UNPLUG AND PLAY:
MANUFACTURING COLLAPSE IN GAZA

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Abstract: This article examines how colonial violence has been recast in light of Israel's disengagement from Gaza during the summer 2005. By looking at infrastructural networks —the systems that distribute water, electricity, sewage, fuel etc—it explores how far from ending the occupation, disengagement provided a distinct spatial scale from which to experiment new methods of control and repression. In particular, it seeks to expose how these life support systems function as geopolitical sites of spatial control and as biopolitical tools to regulate and suppress life. Specially, it illustrates how the mobilization of discourses, strategies and doctrines, criminalize these critical systems turning them into 'legitimate' and 'pre-emptive' targets. Drawing on the destruction of Gaza's only power plant and the subsequent sanctions on electricity and fuel, it argues that the destruction and manipulation of infrastructural networks has severe consequences, particularly in public health. In exploring these claims with respect to Gaza, the article draws attention to the ways in which infrastructures play a crucial role in regulating the elastic Gaza's humanitarian collapse. The article closes introducing the concept of *infrastructural violence* as way to further explore this discussion.

Keywords: *Infrastructural violence, Gaza disengagement, Israel, geopolitics, biopolitics, colonialism.*

Desenchufe y Juegue: la Fabricación del Colapso en Gaza

Resumen: Este artículo analiza cómo han cambiado los roles en la violencia colonial tras la evacuación de Gaza en agosto de 2005. Enfocándose en las redes infraestructurales (es decir, los sistemas de distribución de agua, electricidad, cloacas, combustible, etc.) se asegura que, lejos de terminar con la ocupación, la evacuación implicó el surgimiento de una nueva escala espacial desde la cual experimentar nuevos métodos de control y represión. En particular, el artículo tiene por objetivo poner en evidencia que estos sistemas fundamentales para el funcionamiento de la vida son lugares geopolíticos para ejercer el control espacial, y son una herramienta biopolítica para regular y suprimir la vida. En particular se demuestra que los discursos, estrategias y doctrinas, criminalizan estos sistemas, convirtiéndolos en objetivos 'legítimos' y 'preventivos'. Basándose en la destrucción de la única planta de energía eléctrica y en las consecuentes sanciones (limitaciones en el suministro de electricidad y combustible), se establece que la destrucción y la manipulación de redes de infraestructura tienen consecuencias graves, sobretodo para la salud pública. El análisis de estas cuestiones en el caso de Gaza demuestra la importancia del rol que juegan las infraestructuras en la regulación del elástico colapso humanitario en Gaza. El artículo culmina introduciendo el concepto de *violencia infraestructural* como elemento para profundizar el debate.

Palabras clave: *violencia infraestructural; evacuación de Gaza; Israel; geopolítica; biopolítica; colonialismo*

Introduction

More than four decades of Israeli occupation have transformed the Gaza Strip into a place where life has been rendered dispensable. It is a sacrificed space: a showcase where de-colonizing moments and outbursts of resistance are crushed in spatial performances

that speak far beyond its borders. Nevertheless the actual contents of that showcase remain strangely unseen. Gaza is a space where territory and life is problematized as such; but the logistical and discursive procedures through which Gaza is made into target and a site of regulated humanitarian collapse remain hidden. How is this accomplished? And what explains its effectiveness? The aftermath of the Israeli redeployment within Gaza during the summer 2005 raises fundamental questions about how this event abstracted Gaza by way of distance. Concurrently, it demonstrates how reassembling the regime of control and containment contributed to legitimize the criminalization of everyday life and its sustaining fabric. As French philosopher Henri Lefebvre aphorises, "there is a politics of space because space is political" (Lefebvre 1976: p.33). Studying the exercise of power through actual colonial infrastructure and bureaucracies thus aims at revealing the enactment of a particularly violent politics of space.

In what follows I work with these ideas to expose the ways in which, in the wake of Gaza's unilateral disengagement plan, the Israeli government reinforces the manipulation and destruction of infrastructural networks as a political tool to create and regulate a humanitarian crisis[1]. In doing this, the paper is an attempt to develop a preliminary and critical geopolitics of the infrastructure-violence nexus in the Gaza Strip. The paper begins by describing the spatial reassemblage of Gaza following the Israeli evacuation. I argue that this new assemblage represents a new colonial reality whereby infrastructural networks gain force as geopolitical sites to assert spatial control and as biopolitical tools to regulate and suppress life. I then look at the mobilization of discourses, strategies

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1. The material collected for this paper and the actual writing of it was previous to the Israeli war of aggression against Gaza during the winter 2008-2009. Although these events have not being incorporated into this article, the bloody attack and its unfolding consequences are of the outmost importance for this study in so far as they are proof of the violent turn on Israel's occupation that this research locates in Gaza after the so called disengagement. This is particularly so in terms of the misuse and abuse of infrastructure networks for geo-and-bio political purposes as they are exposed here.

and doctrines that criminalize these public utilities as 'terrorist infrastructure', turning these essential assets into political, 'legal', and military targets. The destruction of Gaza's power plant and the subsequent sanctions on fuel supplies are used as an example to expose the wider political and public health implications of targeting these life-support systems. Finally I reflect upon the idea of *infrastructural violence* and its role in the current humanitarian catastrophe.

A Mock Farewell Party

In the early morning of September 12 2005, after shutting down the gate of the Kissufim crossing, Gaza commander Brig Gen Aviv Kochavi, the last soldier to leave the Strip, declared: "The mission has been completed … The responsibility for whatever takes place inside falls upon the [Palestinian] Authority" (Shany 2006: p.3). These words and an executive decree proclaiming the end of military rule concluded the unilateral disengagement plan in Israel's "officialdom", seemingly putting an end to 38 years of occupation of the Gaza Strip. The previous month left memorable images of a disengagement drama broadcasted around the world. Unarmed Israeli security forces pulled out defiant and distressed settlers from houses and synagogues. Meanwhile bulldozers reduced the suburban colonial landscape of Israeli settlements, military infrastructure, agricultural fields, and industrial states to rubble. In less than a month, more than eight thousand settlers were removed and the most *visible* infrastructure of the occupation completely dismantled. The world celebrated the disengagement as a move towards peace.

Yet Gaza remained subject to a suffocating closure (see Figure 1). Its territory fragmented. And the spectre of Israel intervention loomed ever-present. Furthermore, Gaza's economy had been de-developed over four decades of Israeli occupation and exposed, together with the West Bank, to a campaign of outright *urbicide* after the beginning of the second Intifada in 2001 (Roy 2004; Graham 2002). This open-ended military operation violently rewrote Gaza's geography and particularly the northern locations of Beith Hanoun, Beit Lahia, and Jabalia and
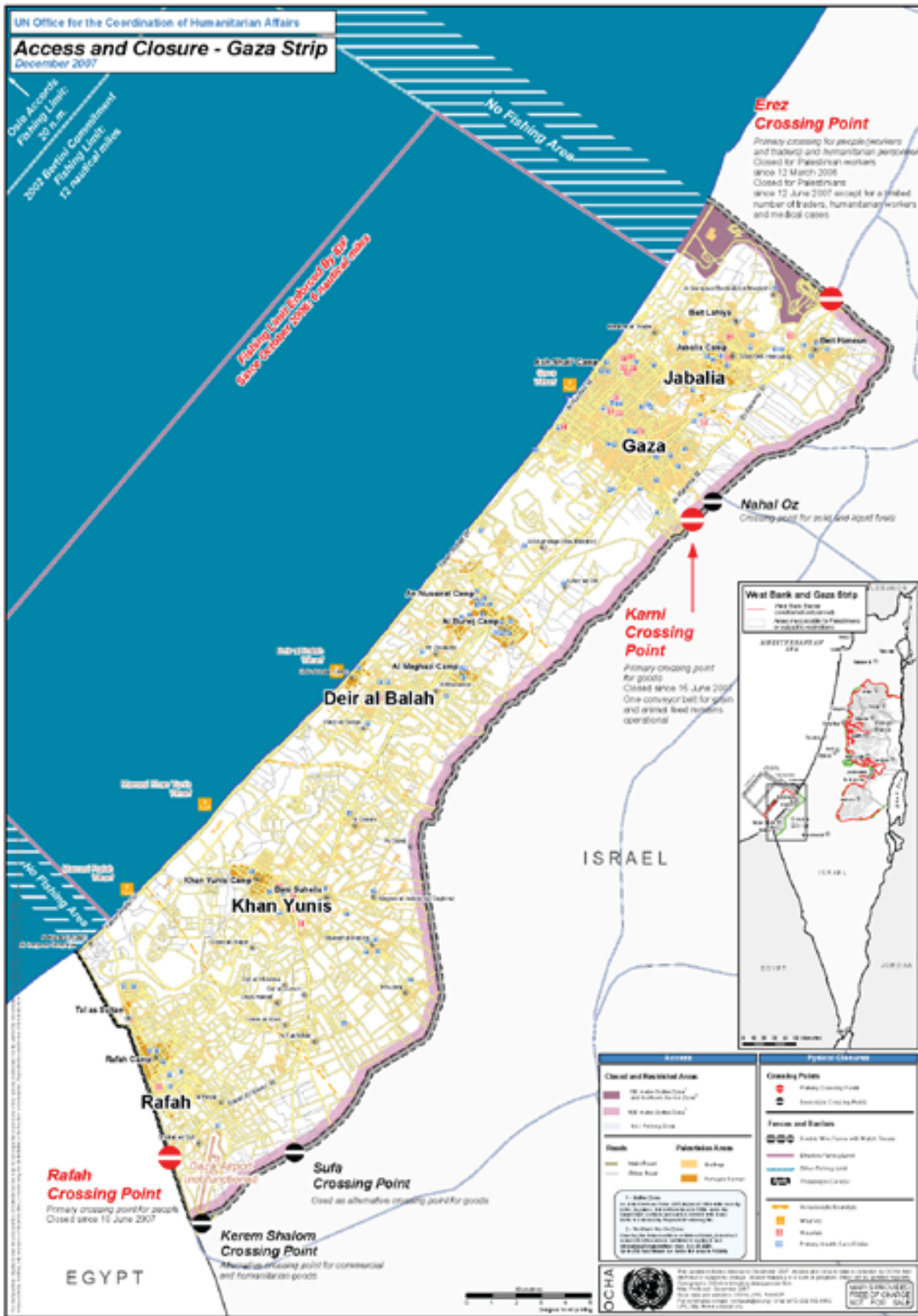
Figure 1. Access and Closure. Gaza Strip. December 2007 (source: OCHA)

the southern areas of Khan Yunis and Rafah. It was a systematic effort to 'shrink by bomb and bulldozer' these living spaces so as to fit the narrow strip within the expansion of the mid-nineties wall, the buffer zone and the spatial designs of Israel's colonial project. The human and material costs of this campaign, which were amplified by frequent closures, left Gaza in a permanent state of crisis. Yet the praised 'peace' initiative from the early nineties, the Oslo accords, was in fact the main responsible in regularizing a framework that enforced a state of permanent dependency as well as spatialities of fragmentation and segregation (Parker 1996). Disengagement was in fact a variation of an Oslo strategy that to a very real extent allowed Israeli planners to apply doctrine and concepts that had been drawn long before –namely Allon, Dayan, Drobless and Sharon Plans (Gregory 2004). These plans, albeit in different ways, sketched out arrangements for the regulation of space where the Israeli government retained control over Palestinian movement, economy, and natural resources. The result was a system of Palestinian archipelagos—islands held apart from each other and the wider world—isolated by an elaborate system of infrastructural networks, checkpoints, barriers, and outright closures. The supporting infrastructure of ordinary life became both target and weapon, an instrumental asset in Gaza's isolation, destruction, de-development, and de-humanizing experience.

As such, the disengagement was one of Ariel Sharon's –Israel's former Prime Minister—final legacies to Zionism, a staged spectacle for massive consumption both at home and abroad. In Guy Debord's terms it could be described as an event intended for paralyzing history and memory and for suppressing the historical and present time of Israel's colonial enterprise; a disengagement from time to create a false consciousness of a fake farewell party (see Debord 1994). Dov Weissglas, the architect and leading advocate and negotiator behind the plan, considered disengagement as a device to freeze time in a way that postponed indefinitely any option for peace. In his own words: "[Disengagement] supplies the amount of formaldehyde that is necessary so there

will not be a political process with the Palestinians" (Shavit 2004). The unilateral move had nevertheless higher stakes. Sharon's plan aimed at getting rid of Gaza's economic and demographic burden while revisiting its legal status as an occupied territory (Cook 2006). The Israeli Government could thus free its hands from any binding responsibility, as an occupier state, towards Gaza's territory and its inhabitants. Spectacle, as recreation of a powerful repertoire of images depicting the dismantlement of the colonial landscape and the evacuation of a civilian and military army, thus preceded and supersede any sense about the real meaning of disengagement. The evacuation certainly took place, but neither the occupation nor military law ended as Sharon try to convey from the podium of the General Assembly a month after the evacuation (Israel Prime Minister Office 2005). The transformation of Gaza into an open-air prison was but a partial geographical solution to a stagnant political-diplomatic and economic situation. Israel disengaged with time in that it tried to erase the colonial past, yet it engaged with space in a distinct scale to uphold the colonial present.

Colonial Rescaling and 'Remote Control' Occupation

It is in this context that the disengagement turned the spotlight to a delusional reality of a liberated Gaza ready to prove itself to the world. The unilateral decision to evacuate the illegal settlers from Gaza was portrayed as the definitive step towards ending the occupation, a model that could inspire the future redeployment of Israel from the West Bank, and even an economic opportunity to transform Gaza into the Dubai of the Mediterranean. Yet the reality turned out to be very different. A land-based military presence was substituted by a 'remote control' occupation in which aerial bombardment, siege, sanctions, and infrastructural networks played an increasing role, albeit not a new one, in the control and management of territory and everyday life. The very text of the disengagement plan explicitly provided much of the 'new' colonial order (Knesset 2004). The State of Israel unilaterally decided to keep the right to guard and monitor the external

perimeter of Gaza while regulating all incoming and outgoing flows of goods and people. The air space, the sea and the electromagnetic field remained under their sole security and control. Additionally, and according to the plan, the Government allowed the continuation of the supply of water, electricity, gas and petrol 'as a rule'. Essential services were thus to be provided by the very infrastructure that ties Gaza to Israel and that was left untouched after the evacuation. In addition, Israel preserved "its inherent right of self defence, both preventive and reactive, including where necessary the use of force, in respect of threats emanating from the Gaza Strip" (2004: p2). Thus the plan exposed what was little more than garrison's realignment behind the 'penitentiary' wall awaiting a sign to punish the inmates of the 'iberated' prison.

Twelve days after the evacuation the Israeli Air Forces carried out several attacks in the strip killing two persons, injuring 24 and damaging 17 houses and a school (Al-Haq 2006). The raids were an assertion of power and a reminder that the occupation had not ended. Airpower not only provided surveillance capacity over the allegedly unoccupied territory, but it was also turned into a recurrent instrument of intimidation and death. Sonic booms – shocks caused by jets breaking the sound barrier—, which reportedly cause anxiety, panic and fear in children as well as miscarriages in women, became a daily and nightly routine after disengagement (El-Sarraj 2005). These practices exposed the new spatial scale of colonial engagement and, as Darryl Li argues, confirmed airpower as the routine method to manage the occupation (Li 2006). Maj. Gen. Amos Yadlin, first air officer to hold the head of Israeli military intelligence, defined the new rules of engagement in 2004: "Our vision of air control zeroes in on the notion of control. We're looking at how you control a city or a territory from the air when it's no longer legitimate to hold or occupy that territory on the ground." (Li 2006: p.48)

In addition to airpower, infrastructural networks acquired a critical role in post-evacuated Gaza in two respects: firstly, in reassembling the regime of spatial control and secondly, in manufacturing a regulated humanitarian collapse. These seemingly banal and ubiquitous systems have been historically strategic assets binding the occupied Palestinian territories – West Bank and Gaza—to Israel, as well as the essential life arteries that sustain and facilitate the expansion of the settlement enterprise. These networks epitomize an unbreakable colonial umbilical cord that facilitates the maintenance and exercise of power and the instrumentalization over both population and territory. Stephen Graham argues how infrastructures, because of the ways in which they connect, bind, and enable life and movement, become essential targets and potential instruments of war (Graham 2005). Describing the 'geometry of the occupation' in Palestine, Eyal Weizman explains the way "[Israeli] architecture and planning were used as the continuation of war by other means. Just like the tank, the gun, and the bulldozer, building matter and infrastructure were used to achieve tactical and strategic aims. It was an urban warfare in which urbanity provided not only the theatre of war but its very weapons and ammunition" (2004: p.172). Weizman also notes how Israel maintains its power over and underneath the Palestinian territory by exercising control over the water aquifers as well as through the airways and electromagnetic fields (2004: p.190). Infrastructure networks thus become effectively essential geopolitical artefacts that expand Israel's power as tentacles over and underneath the territory.

Life Support Systems as Biopolitical Tool

The mediating geography of tubes, pipes, wires and corridors that pierces Gaza is thus an essential mechanism to control and regulate any incoming or outgoing flow to the strip. Infrastructure networks are conceived as an umbilical cord that ties colonized bodies and territory to the colonizer while at the same time enforce a severe and enduring dependency. An anxious uncertainty and unpredictability is the functioning principle of these technical systems. Palestinians are in this way systematically subjected to the will of the State of Israel which designs, manages and interferes at will with the proper functioning of these life support arteries. Given its capacity to manage

and control public utilities, the State of Israel is able to create the possibilities for life, but also to induce failure and death. This environment where seemingly insignificant technical systems periodically intrude upon the lives of the Palestinians hardly makes it to the attention of the mainstream media or academia. And when it does, it is difficult to convey the extent to which these modes of bio-power reach to the utmost details of everyday life. Infrastructural networks bring the politics of colonial occupation to the very spaces of daily life practice, invading the most intimate and private ones: the living rooms, kitchens and bathrooms of the Palestinian homes (see Barakat 1998 and Agre 2001). As Graham reminds us, the interconnected nature of these infrastructural 'scapes' and the fact that they co-evolve in their interrelationships with territorial development is what makes them seamlessly woven into the fabric of social and economic life (Graham 2005). Infrastructure networks are thus the life support systems of modern societies, source of their vitality and yet source of its own fragility and manipulation.

Since the 1967 occupation Israel pursued a double policy regarding life support systems. On the one hand it took over the existing infrastructure networks in the West Bank and Gaza, and on the other, that very infrastructure was connected to the Israeli networks creating a total dependency relation that remains in place to this day. In 1994, Oslo was essential in institutionalizing and normalizing this control apparatus that included both the very material (and immaterial) infrastructure of these networks as well as the related bureaucracies in place to regulate them. Israel was thus able to retain absolute power over natural resources, and flows of people, goods, money and essential services. In addition to the control and regulation of existing networks, the development of large and small infrastructural projects in the Palestinian areas remains to a large extend subjected to the approval by the State of Israel. This is primarily done through a dedicated infrastructural branch under the so-called civil administration; the sovereign authority in the territories that works as a bureaucratized apparatus that intrudes and actively intervenes in the daily life of the population (Tamari 1983). As it appears on the website of the Israel Defence Forces: "This branch organizes the operations of civil administration bodies in the region of Judea and Samaria [West Bank] and the *Gaza penitentiary* in all issues pertaining to water, plumbing, electricity, communication, international funding projects, and communication for the settlements in Judea and Samaria" (emphasis added) (Israeli Defence Forces 2010). To this very day, the civil administration, mainly through the 'joint cooperation committees' created as a result of Oslo, engage Palestinians and international donors and aid agencies in infrastructure project negotiations that are either endlessly delayed, seriously decapitated, or rejected for the most part (Selby 2003). Also interesting was the way Oslo turned up to be exquisitely vague when defining the transfer of infrastructure competences to the Palestinian Authority, yet extremely precise in the very amounts and quantities to be provided through these life support systems. This is particularly the case for water, electricity, fuel and telecommunications as reflected in the interim agreement (IA 1995). Israeli scientists and experts, military staff and humanitarian experts are left to provide estimations deemed necessary to fit the population growth, thus fixing and regulating the 'suitable' flow of essential services to be distributed.

The modalities of infrastructural violence brought by the second intifada and particularly by the evacuation and subsequent outright closure and separation of the Gaza strip, were nevertheless different in nature from previous practices of infrastructural rule in so far as they reconstituted and invested earlier colonial modes of biopower into more lethal forms[2]. Neve

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2. To be clear, the notion of biopower devised by Foucault to explain the forming violence(s) of "modernity" in the liberal European state, one concerned with maximizing the health and wealth of the population (Foucault 1978), cannot be applied in the colonial context of Palestine without qualification. Here, Zionist settler colonialism gave way to a biopolitics (in combination with other forms of power) that racially objectify and geographically segregate the indigenous population. This was done with the aim to "establish a delicate balance in which the health of the population and especially the physical terrain on which it exist are minimized without effecting a total elimination" (Hanafi 2009: p.113).

Gordon has shown that "it is the shifting emphasis on one or the other modes of power, rather than the introduction of new forms of control, that helps explain the extensive transformation in Israel's occupation [since 1967]" (Gordon 2008: p.11). This, according to Gordon, helps to distinguish different, yet organically linked, periods of the occupation that respond to how different forms of control operate, interact with each other and how they produce certain impacts (2008). The modes in which biopower was infused through infrastructure networks to exercise violence over bodies and territory in post-evacuated Gaza, effectively exposed the most ugly face of the radical relationality between colonizer and colonized. The geopolitics of infrastructure networks was inscribed by a biopolitics that intrudes and shapes the very mode of being and dying. Two phenomena are at work in the spatialization of violence, namely a techno-politics of space and a biopolitical instrumentalization of the body. Life is coupled in a cyborg-like binary –of human and machine—to the material appendix of networked infrastructure. The very infrastructure that serves as a tool of control and regulation is turned into a life threatening system; 'addicted' bodies dependent on the supply of the basic services machine to the extreme of death (Gandy 2005). The logics of infrastructural violence after disengagement are not as much concerned with inscribing bodies within a disciplinary apparatus as with placing bodies in the threshold of life and death. This manipulation of infrastructure forces a permanent experience of 'being in pain', a way to confer the status of 'living dead' to the object populations. This is what Mbembe describes as necropolitics, a contemporary form of subjugation of life to the power of death that drives the generalized instrumentalization of human existence and the material destruction of human bodies and populations (Mbembe 2003). However as Bhungalia notes, "perhaps, whereas Foucault produces a totalizing narrative about life, Mbembe constructs a totalizing discourse of death". Moreover she argues that "while Gaza certainly resembles Mbembe's 'death world', the Israeli state has expressed, as well, vested interest in regulating Palestinian life at a biological minimum." (Bhungalia 2009: p.355). Looking at

infrastructure networks nevertheless reveals that practices of infrastructural violence show different modes of biopower in specific time-and-space configurations and thus, have the potential to enforce one or both logics –optimization of life or death—simultaneously or in different historical moments as in the case of Gaza.

Fabricating 'Terror Infrastructure'

Underlying the use of life support systems, as both geopolitical sites and biopolitical tools, lies the mobilization of a repertoire of ideas, forms, images and imaginings that fabricate Gaza as an alien space devoid of humanity; a 'terrorist space' where the urban and rural habitat and its support systems are reduced to 'pre-emptive' sites of punishment or destruction (Finoki 2009). These discursive mechanics are a prominent feature of Israel's particular and lengthy 'war on terror' against the Palestinians. Gregory (2003: p.307), building on Edward Said, highlights how imaginative geographies fold distance into difference through a series of spatialisations, spatial demarcations that define and oppose "one's familiar space which is 'ours' and an unfamiliar space beyond 'ours' which is theirs.". Moreover, Gregory (2004b: p.185) shows how *imaginative geographies* are "in some substantial sense *performative*", and thus potentially *performances of space* given that "it produces the effect that it names". The criminalization of Gaza works very much in this way. A systematic categorization and representation of Gaza as a 'hostile territory' allows Israel to repress political and violent resistance –to colonial occupation—through symbolic and actual spatial enactments of violence.

The categorization of Gaza as 'enemy entity' is a clear-cut example of the way the machinery of *imaginative geographies* is put into motion and how it is used to justify the cuts and disruptions of infrastructure networks as a measure of collective punishment. Following frequent barrages of Palestinian homemade rockets, the 19 September 2007, three months after Hamas took control over the Gaza strip in what journalist David Rose described as a counter-coup against

Fatah (Rose 2008), Israel's security cabinet unanimously decided that Gaza was a 'hostile territory'. In light of this decision the cabinet decided to adopt a series of recommendations presented earlier by the security establishment that included: "… continuation of military and counter-terrorist operations against the terrorist organizations. Additional sanctions will be placed on the Hamas regime in order to restrict the passage of various goods to the Gaza Strip and reduce the supply of fuel and electricity. Restrictions will also be placed on the movement of people to and from the Gaza Strip. The sanctions will be enacted following a legal examination, while taking into account both the humanitarian aspects relevant to the Gaza Strip and the intention to avoid a humanitarian crisis." (Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2007: p.1).

Infrastructural networks are in this way transformed into 'terrorist infrastructure', an 'evil apparatus' that sustains 'insurgent activity', a threat that creates local and regional instability and that therefore needs to be aimed at (Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2008). News headlines, institutional declarations, and political speeches, uniformly and incessantly quote and call for the need to 'dismantle', 'target', 'disrupt', 'eliminate' or 'operate against' Gaza's supporting 'terrorist infrastructure'. The same life dependent systems that distribute electricity, fuel, water, food or sewage become incorporated into a narrative and a policy that translates into indiscriminate punishment. Law protects civilians from direct attack but, as Thomas W. Smith argues, discrimination turns to fiction "when extended to electrical grids, water supplies and other infrastructure that are the sinews of everyday life" (Smith 2002: p.361). The sanctions and disruptions are enacted under a political-juridical register that justifies what is legally unjustifiable –under international law— while appealing to an exceptional and-or emergency situation. For the State of Israel the logic is one of *lawfare,* what former American General and military judge Charles Dunlap calls "the use of law as a weapon of war". Eyal Weizman expands this notion to explain the elastic nature of the law and the power of military action in the case of Gaza. He argues how Gaza is turned into an experiment to test

new warfare techniques and where "certain limits are tested and explored: the limits of the legal, the limits of the ethical, the limits of the tolerable, the limits of what can be done to people in the name of 'war on terror'." (Weizman 2009: p.5). The fabrication of the 'hostile territory' formula thus not only rewrites geography and creates a dedicated legal terminology; it becomes, paradoxically, the means to legitimize the exercise of repression. Yet indiscriminate violence, as the Security Cabinet agreed, is one with 'humanitarian concerns'.

Infrastructural Oxygen: "Cut it all off!"

The fabrication of *imaginative geographies* has been an essential mechanism to single out infrastructure networks as assets that need to be either disrupted or destroyed, as well as a powerful tool to mobilize both political and public consent. A post-evacuated Gaza emptied of settlers and fully isolated, provided the ideal scenario to exercise collective punishment through the interconnected network of infrastructures that previously served both Israelis and Palestinians. Jonathan Cook notes how Ariel Sharon's team first proposed cutting off electricity to the strip after disengagement (Cook 2008). The measure, as Cook argues, was rejected for both being suspected of violating international law and as a move that could undermine Fatah's chance of wining the January 2006 elections (Cook 2008b). Hamas did win the elections, and in the early morning hours of the 28 June 2006, less than a year after the disengagement, the Israeli Air Forces fired eight missiles that destroyed the six generators of the only Power Plant in Gaza. This decision was justified as an attempt to release an Israeli soldier captured three days earlier over the border. B'tselem, the Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, however, reported that the attack constituted a war crime and that it "derive directly from one cold, calculated decision, made by Israel's prime minister, defense minister, and the IDF chief of staff" (B'tselem 2006: p.2). In addition the report expressed its reservations about the leitmotiv of the attack, arguing that it had nothing to do with

the attempts to release the soldier or achieve military needs.

Prior to the bombing of the electricity plant, Gaza used about 220 megawatts of power: approximately 100 megawatts produced by the Palestinian Electric Corporation (PEC), and the remaining 110 megawatts provided by the Israeli Electric Corporation Company (IEC). Yet, as B'tselem highlights, "in addition to the direct dependence on electricity from Israel, Gaza's electricity sector is indirectly dependent on Israel: all the fuel and natural gas needed to operate the turbines of the Gaza power plant come from Israel" (B'tselem 2006: p.5) The destruction of the power plant added to, and enhanced, what already was a chronic dependency on a legacy of colonial infrastructure used to manipulate and regulate the life of the colonized. Yet this particular attack was important in so far as it manifested the turn from a "regulatory" to an "asphyxiatory" application of power. The destruction of the power plant was but the kickoff for military operation codenamed Summer Rains. Rains did indeed fall over the power plant but also drenched Gaza's infrastructural fabric, particularly electricity networks. The ground military operation that followed the destruction of Gaza's power plant targeted the power distribution network, as well as water mains, sewage systems, roads, bridges, or telecommunication systems. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) estimated the damage caused to Palestinian infrastructure by IDF incursions, shelling and rocket attacks to be USD 15.5.million; not including the USD 15 million in damage caused by the IAF air strike on the Gaza power plant (OCHA 2006).

Bombing the power plant left Gaza entirely dependent on Israel's production of electricity and fuel supplies and marked the beginning of an open policy of infrastructural violence. Haim Ramon, Minister of Justice at the time and former Vice Premier, elaborated on the issue of infrastructure and collective punishment following the decision to declare Gaza strip a 'hostile territory'. Ramon referred to the term 'infrastructural oxygen' as a new doctrine advocating the cutting off electricity, fuel and water supply to Gaza (Levy 2007). Ramon already proposed this doctrine a year earlier by suggesting an air warfare campaign –as opposed to land invasion—that would turn Lebanon into "a country with no water, no electricity, no fuel" (Azoulay 2007). Although the security cabinet apparently rejected his plan, after the invasion, Amnesty International published a report accusing the State of Israel of war crimes for deliberately destroying Lebanon's civilian infrastructure (Amnesty International 2006). Nevertheless Ramon was not alone in voicing this 'new' approach to deal with Gaza. For instances, Tzipi Livni, former Foreign Minister, backed his proposal and added that it is "inconceivable that life in Gaza continues to be normal" (Levy 2007: p.1). These declarations only added to increasing political pronouncements that unanimously supported repressive military actions targeting life itself. Dov Wiesglass, the person behind the disengagement, had already provided the way forward in what seemed to be an amusing security cabinet meeting immediately after Hamas had won elections. Israel's policy, he said, would be "like an appointment with a dietician. The Palestinians will get a lot thinner, but won't die." (Levy 2006: p.1). These events uncovered a very troubling reality; that the Palestinian cannot be seen to be living without pain, that the spectacle, the "witnessing" effect in the moment of asphyxiating near death is in itself part of the life-source of the regime which demands the Palestinian collapse. As Bhungalia argues, "In Gaza, death is not 'something to be hidden away' but something to be strategically exposed. The spectacle of death is a critical reminder of the stakes involved in continued Hamas rule." (Bhungalia 2008: p.355). Ramon's infrastructure oxygen doctrine followed this logic, for infrastructure networks provided the biopolitical tool to regulate a diet of electricity, fuel, gas and water. Yet, as we shall see the 'won't die' variable in this equation happened to be wrong.

The full realization and sanction of the doctrine came in September 2007 with the plan commissioned to Deputy Defence Minister Matan Vilani to limit essential services in Gaza. For Vilani the logic of the plan was as follows: "because this is an entity

that is hostile to us there is not reason for us to supply them with electricity *beyond the minimum required to prevent a crisis*" (Greenberg 2007) (emphasis added). The plan established that the supply of electricity and fuel would be reduced to a minimum that preserves the 'humanitarian needs'. This shift towards the more benevolent realm of the humanitarian functioned as a way to cover an unlawful politically driven decision, and to redirect national security discourses away from military based approaches (see Berman 2005). The 'humanitarian minimum', decided according to State and military calculations, reflects, as Darryl Li argues, how this notion "reduces the needs, aspirations, and rights of 1.4 million human beings to an exercise in counting calories, megawatts, and other abstract, one-dimensional units that measure distance from death." (Li 2008: p2). The plan managed to reduce the Gaza population to a condition of *living death* –as oppose to politically qualified individuals with rights— dependent on Israel's will to let them live or die in function of their tolerance and not of any right to life. Whether occupied or hostile territory, and independently of the continuous qassam rocket barrages, the State of Israel had decisively adopted an open policy to target infrastructural networks –and thus the population as a whole—that allegedly constituted war crimes, collective punishment and sanctions against the Palestinian population (Gisha 2008). Yet when Defence Minister Ehud Barak gave green light to the plan in October, an article published by the English version of Yedioth Ahronoth –Israel's most-read newspaper—argued that: "the decision was not part of punishment measures, but rather an implementation of Israel's gradual disengagement from Gaza following Hamas' takeover of the Strip."(Greenberg 2007). The talkback comments at the bottom of the article are indicative of the reader's mood: "cut it all off", "Barak what a sissy your are", "turn off the power in the West Bank as well" or "Turning Off Power Helps Slow Global Warming".

The Thousand Deaths of Gaza

Cuts in electricity and fuel, although not officially, started immediately after the destruction of Gaza's power plant. Already in July 2006, Gisha, the Israeli legal centre for freedom of movement, had issued various statements directed to the Defence minister calling to restrain from further damaging the resources critical for normal life, as well as to restore the interrupted supply of fuel and necessary equipment to continue the provision of electricity. In the aftermath of operation Summer Rains (2005) OCHA reported that Gaza households were receiving six to eight hours of electricity per day, while most facilities in the urban areas were getting two to three hours of running water (OCHA 2006). Several organizations –Adalah, Gisha, Palestinian Center for Human Rights, Al-Haq or B'tselem but to name a few— were crucial in raising visibility to the severe consequences of bringing forward a policy that targeted Gaza's fabric of life. What was described as a critical socio-economic and public health situation only worsened in the following years as a result of Israel's policy to maintain systematic electrical interruptions, power stoppages, fuel cuts, and a strict closure impeding the entrance of spare parts to repair network damages, let alone other 'non-essential humanitarian needs' such as medicine or food (Aid Agency of the Australian Council of Trade Unions 2008).

The 'infrastructural oxygen' doctrine worked as a chain reaction that immediately spread across the Gaza strip shaking every dimension of everyday life. Directly or indirectly every inhabitant of the strip was affected. Modern life as we know it was forced to a halt. Electricity disruption impacted on home electric devices such as refrigerators, making impossible to preserve food, or elevators that stopped running in the multi-storied buildings that sustain Gaza's urban density. Many family businesses such as bakeries or sewing ateliers had to close. Without electricity, water could not be extracted from the wells and then put into the distribution system to be later pumped into houses or industries. Neither could dirty waters from houses be transferred to sewage treatment plants. In addition, health services were severely affected by the impossibility to obtain regular power supply to run lifesaving equipment, generate oxygen, practice surgery operations, treat dialysis patients, or maintain

a minimal level of sanitation to avoid epidemics. The only option left to replace electric supply were fuel run generators, only in possession of some institutions and to those who could afford it. Nevertheless generators constantly failed after prolonged periods of time, and sanctions made it extremely difficult and expensive to obtain the necessary fuel to use these devices as a reliable alternative source. A businessman from Gaza captured the severity of the crisis during the summer of 2006: "We have been thrown back to the way people lived 100 years ago, with no electricity. We do not have water, we don't have milk for our kids" (Gisha 2006: p.1)"

The results of the infrastructural oxygen doctrine designed in the offices of the Israeli Ministry of Justice, were but a calculated application of complex military doctrine underpinning contemporary infrastructural warfare. As Graham (2005) explains, these attacks are systematic de-modernization efforts that target not only military forces but their civil societies as well. Targeting the electricity power plant and disrupting fuel distribution is considered in military terms as an 'effect-based-operation' (EBO). Israel knew too well that the consequences of this attack would have immediate and spiral effects aiming to induce complete societal chaos.

The flow of electricity and fuel was at this stage relentlessly reduced to achieve the proposed aim of a 'humanitarian minimum'. The petition to the Israeli Supreme Court made by several human rights organizations, in cooperation with the deputy director of the Coastal Municipalities Water Utility and a farmer from Beit Hanoun, did not impede the State of Israel to continue the allegedly illegal collective punishment while the hearings were still going on (Gisha 2008). After several months the petition was finally rejected by Israel's Supreme Court, despite the documented evidence of harm to civilians caused by fuel and electricity cuts. As the Director of the legal center for Arab minority rights in Israel (Adalah) Hassan Jabari argued: "according to the Supreme Court's decision, it is permitted to harm Palestinian civilians and create a humanitarian crisis for political reasons. This

constitutes a war crime under international criminal law." (Gisha 2008b: p.2). On the evening of January 20 2008, few months after partial service had been restored, Gaza's power plant ceased production. From this moment on the plant ceased production several times and the flow of electricity becomes continuously discontinued only reinforcing a situation of permanent collapse (see Figure 2)

The 'humanitarian implosion' affecting Gaza was reflected in two reports published in 2008 by several recognized international organizations (OXFAM 2008; OCHA 2008). The documents provide substantial evidence of the public health catastrophe lived in the Gaza strip: three quarters of Gaza's population are dependent on food aid, unemployment is close to half the total population, only 23 out of 3,900 industrial enterprises are currently operational, schools had cancelled classes high on energy consumption, hospitals experience power cuts lasting for 8-12 hours, almost 30% of the population does not receive running water, 80% of the drinking water supplied does not meet WHO standards, 70% of agricultural land in Gaza are no longer being irrigated, and 70 millions liters of sewage goes into the sea due the lack of fuel to pump or treat human waste resulting in significant environmental damage. Although these figures reveal the accumulation of years of siege and blockade, most of them are directly or indirectly a result of the destruction of infrastructure and the manipulation, cuts and restrictions on essential services.

Life in Gaza was suspended and readjusted to an unpredictable schedule entirely dependent on electricity and fuel supply. The power to impose the everyday rhythms of life was exercised by Israel's easy-trigger finger over the 'on-off' switch button: a deliberate attack on public health aiming at the very fabric of life. The years following the destruction of the power plant exposed an elastic 'humanitarian crisis', suspended in time, and continuously 'on verge of collapse' or 'on the brink of disaster' (see Figure 3). As Karen Koning Abu Zayd, the head of UNRWA warned, "Gaza is on the threshold of becoming the first territory to be intentionally reduced to a state of

Figure 2. Power Supply to the Gaza Strip. January 2009 (source: OCHA)

Figure 3. Tranfer of industrial diesel from Israel to the Gaza Strip. November 2008 – January 2009 (source: Gisha)

abject destitution, with the knowledge, acquiescence and – some would say – encouragement of the international community." (McGirk 2008: p.374). Yet, the real collapse of Gaza started with its occupation in 1967 (or even before) and has since then being intensified and postponed. As Patrick Wolfe notes, "settler colonizers come to stay: invasion is a structure not an event" (Wolfe 2006: p.388). Post-disengagement Gaza only provided a new contained spatial scenario for a critical patient: an intensive care unit exposed to the world as a 'big brother' television show where the tension lies on observing a patient' struggle between death and life every time 'infrastructural oxygen' tubes are turned off and back on.

Fuel for Thought

In deconstructing a particular historical event and its subsequent unfolding dynamics this paper has tried to highlight the ways in which colonial violence, in its discursive and material dimensions, is inscribed in physical space as well as in everyday life. By looking at infrastructural networks, the mediating mechanisms that support everyday life, this paper has shown how Israeli policies of collective punishment remain enabled in post-disengagement Gaza. We have argued how a violent production of space involves discursive reworkings and imaginative geographies, as well as reassembling relations of subjugation. Infrastructural networks, usually taken for granted and neglected, become geopolitical sites and biopolitical tools where relations of power at a distance reach into the tiniest details of daily life through the rearrangements of basic service provision. In addition, the paper has exposed how the manipulation and systematic disconnection of these essential and critical systems has vast public health consequences. This is particularly so if we consider the long term consequences of targeting and manipulating infrastructural networks as oppose to immediate effects of military attacks. The paper stresses the critical role that infrastructure networks have in manufacturing collapse in Gaza, nevertheless

we need to be careful not to over-generalize or exaggerate about the role of these systems in compounding for the overall crisis. They have played a crucial role in combination with many other factors such as incessant military operations and an outright closure of goods and movement.

The exposure of the ways in which violence is exercised through infrastructure networks raises the need to "expand the range of referents of political violence beyond the anthropocentric horizon to include the material fabric of urban life" (Coward 2006: p.419). Yet to only focus on the physical damage and disruptions to electrical, fuel, water and sewage networks would miss the point. Thus, as Muna Giacaman has argued, it is important to emphasize "the social and humanitarian elements that have significant impact on civilian health and life and future societal development." (Giacaman et al 2004: p.289). Accordingly, a full analysis of the infrastructure-violence nexus must be sought in a study of the systems that enable connection across wider configurations in time and space, it is here that we can map and eventually understand the power of more subtle spatializing practices that seek to enable strategies of domination. The concept of *infrastructural violence* provides a particularly useful lens through which to study the systematic politics of spatial reengineering that undoes the ordinary geographies of everyday life by generating and unfolding a hostile topography of infrastructure networks for purposes of population management and repression as well as territorial segregation and control. That is, the violent abuse and misuse of the interconnected set of socio-technical systems that sustain modern societies.

Acknowledgments

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