was around a million in 2016, with projections of increasing numbers in the following years (see Pipers, 2017: 14). Other organizations that provide support to Gazans include Mercy Corps, Save the Children, the Palestinian Ministry of Social Affairs, and the United Nations for Development Programme (UNDP), to name a few. Participants also mentioned that many families rely on the help of their relatives or communities. For instance, Hassan stated that his father who works at the UNRWA helps his uncle's family, grandparents, and other relatives in need of help in his extended family:

It takes one working person and he would be supporting maybe 20 or 30 people in his family. Honestly, like my father who started working for the UNRWA, and then he pays for my uncle's family who got killed, and then he pays for my grandparents, and then he pays for my aunt who got divorced, and he pays for poor people in his family. It is like we do not have to really meet all our demands if someone is working, then he shares whatever he had with everyone around him.

The same pattern was observed with other participants who emphasized the development of social solidarity between family members. This does not necessarily mean that people are able to meet their needs; however, they manage with what they have. Khaled pointed out that many people who work for minuscule wages (600 NIS or 170 USD) would solely buy basic necessities for survival. Some participants mentioned that they send regular remittances to alleviate the financial hardship of their families. These are all unsustainable solutions for the economic crisis in Gaza which cannot rely permanently on foreign aid. Even if Israel relaxes the punitive measures and other restrictions, Gaza's economy will need decades to recover.

Drastic Social Changes

Recently, relational sociology has become a common tool among scholars to examine genocide. Sociologists, in particular, depict social groups as a set of relations, connections, identities and contexts, and that genocide targets these meaningful relations that hold group members together. The maintenance of these relations leads to social vitality and the deliberate targeting of them causes social death (Card, 2010: 237-40). This section discusses three social issues that directly or indirectly resulted from the Israeli siege.

Social Problems

One of the foreseeable outcomes of the Israeli siege is the spread of different social ills and other related problems that weakened the “essential foundations” of Gazans as a social group (Lemkin, 1944: 79). The fourteen-year blockade has created conditions undermining all walks of life, shaking the social structure of the victim group. When I asked Ibrahim about the impact of the siege, he stated that it aims to demoralize Gazans:

That is one of the reasons Israelis imposed the blockade, first to kill the spirit of the people, and second to force them to lose their minds, and really ending up killing themselves or surrendering or begging for Israel to come and save them.

This illustrates that genocide does not necessarily take the form of mass killing and can be accomplished through caging defenceless people for decades, depriving them of basic needs and rights, and destroying prospects for a bright future. This will definitely, as indicated by Ibrahim, kill the spirit of the people and drive them insane. The demoralization among Gazans led them to resort to heavy drug use to escape the excessive problems and unbearable responsibilities surrounding them (see Aljazeera, 2019). The infernal living conditions, such as fathers being unable to provide for their families and young people being unable to establish their lives, are among the reasons that Palestinians of various ages use drugs. Ramy stated that illegal drugs that are socially inappropriate and deplorable are now becoming more common within his community due to the siege and deteriorating economic conditions:

I remember when I was a kid, drugs was not a common conversation. People won't talk about drugs at all, and people don't deal with it, and it was not a common commodity in the black market. But now it is everywhere, drugs is everywhere. When I went back home in 2015, I was walking down the street with my brother who pointed at our neighbours: this guy takes drugs, that one takes drugs, this guy sells drugs, they are known, people know who take and sell drugs. The biggest drug is Tramadol, it is an opioid. That definitely affected in a negative way the social fabric of the society ... it affects their household situation, their relationships with their parents, with family, with community.

The widespread use of drugs, especially among young people, imperils the future of thousands of Gazans who are otherwise expected to contribute to building their society. This has surely reduced the social vitality among group members who are no longer able to set up meaningful relationships. This results in the erosion of the social fabric and the dissociation of families.

On the other hand, many participants emphasized that marriage rates among Gazans have significantly dropped. People's inability to find employment, provide for their families, and cover marriage expenses due to the economic collapse, led many to refrain from marriages that might

add burdens on their shoulders. Those few who get married do so with the help of friends of the family; however, they end up with incredible amounts of debts. This, then, leads to domestic violence and perhaps divorce. Adil elaborates on this:

Marriage rates are the lowest, divorce rates are high. People cannot get married. Yes people cannot get married, if I wanna get married, I need like an apartment or a house, and if I have an apartment, I have to pay dowry, and If I have a dowry, I need to find a job in order to get secure marriage.

Adam also stated that people are no longer able to get married compared with ten years ago. Most Gazans are not able to afford the incredibly high expenses involved with marriage:

In terms of getting married in Gaza, the number of people who are getting married in Gaza is nothing compared to 10 years before, see how the change. People cannot afford getting married. In our culture in Gaza, the groom has to cover all expenses ... nobody can afford to get married; it is hard. People do not have the money and even if you have it you get loans, from a friend. They have debts after marriage. You are talking about 10 to 15 thousand. This leads to divorce eventually because there is no income ... they start fighting, shouting, “this is your fault, no it is your fault, no it is the occupation fault, no, no it is the society’s fault, no it is the government fault.”

The sharp drop in marriage rates could be viewed as a strategic weapon used to reduce procreation among Palestinians whose numbers are growing exponentially. Israel is lately concerned about the rapid increase in Palestinians in both Gaza and the West Bank and perceives this to be a grave demographic threat to its existence in the region (see Artema, 2019). The Israeli-induced genocidal conditions have impeded young people from establishing a family, and have impacted reproduction and the maintenance of social order.

Interestingly, Hassan mentioned that radicalism is among other serious problems that surfaced in Rafah, in the southern Gaza strip. He stated that people are becoming hardliners because of extreme poverty and despair:

I know other problems, which is radicalism especially in Rafah because we are close to the Egyptian border, so people think what is happening is due to like something wrong they have done and then they need to correct that mistake by being even more religious or to even be more extreme to fight the occupation, they run and escape to Egypt to go all over,

maybe to Libya, Syria, Iraq or other countries ... this is highly connected to poverty, the most impoverished people, those who got desperate with the world or this life, there is nothing they can do that would work out if they go to college, they pay the money, they study, they spend their life being good people, do whatever they can do, nothing works out. Eventually, they just hate the world, hate that dead-end of their life, and then they decide that the solution is to carry a suicide belt, got to Erez [Israeli crossing] and blow up themselves.

Fundamentalism among young Palestinians who have no prospects for a better life may eventually cause social cleavages and stratification. Fanon argued that the colonizer always seeks to split the colonized societies to cause internal divisions and spark fights among the colonized. In other words, it is a *divide and rule* policy that aims to weaken these societies to achieve the colonist's goals. Gaza is mostly made up of a moderate Sunni community that does not usually tolerate radicalism. Due to growing fundamentalism, in 2009 a bloody confrontation took place between the Hamas military wing and a Salafist group that was promoting radical beliefs. This resulted in tens of casualties on both sides, and damage to buildings and mosques (see Guardian, 2009). As mentioned by Hassan, many Gazans have joined some radical groups in Syria, Egypt, and Libya to get away from their poverty and despair. The situation in Gaza has transformed some of these young people into beasts ready to perform heinous killings in the name of religion. This bloodiness is an outright expression of antipathy and rebellion against the world that did not recognize them in times of hardship.

Among other problems that participants mentioned is poverty. Adil who conducted a field study in Rafah was struck by the rampant poverty in one of its neighbourhoods.

We went to an area in Rafah, we found people who live in houses, in which even animals would not live. They are like a chicken box, 20 or 30 people living in one big room.

Another social ill is the spread of jealousy and cynicism. Khaled indicated that many people no longer appreciate the creative initiatives that aim to alleviate the hardship of Gazans, they have

become cynical of start-ups and other ideas that seek to serve the local community. Khaled stated that this happens out of despondency and high levels of depression among unemployed Gazans.

Social Bonds

Woolford (2015) calls for a relational understanding of genocide. He argues that a social group should be viewed as a set of interactions and negotiations through which group members make and remake their group. “A set of group relations is observed to exist and possess a value that the group offers its members as space for attachment and identity formation”, Woolford adds (2015: 31-32). Therefore, not only does genocide target bodies, but also the relations that hold group members together. Most participants emphasized the change in social dynamics, and the depth of social relationships between families and individuals. The relations are not as robust and group members are not as connected as before the siege and the economic sanctions. Ramy described the changes in social vitality. He stated that before the siege, people were happier and more attached. They were able to reinforce identity and norms through visits and exchange of gifts. The lack of income led to erosion of some social norms that have been maintained through generations, such as gifting money on Eid:

I feel people were happier before the siege, they had better social ties. They had the money to afford to go to visit relatives and friends and bring gifts but now I don't think people can afford this and that affects their social ties. For example, during Eid, Eid is all about gifting money and bringing gifts to your family members, but now it became the season for financial hardship. In the past, people looked forward to Eid, but now they do not really do that, because they would spend money that is necessary for your family.

By the same token, Adam indicated that the social ties between individuals have become shallow and superficial. The economic crisis and the political stagnation have led to pervasive despondency and hopelessness among Palestinians. This is clearly manifested in the lack of sociability,

engagement in unnecessary quarrels and skirmishes, and people's unstable mental state. Adam describes this as a sort of social destruction:

Now when people do not have jobs, no sources of income, they become frustrated, their temper becomes fragile, they become very mad from anything. You see brothers, cousins fight for nothing and friends stop talking with each other for no reason. People are mad, depressed, they have mental issues they are not aware of. The society itself is getting overwhelmed, you see kind of some type of destruction inside the society.

The siege had its toll on family relations too. Adil pointed out that his unemployed father who used to visit his sister very frequently, loaded with gifts, is unable to do that anymore. He also stated that people have no more patience, they can be easily irritated because of the emptiness and helplessness that characterize life. According to Adil, this negatively impacts the social fabric:

The irritation has increased, people have become moody and get pissed easier. Before the siege people were visiting each other twice a week, for instance, after the siege, this became very occasional ... before the siege, my father used to visit my married sister four times every month and he used to give her some money. After the siege, he started to visit her once every two months, and he no longer gives her money. The relationships became faded between families and friends too.

The social aspect of the genocidal Israeli siege remains an understudied area. Most researchers focus their studies on the physical destructiveness of the siege, but few delve into social destructions. Based on the responses of the participants, one can clearly see that Gazan society is targeted not only physically, but also socially. Gaza as a set of relations that holds Gazans strongly connected, is targeted for dismantling. Gaza is no longer a space for attachment and identity formation; it has become a destructive space that pushes its members to seek emigration. Ibrahim described what is happening in Gaza as a "sociological experiment," but he was not able to elaborate on that. I believe he means that Israel has transformed Gaza to a huge space of exception reminiscent of the Nazi extermination camps. It has become an experimental lab where Israel conducts different experiments that aim to disrupt the social relations, and dismantle the social fabric through the policies illustrated in this study.

Forced Emigration (Hijra)

The aggravating circumstances that resulted from the suffocating siege and which became the reality in Gaza have forced thousands of young and middle-aged Palestinians to seek emigration to escape the ghost city of Gaza. The lack of any opportunities for self-development has led inhabitants to think of nothing but leaving. Their life there is marked by multiple deprivations: of clean water, electricity, statehood, free elections, food security, healthcare, freedom, and so on. With the denial of these necessities, Gazans have no choice but to pack up their things and undertake the search for a different life overseas. Through the help of heartless smugglers, Gazans take high-risk routes in the sea or cross hazardous borders to reach continental Europe. A lot of them drown due to shipwrecks that usually result from derelict boats that are often overloaded with refugees. Smugglers, who charge premium prices, care less about the wellbeing of the immigrants and their physical safety. Those who make it to the opposite shore try to start a new life, unleash their potential, and support those left behind.

When I asked the participants about their friends, they said most of them left Gaza and now live abroad. The majority do not consider the option of going back because of the dire conditions. Gazans emigrate to specific places, including Europe, Turkey, and North America. Ibrahim stated that he is intent to return; however, his friends always discourage him because most are unwilling to return to a society that is like a prison:

This is sad reality, most of them just think, they tell me that do you want to get back to the prison, we got released from the jail, who goes back to the jail? If you own your freedom for the first time, how are you gonna go back to being enslaved?

Instead of being a society where people can reinforce their identity and social norms, Gaza has become an open-air prison that people try to escape. It is a space where people feel humiliated, divested of their rights and excluded from humanity. Once they leave to a place where they feel they are recognized humans with have basic rights, such as free movement, electricity, clean water,

and a place where they can thrive and develop themselves and feel more human, they decide not to go back to the prison that will return them to their subhuman state and remind them of the wounds of the past. Gaza has become a space that expels, denies, and disowns. Ramy indicated that most of his friends are now scattered in different countries across the globe. He used to have a group of seven friends, only one remained in Gaza:

I had a group of friends, there was seven of us who would come to my house at least once a month, hang out, listen to music, watch a movie, eat whatnot. Out of the seven, there is only one person is still in Gaza right now. They do not want to come back because of the siege, everybody left. The guy who did not leave, because he cannot, he does not have a passport or an ID, if he had the chance, he would have left.

Emigration has virtually become the dream of every Gazan. When Adil asked his young brother about his ultimate dream after graduation, he answered that it is to leave Gaza. Most people choose the path of emigration because they believe that life outside Gaza is brighter and offers more opportunities. Adil, however, emphasized that travel is not always a solution. It sometimes complicates things even further. Many of his friends are caught between two fires: they are not happy abroad and are willing to go back, but they cannot return because they remain cognizant that Gaza is not any better:

I asked my youngest brother, he finished high school last year, I asked him what are you gonna do after you graduate, he was like I will travel (laughter). So, that is the dream of every Gazan. They just want to, and you know what, travel won't fix things I do not blame them because the situation does not give them the opportunity to start off over there. They cannot settle down. A lot of my friends are now in their forties and they are not married, they don't have jobs.

In a similar vein, Khaled emphasized that most of his friends have either sought asylum, got married to foreign citizens, or pursued different academic programs through which they prolonged their stay. Although he was better off than the majority of recent graduates, Khaled noted that his main reasons for departure were to explore the world, attain career development, and exchange

ideas with the outside world. Interestingly, Khaled stated that the blockade not only restricted physical movement, but it also impacted the flow and exchange of ideas with people abroad:

I do not think they will come back soon, some of them have already applied for asylum, some of them are married to citizens of other countries in order for them to stay abroad and some are switching and upgrading some academic programs ... and some have accepted permanent job offers ... and I think it has become really a convention, at least in my circle of friends. Once you leave, you know you are gonna leave for good ... we all left because we thought, first of all, cannot attain career development, we were not satisfied socially in Gaza ... we wanted to have fun as young people ... we wanted to travel and explore the world ... we internalized a sense that Gaza is growing very tiny, we stopped seeing foreigners coming to Gaza, we stopped being connected to the outside world ... and it is not restricted to the physical movement, but I think it is also extended to the movement of ideas.

This particular response underscores the extreme isolation and segregation of Gaza. People are not able to establish a meaningful connection with the external world as well as exchange ideas of different sorts. This reinforces how the dire humanitarian conditions engineered by the colonizer have situated Gaza outside the realm of humanity. The departure from Gaza is even explicitly facilitated by the occupier. Israel has been in contact with other countries to see if they are willing to absorb Gaza emigrants. Further, Israel is willing to arrange transportation for Palestinians wishing to leave Gaza through some airports in the south (see Keinon, 2019). According to Hassan, some of those who leave and wish to come back are not able to do so because of some signatures people provide upon departure. For instance, Hassan and his friends were coerced to sign a non-return paper upon their departure at Erez. Hassan stated that he is not able to currently go back due to many reasons that are all related to the Israeli occupation:

The fact we signed on a paper not to go back to Gaza when we left ... they asked us to sign a paper not to go back for a visit for the next two years. if you ask me why you don't wanna go back to Gaza, I would have a hundred reasons, but they are all related to the occupation.

He added that most of those who leave the strip are intelligent people (the brain drain) that have recently graduated and are about to give back and contribute to the flourishing of their society.

Hassan acknowledges that the emigration of the intelligentsia from Gaza is such a massive loss to the society. He stated that this is an intentional crime which Israel commits to deprive Gaza of intellectuals who can lead the development process or even any future political settlement with the colonizer:

First thing, know that fact that those who leave the Gaza Strip, are the brightest ... the smartest, are the best in their fields ... you take away from a nation probably 20 or 30 years of investment in one of its brightest minds. It is about when the time when people graduate and about to give back to their nation, that's when they migrate, which is a complete shock and a huge loss to that nation.

This was reiterated by Adam who worked as a nurse in one of Gaza's main hospitals. He pointed out that various specialist physicians have left the Gaza Strip because they mostly do not receive full salaries as well as they did not like the worsening humanitarian conditions. More than 160 qualified doctors left the Gaza Strip in the past three years (Guardian, 2019). In addition, the number of those who left Gaza in 2018 reached 35,000 (Haaretz, 2019). These numbers are so telling of the magnitude of the crisis in Gaza that touched all aspects of life. One should bear in mind that most of the respondents are students pursuing postgraduate degrees in prestigious universities in the US. The fact that none are willing to return speaks to the level of desperation among Gazans. This forced emigration of group members is undoubtedly a component of the slow-motion genocide.

Conclusion

This chapter discussed three major themes namely, childhood in a refugee camp, the implication of the Israel siege, and drastic social changes. Most participants indicated that they did not have a safe or normal childhood because of the violence that surrounded them at all times. The camp life as well as ongoing tragedies happening around them shaped their early childhood. This life was

rather normalized and naturalized and people had to adjust to it. When they grew a little older, they were faced with a darker reality manifested in the Israeli siege that made their lives even worse, especially with the shortages of almost everything, they always felt unsafe and insecure. This emphasizes the account of Fanon who argued that the logic of colonial powers is to break the resistance by inflicting militarized violence over generations of the native (1961: 149-51). This toxic environment is unlikely to produce healthy individuals, especially with the absence of mental health facilities needed to heal different traumas. This mental destruction of children during their formative years is an essential component of the gradual Israeli destruction of Gazans as a social group.

The Israel siege, as well as subsequent military assaults, left the strip with fragile infrastructure and a stagnated economy. Participants' parents and friends faced enormous difficulties in coping with the siege and its repercussions. Ultimately, the Israeli siege caused massive social changes within Gaza as relationships became superficial and families were not able to socialize as they would normally do. The full-blown siege pushed many Gazans to finally emigrate to other countries in search of a better life. This reality emphasizes that what is happening in the Gaza Strip is a continuation of the events of the Nakba.

The findings show that Israel is following genocidal policies towards the Gaza Strip. First, Israel continues to threaten the safety of children and adults alike, causing them profound mental scars and mental destruction. Second, Israel has physically destroyed thousands of houses and inflicted enormous havoc on its infrastructure, and physical destruction. Third, Israel has engineered genocidal conditions that made access to basic services extremely hard including access to food and fishing. Fourth, in addition to the economic destruction, Israel has made Gaza fully dependent on the former as well as reliant on foreign aid. Finally, these genocidal conditions

have made thousands of students and skilled workers emigrate. These all represent a coordinated plan of different actions that aims to slowly destroy Gaza and Gazans. The next chapter discusses other related issues such as inequalities, sovereignty, and the relationship to the land

Chapter 5 – Sovereignty, Inequality and Land

This chapter discusses three major themes that emerged from this study. These themes include the deprivation of civil and political rights, particularly the right to movement and self-determination. The responses provided by participants demonstrate how the occupation curbed the movement not only of individuals but also the flow of goods in the Gaza Strip. The closures and the tightened control of all ports compounded the humanitarian crisis in the coastal strip. The siege imposed on Gaza, coupled with different Israeli sanctions, prevented Palestinian self-determination. Participants admitted that the Gaza government had almost no power to ease these restrictions and that its role is limited to minor affairs inside Gaza. Israel's strangulation policies have created huge disparities between colonial Israel and Gaza. These disparities were shocking for participants who witnessed them while leaving through Israel. The lengthy conflict between Gaza and Israel produced many stigmas and labels that participants needed to correct. They revealed that adjustment abroad was not easy. Also, although Palestinians adhere to some traditions such as planting olive trees or carrying the return home key, some participants noted that their relationship with the land has weakened, mainly because of the occupation and its outcomes.

Sovereignty

This broad theme examines issues of sovereignty in the Gaza Strip through two subthemes. The first discusses the Israeli restrictions and barriers placed to curb the movement of individuals as well as the flow of goods. The other subtheme looks into self-determination and questions whether Gazans have any power over their territory or daily affairs.

Curbed Movement

People in Gaza are living under constant attacks and pressure in an open-air prison.

David Cameron, British PM

Lemkin argued that genocide involves issues of forced labour and free movement. Genocide occurs when an action infringes on the ‘liberty’ of inhabitants because they belonged to a national, religious, or racial group (1944: 77, 93). In most of his writing, Lemkin laid emphasis on liberty as an essential part of the coordinated plan of genocide. In light of this, Israel has controlled the movement of individuals and goods into and out of the Gaza Strip for decades. Since the introduction of the blockade in 2006, these constraints have been severely tightened. Nearly all access to the external world is blocked for the residents of Gaza. Students who win scholarships are denied exit to study abroad, and patients who are in desperate need of urgent treatment not available in Gaza are delayed or turned back. Even members of the same families who live in different parts of the occupied Palestinian territories are not accorded exit permits to reunite or see each other. People wishing to work abroad or travel for tourism are denied an exit because the priority is given to urgent cases. Freedom of movement is enormously handicapped by the occupier who makes life conditions even worse for Gazans. Palestinians in Gaza have no power over the crossing gates or any other exit ports. The beleaguered population has two viable ways to leave and both are complex. The first route is via the Erez crossing on the Israeli side, while the second is in the south via Rafah on the Egyptian side.

All participants managed to get out of Gaza by obtaining scholarships or training opportunities in the US. Participants emphasized that applying for such opportunities has become popular among Gazans who seek to leave the mega-prison where the attainment of one’s dreams is impossible. Their de facto struggle starts once they obtain an opportunity abroad – the “get-out-of-jail card.” The first departure point is the Erez crossing through the Israel side. All participants

noted that they applied for exit permits with the help of Amideast – an American organization that provides English learning services in Gaza and the West Bank. Amideast coordinates on behalf of individuals who benefitted from their English courses with the American consulate (now embassy) in Jerusalem with the Israeli authorities to facilitate their exit from Gaza. Nevertheless, Amideast does not guarantee an exit from Gaza as issuing an Israeli permit takes months in most cases. This process, which is characterized by uncertainty, was described by Ramy in the following way:

The biggest thing about this whole permit system is that you do not know when you leave, it could be today or next month. You do not have the ability to prepare because it messes you up financially and mentally. Financially, if you want to fly, buy your ticket early to get a cheap flight, but you cannot do that, we have to buy them literally once we leave, you get the most expensive flight because you are leaving within that week. And mentally, because you do not know if you are gonna leave or not. You do not know if you gonna have the chance to say goodbye ... I forgot to say goodbye to my siblings who came with me to the border.

As an occupation force, Israel is not taking the responsibility of facilitating the travel of occupied Gazans. On the contrary, it imposes a permit system that complicates things even further. Issuing an Israeli exit permit is a lengthy, non-transparent, and arbitrary bureaucratic process. There are no prerequisite criteria that enable you to know if you are eligible to leave or not (see B'Tselem, 2017). Even when one gets denied, no clarifications are provided. The only thing that Gazans receive is a vaguely standard answer, “denied for security reasons.”

Similarly, Khaled stated that he received a call from the Israeli side asking him to be at the border within an hour. Khaled was confused and perplexed. It is a golden chance that most Gazans are denied, yet an hour would not be enough to pack his stuff and say goodbye to family and friends. Khaled felt humiliated and was deeply frustrated:

I was sitting on my desk at work. They called me, told that your permit has been issued, they said you have one hour to be at Erez. I said only one hour! For me, it was very frustrating, very humiliating.

These demeaning actions indicate that Israel purposefully means to destroy the honour and dignity of Palestinians. Playing ducks and drakes with the destiny of people, the uncertainty of the whole system, the long waiting times, and the absence of any Palestinian role at these crossings, all speak to the brutality of the colonial system. Although the Amideast coordinated for most of my research participants, almost all were denied an exit permit at least once. Due to Israeli inflexibility in handling exit permits, two participants stated they lost their scholarships. For instance, Ibrahim pointed out that he lost two undergraduate scholarships from Indiana University in 2013 and 2014 due to the systematic closures of the border. Similarly, Adil said that he also lost a scholarship at Warwick University in the UK.

Some of those who managed to leave via Israel were interrogated for hours. For instance, Hassan indicated that he was summoned for interviews seven times prior to his travel. He stated that the border officers were calling him simply to waste his time. On the other hand, Khaled, who crossed Erez peacefully, was stopped at the Allenby Bridge, which connects the West Bank with Jordan and is mainly controlled by Israel. Khaled was interrogated for over two hours before he was released. All individuals who cross the Erez gate are directed to Jordan as no one is allowed to use the Israeli airports. Therefore, Gazans would require another permit to enter Jordan which is also hard to obtain. For instance, Adam said that he managed to obtain an exit permit from Israel, but he was denied the Jordanian permit, without any explanation from the Jordanian authorities. Therefore, Gazans have to get two exit permits before they manage to fly to their destination, first from the Israeli side and then the Jordanian.

Most participants said that Egypt was not an option for different reasons. For instance, Hassan mentioned that the Rafah crossing was inconsistent and closed most of the time. Even when it opens, there would be some technical issues in their computers and other operating

systems. These problems are seen by most Gazans as a justification frequently used by Egypt to keep the border shut, which makes the latter Israel's partner in crime. Adil also noted that travelling through Egypt was extremely risky because of ISIS terror activities in Sinai, which could be another ploy to keep the border shut. At least two of the participants who failed to depart through Israel had no choice but to take the risk and leave through Egypt. Leaving through Rafah is even harder than Erez because Palestinians have to register their names with the ministry of the interior in Gaza and wait for months before their turn comes. It all depends on the border, which opens occasionally. Adam touched on this:

Getting out through Egypt is a miracle. You would be really lucky if you get out through Egypt because the border used to be closed all the time. They used to open the border once in a while, let's say once in a six months period, for three or four days. The government run by Hamas had a big waiting list for people who are waiting to leave through Egypt.

Adam, whose name was not on a waiting list, managed to sneak into one of the buses. He was detected by an Egyptian officer who rebuked him and tried to send him back, but with the help of a Palestinian officer, Adam managed to stay aboard. Adam stated that travelling through Egypt was inhumane and humiliating. The bus that normally takes fifty passengers was overloaded with about sixty-five passengers. Adil stated that the way from Rafah to Cairo that normally takes eight hours now takes more than eighteen hours because of the lengthy inspections by the Egyptian army on the road. Adil stated that he bribed the Egyptian officer to skip part of the suffering. This bribery system has been in place for decades; however, this 'service' has become more common in 2018 through local brokers. The paid amount varies depending on the status quo in Gaza; it increases during hostilities and decreases during ceasefires. The bribes range between \$600 and \$10,000 per individual (see Aljazeera, 2019; OCHA, 2018). Although the majority of Gazans suffer from poverty, they mostly find themselves forced to pay these bribes to avoid waiting for months to find a better life outside of Gaza.

The responses of the participants are one part of the story. There are more painful truths about the Israeli restrictions placed on movement. Other than students, hundreds of patients who suffer from deadly diseases perish every year because Israel denies their exit permit or because Egypt fails to open the border. In this situation, Palestinians are caught between two fires. The Palestinian government either in Gaza or in the West Bank have no power or control over these crossings, and they are both unable to interfere to solve this movement issue. The destiny of thousands of Gazans is in the hands of Israel and Egypt. One should also mention that the restrictions on movement enormously impact other sectors such as the import and export of different products, including food and medical supplies. Israel places restrictions on importing certain items and follows a calorie-based system to decide the amount of food needed for each individual in Gaza. These policies are part of the bigger Israel plan that aims to undermine life in Gaza and deprive Palestinians of the freedom of movement, and other rights that are necessary to lead a basic life.

Zero Self-Determination

“As part of a synchronized attack on different aspects of life of the captive peoples, genocide has a political meaning” (Lemkin, 1944: 82-83). In the same text, Lemkin explains different aspects of destruction, including the political. He argued that the Nazis were destroying institutions of self-government and imposing a German pattern of administration as part of their coordinated plan to annihilate Jews. It is the nature of colonial projects to prevent any practice of self-determination among colonized societies. The context of Gaza, as well as the policies followed by Israel to inflict harm on Gaza, are different than other contexts where genocide has happened. Hamas found itself forced to rule the Gaza Strip and oust the PA forces after a failed coup attempt designed by the PA and prompted by the US and Israel in 2006 (see Chomsky & Pappé, 2010: 116-7). The coup aimed

to overturn the free elections that brought Hamas to power. The failure of the US-sponsored plans against the Islamic movement of Hamas led the former along with other donors to halt their support to the PA. Therefore, the Hamas-led government was deemed illegitimate and was left unsupported. Simultaneously Israel laid a full-blown siege that was seen by many as a collective punishment for all Gazans who voted the “wrong way.”

Although Hamas was elected through free and democratic elections, its rule in Gaza is seen by many as autocratic and despotic. Ramy described Hamas’s rule in Gaza as authoritarian governance. “The Hamas government rules with an iron fist and does not consistently comply with the constitution or laws,” Ramy adds.

When I asked participants about the role of Hamas in Gaza, most agreed that their role is very limited and severely restricted to certain aspects of life inside Gaza. Their governance is overly impacted by the occupation, which has the upper hand in controlling the territory. Hamas is not able to control the flow of goods into and out of Gaza, it cannot determine when the border with Egypt or Israel will open or close, and it also has no power over the fishing zone. Hamas’s power is extremely limited. Hassan described the Gaza government as a ‘reaction government’ that solely reacts to emergencies and other daily problems that arise due to the siege. Likewise, Ibrahim noted that Hamas’s policies are generally shaped by the blockade:

You cannot take any decision by Hamas without putting it in the big picture that led to that decision, meaning that you have to look at the updates or the developments of the blockade, because you are completely in a prison. So, a prison run by the prisoners, but it is always shaped by the jailer.

Even minor decisions taken by Hamas are mostly influenced and shaped by the intricate details of the occupation and its policies in Gaza. Almost everything that happens inside Gaza is remotely engineered by colonial Israel because Gaza is inextricably connected to it. Its economy, politics as well as all life systems are linked with Israel, which uses this linkage to complicate the lives of

Palestinians and influence political outcomes. Most participants stated that they have not voted in any elections. Even most of their peers have never partaken in choosing a president or a government. Since the political crisis that took place in 2006 between Hamas and Fatah, no elections have been held since many political issues are still unresolved. This divide led to the establishment of two different governments, one in Gaza led by Hamas and another in the West Bank led by Fatah. This has caused a national divide that further complicated the conflict. The consequences of this divide touched on all aspects of life, most notably the suspension of thousands of PA employees' salaries in Gaza. Although Hamas and Fatah are to be principally blamed for this political stalemate and the delay of national reconciliation, Israel as an occupying force is to be blamed for putting up barriers of different sorts to keep Palestinians fragmented. Participants agreed that the Hamas government in Gaza, by all means, has no self-determination. This was spelled out by Ramy as follows:

We have zero-self determination ... Israel controls all the ports leading to Gaza, so they control air, land and seaports. That affects the economy, so you cannot really control your own economy, so you don't have self-determination. We also cannot have any election; we don't have political self-determination if you don't want this government, we cannot choose another. We don't really control any aspect of our life. Honestly, you cannot even get your full salary (laughter). So, there is no control. Even if you want to leave, you almost have no control over it.

Adil also emphasized that Hamas's power in Gaza is so limited. He referred to the fishing zone as a particular aspect that Hamas cannot control. Fishers are one of the most harassed groups in the strip. They are subjected almost daily to Israeli gunshots, arbitrary detentions, and confiscation of their boats. Israel maintains a heavy navy presence and continues to harass fishers even within the allowed fishing zone. These Israel restrictions have led to the destruction of the fishing industry (see B'Tselem, 2018).

Other participants, such as Khaled, asserted that not only does Israel restrict Palestinians basic rights, but it also constrains the entry of goods into Gaza. Israel imposes a calorie-based system that allows Gazans to have food to a point where they can maintain their bare survival. Before the tightening of the Israeli siege in 2007, the average truckload was over 13,000 whereas this number dropped to 2,236 in 2008. Tens of items are banned from entering Gaza because they are deemed dual-use items that could be used by both civilians and militants. Yet no one is holding Israel accountable for their nuclear program and the loads of weapons that flow in annually from many countries, especially the US. The restrictions on food imports made more than a million Gazans food insecure (see Piper, 2017). Khaled described Israeli policies as paradoxical because, on the one hand, Israel counts itself as a member of the Western civilized world that promotes global citizenship rights, but on the other, it denies the Palestinian the very basic rights needed to become a global citizen. Khaled narrates on this issue in the following way:

You know Israel controls everything, they control even the number of carbohydrates and calories that enter Gaza and then what people have access too ... all these rights are denied because of the Israeli occupation ... what is ironic is that Israel tries to portray itself as a member of the modern, Western, enlightened world and this world subscribes to and constantly promotes the idea of global citizenship, and once you try to act as a global citizen, the very acts adopted by Israel, the modern, enlightened part of the world, keeps denying you the opportunity to become a global citizen, to deny you even the access to any opportunity that would help you develop as a global citizen.

Interestingly, some participants stated that some NGOs such as the UNRWA and other international aid organizations that operate in Gaza have more power and privileges than the Gaza government. Ironically, Ramy noted that Palestinians have authority over some simple rights:

You have some certain degree of control over small aspects of your daily life, when to wake up and sleep, and when to go to work.

But even those simple rights that Ramy mentioned are enormously impacted by the occupation. One cannot determine when to go to sleep when Israel is bombing, and one does not guarantee that

they would wake up the next morning. In addition, no one can go to work if Israel imposes a curfew. This shows that Gazans live under the mercy of their occupier. Even the self-governance buildings and other ministries were turned into rubble during the consecutive Israel military offensives.

Life in Israel and Beyond

This section looks into participants' opinions and experiences about life outside Gaza. The first subtheme revolves around the quality of life in Israel since most participants passed through Israel to travel to their destinations. The other subtheme discusses peoples' perceptions about Gaza and how participants are adjusting in their new places.

Perception of Israel

The gaze that the colonized subject casts at the colonist's sector is a look of lust, a look of envy. Dreams of possessions (1963: 5)

Frantz Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*

All of the participants asserted the massive disparity in quality of life between Gaza, part of the colonized territories, and colonial Israel. They emphasized the level of development in Israel in comparison to devastated and ghettoized Gaza. "Most of the land around the borders are empty lands that have no buildings or any construction activities," said Hassan. These empty spaces of land were seen by other participants who felt disappointed with this reality.

Ramy was struck by the difference in the quality of life between Gaza and Israel. He underscored the infrastructural development in Israel:

The moment you leave the Gaza Strip and pass the Erez crossing, you notice how vast the land is, the quality of roads, buildings, farms, just by looking at things there is a big difference, a big disparity.

This comment evokes Fanon's account of colonialism. Fanon argued that the colonist's sector is built to last, all stone and steel. It is a sector of lights and paved roads, where the trash cans constantly overflow with strange and wonderful garbage, undreamed-of leftovers. This disparity is manifested in almost every aspect. The colonized ghetto is a disreputable place inhabited by disreputable people. You are born anywhere, anyhow. You die anywhere, from anything (1963: 4). When passing the border, Adam felt like he had moved to a developed country like Canada or the US, he felt he was in a different world:

Israel is a country, it is like a US city, as a Canadian city, it is different. You feel you are in Europe. It is funny that you live within miles away from this country, and "oh, my god, I am in a different country, or a different world." You see people there living their normal lives. You see airplanes flying, civilian helicopters flying, you see restaurants, girls wearing skirts that you are not used too, "oh, my god, this is a Western country" ... they live their lives normally and happy, shopping, walking their dogs, the houses are so beautiful, infrastructure amazing, you see landscapes, implanting flowers on the sidewalks, they have sidewalks, we don't have sidewalks in Gaza, people walk on the road. We don't have traffic signs in Gaza, it was my first time seeing traffic signs in Israel.

The colonized is prohibited to cross to the colonial city, since the border is marked by barracks and the police stations. It is true that the colonized sector is a few hundred metres away; however, crossing to that heavenly sector is fatal and risky. Adam's statement is indicative of the stark differences in life quality and severe deprivations that characterize life in Gaza. The Palestinian side lacks decent sidewalks and traffic signs. The colonized sector requires perhaps decades, if not centuries, to attain such a level of development – if ever allowed to do so.

Some participants were happy as they were able to finally see historical Palestine, but they did not hide the fact that they were as much offended and disgusted by the differences in life quality between both territories. They could not ingest how a nation that lives minutes away behind a segregation wall enjoys a privileged life, while another people living in Gaza are suffering from infinite deprivations. Participants grappled with this moral issue and found it hard to reconcile.

Ibrahim was extremely offended and frustrated because his people in Gaza live in houses piled on top of each other, while Israelis enjoyed spacious houses and a peaceful life. Ibrahim wished he did not leave through Israel to avoid seeing the striking inequalities:

I was really crying, I got into this state of mind like this is my country ... I was like “wow, this is us.” How unfair that indigenous people are now packed in refugee camps while our lands are empty really, most of the land around the Gaza Strip, where most of the refugees in Gaza came from, they are all empty ... it was devastating, I wish I did not leave through Israel to not see the manifestation of oppression, of a colonizer to take your land and to put you in a prison, and for them to enjoy life and for us to suffer.

Other than the feeling of discomfort, other participants were envious of the beauty of life in Israel, of the bountiful resources that are not shared with the colonized sector. Ramy got indignant when he saw the man-made disparities in life quality. He was particularly offended because his people are unable to share the massive empty land and enjoy the same level of prosperity and wellbeing:

I get pissed, literally, every single time I leave I think, why cannot we share this, I see all this open land, you can literally build many houses and happy people live there, why cannot we share it.

Hassan shared the same feeling of frustration and anger at the occupation that deprives Palestinians of their basic needs. While Palestinians suffer shortages of almost everything, the other side is leading a luxurious life:

I was like “oh, my god why Gazans are not allowed to move, for example between Israel and Gaza,” we have lack of food, lack of supplies, of everything, we could be doing like economic exchange, why are we crammed in such a so little space in Gaza strip, it was so sickening to see that, to think someone actually the feeling of enjoying such affluence while few hundred meters away from them, lives a nation in the worst conditions in the whole world, it was so disgusting.

These responses are so telling of the entrenched colonial system that is mainly based on categorization, racialization, and compartmentalization. Zionists have separated the land into two contrasting worlds: one is fully privileged, developed, and enjoys luxury services, and the other lives a miserable life in ghettos characterized by endless deprivation. This has been going on for

decades now and Israel does not seem to care much about the crisis in Gaza. Disparities widen even further.

Stigma and Adjustment

Some participants pointed out that many people hold false perceptions and stereotypes about Gaza and life there. This differs according to the country and individuals. For instance, Khaled, who studied in the UK and is currently studying in the US, stated that people in the UK, in general, were aware of the situation in Gaza, the Israeli siege, and consistent violations. On the other hand, the chance of meeting an American who is conscious of the conflict was slim. Although some have a sort of understanding of the situation, their perceptions were mostly erroneous:

In the UK, the majority of people know about Gaza, they know about Palestine, they had some level of an accurate and comprehensive understanding of Gaza, they were like “we understand like you are not all terrorists, we understand that Gaza has been under illegal blockade for a number of years” ... on the other hand, if you go to the US, the chances of you meeting a person who knows, they will have heard or recognized the name of Gaza or Palestine, but they will make so much negative associations about that, especially as an Arab, Muslim, as a Palestinian from Gaza.

On the other hand, Hassan’s encounter with Americans was different. He revealed that the majority of Americans showed solidarity and sympathy upon meeting him. However, some still held false perceptions and prejudgments that were hard to change.

Mainly when I came here to the US, based on my interactions, most people showed solidarity and support for the situation in the strip from a humanitarian perspective. I found that people have a good awareness of the situation. I would say it depends on the person. Usually, people do not change their premade perceptions or judgement very easily, no matter how hard you try.

Similarly, Ramy noted that the perception of Gaza differs from one person to another. He stated that there are two categories: one is well aware of the situation and the dimensions of the Israeli siege, and another, which knows what is happening, but is less aware of complex details of the

occupation and the siege. Although some would show sympathy, others would care less and put the blame on Palestinians for their misery:

The way people perceive differs from one person to another. People who are very aware of what's happening, they know exactly how devastating it is. Some people are in between, they know there is an occupation, they don't know to what extent or the intricate details of the Israeli occupation and the way they impose control over Palestinians. They know the situation is bad, but they don't know that fishermen cannot go past 3 or 6 miles, affecting the whole industry ... some people they know it is bad, they don't care, and they blame Palestinians for their misery.

Other participants emphasized that Gaza is not well-portrayed in many contexts and that many problems in the Middle East are attributed to the Palestinians. Ibrahim, who had a socially closer encounter with American society, remarked that he felt disturbed and shocked by the level of ignorance among many Americans who viewed him as a victim who must seek treatment. Ibrahim argued that Americans and other organizations focus on the problem, not on the source of the problem. Instead of healing trauma, one should tackle the reason for trauma:

It hurts me, they will treat us as victims, and we need healing instead of we are fighting for our freedom and statehood and that they have to join our forces. This is again the industry of trauma and bullshit, instead of dealing with us as people who are aspiring to have their statehood or freedom, no, no no, they don't hear to see it from that angle ... they are just inventing all this trauma and mental health ... and pouring millions of dollars to Gaza mental health program. This is a result; you are missing the main core of what's causing all of that. They don't dare to face the oppressor ... I am really traumatized by ignorance.

The fact that many people associate Gazans with negative images such as victimhood and terrorism signifies the attempt made by the colonizer to tarnish Gazans, for it is the colonizer who has the power to draw the image of himself and that of the colonized. Fact invention is a privilege of the colonizer and forced silence is a feature imposed on the colonized. Adam stated that his first encounters with some Americans were not pleasant because they thought he was a bad person:

When I came here when I met some people and I told them I am a Palestinian, they thought I am a bad person or a terrorist, they do not tell you in a direct way, but you feel it.

When I asked participants about the adjustment in their new places where violence is less likely to happen, most admitted that adaptation was not unchallenging. Ramy noted that transition to the US was hard because he moved from a predominantly violent environment to a new place where everything seemed normal. This was too much to handle after the infinite tragedies that one has experienced. Adil ironically said, “it feels different when living a period of time where the house does not shake [laughter].” Similarly, Adam stated that it felt weird to be safe for the first time, to be reassured that nobody would shoot you. Adam, however, narrated that seeing helicopters and military parades still evoked negative flashbacks:

I had bad experiences when I saw a helicopter for the first time flying over low, I got scared, and the first time I’ve seen it I tried to hide ... during July 4th when I see military tanks in the streets, I feel scared or upset because I remember Gaza. But the adjustment was not that hard, it was easier for you as a human being to adjust in a safer place than a dangerous one.

Participants sought to correct some of the misunderstandings and false perceptions that people held about Palestine and Gaza. They mostly provided first-hand experiences about the conflict as well as reliable sources of information about the struggle. Khaled, for instance, mentioned that he does not talk about the occupation, rather he sheds light on the bright side of life in Gaza:

I always try to focus on the bright side when it comes to Gaza ... I do not talk about the Israeli occupation or violence or whatever, I focus, you’ve got a young population, they are extremely talented, motivated, yes they are scarred by the political events and political developments that are back home. I don’t specify them, and what we hope for is for peace to happen for us to thrive and make the, I think, important contributions we can make in fields like technology, education, research, and all the other trends around the world, we are able to resist despite the insurmountable difficulties we face.

In so doing, Khaled tries to deviate from the violence-dominated discourse and rather tell people more about the potential of people in Gaza, about hope in the midst of hopelessness. People always associate Gaza with war, poverty, and negative images. Few know, for instance, that the number of Ph.D. holders in Gaza surpasses that of any country in the world, or the beauty of Gaza beach,

or the generosity of people regardless of the siege and poverty. These facts are clouded, and only negativity is exported.

Relationship to the Land

Patrick Wolfe argues that land is life or at least it is necessary for life. Thus, contests for land can be – indeed, often are – contests for life (2006). The basic fact of the Arab-Jewish conflict is the conquest of the country by one people and the dispossession, with ruthless destructiveness, of another. The core of the conflict since its onset has always been the land, and how ethnic identity is tied to the land. Both native Arabs and Jews need the land. Palestinians belonged to the land as it was their life and a source of sustenance. It was the site where they expressed the meaning and the purpose of indigenous life. And Jews needed the land to establish an autonomous state and put an end to their subjugation and oppression in Europe. For that end, Israel has always envisioned Palestine as a virgin land that belonged to nobody, exactly as most colonial projects do. Claims for land rights are often met with denial and derision, and Palestinian requests for compensation and return are not even negotiable. The land was never acknowledged in principle or practice as having been taken from its previous owners. Nevertheless, Palestinians have never given up on their fight for the land. Palestinians who were forced out of their original towns educate other generations to keep the Palestinian cause as well as the right to return alive in them. These daily conversations aim to amplify the connection with the land. When I asked Adam about the connection to the land, he said that most of his memories were in Gaza as he was born and raised there. He also referred to the anecdotes of grandparents passed on to their grandchildren:

I feel the old generations, especially the first generation that witnessed the Nakba, they do their best to educate the second and current generation about their hometowns. Do not forget about this, even in schools we are always asked about our original towns and cities. Hopefully, the current generation teaches the next generation about that too.

This signifies that the camp is a time-space of dislocation: a space of displacement and exile, and a time of interruption, waiting, and stasis (see Sanbar, 2001). Although Gaza is part of Palestine, elders tell the young that their original towns are under occupation and they shall return one day. Their residence in Gaza's refugee camps is temporary and transient. In Agamben's words, the camp exists in a 'zone of indistinction' between permanence and transience (1998: 169). It is as if grandparents seek to persuade other generations that the refugee camp is never intended to be their permanent home (see Ramadan, 2013). This intergenerational indoctrination and education about historical Palestine was emphasized by Ramy whose family was kicked out of Jaffa, which was called the land of oranges as a way to stress the importance of the land. Ramy also stated that Palestinians have a special relationship with the land. When his family moved to a new house, the first thing they bought was olive trees, which are reminiscent of the olive groves that covered massive areas of historical Palestine:

There is definitely a special relationship between Palestinians and land ... a few years ago we built a new house on a piece of land that we had. Once the house was done, we wanted to plant some trees in the front yard of the house, literally the first thing my Mom wanted, a couple of olive trees, and she was like olive trees, we went to the garden and she picked different types of olive trees ... I do not know how this came to be, but I think this was generational, Palestinians have always been farmers, and I think the lost land during Nakba, amplified the connection with the land. I came from Jaffa, and it was literally known as the city of oranges, not the city of fishes although it has a big fishing industry and port. The city of oranges as a way to emphasize the importance of land. The stories of my grandfather always revolved around the orchards of oranges in Jaffa city.

Ancient olive trees have stood as a symbol for Palestinian resistance since the Nakba. It is a tree that reminds Zionists of peasants (*fellaheen*) who fought vehemently for the land. Some of these trees still stand as a witness to the Israeli crimes as they age several hundred years – older than Israel. In every invasion, Israel fells these entrenched trees as a way to deny the Palestinian existence in Palestine. Albert Memmi argues that the colonizer endeavors to extinguish memories

and rewrite laws. He would do anything to transform his usurpation into legitimacy (2013: 52). Planting olive trees in every yard and even on the streets represents a renewed attempt by Palestinians to revitalize the cause and reinforce their identity and origins. According to Ramy, this amplifies the connection with the lost land.

In a similar vein, Ibrahim stated that he always carries the keys of his ancestors' home that has been colonized by Israel as a reminder of the stolen land, and to keep alive the struggle of return. Although Ibrahim stressed that the Palestinian cause is different than the struggle of Indigenous peoples elsewhere, his biggest fear is that Palestine would be fully colonized and turned into something from the past. Ibrahim notes the following in his story:

The natives in Canada, the US, Australia, I think they are completely different ... because unfortunately, for these natives, they have no hope to restore their country, it is gone, it is fully colonized, and another nation with another culture is standing. In our case, it is our land and the cause is alive, and my fear personally, is our cause turns to be from a dream of statehood to a dream of once upon a time ... so my relation to the land is an obligation to keep cherishing the culture, the language, the traditions, but also an obligation to save the land and regain the lands that were stolen.

Ibrahim feels that he is obliged to keep the resistance against Zionism as well as to cherish the culture and tradition hoping to restore the land of his ancestors. On the other hand, other participants stated that one should not be overconnected to the land because it is too costly an attachment. This linkage with the land is unhealthy as it evokes awful memories of death, destruction and pain. This has even led them to hate the land and abhor voices that call for martyrdom. For instance, Hassan noted that he yearns to see the wide and boundless lands of his grandparents. On the contrary, he stated that the life of camps is terrible and not ideal a place to spend one's childhood. He even started to detest the land that provokes unpleasant memories:

We lived in camps, and I myself spent most of my time in the streets: studying on the streets, playing on the streets. These camps were not really a nice place to live in. So, my family has always talked about the home country and how our villages looked like in historical Palestine, and how wide it was, how far they had to walk distances to see each

other ... it is something I'd like to see. I am gonna be honest with you, as much as I am attached to the land and feeling like "O, this is amazing," and I go to farming areas in Rafah ... as we grew up and the Intifada started, we started losing houses and people, it was shocking. I stopped caring about land so much. What was traumatizing for me is the fact that you've lost people that you lived with and they are no longer around you ... the land did not even become a priority for me. I'd even go to farms, to areas where I used to go and spend time with friends and family, and I would not even like it. I would even hate that place because it reminds me of people that are no longer there.

The great losses endured by Palestinians as a result of the Israeli occupation have weakened the unique connection with the land. Starting from the first Intifada and ending with the Israeli siege coupled with numerous military offensives, the land triggers nothing but violence and death. Participants feel that Palestinians have sacrificed enormously yet the outcome is still the same: more pains and tragedies. Khaled shared the same opinion with Hassan and stated that the attachment to the land is very costly. He said that the popular culture believes in and promotes martyrdom as a way to restore the land; however, Khaled believes the opposite should be the case. The land should be sacrificed for people to live. This relationship has been inherited from ancestors who emphasize the importance of the land. However, Khaled believes that it is hard to fight for a land that one has never seen, and nevertheless, this ongoing struggle brings nothing but grief:

Frankly, I don't believe in the notion of homeland. For a long time, even before leaving Gaza, because I felt this is an attachment that is too costly, too vague and superstitious in a way. I lost my connection to the land, and it is because of the occupation by the way. What did the homeland offer me as seeing people dying for the land, it has to be the contrary.

Hence, one can see the emphasis placed on the importance of the historical land of Palestine by grandparents because they lived in that land, planted it, and enjoyed its blessings. These grandparents continuously seek to pass the narrative to other generations who have never seen the colonized land. However, this process is impeded by the occupation, which keeps inflicting various harms on Palestinians. It is true that some participants still cherish the land and embrace certain norms to keep the cause alive, others seem to have lost this connection, mainly because of the

occupation. If Israel continues with the same strangling policies, this might result in a weaker relationship with the land. Gaza offers its people nothing but unemployment, violence, economic collapse, and political stagnation. Therefore, losing the connection with the land seems a natural outcome.

Concluding remarks

This chapter touched on sensitive issues such as sovereignty, life outside Gaza, and connection to the land. The interviews revealed that Palestinians in Gaza have no power over their internal or external affairs. The fact that Amideast and other aid organizations in Gaza have more privileges and power within Gaza than the democratically elected government raises many questions about the right of Palestinians to self-rule as per international agreements. Hamas is still viewed by Israel and many Western countries as an armed militia but not as a social movement with a large popular base that is deeply rooted in the society. This hostile stance is largely reflected in the punitive policies enacted against ordinary people who are often seen as criminals that assisted a terrorist group to ascend to power. The isolation and boycott of Hamas made its government futile and powerless. Amendments of its charter where it implicitly recognizes negotiations to build a Palestinians state with 1967 borders were ignored by Israel and the international community. This indicates that the Israeli colonial system is recognized and supported by other countries such as Egypt as well as the international community which does not take proper measures to end Israeli violations. In addition, this miscalculated boycott of Hamas resulted in a political crisis and a national rift between Gaza and the West Bank and the main victim was the residents of Gaza.

Life in a mega-prison where the colonist controls all aspects of life made self-determination difficult to exercise. A prisoner may have some limited power inside their prison; however, the

main power remains in the hands of their jailers who would shape how the prison would look like, what prisoners can eat and drink, what services should be offered and what decisions should be made. Any attempt of rebellion is met with brutal force and stricter measures. In other words, the colonized becomes “divorced from reality” and inadequate to assume any role (Memmi, 2013: 94, 106). Therefore, having self-determination or political will inside a prison is ludicrously impossible. Israel is the sole sovereign who constructs the rules and defines life and death.

Although there were some restrictions on movement before the siege, people were at least able to move with less difficulty. Constraints on movement curb any attempt of development, prosperity or communication with the external world and other societies, Gazans are segregated and shackled within this system. Gaza has been transformed into a mega concentration camp where people are unable to exercise their rights without the permission of the colonizer. Even the entry of food items and their prices are determined by Israel which limits the entry of allowed items. Calories are also calculated to control the growth of Gazans’ bodies through malnutrition or undernourishment. Hassan said, “ we grew up on dipping bread in sweet tea, it was all unhealthy.” This disruption of societal life as well as the trajectory of everyday life in Gaza is genocidal.

Participants were also shocked by the massive levels of inequality between the colonizer and the colonized sectors. This raised moral concerns and aroused a feeling of disgust and discomfort among participants. This manifest inequality and other oppressive practices made some participants strengthen their linkage with the land, yet on the other hand, many stated that their connection to the land has become fragile due to the occupation’s practices. The colonizer’s success in weakening this relationship between Palestinians and their land, and cutting it off in many cases is genocidal.

Chapter 6 – Limitations and Contributions

Genocide or Not?

The Israeli genocidal policies discussed in this research could be viewed as a colonial mesh that takes place on three levels: micro, meso, and macro (see Woolford, 2015: 20-22). On the macro-level, Israel made the economy of Gaza fully dependent on it. Imports and exports, the flow of goods, and any process of economic prosperity lie in the hands of Israel. In terms of governance, participants revealed that Gazans have almost no control over their territory, daily affairs, or even any form of self-autonomy. They are not allowed to have independent governance or a government that would advocate for their rights. On the meso level, one can think of the cooperation between different bureaucratic levels within the Israeli state. The siege is a result of a collective effort between various politicians, ministries, and governmental and non-governmental institutions. The Israeli military, which implements most of the punitive measures against the strip works intimately with other state institutions such as the supreme court that enacts ruthless policies, the Israeli cabinet which votes on most resolutions of peace and war, and the ministry of commerce that dictates what products should go into Gaza. An example of non-governmental cooperation with the Israeli government is the role of some private security companies which run most of the checkpoints (see Herman, 2018). The army works closely with all these layers to efficiently control the strip and maintain the siege. The disappearance of some social habits such as family visits, exchange of gifts, and the weakened relationships between individuals are all examples of changes that took place on the micro-level. These micro-changes occur when they come into play with other factors such as the lack of food, declining healthcare, and widespread poverty. Thus, the Israel siege is a network of interactions that target the social fabric of the Gaza society. According to Woolford, these three levels make up the colonial mesh which entraps indigenous populations

(2015: 20-22). These levels are interconnected and interdependent. They represent a coordinated plan that aims to destroy the essential foundations of Gazans as a social group (Lemkin, 1944: 79). Palestinians in Gaza were not fully destroyed, though many of them experienced “in part” destruction of different kinds. Therefore, the siege that has started in 2006 should be conceived of as a long-term plan or a protracted process that aims to destroy Gaza slowly.

In the words of Helen Fein, what is happening in Gaza is genocide by attrition (1997). Israel created dire humanitarian conditions that led to the development of extreme crises that directly threaten the existence of Gazans. One can see that Israel relies more on indirect methods of destruction than direct forms. Of course wars take place from time-to-time, yet Israel resorts more to strict measures, including economic restrictions, movement constraints, undernourishment, and daily harassment of fishers. We saw that these were effective tools that led to high levels of depression and frustration among participants, lack of national feelings among some, poverty and social erosion, and the emigration of potential leaders and professionals. These purposeful actions are sustained regardless of the surrender of Gazans, who have no more energy to fight; they are drained (see Fein, 1993: 24). On the other hand, the situation in Gaza is consistent with Lemkin’s understanding of genocide. As illustrated earlier, genocide in Gaza is a result of a “coordinated plan of different actions aiming at the destruction of the essential foundations of life.” Almost in each offensive, Israel targets institutions of self-autonomy, including ministries, governmental buildings, and cultural edifices. To a large extent, it also managed to destroy the national feelings, security, dignity, and liberty (Lemkin, 1944: 79). These rights and others are elusive.

Relatedly, the Israeli siege should be viewed as a tool for population management. The colonizer applies disciplinary power that seeks to bring about the submission of Gazans.

Management is implemented through a series of deprivations: deprivation of sufficient nutrition, free movement, fishing, safety, deprivation of sleep, medical supplies, political and citizenship rights. Israel employs different technologies, advanced weapons, and sophisticated surveillance systems to keep Palestinians under constant monitoring and ensure their obedience to the predetermined rules of engagement set by Israel. By so doing, Israel ensures that Gazans remain under its mercy, destitute, and desperate. The transcendence of the “bare life” is often impeded by Israel which meets any violation with a fatal response that reduces the bare life to a corpse (see Agamben, 1998: 2-5). According to Ghanim, the application of these punitive measures made Palestine bargain, not for life, but for death (2003: 68). Only death will bring an end to their long-lived misery.

Genocide in Gaza should be seen in relation to the context of the 1948 war and subsequent events that transpired. It represents a continuation of the series of Israeli crimes against Palestinians throughout the last century. This includes Deir Yassin, Tantura, the two Intifadas and other policies aiming to empty the land from native Arabs and strengthen the existence and influence of colonial Israel in the Middle East. Israeli soldiers who fought different wars in 1948, 1967, and 1982 have served as politicians who enact ruthless policies against Palestinians including the Gaza Strip. What could one expect from a state that is ruled by those whose hands are stained with the blood of thousands of Palestinians and Arabs other than more death and destruction? One must also situate genocide in Gaza within the context of the disastrous agreements signed between Arabs in general and Israel. Today and after 27 years from Oslo, Palestinians have grown aware of the colonial trap that was maliciously set for them. Many admit the historical mistakes made by the Palestinian leadership which signed Oslo that brought Palestinians nothing but more misery. While Palestinians executed most of the duties assigned to them, promises made by Israel are still ink on

paper. Complex issues of the right of return, Palestinian refugees, East Jerusalem, Israeli settlements, and borders are still unresolved. What even made things worse on the ground today, is the US's approval to move its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, granting the occupation more legitimacy and declaring Jerusalem the capital of Israel. All of these practices emphasize that the occupation came to remain forever. It also demonstrates Israel's intent to exterminate native Palestinians and build a Jewish state that embraces one race only. The expansionist ideology followed by colonial Israel is manifested in the annexation of 60 percent of the West Bank, and the siege imposed on Gaza since 2006. When one examines the situation in Gaza, one should ponder the series of massacres, dispossession of Palestinians, and the razing of hundreds of villages in the 1940s, and remember that Israel started as a colonial project based on the logic of elimination (Wolfe, 2006). Israeli policies against Gaza is part of the logic of elimination that started upon the establishment of a Jewish state on Palestinian soil. The genocidal situation that Palestinians experience is eloquently captured in the verses of the Palestinian poet Samih Al-Qasim (1964: 21):

We cried, the day the others sang

And we turned to the sky

The day the others despised it

Because we are weak

Because we are strangers

We weep and pray

The day others sing and play

And we carried our bleeding wound

And to a skyline behind the unseen we flit ... we were invited

Little pieces of orphans

We've been folded inside a dark waste...year after year

And we remained strangers...

Study Limitations

If I were to repeat this study, not only would I include the period of the siege, but also the whole period of the occupation that started at the turn of the 20th century. The expansion of this timeframe would enable the reader to comprehend the processual nature of genocide in Gaza. I would try to precisely demonstrate the interconnectedness between, and the similarities of different colonial policies across time. What currently takes place in Gaza is similar to what took place decades ago, yet the form of destruction and the techniques used have changed. I was not able to thoroughly discuss that due to reasons of space and time. For the same reasons, I was not able to incorporate discussions about destruction of the West Bank. Although the level of physical destruction is different there, Israel applies a similar logic of elimination that eventually aims to occupy the land and remove its inhabitants. If Israel applies a strangling siege in Gaza, it utilizes policies of annexation and landgrabs to take over much of the West Bank. The latter also shares racist policies of segregation and fragmentation with the former, however, on a more extreme level. These policies are manifested in widespread checkpoints, the segregation wall, and the fragmentation of the West Bank into areas A, B, and C. Combining Gaza with the West Bank, and East Jerusalem where policies of Hebronization of the old city are continuing, would offer the reader a more inclusive picture of the situation (see Fischer, 2016). It would prove to the reader Israel's intentionality to take over the whole land and/or remove the last Palestinian.

Another limitation of this study is the slim attention given to political groups. Although I partially discussed the role of the Hamas government and their rift with the PA, I did not shed

much light on the overall role of these groups in the conflict. Examining the relationship between the systematic targeting of these groups and the realization of genocide would perhaps require another meticulous study. However, if we viewed these groups as liberty fighters who resist a brutal colonizer, their actions could be justified. In the end, they are fighting for their basic rights and a better life. Any other study should look at these groups from this perspective and not fall victim to Israel's demonizing misrepresentations. Nevertheless, one should also question Hamas's authoritative rule in Gaza and their ongoing disputes with the PA, which in turn affects many families whose salaries were suspended. This might put Hamas and the PA within the circle of criminals because of their negligence and disregard for people's wellbeing.

Moreover, this study did not evaluate the role of the PA and its continued cooperation with Israel. This collaboration is a commitment made by the PA as part of Oslo understandings. The cooperation between the two has curbed most resistance activities in the West Bank and facilitated the accomplishment of Israel's colonial objectives by annexing much of the West Bank. This role has to be questioned in any future study. The PA is also accused of coordinating with Egypt to tighten the grip of the siege on Gaza by keeping the Rafah border shut for protracted periods. The PA which dreams of restoring its governance over Gaza succeeded in pressuring Hamas, but the restrictions on movement are overly felt by civilians. And this, again, makes the PA a partner in crime as their actions are no different than the colonizer's. Finally, the implicit and explicit cooperation between Israel and Egypt to undermine governance in Gaza through pressure put on the elected government should be studied further. Keeping Rafah border shut for months in the past decade and arresting those who pass through serve nobody but the Israeli colonial project. The complicity and the support of other countries and the silence of the international community are all other limitations that must be examined in future studies.

Finally, this study did not shed much light on ecocide. Although Israel commits most of its crimes against civilians and political groups, many of these violations have caused ecocide. Many Palestinian farmers are unable to farm or plant their lands because of the scorched land policy followed by the IOF in most of its invasions into Gaza. Most of the land that is located near the perimeter fence that separates Gaza from Israel is inaccessible by farmers because that is deemed a buffer zone by Israel. Israel employs herbicides that are sprayed on these farms through special drones (see Hass, 2018). One should also bear in mind that Israel has used internationally prohibited weapons that caused severe environmental damage and air pollutions during the three major assaults. This air pollution as well as the contamination of the seawater led to the emergence of many diseases and health issues.

Contributions

Although some aspects of the destruction that has taken place in Gaza are similar to other genocides, this study sought to demonstrate the unique methods employed by Israel to inflict the utmost harm on Gazans as a social group. Although mass killing was an essential component used often by Israel, the latter did not use it to exterminate Gazans, but to impose control and discipline from time to time. As argued throughout the thesis, other aspects of destruction such as economic, social, and infrastructural were more effective in inflicting structural and long-term harm on Gazans. In what follows, I outline the contributions of my study and the critical aspects that make up a slow-motion genocide:

1. *Generational Destruction*: Most participants emphasized that Gaza was not an ideal place for one to have a stable childhood. The feelings of security and safety which are essential for children were completely missing. Participants were born into two major uprisings, violence

and Israeli raids on their houses. When they grew older, they were faced with vicious Israeli assaults and a full-blown siege. The existence in this ceaseless circle of violence did not allow them to have enough time to discover themselves or realize the massive mental destruction inflicted on them. Ibrahim, for instance, mentioned that he cried for his cousin who was killed by the IOF when he left Gaza for the US. These generations are growing up devastated and traumatized. Their lives were characterized by constant movement from one place to another to avoid death.

2. *Recurrent Wars:* It was Adam who stated that Gazans are in a continual state of war. One war barely ends and before embarking on repairing the damage, another war erupts. Everyone in Gaza was targetable during these attacks and destruction touched almost every corner in the strip. The deliberate killing of civilians and the extermination of entire families while sleeping signify Israel's intent to target whoever identifies him/herself as Gazan. Israel has turned Gaza into a testing arena for its new high-tech weapons including internationally prohibited munitions like white phosphorus munitions (see HRW, 2009). The Israeli recurrent attacks were unprecedentedly cruel and vicious according to the participants.
3. *Ghettoized Context:* Gazans have lacked access to basic services such as electricity, water, and healthcare since the occupation of the Gaza Strip. Access to these services are either rare or extremely difficult. Israel has led infrastructural warfare against the Palestinians to keep them reliant on it, and this step aims to un-dignify Palestinians and humiliate them. The maintenance of the ghetto status or the implementation of development and prosperity plans all hinge on colonial Israel, which is in control of everything. The destruction of this infrastructure coupled with recurrent violence has made Palestinians lives even more difficult.

4. *Economic Dependency*: Israel managed to make Palestinians fully dependent on it through agreements such as the Paris Protocol and also through depriving them of any concrete development or attempts of independency. This has even worsened with the Israel siege through which Israel strangled Gazans economically. Products that get in or out of Gaza as well as the closure of commercial crossings are all controlled by Israel. Due to this policy, Gazans have incurred significant losses, and most have become aid-dependent. The silence of the international community as well as NGOs towards these punitive measures make them complicit in this slow-motion genocide.
5. *Social Destruction*: This is another indirect consequence of the Israel siege that received little attention from scholars. Participants mentioned that many people have resorted to drugs as a way to get over the overwhelming problems that surround them. Other problems that prevailed include radicalism, poverty, and low marriage rates. Participants also noted that the relationships among group members have weakened. Even the social dynamics and the meaningfulness of these relations were severely affected because of the siege. For instance, the collapse of the economy in Gaza has impacted family visits and the exchange of gifts.
6. *Forced Emigration*: The Israeli siege and other punitive measures that caused irreversible destruction in Gaza pushed a large proportion of young Palestinians, intellectuals, doctors, and others to leave the Gaza Strip and search for a fulfilling life abroad. The emigration of these individuals as well as young people is a brain drain and poses a huge loss, particularly for a nation that is still underdeveloped. Those who emigrate usually do not return because they have had freedom for the first time.
7. *Deprivation of Liberty*: Palestinians in Gaza have been caged since 2006; they cannot fly in the sky; they cannot cross borders, and they cannot sail in the sea. Israel has transformed the

strip into a mega-prison for two million Palestinians who receive the same inhumane treatment – they are all criminals. Israel keeps monitoring them constantly from the sky, ground and sea. The sealing off of Gaza has caused the death of hundreds of patients, the loss of many student's scholarships, and curbed the flow of goods into Gaza. Nobody should apply for permits or bribe border officers to leave his homeland; free movement is a right for all, not a privilege.

8. *Zero Self-Determination:* Israel deprives the Palestinians of the right to have political will; they cannot have free elections or an independent political outcome. They are not recognized as a state in the first place. Palestinians in Gaza have no seaports and airports or even or proper governmental institutions. The government in Gaza is powerless and most decisions are reactive and shaped by the occupation.
9. *Massive Inequalities:* Participants described the striking inequalities between the colonizer and the colonized sectors. Colonial Israel is fully developed and owns significant resources, whereas Palestinians in Gaza suffer from different sorts of deprivations.
10. *Tough Adjustment:* The study showed that the transition from Gaza to other countries was challenging. Participants moved from a toxic environment to new places where everything seemed normal and quiet. They realized that growing up in Gaza was pathological and that it impacted their interactions with others abroad.
11. *Weakened Relation to the Land:* As a result of the occupation, uprisings, recurrent violence, death, a strangling siege, bombardments, curbed movement and the deprivation of basic rights, has meant that many participants admitted that their attachment to the land has dwindled.

One can conclude that these eleven components and others that were discussed throughout the thesis are essential elements in Israel's slow-motion genocide against Gaza. Instead of committing a high-intensity killing genocide, Israel has resorted to other techniques that often go unfelt and

unnoticed or underestimated sometimes. In the case of Gaza, genocide should be seen as a process that, so far, has caused “in part” destruction to Gazans as a social group. The perpetuation of these policies will, with no doubt, lead to a point where life becomes impossible in Gaza.

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