

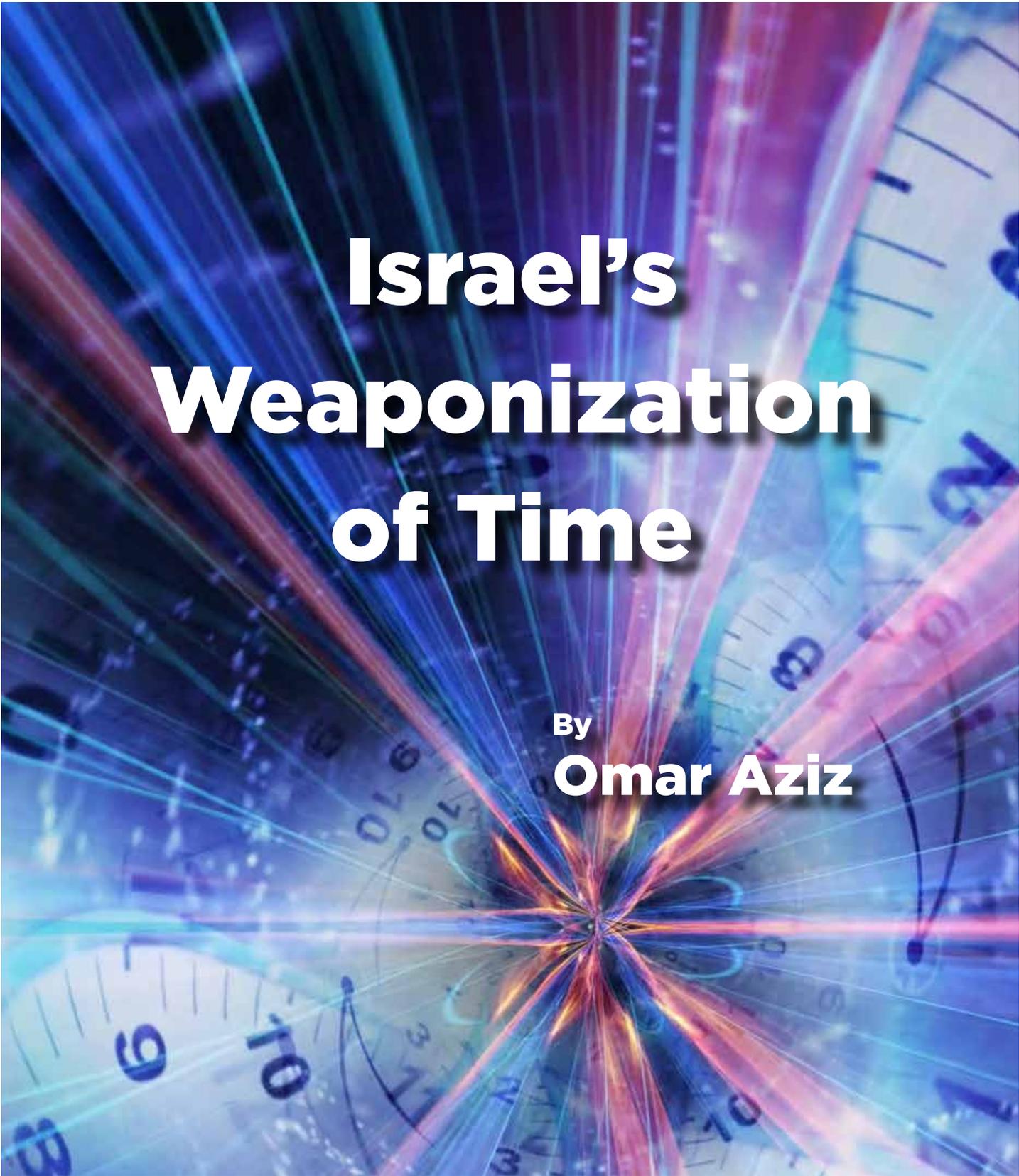
# *The Link*

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The background of the cover is a complex, abstract composition. It features a central point from which numerous thin, multi-colored lines (in shades of blue, purple, and pink) radiate outwards, creating a starburst or lens flare effect. These lines are overlaid on a background of several clock faces, which are slightly blurred and semi-transparent, suggesting a sense of motion and the passage of time. The overall aesthetic is futuristic and digital.

## **Israel's Weaponization of Time**

By  
**Omar Aziz**

## About This Issue

The first time I sat down with John Mahoney since breaking bread with him decades earlier in the Interchurch Building, a.k.a the “God Box,” he told me the next issue of *The Link* was already sorted out. A week earlier, he and the Board had invited me to become AMEU’s fourth Executive Director, and so, for the first time in my 30-plus years as an avid Link subscriber and reader, I was being offered a rare sneak preview around the corner and into tomorrow’s front page.

Omar Aziz’s feature article “The Weaponization of Time” hones the argument he has recently made elsewhere, and reminded me of the confident grit that I have for so long admired about *The Link*, and the invisible hand that has so consistently and deftly guided its course. Chronicling the “permanent precarity” wrought by Occupation — the deaths from vaccinations withheld; the literally ticking timebombs of unexploded ordinance in Gaza; the caprice of collective punishment; the whiplash of the Israeli judicial system — the author shines a light through the curtain of Occupation, and lays bare the systematic theft of Palestinian agency. I feel grateful to be introducing many of our readers to the powerful young voice of Omar Aziz. Omar is Associate Director at *Palestine Deep Dive* ([www.palestinedeepdive.com](http://www.palestinedeepdive.com)), an invaluable online resource on Israel Palestine since 2019.

As I settle in at AMEU’s office — still nestled uptown in the God Box — I look forward to getting to know you, the Reader, and strengthening our reach into the American conversation. I am grateful to John Mahoney for his unstinting commitment to an issue that remains at the center of the American promise, no less precarious now than it was when AMEU was founded over half a century ago. The difference now, insha’llah, is the youth are listening, and hearing, reading, and speaking.

AMEU is committed to amplifying those voices, and is grateful for your support.

Nicholas Griffin  
Executive Director

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# Israel's Weaponization of Time

By Omar Aziz

"Time is no friend of ours" most Palestinians won't be afraid to tell you. And in Gaza especially, you would be forgiven for thinking that for many years, time has been stuck on a repeat in a loop of its own.

By now, the hyper-regulated system of control Israel wields over Palestinians' everyday lives is well-documented. Jeff Halper, co-founder of the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions (ICAHD), developed the term "Matrix of Control" to describe the extent of Israel's reach into all facets of Palestinian existence, from the most banal functions of the administrative state, to the outright expropriation of land and property, to the unchecked use of military force. With apartheid walls and myriad checkpoints crisscrossing the West Bank, systematically fragmenting Palestinian communities between East Jerusalem and Areas A, B, and C, not to mention Gaza's hermetic siege and those driven into exile, Israel's spatial domination of Palestinian life is plain to see to all who visit or complete a quick Google search.

But when we listen to Palestinian voices and their accounts of daily life at the hands of Israel's apartheid and settler-colonialism, so much more is revealed. What becomes clear is that Israel's matrix of control extends beyond the spatial and into the temporal, manipulating the experience of each second, each hour, and each day.

Where Israel unleashes lightning military strikes and unilateral offenses, and affords its own citizens access to the ever-accelerating speeds of this modern age, Palestinians by contrast, are kept waiting, and waiting, and waiting. At checkpoints they wait, and on sluggish internet connections, for travel permits, under siege, they wait to be granted the right to return home, for loved ones to be released from detention. Families are then made to

wait again, for the bodies of slain relatives to be returned to them, for burial.

After 54 years of so-called "temporary" occupation, perhaps Ariel Sharon was right when he proclaimed, "time is on our side," with Israel's incremental colonization advancing seemingly unabated for decades now. Yet, with each day, despite Israel's regime of enforced waiting being at its most sophisticated, a sense of collective agency, especially among young Palestinians and against all odds, seems to be growing. Before we can fully appreciate the significance of this energetic surge and what we can all learn from it, we must first understand from where it is emerging.

## In the Blink of an Eye

Half a second, one hundredth of a second, one thousandth of a second ... what difference can the blink of an eye really make over a lifetime? In a world where time becomes ever more compressed, the potential capacity of even the millisecond grows exponentially. And it would be an understatement to say we live in an era increasingly reliant on digital technology, instant communications, and global networks of information exchange, now all fundamental elements of growth models in the developed world.

Lauding itself the 'Start up Nation,' rapid digital connectivity keeps Israel's high-tech sector competitive in the global market, accounting for 61% of its total net-service exports. As Mona Shtaya, Local Advocacy Manager at 7amleh – the Arab Center for the Advancement of Social Media, tells me, "Israel continues to brand itself as tech savvies who race to achieve things first in the

world. Remember how they were first globally to distribute Covid vaccines?” But, she adds, “when it comes to Palestinians, they are trying to create delays. In fact, not just any delays – it takes Palestinians decades to get the same services.”

While granting its own citizens high-speed internet coverage, Israel continues to systematically deny the five million Palestinians under its occupation access to the same technology. Israel’s 3G networks went into service in 2004, were upgraded to 4G in 2014, then to 5G coverage in 2020. Yet right now in Gaza, Palestinians still endure 2G coverage and Israel granted the West Bank access to 3G only in 2018. Even then, the delays continue for most Palestinians, as the technology is simply too expensive to access.

The differences between 2G, 3G, 4G, and 5G networks are monumental. A standard webpage on a 2G network takes around 3 minutes to load, compared to 0.5 seconds on 4G; to download a mobile application may take 40 minutes on 2G compared to 8 seconds on 4G. Video calls are impossible on 2G along with most day-to-day online activities many of us now take for

granted. The huge differences between these networks are the measure of today’s digital divide.

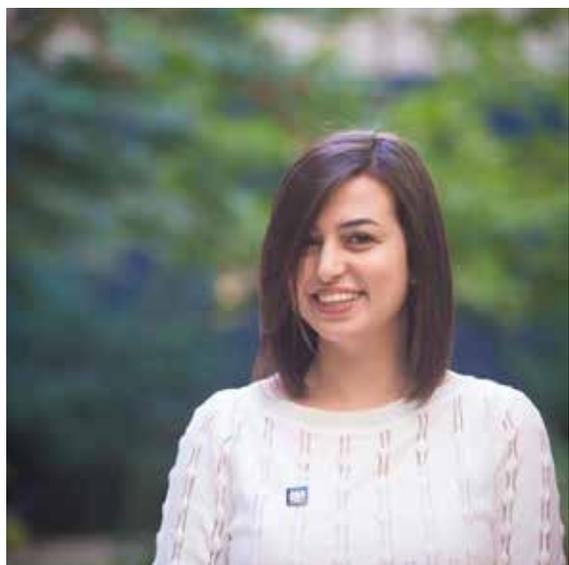
Israel has constrained access to the electromagnetic spectrum by delaying the granting of licenses to Palestinian mobile telecommunications companies. They are able to do so, as Shtaya explains, because “under the Oslo Accords, all the communications infrastructure was placed in Israeli-controlled Area C of the West Bank – making it subject to Israeli approval and requiring permits to move forward with these technologies.”

In most instances, workarounds are costly. Abdul Majeed Melhem, general manager of Jawwal, one of Palestine’s two leading telecom companies, states on his company’s website, “we were forced to use switchboards in London instead of Palestine as the Israeli occupation seized our equipment in 2001.” A 2016 World Bank Report estimates that the total revenue loss for Palestinian telecommunications operators caused by Israeli obstructionism could range from \$436 million to \$1.1 billion over three years.

For years, Israeli network operators have built 3G and 4G towers in illegal settlements throughout the West Bank. Oftentimes, these towers are erected on privately owned Palestinian land, granting high speed network access to settlers and profiting from frustrated Palestinians who have no alternative but to resort to using smuggled Israeli SIM cards.

Adequate network infrastructure is a prerequisite for any functioning economy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, including those enduring siege and occupation. Taken together, these seemingly microscopic delays contribute dramatically to the longterm economic prospects of both the West Bank and Gaza, especially in the latter where electricity is shut off for up to 20 hours per day due to power shortages caused by the siege.

Israel controls everything that enters or exits Gaza. Ahmed Alnaouq, from Gaza and now living in



Mona Shtaya *Courtesy of Omar Aziz*

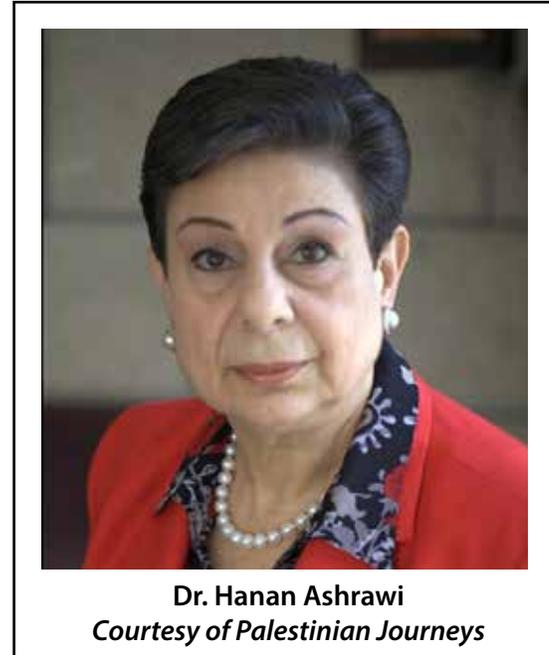
London, explained to me Israel's selection process. "They do allow laptops and smart phones inside Gaza, not because they care about us but because they use these devices as spying tools against the Palestinians. This is one of the primary ways of getting information about us. They hack all of our phones and laptops ... They only allow in things that serve their own purposes." The capacity for widespread surveillance of 2G network coverage is light work compared to penetrating the security offered by 3G. But even that offers scarce sanctuary for Palestinians from Israel's control and penetration of fiber optic cables carrying digital information from Palestine and beyond, and from the infiltration of the handheld devices themselves by Israeli spyware such as Pegasus.

Palestinians, being at the brunt end of Israel's temporal violence right from the first millisecond of their digital lives, are all too aware that time is an artifact of power, and that the question of who has control over the time of others is inherently political.

## Minutes ... Become Hours

Over 5,000 military laws and edicts dominate the lives of Palestinians, attempting to stall daily life in every way imaginable. Often it is not possible to even dig for water, start a business, work, travel, study, tend crops, obtain medical care without first having to confront Israel's occupation bureaucracy for permission.

At the same time as Israel's citizens and illegal settlers drive freely on pristine highways, Israel forces Palestinians to wait indefinitely at checkpoints or attempt to meander lengthy detours on dilapidated back roads. Palestinian politician Dr. Hanan Ashrawi described to me her own experiences of being forced to wait under occupation. "I was in my car with two of my assistants, my driver, and with my posters and leaflets going to Jerusalem to campaign because I was running for Jerusalem. I was stopped at the



**Dr. Hanan Ashrawi**  
*Courtesy of Palestinian Journeys*

checkpoint. They beat up my assistants. I tried to rescue them, they beat me up and then they held me up all day there. And they confiscated my posters and leaflets. The next day I went back and I got through.... There is nothing normal under occupation.... Every aspect of your life is determined by this system of control. It is so pervasive, institutionalized, and structured. It is so cruel."

With over 700 road obstacles and at least 140 checkpoints across the West Bank and East Jerusalem, forcing Palestinians to wait sometimes minutes, sometimes hours, or sometimes forcing them to turn back altogether, every Palestinian there has stories of the injustices faced as a consequence of these physical manifestations of weaponized time. During the Second Intifada 60 women were forced to give birth at checkpoints; 36 babies and five women died as a result.

Farah Nabulsi's 2021 BAFTA-winning short film "*The Present*", now on Netflix, dramatizes these temporal injustices through the story of a father and daughter attempting to pass a checkpoint during a shopping trip. The film powerfully displays how checkpoints not only incapacitate individuals but can ignite collective and intergenerational trauma each time one is forced to ap-

proach them. When the apartheid regime's unpredictable and ever-changing net of barriers, curfews and closures makes planning ahead virtually impossible, the future is rendered uncertain and time becomes an enemy.

Violence, harassment, and intimidation of Palestinians are commonplace occurrences at checkpoints; in the most tragic cases, these supposed 'security structures' have become death traps for Palestinians, when even the slightest mistake becomes the excuse for the Occupation force's hair trigger. The June 2020 extrajudicial killing of 26-year-old Ahmed Erekat is only the most recent example, where, while en route to his sister's wedding in a rental car, Ahmed's low-speed collision with a concrete barrier at Bethlehem's 'Container' checkpoint resulted in his death at the hands of Border Police moments later. As he exited the vehicle and backed away from the soldiers, posing no threat, he was shot six times, three times while he was on the ground.

## Hours into Days ... Days into Weeks

Gaza is home to one million children. One million children living in one of the world's most densely populated places, a 141 square-mile strip of land Israel completely blockaded by land, air, and sea. Every mortar Israel fires and every missile Israel aims toward Gaza is done in the knowledge that children will inevitably end up recipients of its devastation. Israel's bombing campaign "Operation Guardian of the Walls" killed 67 children in 11 days during May, roughly one-quarter of the total fatalities. A vast majority of children in Gaza unsurprisingly show signs of deep psychological distress and 60% are anemic.

The systematic nature of Israel's temporal violence is more blatant in Gaza than anywhere else. I spoke with Dr. Bahzad Al-Akhras, a medical doctor and child mental health specialist working in Gaza, about life there today, and how time may be a factor in health

outcomes. "I would agree that time is our biggest enemy; we are suffering a lot from the psychological pain of waiting for something that some of us feel is not happening in the future," Dr. Bahzad said. The ongoing collective punishment of two million people, where 97% of water is undrinkable, who have been forced to endure a man-made humanitarian catastrophe, minute after minute, day after day, for 15 years now. In 2008,



**Dr. Bahzad Al-Akhras**  
*Courtesy of Omar Aziz*

senior advisor to Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, Dov Weinglass, explained how Israeli policy in Gaza was "to put the Palestinians on a diet," though, he quickly added "but not to make them die of hunger." This was backed up by findings from Israeli documents from 2008 that cynically calculated the minimal caloric intake necessary for Palestinians to avoid outright malnutrition in spite of the blockade.

Dr. Bahzad informed me of another way in which Israel uses timing as a psychological weapon to cause maximum distress during bombardments. "During the

last escalation I was much more scared than during the previous escalations because there was no electricity and the sounds of the drones and the war planes were really awful. Especially with this late-night bombardment – most of the bombardments were late in the night. This puts more psychological pain because humans tend to go into deep sleep during the last third of the night, but we were forced to remain awake in a very dehumanizing way. You just wait. You don't know if this bombardment will be near your home, it may hit a friend's home or a relative's home in another city. So it was painful and emotionally intolerable.”

Not surprisingly, the extreme nature of the suffering in Gaza requires new paradigms of mental health and support, with there being no “post” traumatic stress in Gaza, as the trauma is ongoing. “In Gaza the incident is never ending. In 2006 there was the first escalation ... then in 2009, then 2012, in 2014, and now in 2021, and so on, in a continuous traumatic event. And now the world is speaking and researching the concept of continuous traumatic stress disorder.” Even the reconstruction of Gaza is forcibly slowed down, with Israel blocking essential materials, such as water pumps, elevators, and iron when and as it chooses.

Along the continuous spectrum of Israel's weaponization of time against Palestinians, the most obvious example may be unexploded ordinance. Often dormant for months in residential areas or even under schools, they lie as silent reminders of the destruction caused by the 2,750 aerial attacks and 2,300 artillery shells launched against Gaza in May, and a sinister reminder of Israel's rapid destructive power that can be re-ignited at any moment. On June 9, nine-year-old Obaida al-Dahdouh was killed after finding an unexploded device in his garden in the east of the enclave.

At the epicenter of Israel's temporal matrix of control is, of course, the prison. And today perhaps no other people as a whole are more familiar with the inside

of a cage than the Palestinians. Since 1948, it is estimated that one in five Palestinians have been incarcerated, with over 800,000 arrested in the West Bank and Gaza alone since 1967. Today there are 4,650 political prisoners, 200 of whom are children.

Israel's military judicial system sees Palestinians tried at military courts that hold a 99% conviction rate with over 1,600 criminal codes incriminating basic civic engagement, such as participation in demonstrations, which can be considered destruction of public order.

In 2016, Israeli soldier Elor Azaria shot dead already motionless Abed al-Fattah Yusri al-Sharif in occupied Al-Khalil (Hebron). He was sentenced to 18 months in jail, of which he served 9 months. Meanwhile, in the same year, five Palestinian boys from Jerusalem aged 14-17 were arrested for allegedly throwing stones at cars and given sentences from 2-4 years, which some even argued was lenient considering such an offence offers a maximum sentence of 20 years in prison under Israel's military law. It is not an exaggeration to say that every Palestinian has been impacted directly or indirectly by Israel's weaponization of time through what can only be understood as a policy of-mass incarceration.



Ahed Tamimi Source: @AhadTamimi5

Ahed Tamimi was just one of hundreds of children Israel kept in cages when she was incarcerated in 2017, at age 16. Recently speaking to British rapper Lowkey on *a/Political*, Ahed described the pain she endured during the interrogation process ahead of her conviction. “Each day, at 2:00 am exactly, the soldiers came to take me to the interrogation room where they kept asking me, ‘Who is backing you? Why are you doing this? What is your name?’ It stayed like this for about 16 days. I couldn’t sleep.”

Almost all of the arrests of Palestinians are conducted through middle of the night raids, with Israeli soldiers bursting into Palestinian homes, often ransacking them and terrorizing family members. The IDF even carries out such raids in Area A, supposedly under total Palestinian control, thus exposing the illusory nature of Palestinian autonomy under occupation.

## Weeks into Months ... Into Years

By now it comes as no surprise to learn that Israel forced Palestinians under occupation to wait for COVID-19 vaccines. Israel began vaccinating its 9.3 million citizens in December 2020 and by May had clearly executed the world’s fast program, having administered two doses to 54.4% of its population. At the same time, 5 million Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza were forced to wait.

Once again Israel employed the temporary Oslo Accords to attempt to negate its responsibility here, despite Article 56 of the Geneva Conventions specifically mentioning medical supplies relating to a pandemic:

“The Occupying Power has the duty of ensuring and maintaining ... public health and hygiene in the occupied territory, with particular reference to the adoption and application of the prophylactic and preventive measures necessary to combat the spread of contagious disease and epidemics.”

Israel did begin vaccinating some West Bank Palestinians in March, but only laborers with Israeli work permits. En masse, Israel has delayed Palestinians from accessing vaccines for as long as possible, forcing them to look elsewhere to China, Russia, and the World Health Organization-led COVAX program.

In February, Israel even held up for several days the delivery of a mere 2,000 Sputnik COVID vaccines that were destined for medical staff and COVID patients. An Israeli security source stated the

vaccines were not allowed to pass into Gaza as the ‘request was still being processed.’ Yet in the same month, Prime Minister Netanyahu attempted to send vaccines around the world to allies, including Hungary and Guatemala – two of the first countries that had endorsed Israel’s illegal claim to Jerusalem as its capital.

Unquestionably, Israel’s temporal violence in delaying access to vaccines for Palestinians has been deadly. Not only have 4,236 Palestinians in Gaza, the West Bank, and Jerusalem already died from COVID at the time of writing, damningly but predictably, the Case Fatality Rate (the proportion of deaths among confirmed cases) remains significantly higher for Palestinians in the occupied territory than in Israel itself. With 1.0% CFR in Gaza and the West Bank, compared with 0.6% in Israel,

**Every society is founded  
on a relation of speed:  
the one who goes the fastest  
has the ability to  
collect taxes, to conquer,  
and to exploit society.**

- Paul Virilio

clearly the extreme health inequalities Palestinians suffer under Israel's occupation, especially in the Gaza Strip, have been compounding the lethal effects of the virus.

The dangers of this "permanent assault on time" have been studied by cultural theorist Paul Virilio, whose book *Pure War* provides a thought-provoking lens into understanding Israel's ongoing settler-colonialism. He argues we are living in an era not of democracy, but of 'dromocracy' (from the Greek *dromos* meaning "race," that is, race as in the reign of speed), whereby power lies in access to speed in an ever-accelerating world, which, he predicts, will one day climactically result in the elimination of human agency altogether. Every society, he writes, is founded on a relation of speed: the one who goes the fastest possesses the ability to collect taxes, to conquer, and to inherit the right to exploit society. Palestinians not only face the most extreme examples of advanced hyper-accelerated military terror, but also must endure it while their own lives are systematically slowed down.

Perhaps the most shocking example of Israel's weaponization of time is against medical patients in Gaza seeking urgent treatment. Each month, patients have their travel permits rejected by Israel's administrative occupation bureaucracy, even though most of the requests are simply to access other Palestinian medical facilities such as hospitals in East Jerusalem.

In July 2021 alone, 293 Gaza patients, 25.8% of the total were delayed access to care, according to the World Health Organization, having received no response to their applications by the date of the appointment. Of these, 32% were for children and 29% for cancer patients. And in 2020, Physicians for Human Rights in Israel complained Israel only approved half of the medical permits for Gaza's patients. In 2017, 54 Gaza patients died after their permits were delayed or denied.

Ahmed Alnaouq, Advocacy Officer at Euro-Med Monitor human rights group, described his ordeal at-

tempting to obtain a travel permit for his mother, Basema, to travel to Jerusalem for breast cancer treatment. She had already received a late diagnosis because of the lack of effective scanning equipment in Gaza due to the blockade. "She started medications, but they were never enough. The equipment in Gaza is very bad, so she had to endure much suffering and much pain for many months. And after that, when she finally managed to get a permit to travel to Jerusalem, the doctors told her that it's actually too late. I called the doctor and he told me you sent her to us very, very late and now we can't help her. I told him, it is not we who sent her now, it is only now that we have the permit. I had to fight for months in order to go to a hospital that is only 40 minutes from Gaza. For that I lost my mother."

Ahmed, like so many Palestinians, already knew all too well the violence of life under Occupation, with Israel slowing things down and speeding things up by design: In July 2014, Ahmed lost his older brother Ayman and close friends in an Israeli missile strike on Gaza. They were all killed in a second.

Even the dead can be weaponized. Right now, Israel continues to withhold the bodies of at least 82 Palestinians slain by Israeli forces, using them as 'bargaining chips' for negotiations. The individual case cited previously, of the June 2020 killing of Ahmed Erekat, killed by Israeli soldiers at a checkpoint between two Palestinian towns, is one of those bargaining chips. Even after he was shot, video footage appears to show signs of life in him, and yet Palestinian medical teams, which arrived quickly, were refused access to where he lay. Nearly two hours later, lifeless and stripped naked, was he placed into an Israeli ambulance. A report from Forensic Architecture described the deprivation of medical attention as "killing by time." Now, even in death, Ahmed's family is made to wait indefinitely for the return of his body.

Budour Hassan, Legal Advisor at Jerusalem Legal Aid and Human Rights Center, recently explained on

Palestine Deep Dive how the forced delay of returning Palestinian bodies illuminates Israel's exploitation of British mandate era policies and, in turn, Britain's colonial legacy in Palestine. The delay is authorized in Article 133 of Britain's 1945 emergency regulations, which requested that commanders prevent the return of the bodies of any person killed in one of its central prisons or in combat.

In addition, the emergency regulations also authorized the policy of "administrative detention," incarceration without trial, and punitive home demolitions – two key methods of Israel's collective punishment of Palestinians that are still wielded today.

## Decades Make a Lifetime

Israel also wields time as a weapon by exploiting the supposed temporariness of intermediary legal fix-tures, using them as a cipher for establishing permanent realities on the ground. Despite "occupation" defined in international law as a temporary and exceptional situation, 54 years since Israel initially occupied the West Bank and Gaza and illegally annexed East Jerusalem, the colonization of Palestinian land is more conspicuously permanent than ever.

UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in the Palestinian Territory Michael Link has drawn attention to Israel's occupation as the longest in the modern world, recognizing it as "occu-annexation" that is "endlessly sustainable without decisive international intervention." Palestinians have become locked in a permanent temporariness, where Israel's military rule and permit bureaucracy are wielded against them indefinitely to facilitate its colonial ends.

Palestinians must wait years for building permits to construct or extend properties even marginally, usually for them only to be rejected, while the authorization and

construction of illegal Israeli settlements flourish at ever accelerating rates. Between 2016 and 2018, Israel denied 98 percent of building permits requested by Palestinians in Israeli-controlled Area C. From 2019-2020, Israel approved only 32 permits for Palestinians in Area C, but 6,098 for Jewish settlers. Over 150 settlements now thrive across the West Bank and East Jerusalem, housing over 750,000 illegal Jewish settlers.

Israel's permit bureaucracy forces Palestinians into an impossible dilemma: either wait years, indefinitely hoping for an approved permit against all odds, or take their chances and build "illegally" on their own land, only then to have to wait in fear of their homes being demolished.

Across the West Bank and East Jerusalem, Palestinians not only wait anxiously in fear of their homes being torn down, but also in fear of systematic forced ethnic displacement – another reality of this so-called temporary occupation. In Sheikh Jarrah, East Jerusalem, Mohammed El-Kurd, 23, has only known the uncertainty caused by legal threats of forced displacement. "Time is your worst enemy" he told me, "Because of the sense of powerlessness that comes with it.... There's this looming threat of losing your home at any given moment. You don't know when it is so you sit and you spend your life waiting for something to happen."

He describes how, since childhood, his sense of time has become intrinsically tied to court dates. Perhaps this is not surprising, considering that when he was thirteen, settlers had moved in and taken over part of his home. At that time, he told an interviewer "We still have some evacuation orders, but nothing happened yet, but it could happen at any moment." The ongoing threat of looming homelessness has taken its toll on his family, whose members for years have spent hours in courtrooms, feeling temporary relief when their case is yet again postponed.

While the neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah is now famous internationally for the ethnic cleansing operation Israel wields against its residents, thanks to the #SaveSheikhJarrah campaign launched by Mohammed, his twin sister Muna, and their neighbors. Beginning as early as 1970, settler organizations, in conjunction with Israeli authorities, have been trying their utmost, sometimes successfully, to displace and replace Palestinian families there.



**Mohammed El-Kurd (Zoom screenshot)**

One thing Mohammed is keen to emphasize is time's ability to normalize the abnormal. "We decided to start the #SaveSheikhJarrah campaign back in October 2020. When I learned of the court order, I was in New York. I stayed in bed for two or three days. I didn't go to work, I didn't go to classes, and I was really depressed, not because of the court order, but because I knew I had to do something about it. You know they take houses every day. They demolish houses every day. We are lucky we are not getting killed. We are lucky we are not getting bombed. It's fine, you know. I needed to convince myself that my house, my only house, where I rest my head, where my elderly father stays, was worth fighting for. I needed to convince myself that I was worthy of housing because it was so normalized in me, the idea that my house was going to be taken. You'll see this across the Palestinian experience, the idea that time doesn't heal, but it definitely normalizes."

Israel's own calculation that time eventually normalizes seems to have born fruit at an international level too. Last year, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco all announced normalized relations with Israel.

Freezing Palestinians in the permanent temporariness of eternal de facto annexation is the continued official Israeli policy under its new Prime Minister Naftali Bennett. Although this is nothing new, and has been the case since 1967, the normalization of apartheid seems to have entered a new phase of acceptance, both domestically and internationally, with the trendy term "shrinking the conflict" now in vogue.

Israeli settler-philosopher Micah Goodman lays out such ideas in his book *Catch 67*, where he contends Israelis would be far better off if they stopped defining the situation as a "problem" and started framing it as a "catch" instead. Why? "Because problems are meant to be solved – and this problem has no solution." Rather, Goodman likens the fate of five million Palestinians under Israeli control to a 'malignant disease' which can only be controlled rather than eliminated. With such philosophy influencing Bennett's approach to policy, coupled with Israel's Knesset offering no incentive for the government to deal with any difficult questions that might risk splitting the delicate coalition, it is no wonder meaningful change is not coming from within Israel any time soon.

But time doesn't only normalize, it can also exhaust. By constantly stalling court decisions on individual cases, Israel buys time as its incremental colonization continues unabated in other places. While the overly optimistic cliché suggests the wheels of justice do indeed turn slowly, Israel makes sure the slow wheels of injustice grind even slower when it suits. On August 2<sup>nd</sup>, after global outrage at Israel's carpet bombing of Gaza and the #SaveSheikhJarrah campaign burst through to public consciousness, Israel's Supreme Court predictably delayed a final verdict on the appeal of Sheikh Jarrah

families against their displacement, giving no future date for the final decision.

“Israel understands the news cycle,” Mohammed asserts. “It understands that now there is momentum, there is a global uprising, all these things, but a year from now that’s not guaranteed and this is also how time becomes our enemy because the more time passes by the less people tend to care and the less intensity your momentum has.... Do I think that the Israeli government is postponing this because they’re afraid of the international backlash? Definitely. Certainly. Yes. Do I think that this means they don’t want to take our homes at all? No. Certainly not. What they’re doing to us is ethnic cleansing, hands down, but they understand that accelerated efforts of ethnic cleansing will wield a negative public response, so they are doing it in such a way that it’s done in small increments across time, in slow motion so you can’t really argue that this is mass displacement.”

This controlled, incremental colonization is, in fact, accelerating. The UN’s Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reports that in August 2021 in East Jerusalem, nearly 100 Palestinians were displaced from their homes – the highest number of displacements this year. And 53 homes were demolished there since the beginning of the year, 38 by their owners to avoid financial penalties and/or imprisonment. The fact that Israel has no legal jurisdiction over East Jerusalem seems to bear little consequence on the occupying state determined to lay claim to the entire city and rid it of Palestinians in any way possible.

And in Gaza, the long-term impact of Israel’s weaponization of time on the besieged enclave is massive. Ahmed and Dr. Bahzad both assert that Israel not only slows down Palestinian lives there as much as possible, but is sending the population back in time altogether.

“Fifteen years ago, before the siege, the youth in Gaza had many dreams,” Ahmed tells me, “but right now

you will find that most people there just want to survive ... It has become like two thousand years ago when people were living just to have food, water, and shelter.

Dr. Bahzad agrees. “In 1998 we had our first international airport, but after the Second Intifada Israeli forces destroyed it. When you have progress and then it is destroyed, you are forced to go back to more traditional ways of travelling and I think this indicates going back in time. “

It is an absurdity to think that right now Gaza relies heavily on donkey carts for transport of goods when over two decades ago it had its own runway.

Another example is architecture. Gaza, especially Gaza City, used to have tall buildings, towers, and futuristic designs, like those found in cities across the world. According to Bahzad, “when these are targeted and destroyed (and reports confirm that 15 high-rise buildings were targeted by airstrikes on Gaza in May, 2021), you are forced backwards.

## **The Unity Intifada: A Fight for the Present/A Fight for the Future**

After more than seven decades of fragmentation and colonial violence, a sense of unity and collective agency is surging, especially among young Palestinians, and against all odds. Instead of submitting to Israel’s attempts at forcing them into an eternity of waiting, Palestinians continue to find agency in even the most sophisticated examples of Israel’s weaponized time.

Nothing more powerfully depicts this than the miraculous escape of six Palestinian prisoners from Israel’s maximum security Gilboa prison. Four of the six detainees had been sentenced to life, but, armed only with a single metal spoon, managed to tunnel their way to freedom. “For five days, I was free after 22 years of

continuous imprisonment. I enjoyed wandering in the fields and plains and in the open air in northern Palestine, far from restrictions and fences,” escapee Muhammad Al-Ardah told his lawyer after being recaptured.

Even within prison itself, Palestinians have been collectively demonstrating their agency through hunger strikes and even smuggling out sperm to conceive children. Take Maher Al-Akhras, whose 103-day hunger strike in protest of administrative detention led to his release. “We do not have weapons, but rather we have the strong will and determination to confront the occupation and its racist policies,” he said after his release. At the time of writing, at least six Palestinian prisoners are on hunger strike protesting their incarceration without charge.

Ahed Tamimi with her prison-mates creatively regained agency against attempts to steal away their precious childhoods. “We were in prison in one room, four walls, not allowed to leave. We couldn’t see anyone, talk to anyone. We refused to allow ourselves to break, so we brought books, novels, we studied, we read until the prison stopped being a prison and became a school to us instead. We were not broken by this occupier, we rebelled with a pen and a book.”

Time is undoubtedly an artifact of power, but Palestinians are demonstrating that even the most powerful players can be forced to make concessions in the face of collective action and determination. While the lethal consequences of Israel’s assaults on Gaza in May will never be forgotten, those I interviewed unanimously agreed that the attacks also contributed to a new phase of public awareness and strengthened Palestinian unity.

Ahmed Alnaouq told me, “During the last war on Gaza, as Chevening Scholars we organized a speaking event that was the most exciting I have ever spoken at. You know why? Because for the first time I, along with Palestinians from ’48, from the West Bank, and from the diaspora all spoke together in one



**Muhammed Al-Ardah, rearrested**  
**Source: Israeli Police Handout**

setting. For me that was a huge deal. We are delivering a message to the Israeli regime that no matter how much or how far they try to separate or segregate us from each other, we will always find a way to communicate, to talk, and to be united again. So yes, for me I believe it is a Unity Intifada.”

By exploiting methods of communication that modern digital technology facilitates, albeit under the ever present realities of slowed and unstable internet connections, censorship, and surveillance, young Palestinians especially are finding new ways to overcome Israel’s forced fragmentation and to find unity.

Those of us on Instagram in May 2021 saw in real time, in between electricity blackouts, how Palestinians endured bombardments aimed towards them. And we will never forget it. One particularly ferocious night during the attacks, Dr. Bahzad recalls how a friend phoned him. “She was following the news, as she



Ahmed Alnaouq Source: Facebook

knew me when I studied in London ... I was crying and she said this to me, “I don’t know what you are experiencing right now, but I can imagine it. I would say that this time it is completely different. Your voices are now heard, the world is now watching, listening, and there are lots of protests, especially in London.” She sent me photos from the marches there and that moment was like the spark or the light when I was about to completely lose hope ... So, I would say that the last bombardment, even though it was difficult, at the same time it was very promising.”

With social media continuing to provide an avenue to rapidly bypass mainstream media, it is no wonder people are finally waking up to the suffering Palestinians have endured for so long. Organizations such as We Are Not Numbers ([www.wearenotnumbers.org](http://www.wearenotnumbers.org)) are breaking new ground with young Palestinians articulating their own discourse, telling their stories through creative and imaginative ways.

The day after I interviewed Mohammed El-Kurd for this piece, he, along with his sister Muna, were listed in *Time* magazine’s 100 Most influential

People of 2021 – symbolic proof of the momentous breakthrough Palestinian voices has made into public consciousness. That such recognition came in *Time* perhaps prophetically points towards a possible future where time eventually runs out on the widespread international silence and complicity Israel relies on.

In September, members of Britain’s Labour party passed a motion calling for sanctions on Israel, and the week before that, Rep. Rashida Tlaib bravely called out Israel’s apartheid in the U.S. Congress.

Mohammed El-Kurd assures me, “I believe wholeheartedly that we are in a new era, we have tipped the scales in a way that hasn’t been done before, we have forced ourselves onto the center stage and we have left this framing of us as victims ... to freedom fighters who have their political agency, who have their own say in what is happening to them. Palestinians are articulating their own stories. We have radicalized a new generation of people all around the world who will go on and live lives and have discourse and write articles and make films and contribute to this conversation. We have this collectivizing of the Palestinian experience, which hasn’t happened since 1936 ... You know this is the era of the Palestinian who is unabashed, the Palestinian who doesn’t

**“You know this is the era of the  
Palestinian who is unabashed,  
the Palestinian who doesn’t need  
approval, the Palestinian who is  
not muzzled.”**

-- Muhammed El-Kurd

need approval, the Palestinian who is not muzzled.”

What is increasingly apparent is that, despite Israel’s best efforts at erasing Palestinian pasts, presents, and futures, the history of tomorrow has not yet been written. Young Palestinians, by continuing to articulate their own discourse, reclaim the narrative, and lead from the front in the struggle for liberation, prove they are indeed actors who will shape their own fate.’

While for the rest of us time may not feel weaponized against us in such a vicious way, we have a great deal to learn from young Palestinians in how to be defiant, unabashed how to struggle, to organize and act collectively in the face of external forces manipulating our own temporal existences. From corporations expanding the working day to eat more and more into our leisure time and even our sleep, or in the face of unscrupulous bosses demanding ever greater efficiency to extract ever greater profits from our labor time, or in the face of companies creating increasingly addictive technology capturing our personal data while stealing our waking movements in their monetized attention economy, or even in the face of the very real catastrophe of impending climate breakdown, the actions being taken by young Palestinians today provide inspiration to us all.

Paul Virilio places freedom not in access to speed, but in access to expanse. After all, what is freedom if not a vastness, an open plain for us to decide how we choose to spend our lives, free from stress, exploitation, and domination? The fight for control over our time is the fight of our lives, the fight for our futures, and ultimately the fight for our freedom.

And what we learn from the Palestinian struggle today is that through fearless collective action and determination, freedom may well be irresistible in every sense.

*Muhammed El-Kurd, co-Founder of #SaveSheikhJarrah and a featured voice in this issue of The Link, recently published his first book of poetry, entitled “Rifqa.” The volume is dedicated to his grandmother, Rifqa El-Kurd, who died last year at the age of 103 years. As he says, she was older than Zionist colonization, and was widely hailed by Jerusalemites as an icon of Palestinian resistance.*

*While AMEU has for the most part given up its book and video resale business, we’re confident that our readers wouldn’t want to miss this powerful new collection of verse. Rifqa, which means “camaraderie” or “accompaniment” in Arabic, is available from [Haymarketbooks.org](http://Haymarketbooks.org), and we are grateful for permission to reprint a selection here.*

### **And They Leave and Never Leave**

I have studied the tight curls on the back of  
your neck  
moving away from me,  
and I have waited in stance,  
wilted for distance,  
rooted in the cracks  
of my ceramic bathroom tiles,  
staring into the mirror,  
waiting for your face  
to exit me.

I have memorized the patterns of breaths in which  
your voice invaded my throat,  
gloated that you  
are leaving me.

Atlanta put me in a taxi.  
Transit becomes home.  
This time, in Palestine,  
there were no pomegranates in trees  
but suitcases  
situated by storm,  
and I have fled  
a different kind of heartache  
than that my mother  
had pickled and jarred  
and served for me.

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