

Everyday Insecurity in Gaza: Experiencing Blockade, Displacement and Panopticism

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Following the Hamas-led massacre and invasion of Israel on October 7, 2023, Israel has launched a continued assault on Gaza, deploying aerial bombing, ground invasions, and a total blockade in its effort to destroy Hamas. In these 12 months the assault has killed approximately 42,000 Palestinian, displaced over 90% of Gazans, and destroyed over half of all Gazan buildings (BBC Visual Journalism Team, 2024). This widespread destruction, combined with Israel's blockade, has created a major humanitarian crisis consisting of famine, spread of infectious diseases, and a collapsed healthcare sector (Batrawy, 2024). To explore the (in)humanity of this crisis, the developing field of everyday security studies can provide valuable insights. As opposed to earlier positivistic theories of security, everyday security studies focus on the daily, habitual, and mundane aspects of life and how they relate to in/security. Where the referent object of traditional theories of security may be the state, international institutions, politicians, military or the bourgeois, everyday security explores those often relegated to the private sphere: civilians, workers, women, and children. By exploring the spatial, temporal, and affective experiences of non-elite actors within Gaza, we can illuminate Israeli security apparatuses of blockade, bombing, ground invasion, surveillance, and forced displacement. This lens allows for a greater understanding of both the wider Israeli-Palestinian conflict and other global conflicts that oppress groups via acts of everyday violence, be it Ukrainians, Kurds, Kashmiris, or the Rohingya.

Conceptualising the Everyday

The field of everyday security studies is a relatively new development in International Relations (IR), emerging in the past 20 years out of the post-positivist turn in the 1990s. Where traditional, positivist security studies focus on the macro-level of the state, international organisations, the balance of global power, or political economy, these new developments draw focus to the micro level, the everyday experiences of individuals within structural situations of violence and in/security. The everyday explores the daily, mundane, and habitual instead of the exceptional event; it explores the experience of the civilian, worker, or housewife instead of the political executive, military, or bourgeois. This method of analysis is heavily influenced by both the field of feminist security studies—which deconstruct the binary dichotomies of masculine/feminine, private/public, and international/domestic—as well as criminological, sociological, and psychological studies of the everyday (Peoples & Vaughn-Williams, 2020). Conducting a meta-analysis of a number of key papers that explore the everyday in security studies, Nyman (2021, pp. 317) identified three dimensions that comprise the everyday: mundane space, temporal routine practices, and affective lived experience. These dimensions are not neatly defined and often interact but produce a useful framework to examine both the subjects' everyday experience of techniques of top-down in/security and the subject's bottom-up practices of everyday security to ensure survival (Lemanski 2012). By incorporating an analysis of the everyday, the field of security studies can expand its scope and depth, exploring the often unseen and silenced voices that live in/security.

Mass Surveillance in the Gazan Panopticon

The current war on Gaza is part of a larger ongoing conflict, which Pace and Yacobi (2021) call “settler colonialism (without settlers)”, building on Patrick Wolfe's concept of Settler Colonialism as an ongoing logic of elimination. To Wolfe (2006), settler-Colonialism is not a genocidal or invasive event but an ongoing power structure, dispersed

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across all aspects of the settling state and society. Following Israel's decisive victory during the 1967 Six Day War, it occupied and established settlements within Gaza until 2005. While Hamas has maintained political authority over the strip since 2007, Israel has continued to impose its settler-colonial sovereignty at a distance, via an ongoing blockade, the deployment of advanced weapons, surveillance technologies, and infrastructural violence; methods that Pace and Yacobi call slow violence. Israel has been testing and developing these advanced surveillance and military technologies and techniques in Gaza, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem for over 50 years, of which it sells to the global market as a key export (Lowenstein, 2024). Within the open-air prison of Gaza, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem, Israel operates a panoptical network of AI assisted security cameras, body cameras, and drones connected to extensive biometric databases, such as the Blue Wolf facial database, that can identify an individual, their education, family history, and security level (Lowenstein, 2024. pp. 63-65). Palestinian subjectivity must operate under the Israeli gaze, creating a situation of fear, uncertainty, and psychological trauma.

Agius (2017, pp. 376-377), has detailed the psychological effects of the constant presence of drones on communities in the Waziristan region of Pakistan, detailing rising rates of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and other mental health issues. The constant buzzing of the drone is a reminder of the Others' sovereign control, able to survey or take life at any moment, leaving the subject under a constant state of fear. In 2022, the 18-year-old Bissam describes this condition within Gaza (RFI, 2022):

The drone is constantly with me in my bedroom—worry and fear don't leave our homes At night I try to review the lessons for my exams, but I can't read because of this annoying racket.

Besides exposing forms of subjection and control, an exploration of the everyday may illuminate the everyday security practices by which individuals defend their physical or ontological security. Maram Humaid (2024), a reporter based in central Gaza has detailed her experiences enrolling her daughter in an Egyptian school, after education ceased following the onset of war. Humaid (2024) describes methods by which her daughter must adapt and conceal widespread violence to maintain daily life within war:

'Turn off the microphone so no one hears the buzzing sound around you,' I'd tell her. 'If there is shelling and sounds of gunfire, turn off the microphone and don't answer. Make excuses about the internet connection,' I'd remind her.

While Maram's middle-class connections are certainly not available to all Gazans, this is one example of many acts of everyday security practice resisting assaults on ontological security, under the eyes of advanced Israeli technological destruction.

Spatial Control and Displacement in the Death World

In the text *Hollow Land*, Eyal Weizman (2007) details the ways in which Israeli architects and urban planners have manipulated spatiality to maximise control within the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem through a complex grid of checkpoints, overpasses and settlements that utilises the region's hilly topography. This carving out of space is a technique that has evolved from the the colony, the slave plantation, and Apartheid South Africa as a key technique of colonial control, which Achille Mbembe (2003) terms "necropolitics". For Mbembe, necropolitics are the politics of death and terror, political strategies geared towards the maximisation of fear, pain, and disorientation of a target population that exist within geographical spaces known as "death worlds".

Israel has expanded its necropolitical apparatuses of spatial control in the current Gazan war, as observed by the research group Forensic Architecture, headed by Weizman. Based in Goldsmiths University, the group investigates human rights abuses through architectural technologies and methods. The group have noted the complex, contradictory, evolving, and unaccountable division of the Gaza Strip into a grid of numbered areas by which the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) advise Gazan citizens of safe zones and areas of evacuation which are enforced via spatial control of buffer zones, checkpoints, and tightly monitored corridors (Forensic Architecture, 2024a). Beginning in October of 2023, Israel ordered the mass evacuation of Northern Gaza, directing evacuees towards the al-Mawasi 'safe-zone' in Southern Gaza, followed by countless further evacuation orders that Forensic Architecture argue categorise a deliberate, targeted mass displacement as a method to eliminate the native. Communicated via leaflet

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drops and social media, these directives are non-accountable or responsive to Gazan questions, as evidenced by the following comment on an official Israeli Facebook post “Is Block 53 in Ma’an within the zone of evacuation? Please reply”, to which there was no response (Forensic Architecture, 2024a).

Beginning in October 2024, the IDF have intensified the logic of the death world in Northern Gaza, implementing what many argue is the ‘Generals Plan.’ This plan involves the total blockade of the North, preventing any aid from entering with hopes to force Hamas to starve or surrender (McKernan, 2024). Those that have evacuated to the South have been directed to the al-Mawasi safe zone, north of Khan Younis, which has undergone multiple short notice relocations and reshaping, as well as a ground invasion of the safe zone in mid 2024 and 11 airstrikes between May-September of 2024 (Forensic Architecture, 2024b). Through the creation of a grid of constantly changing territories and unknowable zones of in/security the Gazan subject is placed into a position of permanent temporal confusion, forced into a mandatory nomadism. This ongoing displacement denies the subject the ability to conceive of a future living situation or sense of being, denying an ontological status of being within Gaza.

“Tent Life”

In addition to the imposition of spatial regulation via Israeli evacuation directives, Gazans must respond to the widespread destruction of territory, infrastructure and homes via a continuous, unpredictable and indiscriminate aerial bombing campaign. Forensic Architecture (2024b) have documented the widespread destruction of Gaza with estimates that over half of all Gazan buildings had been reported as damaged or destroyed, serving as another method of forced displacement. Arising from deliberate mass displacement and indiscriminate bombing sprawling ‘tent cities’ have sprung up, as an everyday security practice, as Gazans attempt to reclaim control of their lives (Leatherby, 2024).

Access to social media provides a unique opportunity for individuals to document and share their everyday experiences and routines within these ad hoc settlements under the imposition of war. A number of young Palestinians have documented the daily effects of the war via Instagram and TikTok, including 19-year-old Mohammed ‘Medo’ Halimy, to keep active, spread awareness and raise funds (Tolentino & Scott, 2024). From late May of 2024, Halimy produced a daily series documenting his daily routines following the destruction of his home and displacement into a tent city in the al-Mawasi safe zone, which he titled ‘Tent Life’. These videos show the quotidian, unnoticed repetitions of daily life experienced by the displaced Gazan, including the search for available food at the market, makeshift recipes, and the struggles involved in sourcing e-SIMs and internet connection. A number of these videos show the unavailability of fresh food and water and the daily routine of collecting water, with Halimy (2024a) explaining:

We have to carry these buckets and walk about half a mile, then fill them up and carry them all the way back. Each one of these buckets is around 20kgs . . . I gotta carry those two, walk around half a mile back to the tent to pour them back into the big tent.

He then goes on to demonstrate the correct lifting technique to prevent injury—a futile process, as another video weeks later shows the teen bedridden for days with a back injury caused by the inevitable strain of this daily routine.

Slow Violence of Blockade

The lack of water, food and medication within tent cities is a direct result of the Israeli blockade, wherein a limited number of aid deliveries are entering Gaza from the Israeli border. These borders are administering everyday violence, where a heavily administered routine of lengthy inspections, rejections, and Israeli protestors are blocking aid. Compared to the 500 aid trucks that entered Gaza daily prior to the war, under 3000 trucks were granted access during the month of September of 2024 (Travers, 2024). Besides the threats of shelling and criminal gangs, Israeli administration’s refusal of up to 50% of aid deliveries classifies as a form of slow violence that targets the Palestinian population through the deprivation of food and water (Westfall, 2024).

Beyond the border, the security of aid delivery drivers is threatened by the direct violence of airstrikes and the

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indirect effects of Israel's targeted destruction of the Gazan civil state. The Gazan police force has been under the control of the Hamas government since 2007, while retaining its independence from the Hamas military wing, the Izzedine al-Qassam Brigades. Throughout the war, the civil police force has been tasked with defending the limited number of aid trucks delivering food across Gaza, against looting and criminal gangs. Under the pretext of their subordination to Hamas, the IDF have begun targeted strikes against police officers and stations, leading to officers abandoning their posts. As a result, aid delivery drivers are exposed to criminal gangs that leave drivers "shot at, attacked with axes and box cutters and had their windows smashed" (Morris, Balousha & DeYoung, 2024). An everyday, structural approach demonstrates the plethora of actors, routines, and spaces that face, resist and reproduce violence leading to the creation of food insecurity within Gaza.

The Right to Maim and Everyday Resistance

An estimated 495,000 people in Gaza are facing food insecurity at great risk of famine, with reports of Palestinians eating grass and animal feed to survive (Morris, Balousha & DeYoung, 2024). Puar (2015) has detailed the ways that Israel has deployed a synthesis of biopolitical and necropolitical control over Palestine, through its 'right to maim' or 'stunt'. The right to maim functions through assaults on the individual body that fall short of death, including targeted blinding, crippling and a limiting of calories, nutrients and medicine that stunt childhood development and limit the individual's capacity to resist. According to Puar this allows the Israeli state to make claims that its humanitarian efforts are "unparalleled" (Travers, 2024) by facilitating aid, while maintaining strict biopolitical control in its settler-colonial aims. In another clip Halimy (2024b) describes the condition of caloric control within al-Mawasi thus:

Very scarce amount of food, which is not even food it's just canned food and it's very scarce. I haven't had real chicken in so long, I haven't had real meat, red meat in so long We're just having canned food, which is super unhealthy but we gotta survive.

By July, Halimy had responded to food insecurity, daily boredom and a feeling of hopelessness by building a small vegetable garden outside of his tent. Henceforth, Halimy's videos open with an update of his garden, a daily labour that allows Halimy to regain autonomy and purpose through the repetitive investment towards a life-generating object. Halimy's garden can be understood as an everyday security practice, allowing for a reterritorialization of spatial, temporal and affective control against the Israeli necropolitical death world. Halimy never saw the productive outcome of his garden, his life cut short in an airstrike in Khan Younis in August of 2024 (Murphy, 2024). The garden now tended by friends and family lives on as a symbol of resistance against the ongoing settler-colonial, necropolitical death world that attempts to eliminate these everyday practices of ontological continuity.

Halimy's video series and garden, Maram's secretive education, and the creation of tent cities all demonstrate the quotidian repetitions of everyday resistance within the war zone. A focus on the banal allows us to uncover both these everyday security practices as well as the forms of everyday violence deployed in this conflict. This methodology demonstrates the ways that violence occurs outside of the exceptional event. Violence in both war and modern colonial subjugation takes place in the everyday administration of the border, at a distance via advanced, persistent technologies, in the abstract of geographical contouring and the slow violence of caloric, infrastructural, and spatial control. By applying an everyday security studies lens to a settler colonial and necropolitical apparatus of control, we can explore how in/security and violence are experienced, reproduced, and resisted by aid workers, truck drivers, Gazan children, teens, and mothers as well as Israeli border officers, drone operators, and advanced technology engineers. Beyond its application to war, settler-colonialism, and necropolitics, an everyday analysis can provide a phenomenological and human-centred understanding that reveals and challenges the myriad of systems and experiences of global in/security.

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