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## Gaza's Children Are Burying Each Other: The Commemoration of Palestine's Martyred Children

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Gaza's Children Are Burying Each Other:  
The Commemoration of Palestine's Martyred Children

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## **Abstract**

On October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023 Israel announced a state of emergency in response to a series of attacks carried out by Hamas and members of the Islamic Jihad. For the past one hundred- and seventy-seven-days Israel has laid siege to the Gaza strip. The Israeli military operations have consisted of armed attacks of civilians, the indiscriminate bombing of homes, schools, and hospitals, and a strict blockade. Over 32,000 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza since October, almost half of whom have been children. The struggle for visibility under Israeli occupation is highlighted in the anthropology of Palestine. By highlighting the loss of young life in Gaza through social media posts, this paper examines themes of mobility, suffering, and martyrdom in the Palestinian experience. Ultimately, calling into question the treatment of Palestinians by Israel and the international community.

## **An Introduction to the Israel-Palestine Conflict**

Before Israel there was Palestine. Contemporary Palestinian society can be traced back to the gradual dissolution of the Ottoman Empire in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the late Ottoman era, the large and diverse Arab Muslim and Christian populations began to separate and form distinctive nationalist claims in respect to their unique attributes. The collapse of the Ottoman Empire following World War I saw the emergence of new claims for Arab states in the former Ottoman territories. Among those struggling for self-determination were the Palestinians.

The Palestinian people and their culture existed for centuries prior to the fall of the Ottoman Empire; it was the notion of self-determination sweeping through the former Ottoman territories that ignited a Palestinian national consciousness which called for an Arab state. In the interwar

period, Palestinian calls for state were met decisively with British occupation. During this period the socio-political landscape of Europe was also changing.

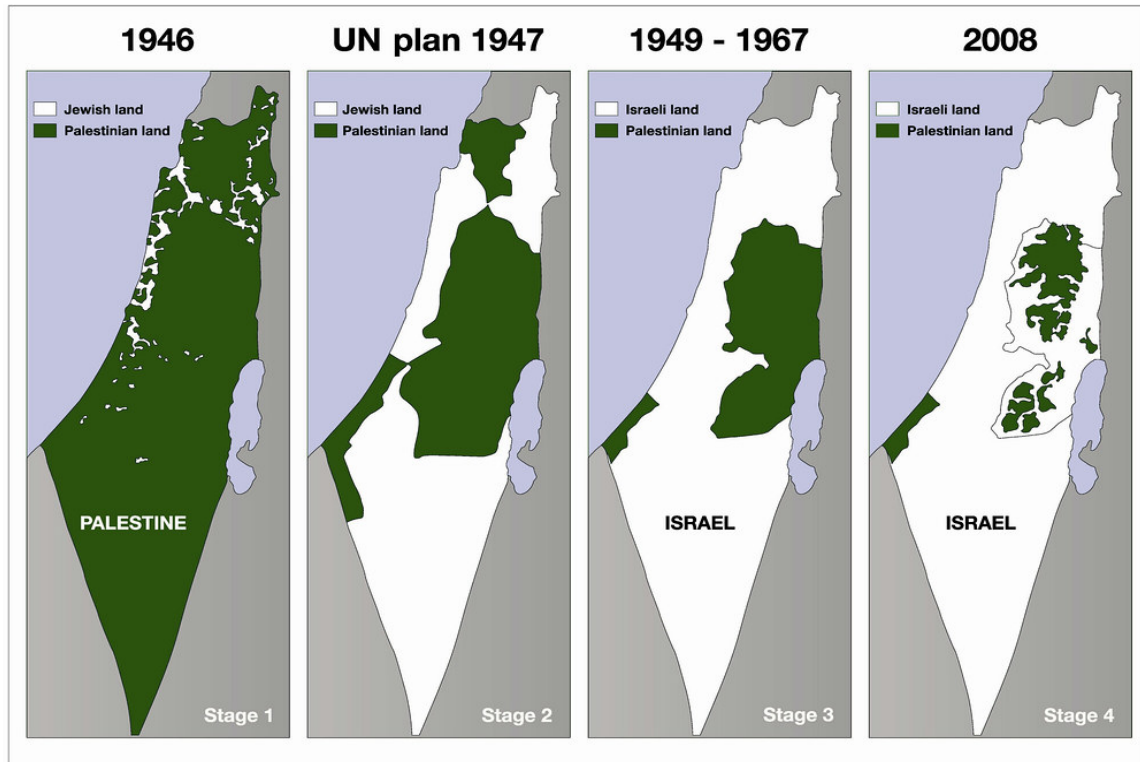
In the late nineteenth century, Jewish nationalists in Germany created Zionism, a political ideology that rejected the idea of Jewish assimilation into European society and emphasized the disenchantment of Jews with their religious culture.<sup>1</sup> Pogroms in the Russian Empire furthered the acceptance of Zionism among the Jewish community and strengthened the desire of Zionists to gather and unite all diasporic Jewry into a single people in a reconstituted Jewish society.<sup>2</sup> In order to accomplish this however, people without a land needed a land without a people. Ultimately, it was Palestine that became the clandestine home of the Jewish diaspora.

Under the British Mandate for Palestine, the British government supported the immigration of European Jews and Zionists to Palestine. British occupation supported the growth of Jewish settlements not just as a homeland for the Jews, but as a state by encouraging the establishment of Jewish institutions in Palestine. State growth for the Palestinians, on the other hand, was stunted by British and Zionist encroachment. In 1948 Zionist settlers eventually formed a state, leading to the violent displacement and dispossession of the indigenous Palestinian population. This is known as the Nakba, or 'catastrophe,' in Palestinian history. In 1967, Palestinians were again displaced in the 1967 War, or 'Naksa,' as Israel came to occupy the territory formerly under Arab custodianship.

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<sup>1</sup> Charles D. Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict: A History with Documents*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed., (Boston: Bedford/St.Martens, 2007), 32.

<sup>2</sup> Kevin Avruch, "The Emergence of Ethnicity in Israel," *American Ethnologist* 14, no. 2 (1987): 328.

**Image 1: The various stages of Palestinian territory 1946 - 2008**

In its simplest form, the Israel-Palestine conflict is a question of nationalist expression: Who belongs where and why? Palestine was not a land without a people. As a result, in 1948 the Palestinian experience became one of exile and redefined in 1967 by the unequal power relations in the Israeli occupied West Bank and Gaza strip. The struggle for Palestinian liberation and the concurrent state building project of Israel has generated decades of violence and death which has had a profound impact on the development of Palestinian and Israeli society.

Palestinian resistance began in the early stages of Jewish settlement but is redefined by the first Intifada in 1987, a genuine popular and civil uprising against the occupation of Gaza and the

West Bank. The first Intifada succeeded in focusing international leadership on the demand for a Palestinian state but failed to generate any substantive peace agreement. The Intifada justified the further use of violence by the Israeli state and deepened Israeli occupation in the West Bank and Gaza through unrestrained military power.<sup>3</sup> The repression of Palestinian grievances in the aftermath of the revolution contributed to mounting frustrations with the Palestinian Authority, international community, and Israeli state.

The past three decades of the Israel-Palestine conflict has become increasingly violent as Palestinian resistance becomes more desperate and the Israeli response more controlling. Palestinian resistance has gained international attention for its use of violence, but the international community fails to recognize that the Palestinian resistance is the product of its environment: generations of oppression, exile, alienation, and elimination of Palestinians, Palestinian culture, and Palestinian land.

The Israeli occupation is predicated on the ethnic cleansing of Palestine, a system that is supported by the militarization of the West Bank and strangulation of the Gaza strip.<sup>4</sup> The Al-Aqsa intifada in 2000 marked yet another shift in Israeli occupation, one defined by target killings of those believed responsible for terrorist acts and armed resistance, and Israeli withdrawal from Gaza in 2004.<sup>5</sup> In 2006, Hamas rose to power and Israeli operations escalated with more firepower, higher civilian casualties, and more collateral damage resulting from a tighter siege, blockade, and

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<sup>3</sup> Baruch Kimmerling, *Politicide: Ariel Sharon's War Against the Palestinians*, (London: Verso, 2003), 137.

<sup>4</sup> Neve Gordon, 2008, "From Colonization to Separation: Exploring the Structure of Israel's Occupation." *Third World Quarterly* 29, no. 1: 35.

<sup>5</sup> Kimmerling, *Politicide*, 162; Ilan Pappé, *The Biggest Prison on Earth: A History of the Occupied Territories* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2017), 214-215.

greater intentions to kill.<sup>6</sup> Since the Al-Aqsa intifada, Israel's military strategy has been one of separation and dismemberment with the goal of isolating and absorbing Palestinian territory.<sup>7</sup>

Israel's withdrawal from Gaza has turned it into an open-air prison: Disengagement left Israel in control of Gaza from the land, air, and sea.<sup>8</sup> This is accompanied by the strict control of Israel's borders as no Palestinian, goods, or materials are allowed to enter or exit without permission.<sup>9</sup> The escalation of Israel's military operations in Gaza has created inhumane conditions as Palestinians are trapped by Israel's militarized borders and subjected to collective punishment and indiscriminate killing. The movement of Palestinians in Gaza is dictated by Israel; thus, Palestinians are unable to escape the closed narrative of violence that punctuates everyday life.

We are currently witnessing this with the war on Gaza. Although the war began with the October 7<sup>th</sup> attacks in 2023, Gaza has been the subject of countless conflicts with Israel over the past two decades. The inhuman conditions created by the Israeli occupation in Gaza and the West Bank demonstrate the structural brutality of violence in Palestine and the chronic crisis Palestinians face under occupation. The marginalization of Palestinians by the Israeli state through the mobilization of violence and mainstream politics solidifies Palestine's regional and global significance: Under Israeli occupation, the Palestinian experience became one of inescapable violence, checkpoints, and negated identity.

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<sup>6</sup> Pappé, *The Biggest Prison on Earth*, 216.

<sup>7</sup> Ghazi-Walid Falah, "The Geopolitics of 'Enclavisation' and the Demise of the Two-State Solution to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict," *Third World Quarterly* 26, no. 8 (2005): 1341.

<sup>8</sup> Ghazi-Walid, "The Geopolitics of 'Enclavisation'," 1350.

<sup>9</sup> Ghazi-Walid, "The Geopolitics of 'Enclavisation'," 1350.



The struggle for visibility under occupation is highlighted in the anthropology of Palestine and can be understood by the cultural polemics of martyrdom. The relationship between the Israeli occupation and life in Palestine is embodied in the life of the martyr, the victims of Israeli occupation. The martyr is a central icon to Palestinian suffering. While the martyr is described generally in Islam as an act of jihad in the way of God, the Palestinian martyr has taken on a specific meaning within the context of oppression under Israeli occupation: Martyrs appear at the heart of Palestinian narratives of suffering, victimhood, and heroism.<sup>10</sup>

The martyrs of Palestine are the victims of Israeli coloniality. Visual representations of martyrdom are important for making Palestinian suffering visible not only to Israelis, but to the rest of the world. Across Palestine, posters depicting martyrs are utilized to generate sympathy and anger towards the Israeli occupier.<sup>11</sup> Recently, social media has become a powerful tool in the visual representation of Palestinian suffering, particularly as media censorship continues to silence Palestinian voices. The world cannot ignore the suffering of Palestinians any longer.

The war on Gaza necessitates a new discussion on life in Palestine under siege, one that highlights the vulnerability of the Gazan population and calls into question the international community's understanding of the Israel-Palestine conflict. The martyrs of Gaza are primarily children. In 2022, the population of Gaza was 2.2 million, 47 percent of whom were under the age of 18.<sup>12</sup> According to recent statistics published by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, of

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<sup>10</sup> Lotte Buch Segal, "Mourning, Grief, and the Loss Politics in Palestine: The Unvoiced Effects of Military Occupation in the West Bank," in *Living and Dying in the Contemporary World: A Compendium*, ed. by Veena Das and Clara Han, 1st ed. (University of California Press, 2016), 479.

<sup>11</sup> Jake Silver, "Familiar Pixels: Imaging the Dead and the Political in Israel/Palestine," *American Anthropologist* 123, no. 1 (2021): 121.

<sup>12</sup> Linah Mohammad, "Children Make up Nearly Half of Gaza's Population. Here's What It Means for the War," NPR, October 19, 2023, [https://www.npr.org/2023/10/19/1206479861/israel-gaza-hamas-children-population-war-palestinians#:~:text=The%20current%20war%20in%20Gaza,47.3%25\)%20are%20under%2018](https://www.npr.org/2023/10/19/1206479861/israel-gaza-hamas-children-population-war-palestinians#:~:text=The%20current%20war%20in%20Gaza,47.3%25)%20are%20under%2018)

the 32,705 martyrs in Gaza, 42.8 percent (14,000) are children.<sup>13</sup> During periods of armed conflict children are more vulnerable and because Gaza is an immobile population, children are at an even greater risk of injury, malnourishment, and death. Israel's method of collective punishment in Gaza highlights the failure of the international community to uphold its obligation to protect children from the Israeli government's grave violations of human rights in the Gaza strip.

The image of the martyred child calls attention to the extermination of Gazans under Israel's siege by highlighting the vulnerability of the Palestinian population. Gaza's children subsequently demonstrate how Palestine's isolation and dismemberment by Israeli military operations have allowed for the systematic killing of millions of Palestinians trapped in an open-air prison. This paper explores the commemoration of martyrdom and, in doing so, situates Gaza's children at the center of the current conflict.

### **The Cultural Polemics of Martyrdom**

The interpretation of a martyr's images, narrative, and cause of death are representative of larger themes within the Israel-Palestine conflict.<sup>14</sup> Historically, images are a social and aesthetic mechanism used widely by Palestinians to communicate their political concerns to a global audience, air collective grievances, or support the families whose members were killed by the Israeli occupation.<sup>15</sup> These visual representations of martyrdom also challenge the narrative in Israeli areas that do not usually confront Palestinian death due to the isolation and silencing of Palestinian loss and mourning.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> PcbS, "Martyrs," PCBS, accessed March 31, 2024, [https://www.pcbS.gov.ps/site/lang\\_\\_en/1405/Default.aspx](https://www.pcbS.gov.ps/site/lang__en/1405/Default.aspx).

<sup>14</sup> Silver, "Familiar Pixels," 123.

<sup>15</sup> Silver, "Familiar Pixels," 124.

<sup>16</sup> Silver, "Familiar Pixels," 123.

There is an important distinction to be made between the martyr and martyrdom operations. Martyrdom operations emerged in 1987 as a defense tactic during the first Intifada. For those engaging in these operations, martyrdom is a means of liberation utilized by the oppressed to free themselves from the occupier. Martyrdom operations have become an important component of Palestinian resistance and have conversely strengthened the counter-terrorism narrative of the Israeli state.<sup>17</sup> Martyrdom operations are generally carried out by the members of resistance groups like Hamas and the Islamic jihad, but are often critiqued within the Palestinian and international sphere for ineffectively communicating the Palestinian struggle to the Israeli, and by extension global, audience.

In the West, martyrdom operations are known as suicide bombings and are often described as senseless acts of terrorism. It is necessary to recognize that martyrdom operations do instill terror in the Israeli population and often result in civilian death. Palestinian political leadership does not order martyrdom operations. Rather, these operations are often reactions to the death of newborn babies, women, and children at the hands of the Israeli government.<sup>18</sup> Martyrdom operations are perceived simply as acts of terrorism, but for Palestinians they can “create cultural conceptions of accessibility and represent the breaking down of barriers, thus helping to mediate issues of confinement, isolation, and fragmentation.”<sup>19</sup> Ultimately, martyrdom operations are a direct response to the nature of state violence by Israel and the Palestinians’ daily encounter with the occupation.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Pappé, *The Biggest Prison on Earth*, 109.

<sup>18</sup> Lori Allen, “Palestinians Debate ‘Polite’ Resistance to Occupation,” *Middle East Report* 225 (2002): 39.

<sup>19</sup> Nasser Abufarha, *The Making of a Human Bomb: An Ethnography of Palestinian Resistance*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 1.

<sup>20</sup> Abufarha, *The Making of a Human Bomb*, 2.

In Gaza, martyrdom operations are about regaining bodily autonomy in a space where movement is completely controlled. Checkpoints, forced closures, and the random search and seizure of Palestinians constitute the ongoing restrictions on mobility and characterize the constant, almost default suspicion of terrorism Palestinians live under.<sup>21</sup> Martyrdom operations are often the focus of western media whereas the martyr, the innocent man, woman, and child who is killed by the Israeli Defense Force, is absent. The martyr is central to the Palestinians' national understanding of themselves as a people who are subjected to indiscriminate violence and death. Therefore, the silencing of Palestinian martyrs from the representation of the Palestinian experience prevents us from developing a deeper understanding of life in the open-air prison that is Gaza.

### **Commemorating Gaza's Martyrs**

Commemoration, the use of iconic images, objects, and persons, is used to translate the martyr into a national ethos which, in turn, represents important themes in the Palestinian experience.<sup>22</sup> All nationalist commemoration is associated with icons that are a part of a larger narrative about the nation. When Laleh Khalili wrote her ethnography *Heroes and Martyrs of Palestine: The Politics of National Commemoration* in 2007, the commemoration of martyrs in paper and electronic media, such as television and the radio, allowed for the transmission of iconic images across borders.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Lotte Buch Segal, "Mourning, Grief, and the Loss Politics in Palestine: The Unvoiced Effects of Military Occupation in the West Bank," In *Living and Dying in the Contemporary World: A Compendium*, ed. by Veena Das and Clara Han, 1st ed., 475–92 (University of California Press, 2016), 478.

<sup>22</sup> Laleh Khalili, *Heroes and Martyrs of Palestine: The Politics of National Commemoration*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 1.

<sup>23</sup> Khalili, *Heroes and Martyrs of Palestine*, 77.

While these forms of communication reached an international audience, new forms of electronic media, such as social media sites like Instagram, Twitter (now known as X), and Facebook, are far more effective at not only reaching an international audience, but also delivering shocking and powerful messages through images and videos of suffering in Palestine. Social media has become an important source of information for the war on Gaza as it provides a global audience with on the ground reporting. Through social media we witness the destruction and violence in Gaza in real time.

Since October 7, 2023, my social media feed has been full of pictures and videos taken in Gaza documenting the atrocities of Israel's ongoing siege. The images are disturbing and gut wrenching: videos of children crying over their martyred mother, limp babies being carried by their mourning father, blood and tears stain the faces of every individual I come across online. The representation of Palestinian suffering on social media is more significant than just informing the global audience of the ethnic cleansing of Gaza; it is an active effort to commemorate the martyrs of Palestine and incorporate them into a new Palestinian narrative defined by Israel's siege on Gaza.

In this analysis I will look at media posted to Instagram by various accounts supporting Palestinian Nationalism. These accounts include Eye on Palestine ([eye.on.palestine](https://www.instagram.com/eye.on.palestine/)) and Filastinyat ([filastinyat](https://www.instagram.com/filastinyat/)), among others. Drawing from posts made by these accounts from October 2023 to March 2024, I examine patterns between published images, videos, and their captions to create a narrative representative of Palestine's young martyrs.

## The Tragedies of Gaza

The politicization of the current war on Gaza makes it difficult to provide a corroborated account of events. The general consensus is, however, that the war started on October 7, 2023 when Hamas and other Palestinian militant groups, such as the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, launched an attack on Israel from Gaza. Israel retaliated, declaring a state of emergency and war on Gaza. The war has continued to escalate as Israel's military operations appear to be targeting residential buildings, hospitals, schools, and refugee camps under the auspice of counter terrorism. The result has been a catastrophic loss of life in Gaza as civilian casualties reach an alarming number. Palestinians are martyred leaving their homes per Israel's evacuation instructions and most Palestinians are not permitted to leave Gaza.

In late December of 2023, the South African government brought a case against Israel to the International Court of Justice. The South African government argues that Israel's deliberate denial of humanitarian aid could constitute one of the acts prohibited under the Genocide Convention by "deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part."<sup>24</sup> On January 26, 2024, the International Court of Justice ordered immediate measures to protect Palestinians from the risk of genocide in the Gaza strip. However, on February 26, 2024, Amnesty International reported that the Israeli authority has failed to ensure "sufficient life-saving goods and services are reaching a population at risk of genocide and on the brink of famine" due to Israel's blockade and attacks.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> "Israel Defying ICJ Ruling to Prevent Genocide by Failing to Allow Aid into Gaza," Amnesty International, February 28, 2024, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/02/israel-defying-icj-ruling-to-prevent-genocide-by-failing-to-allow-adequate-humanitarian-aid-to-reach-gaza/>.

<sup>25</sup> "Israel Defying ICJ Ruling to Prevent Genocide by Failing to Allow Aid into Gaza," Amnesty International, February 28, 2024, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/02/israel-defying-icj-ruling-to-prevent-genocide-by-failing-to-allow-adequate-humanitarian-aid-to-reach-gaza/>.

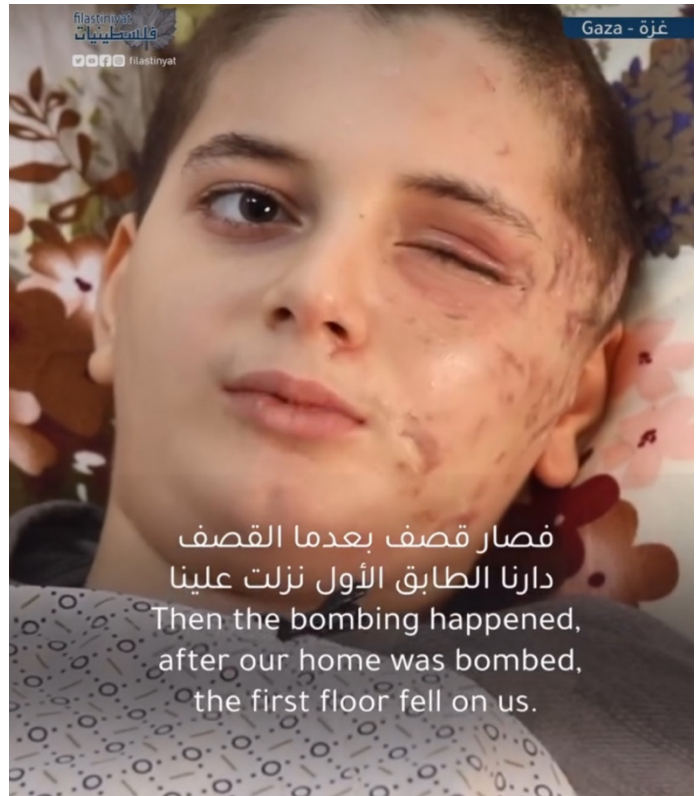
As Israel continues neglect the orders of the ICJ, the humanitarian disaster in Gaza deepens. The main victims of Israel's attacks are not Hamas; it is Palestinian children, children who are dying of malnutrition and fatal injuries from indiscriminate bombings and armed attacks.

This provides a general framework for understanding the nationalist ethos emerging from Gaza in response to Israel's siege and a backdrop for the nationalist commemoration of Palestinian martyrs in Gaza. The following pages include sensitive material and descriptions. While there are far more graphic images in the media, the purpose of this work is not to exploit children's suffering, it is to honor the losses of Palestinian families and encourage change.

*Dismemberment and Death: Mourning our Children*

Generally, there are two different subjects in the images emerging out of Gaza: images and videos of disfigured and wounded children, and images and videos of martyred children. The first group of images symbolizes the legacy of Israel's violence: whole generations of children will grow up with a permanent reminder of the war and Israeli oppression. The missing limbs of toddlers, gouged faces of babies, and broken bodies of children reflect the scars left on the nation: the dismemberment of Palestinians is the disfiguring of the nation.

Fouad Abu Ouda lays on a floral print pillow in a hospital somewhere in Gaza speaking to the camera. He is telling the story of how he was injured in a bombing on his house. The bombing took the life of his father and injured his pregnant mother. Fouad was sitting at home when the first bombs fell, burning his right arm, breaking several of his fingers, and severely wounding his face, completely impairing his left eye. Fouad’s cousins who passed in the bombing were sitting right next to him. “Our home fell on them,” Fouad said.



Fouad Abu Ouda taken from filastinyat on Instagram

Fouad’s story is one of many: Children are found buried under the rubble of their own homes every day. Palestinian journalists such as Motaz Azaiza show infants being pulled out from under three stories of concrete.<sup>26</sup> It’s a haunting scene, watching a child be pulled from tons of rubble and it’s even more heartbreaking discovering that some of these children survive simply to become orphans, their families crushed by their own homes. In October, Israel gave Palestinians an order to evacuate their homes warning of an imminent bombing.<sup>27</sup> Regardless where Palestinians fled, to the North or South, the bombing followed.

<sup>26</sup> Motaz Azaiza. Instagram, [https://instagram.com/motaz\\_aazaiza?igshid=OGQ5ZDc2ODk2ZA==](https://instagram.com/motaz_aazaiza?igshid=OGQ5ZDc2ODk2ZA==)

<sup>27</sup> Gabrielle Tétrault-Farber, “Israel’s Gaza Evacuation Order Could Breach International Law - Un,” Reuters, October 17, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/israels-gaza-evacuation-order-could-amount-crime-forcible-transfer-civilians-un-2023-10-17/>.



For some children, their wounds will have a permanent impact on their quality of life. A little girl with swollen eyes and hair matted with blood stares into the camera. The deep lacerations on her face hide the sinister wounds in the next photo: At just seven years old, Aseel Musameh had her left leg amputated due to the injuries she sustained in the bombing of her home. Aseel seems unphased by her injuries, but the look in her eyes tells a different story.



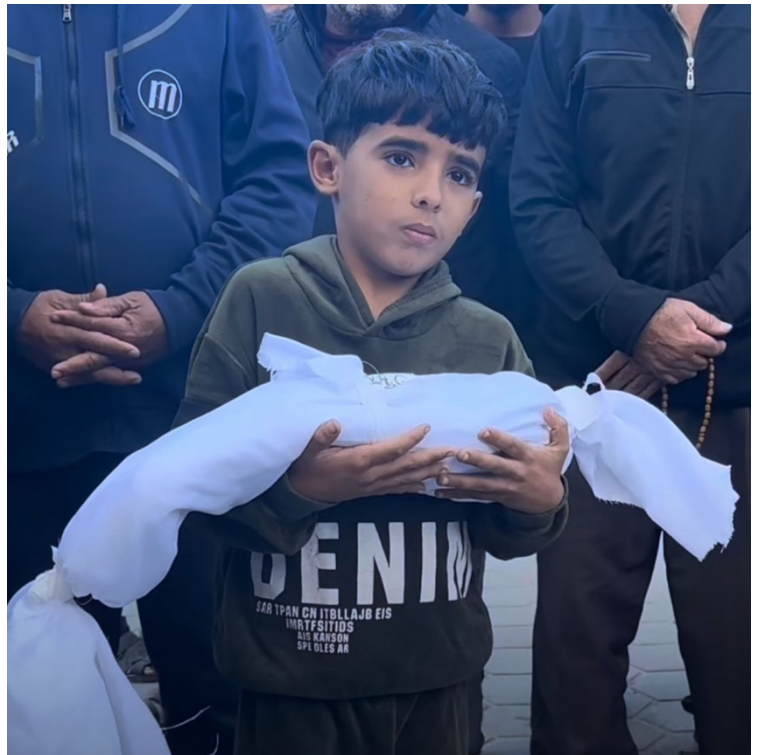
Aseel Musameh taken from eye.on.palestine on Instagram

The Palestinian children are not afraid of death, it is a regular part of their everyday life. Aseel is a reminder of how we've failed to protect Gaza's children not just in recent months, but from years of abuse at the hands of the Israeli occupation. The media mourns the children who are injured by Israel. Social media posts featuring children telling their own stories, such as Fouad, or simply a collection of photographs which speak louder than any interview could as with Aseel, demonstrate how Israel's strategy to dismember Gaza has manifested itself in the disfigurement of Palestinian children. While this widescale violence seems shocking to an international audience, generations of Palestinian children have grown up in this environment: uncertainty, violence, oppression, and death have been their everyday waking life since birth. Palestinian suffering,

particularly that of children, is punctuated by this notion of victimhood and the desire for Palestinians to be recognized as deserving victims.<sup>28</sup>

For some children, names escape them. Little bodies in bloodied white sheets lay on the floor of hospitals waiting to be found by their families. Some of the bombings are so intense that only parts of the martyred children are found. Mothers and fathers write on their children so that if they are lost and torn apart by the bombs, they can still be identified. The anonymity of death is a product of the unpredictability and uncertainty of violence.

“You let Gaza’s children bury each other.” That is the caption of a photograph depicting a young Palestinian boy, no more than nine years old, carrying the body of his martyred brother. His brother was an infant, his cloaked body hardly takes up any space in his brothers’ arms. The loss of this young boy’s brother evokes a sense of grief accompanied by a life bounded by senseless death: Childhood does not exist in Gaza. This is echoed in the abrupt end of



life for those who have yet to be born. A child holding his infant brother from wearthepeace on Instagram

<sup>28</sup> Lotte Buch Segal, “Why Is Muna Crying?: Event, Relation, and Immediacy as Criteria for Acknowledging Suffering in Palestine,” in *Histories of Victimhood*, edited by Steffen Jensen and Henrik Ronsbo, 179–97 (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 187.

The death of a pregnant mother is one of the most egregious war crimes Palestinians have borne witness to. Maternal death is not only defined by the tragedy of the mother's death, but the martyr of her unborn child. The images of martyred newborns and fetuses are difficult to look at but are a critical feature of the isolated life in Gaza. A photo depicting an 8-month-old fetus in the arms of a man who is not her father is heartbreaking. The baby is wrapped in a white sheet, but her face is exposed to the camera. Her mother died in the bombing of Khan Younis. Like many of the martyred children the unborn martyrs are not given a name as the anonymity of their death serves as a reminder that life is savagely finite in Gaza: "The horror of suffering is not only in immensity but the faces of the anonymous victims who have little voice, let alone rights, in history."<sup>29</sup>

### **Concluding Remarks on Violence and Mobility**

The current war on Gaza is not the first war between Israel and Gaza but it is by far the deadliest. This is in part due to the inability of Palestinians to escape Gaza: Israel controls its borders and, therefore, movement to and from Palestine. Violence in Israel and the Occupied Territories has only deepened Israel's occupation in the West Bank and militarization of the Gaza strip.

The Israeli occupation of the West Bank and militarization of Gaza constructs space as a feature of violence. This maintains the tradition set by Israel upon its establishment in 1948 when hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were expelled from their homeland to make way for the Zionist state. The violent removal of Palestinians, whether it be through Zionist settlement policy or Israeli military operations, are the key mechanisms responsible for institutionalizing the suffering and death of Palestinians. Suffering is a part of the human experience, but when external

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<sup>29</sup> Paul Farmer, "On Suffering and Structural Violence: A View from Below," *Daedalus* 125, no. 1 (1996): 272.

forces structure inequality on the basis of race and ethnicity, suffering is unequal as the discriminated group will experience extreme suffering at the hands of the dominant one.<sup>30</sup>

Gaza has been carefully constructed over the years by Israel as the world's largest open-air prison: control over Palestinian movement is a central part of Israeli occupation practice.<sup>31</sup> Life in prison is defined by confinement and the loss of control, both are key features of the Palestinian experience in Gaza and the direct result of the structural inequality produced by the Israeli occupation of Palestine. Violence in confinement thus becomes inescapable and a part of daily life. The normalcy of violence and the indiscriminate death in Palestine highlights the horrors of the current war on Gaza through the martyr of children and the permanent disfigurement of Gaza's youth.

Palestinian children do not have a childhood in Gaza, it is robbed from them by the occupation. Hamas' attack on Israel did not happen in a vacuum and it is important not to neglect the loss of human life in their attacks. With that said, Israel's current approach to targeting Hamas is, in fact, not affecting Hamas but the civilians trapped in Gaza with no means of escape or refuge. On April 1, 2024, Israel's siege on Gaza reached day number one-hundred and seventy-seven. How much further will we allow this genocide to go? Mourning the martyred children of Gaza through nationalist commemoration on international social media platforms shows that Palestinian life is at the mercy of Israel. What will it take to free Palestine's children from the violence and uncertainty that punctuates the Palestinian experience in Gaza?

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<sup>30</sup> Farmer, "On Suffering and Structural Violence," 279.

<sup>31</sup> Ilana Feldman, "Gaza as an Open-Air Prison," *Middle East Report*, no. 275 (2015): 13.

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