

## CONSTRUCTED VISIBILITY: PHOTOGRAPHING THE CATASTROPHE OF GAZA

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*Please note: this paper is a first draft and is made available for review and comments. Please use either the blog comments dialog or the private contact facility at my web site to submit comments. The paper will be revised and submitted for publication to an academic journal later in the year.*

## Introduction

Israel's three-week war against Gaza was a devastating assault, resulting in the death of some 1,300 Palestinians and the destruction of thousands of buildings.<sup>1</sup> The story of this military operation dominated the world's media in January 2009, yet many felt that the reality of the conflict had been hidden from a global audience because of Israel's exclusion of the international media from Gaza.<sup>2</sup> This view was detailed on British television in a Channel 4 documentary entitled "Unseen Gaza."<sup>3</sup> Beginning with the documentary's approach to the issue of how conflict should be covered, this paper explores the photographic enactment of Israel's war on Gaza in January 2009, using the pictorial coverage of *The Guardian* and *The Observer* as the principal source. The purpose of this analysis is to consider whether the humanitarian visualization of Gaza and its inhabitants provides a compelling account of catastrophe in a zone of permanent emergency, and what this issue means for how we understand the photography of conflict, crisis and catastrophe.

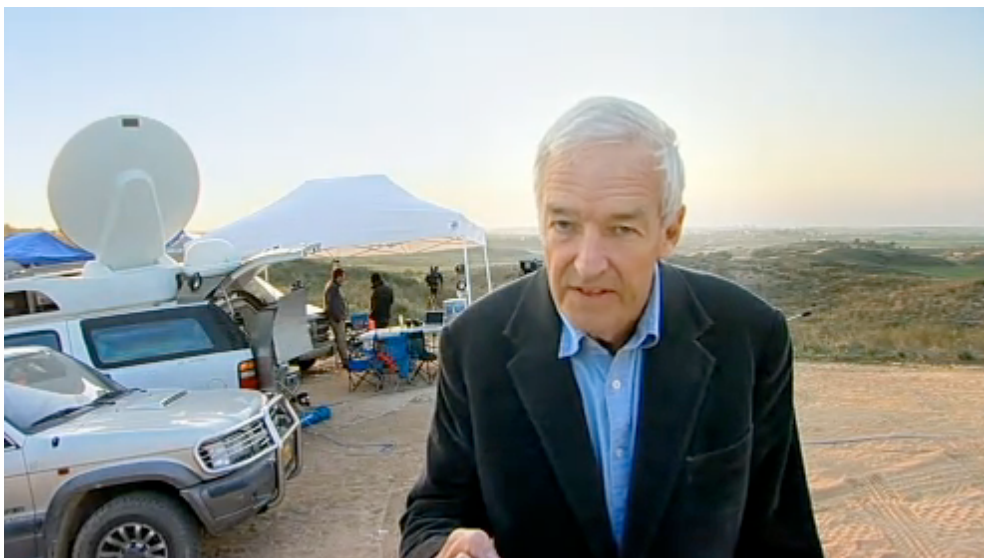


Figure 1: Jon Snow, *Unseen Gaza*, 22 January 2009, screen grab.

## Seeing Gaza

Presented by Jon Snow, “Unseen Gaza” detailed how foreign reporters were kept away from Gaza and corralled on a hilltop some 75 minutes south of Jerusalem from where they peered into the occupied territory. This location was some distance from the Israel/Gaza border because the IDF had declared a 2-4 kilometre wide strip of territory in southern Israel contiguous with Gaza to be “closed military zones.”<sup>4</sup> On this hillside beyond the closed zone journalists were closely monitored by the military and the police, making it difficult to even observe the remote traces of conflict (the sound of artillery, the streaks of aircraft and the sight of smoke rising from the targets). One reporter interviewed in “Unseen Gaza” called it the “Hill of Shame” because of the restrictions that placed them there, and the “Hill of Same” because of the way the location homogenized all news coverage emanating from there.



Figure 2: The Journalist Hill, 7 January 2009. Photo: Merav Maroody.

The international media found themselves in this position because the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) decided, in the aftermath of their 2006 war in Lebanon, that giving reporters access to the frontlines restricted the military’s ability to pursue its strategic goals. Ignoring a ruling by the Israeli Supreme Court in early January to allow some journalists limited access to Gaza, the IDF implemented media controls devised by the new National Information Directorate in the Israeli Prime Minister’s office. Indeed, these controls functioned in advance of “Operation Cast Lead,” with

restrictions on the media entering Gaza implemented from early November 2008 onwards.<sup>5</sup>



Figure 3: An Israeli military policeman shows the “Closed Military Order” map at his roadblock, complete with spikes, outside Kibbutz Ni Am, across the street from Sderot, 19 January 2009. Photo: Jim Hollander/EPA.

Journalists on the hillside found themselves in a situation no better than the Israeli war tourists, who came from nearby towns to take snapshots of a military action they had no doubt was justified by the on-going Hamas rocket attacks on southern Israel.<sup>6</sup> Even when photographers entered the closed zones with telephoto lenses, there was not much to see. In the words of one photographer trying to cover the conflict despite being shut out of the battle zone, the IDF turned photojournalists into “War paparazzi,” leaving them to scramble for stories in a way that was “not pretty.”<sup>7</sup>



Figure 4: Israelis gathered on a hill near Gaza to see the "show" during one of the last days of bombing by the Israeli Air Force, January 2009. Photo: Miki Kratsman, courtesy of the photographer/Chelouche Gallery, Tel Aviv.



Figure 5: "Wire service" photographers on a natural lookout over the Gaza Strip... Shortly after this photo was taken, the photographers left because a military jeep was making its way towards them to eject the group for being in an officially "closed military area." Photo: Jim Hollander/EPA.

The impact of distance on the ability to see and thus understand was at the heart of the concern “Unseen Gaza” addressed. Stranded on the outside as remote observers, the international media was handicapped in their efforts to present what was repeatedly called “the whole truth” or “the complete picture.” In the resultant “vacuum of verifiable fact” both journalists and viewers were at risk of manipulation from the “spin” presented by parties to the conflict. With the IDF media operation in full swing on one side of the border, and Arab journalists the only ones working on the other side, the reporter’s interviewed by Jon Snow declared that without direct access to the conflict their work was inevitably compromised.<sup>8</sup> While all the journalists acknowledged there was no lack of pictures coming out of Gaza they claimed there was a shortage of “hard fact” because their absence meant the pictures’ context could not be known. In the words of the BBC’s head of news, this meant they could not secure the “objective and impartial truth” they strive for in order to move beyond the contestable claims that marked such events. All this lead Jon Snow to conclude – in a reprise of the quote that inevitably appears when the question of war and propaganda is being debated – the “first casualty has inevitably been truth.”<sup>9</sup>

### **Immediacy, visibility, ethics**

“Unseen Gaza” is an accomplished documentary that reveals much about the news coverage of this particular conflict. It also reveals much about the assumptions that drive the international media’s approach to coverage generally. By arguing that the inability of reporters to be in Gaza during the fighting made “truth the victim” we can appreciate how much journalism relies on the concept of immediacy to authorise its stories. ‘Immediacy’ is a “*belief* in some necessary contact point between the medium and what it represents” such that one can go beyond mediation and reach

events, issues or objects outside of representation.<sup>10</sup> Although this is a curious act of faith for media practitioners whose work is obviously dependent on complex practices of mediation or “hypermediacy,”<sup>11</sup> it expresses itself in the claim that the media’s bodily presence in the zone of conflict during the fighting – the live coverage of events by reporters acting as first-hand witnesses – is essential for understanding. The assumption is that access to a particular time and space is the best and indeed singular route to reliable knowledge.

Although journalism’s belief in immediacy is situated in a hypermediated set of practices, with such practices logically having an impact on the forms of knowledge they can produce, the end product of these practices is nonetheless deemed to be ‘truth’ in the form of ‘comprehensive, factual, impartial and objective’ knowledge. However, although knowledge characterised in this manner would be disinterested, “Unseen Gaza” suggests there is a moral and political claim in its concerns. At one point in the documentary Jon Snow wonders if a ceasefire might have been more speedily arranged, and further suffering ameliorated, if the international media had been on the streets sooner. Such a suggestion aligns the international media with the global human rights movement in a shared logic about the relationship between vision, ethics and politics. “Seeing is believing” is a fundamental tenet in the human rights approach to testimony and witnessing. Indeed, human rights culture, especially in the post-World War Two context, has been animated by an assumed link between visibility, witnessing, testimony and rights.<sup>12</sup> In this view, understood by activists as the desire to “mobilise shame,” bad deeds are done in the dark and shining a light into those corners can be a strike for justice. As Thomas Keenan argues, this concept “gathers together a set of powerful metaphors – the eyes of the world, the light of public scrutiny, the exposure of hypocrisy – as vehicles for the dream of action, power and enforcement.”<sup>13</sup> This dream follows a

familiar script – perpetrators fear visibility, witnessing is an active intervention, and the knowledge that results from exposure drives change.

This dream is common to, and even constitutive of, the conventional practice of photojournalism. Photographers regularly speak of their purpose in terms of bearing witness by visualizing violence, “turning the camera’s gaze to [war’s] victims,” so that their viewers can be mobilised to speak out against the conditions pictured.<sup>14</sup> Eliane Laffont, co-founder of Sygma (the largest photojournalism agency before its sale to Corbis in 2000) recently encapsulated this by declaring that photojournalism is “a mirror of the world and a witness to its time.”<sup>15</sup> The famous British photojournalist Don McCullin reiterated it in a column lamenting the absence of photographs from Sri Lanka’s war with the Tamil Tigers by stating “there is always a need to be a witness to conflict,” while Yannis Behrakis, a Reuters photographer working in Israel/Palestine, put it this way: “to be in the right place at the right moment - this is every photojournalist’s dream. To be on the scene to record the “decisive moment” with your camera.”<sup>16</sup>

There are a number of problems with this dream. The first is that despite the near ubiquity of this view amongst media practitioners it is not easy to show when and where the dream has been realised. Although there are many claims that particular pictures have changed the world (most notably with regard to photographs produced during the Vietnam war), demonstrating a causal relationship in specific circumstances is far from easy.<sup>17</sup> The second problem is that in our mediated world we have to recognize that perpetrators regularly operate in the glare of publicity cognizant of their likely exposure. As Keenan observes, “today, all too often, there is more than enough light, and yet its subjects exhibit themselves shamelessly, brazenly, and openly.”<sup>18</sup> The third, and most important problem is that justifying



images in terms of them being both 'windows' and 'witnesses' deploys contradictory discourses, combining a desire for objectivity with a demand for engagement. The ethics of the latter does not sit easily with the epistemology of the former. Nonetheless, this contradiction has been part of photography since its inception, with the technology constituted by an epistemic and ethical project that linked mechanical objectivity with a humanist ethos, thereby producing the dual character that continues to haunt the practice.<sup>19</sup>

Despite all these issues, the paradigm of immediacy remains prominent in the coverage of conflict, even to those with different agendas. The IDF's media restrictions are based on the idea that if you control vision by denying presence you can qualitatively change the world's understanding of war. Photographers and journalists rail against such restrictions because they believe in the necessity of presence for a true picture. And the Palestinians – as shall be demonstrated below – locate their claims for justice in the immediate presentation of bodies and victims. The paradigm of immediacy structures debates about these issues of mediation in terms of visibility versus invisibility – hence the title and content of the documentary "Unseen Gaza". And because the taking of a picture inevitably relies on visible traces in a specific time and space, visual media reinforces this duality because of the way it focuses on the symptoms of an event rather than its causes or context.<sup>20</sup>

However, the image of war in Gaza needs to be understood in terms of controlled and structured visibilities rather than dualism of hidden versus observable pictures driven by the paradigm of immediacy. That is because when the IDF restricted media access from November 2008 onwards, and barred them from entering during the war itself, it would have been well aware that professional

Palestinian photographers working for the international agencies and broadcasters, as well as the indigenous Palestinian and regional Arab media based in Gaza, would continue taking and distributing pictures. It was therefore not an attempt to keep Gaza hidden – it was an attempt to politicise the hundreds of pictures that emerged daily as inevitably ‘biased’.<sup>21</sup> And far from simply limiting the images available, the media restrictions were part of an effort to produce a particular visualization of the conflict. As Ariella Azoulay argues, keeping the international media on a remote hilltop the other side of a closed military zone was not about keeping the war at a distance; it was about constructing a particular war: “From their observation point [on the ‘hill of shame’], what they see is exactly the picture that Israel wishes to show: a war fought on equal footing by two sides. Missiles launched in Gaza hit Israel, and Israel retaliates.”<sup>22</sup>

Nonetheless, even after we reframe the issue in terms of constructed visibility, we have to ask how much of the war in Gaza we did see, in what way did we see it, and how could the widespread pictures of destruction coming out of Gaza fit with the IDF’s desired visualization of the conflict? These are the questions that drive the following analysis of the photography of the conflict published in *The Guardian* and *The Observer* during the three weeks from the first airstrikes on 27 December 2008 up until the ceasefire on 18 January 2009.

The face of war

PICK OF THE ARTS  
EVENTS FOR 2009

LILY ALLEN ★ U2 ★ LA BOHEME ★ MICHAEL SHEEN  
OUR CRITICS ON THE HIGHLIGHTS OF THE COMING YEAR

IN THE REVIEW SECTION PAGES 16-17

# The Observer

Sunday 28 December 2008 www.observer.co.uk £1.90

## Air strikes in Gaza kill 225 as Israel targets Hamas

■ Israelis refuse to rule out ground invasion ■ Hamas defiant and vows revenge

by Tom O'Loughlin, Jerusalem  
Hassan Balqasha, Gaza  
and Toby Helm

ISRAEL STOOD defiant last night in the face of mounting international condemnation, as it vowed to continue a massive bombing offensive against key targets in the Gaza Strip that left 205 dead and 700 others injured.

As world leaders called for an immediate end to the biggest air assault on Gaza since 1967, Ehud Barak, the Israeli defence minister, refused to rule out a ground invasion in the next few days saying that the retaliation against rocket attacks by Hamas had only just begun. "It won't be easy and it won't be short," said Barak. "There is a time for calm and a time for fighting and now the time has come to fight."

Asked if a ground invasion would be the next move, as bomb attacks continued into the night, Barak said: "I do not exclude anything as long as the result has not been achieved."

A flight of Israeli F-16 fighters fired at least 30 missiles during air strikes against Hamas positions in Gaza.

Gordon Brown last night expressed "deep concern" and urged both sides to exercise restraint, amid signs that 45-hour clashes were spiralling out of control. He said the only way to reach a lasting solution was through peaceful means. "I understand the Israeli government's sense of obligation to its population. Israel needs to meet its humanitarian obligations, act in a way to further the long-term vision of a two-state solution, and do everything in its power to avoid civilian casualties," he said.

A White House spokesman said that the United States "urges Israel to avoid civilian casualties as it targets Hamas in Gaza," adding: "Hamas's continued rocket attacks into Israel must cease if the violence is to stop."

Hamas remained defiant. "Today we are stronger than we've ever been," said

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FULL DETAILS  
THIS SECTION  
PAGE 21

IN REVIEW

DEBRA  
WINGER

On roles for women,  
Barack Obama - and being  
back in the limelight.  
COVER STORY

REVIEW

THIS SECTION

ROWAN  
ATKINSON

The creator of  
Blackadder  
and Mr Bean  
prepares to  
play the lead  
role in  
Oliver!  
PAGE 33

A child, wounded in the Israeli strikes against Hamas in Gaza, waits for medical attention at the Shifa hospital yesterday. At least 30 missiles were fired by F-16 fighter planes in retaliation for Hamas rocket attacks. Photograph by Abid Katib/Getty

INSIDE

A time for calm... a time to fight. Reports and eye-witness account, 2-5  
Talking, not force, is the solution, Observer Comment, 22

Hamas spokesman Taher Nounou: "We won't raise the white flag, we won't give anything up, we won't retreat. We call on the Arab states in the region to take a stance against this massacre and not to be satisfied with just condemnation." Fawzi Barhoum, another spokesman, called the air strikes a "holocaust" and "an act of war."

The attacks, which came days after a cease-fire expired, prompted speculation that Israel might be preparing a full-scale military invasion of Gaza. Ehud Olmert, Israel's prime minister, said: "Israel wishes to make clear that it will continue to act against terrorist operations and missile fire from the Strip which is intended to harm civilians." Public support for an attack has been growing in Israel, where a recent opinion poll showed that 20% of voters supported reoccupying Gaza, 27% wanted a return to assassinations and 18% wanted a short military strike.

The Arab League is convening an emergency meeting on Wednesday. Egypt announced it would open its border with Gaza to allow the injured to be treated.

### Parents accused of killing obese children with kindness

by Denis Campbell  
Health Correspondent

BRITAIN'S PARENTS will be accused this week of 'killing their children with kindness', as the government embarks on a new campaign aimed at the growing and deadly problem of childhood obesity.

Graphic examples of children dying early from diabetes, heart disease and cancer will be publicised and the Department of Health will reveal "shocking" levels of ignorance and complacency among parents who are failing to accept responsibility for their child's own health.

The campaign will be based on an unpublished DoH report, seen by the Observer, that has been sent to senior NHS managers. It says that three million families with young children need to be better informed to prevent their children becoming dangerously overweight.

In a section entitled "Killing with kindness", it says: "It's hard to say no to your kids, but if you give in every time you're not being kind, you're killing with kindness. Kids who eat the wrong sorts of food and sit around all day are more likely to get heart disease, cancer, diabetes and to die young. Some will die younger than their parents."

Beside a photograph of three young children, it adds: "One of us will die of heart disease or diabetes when we're older because of the food our parents let us eat now."

The document, a briefing on the government's Healthy Weight, Healthy Lives strategy, details how parents are helping to establish bad habits in their offspring.

"Parents do not value physical

INSIDE | WEATHER, THIS SECTION, P35 | CROSSWORDS, AZED, REVIEW P28 EVERYMAN, REVIEW, P21 AND SPEEDY, THIS SECTION P35

Figure 6: *The Observer*, 28 December 2008, 1. Caption: "A child, wounded in the Israeli air strikes against Hamas in Gaza, waits for medical attention at the Shifa hospital yesterday. At least 30 missiles were fired by F-16 fighter planes in retaliation for Hamas rocket attacks. Photograph by Abid Katib/Getty."

*The Observer* opened its photographic coverage of the Gaza war with a familiar image of conflict showing a young girl, her face darkened by dried blood and dust from an airstrike, being comforted as she waited for hospital treatment. The picture editor of a competitor paper (Sophie Batterbury of *The Independent*) later

wrote about seeing this photograph and how she came to choose between the many options for her publication:

Modern technology allows us to receive a large volume of material very quickly. By 4pm last Saturday [27 December 2008] we had in excess of 300 images from that morning's assault on Gaza. Some images showing general wreckage and crowds, some showing injured people, the strongest being the image we used on the front. There were also a number of images showing dead and dismembered bodies, some of which were relatively mild in tone and others which were so horrific that I couldn't look at them any larger than thumbnails.

Two images in particular stood out: one of the injured young girl, frightened but protected by adult hands [*The Observer's* choice] and the image we used on the front page, of an injured man being helped away from the apocalyptic scene behind. We felt that after much deliberation the injured man said more about the scale of the attack.<sup>23</sup>

It is striking that for two liberal papers the choice was between two photographs. Indeed, *The Independent's* preferred image was *The Observer's* second choice, appearing as the main photograph on pages two and three of that paper's coverage (Figure 7). Each, though, was designed to achieve something different, with the photograph of the child producing an empathetic response while that of the man being helped from the rubble demonstrated the extent of the strikes.<sup>24</sup>



Figure 7: *The Observer*, 28 December 2008, 2-3. Caption: "...an injured man is helped from the rubble following a strike in Rafah, above." Photographs by Hatem Omar/AP.

In the first few days of the war *The Guardian* used photographs that showed individuals caught up in the destruction of their urban environments (Figure 8, which appeared large format on page one) before moving to devastated landscapes to signify the scale of destruction that was on-going (Figure 9). The first image of the IDF did not appear until 31 December, when a large photograph of Israeli tanks with their crews relaxed was used (Figure 10). This was juxtaposed on the page with a small picture of a Palestinian boy getting hospital treatment (Figure 11). The juxtaposition of images became more frequent as the conflict went on. For example, the photograph of the bombed-out apartment block (Figure 9) was flanked on the left by a picture of two Israeli women – this was the first image of Israeli's in *The Guardian*, and showed them with their hands clasped over their mouths in fear after a rocket attack (Figure 12) – and on the right by a similarly sized photograph of a Palestinian victim whose body was wrapped in a flag awaiting burial (Figure 13). Juxtaposition was also evident in the photomontages the paper used to summarise the conflict (Figure 14).



**Trapped in the rubble**  
An injured Palestinian reaches for help after being pinned down by the ruins of Saraya prison, in Gaza City, after it was hit during an Israeli air force missile attack yesterday  
Photograph: Majed Hamdan/AP

Figure 8: *The Guardian*, 29 December 2008, 1.



Figure 9: *The Guardian*, 2 January 2009, 16-17. Caption: "Hamas leader killed. The ruins of the apartment block where Hamas leader Nizar Rayan was killed in an Israeli air strike in Jabalia refugee camp yesterday, with two wives and four children. Photograph: Mahmud Hams/AFP."



Figure 10: *The Guardian* 31 December 2009, 4-5. Caption: "Waiting game Israeli troops relax yesterday as a column of armoured vehicles is deployed near Israel's border with the Gaza Strip. Border crossings into the territory have been closed. Photograph: David Silverman/Getty."



Figure 11: *The Guardian*, 31 December 2008, 4. Caption: "A boy is treated at the Shifa hospital." [No credit].



Figure 12: *The Guardian*, 2 January 2009, 16. Caption: "Israelis minutes after a rocket attack yesterday. Photograph: Uriel Sinai/Getty."



Figure 13: *The Guardian*, 2 January 2009, 17. Caption: "The body of Muhammad Khawaja, 19, lies in hospital before his burial in Ramallah." [No credit].





Figure 14: *The Guardian*, 19 January 2009, 18-19.

### Balance, war, death

Media coverage of Israel/Palestine is one of the most contentious issues in journalism, with most coverage punctuated by claims of bias and politicisation from all sides.<sup>25</sup> *The Guardian* has attracted much opprobrium from supporters of Israeli state policy, with a conservative UK columnist calling it “evil” and a conservative blog labelling it “Britain’s most disgusting paper.”<sup>26</sup> As I shall argue, however, despite first impressions to the contrary, *The Guardian* adopted a cautious and somewhat conventional approach in its pictorial coverage of Gaza that in the end produced an understanding of the conflict more consistent with official Israeli goals than might be imagined.

That might seem an odd conclusion given the way the photographs above

offered ample evidence of large-scale urban destruction in Gaza and widespread casualties. With the summary montage of the conflict (Figure 14) dominated by a picture of a lone Palestinian child in the rubble of a Rafah mosque destroyed by an Israeli airstrike, the paper's perspective would appear to have been materialised in the size and subject of this image. Representing Palestinians generally, the boy is presented as the victim of a devastating military power against which he can offer little resistance. It follows on from an earlier presentation of photographs in which a large image showing the wounded corporeality of a Palestinian woman was contrasted with smaller pictures of the clean, remote, cyborg-like qualities of the IDF (Figure 15).



Figure 15: *The Guardian*, 5 January 2009, 4.

However, although these images offer traces of the newspaper's perspective they are nonetheless presented through juxtaposition that, while based on journalistic codes of balance and impartiality, also posits a reciprocal relationship between Israel and the Palestinians. This is most evident in the way the conflict was presented as a "war." On the one hand that would seem to offer a critique of Israeli actions beyond that had the events been characterised in a way that obfuscated the violence (such as in the past British rendering of events in Northern Ireland as "the troubles" or the Israeli media's reference to "the situation" in all things related to the Occupied Territories). On the other hand, casting the conflict as a war establishes a formal symmetry between two sovereign entities even though the effect of Israeli policy in the last decade has been to deny sovereignty to any part of the Palestinian territories. This representation establishes the grounds from which Israel can easily claim self-defence for the right to respond with overwhelming force to Hamas rocket attacks because it externalizes Gaza as a threat even though Israeli policy has denied Gaza an independent existence on the outside. For this reason Adi Ophir declares, "this is not a war. The assault resembles an expedition of a colonial power that goes out of the colonist's enclave to teach a lesson to rebellious barbaric tribes...only now the natives not the colonists are in the enclave."<sup>27</sup>

Other elements of *The Guardian's* photographic coverage deploy conventional motifs of the Palestinian struggle. Within Palestinian life under occupation funerals are a significant sites of memorialisation that contribute to the construction of a public sphere populated by national subjects, and there was no shortage of funeral photographs in the paper. However, as Lori Allen writes, "in contrast to much international media coverage of these ceremonies, which in the US has tended to highlight images of angry masked men wielding guns and shouting with primal rage, funerals are, for the majority, rather sedate affairs, part of quotidian life under occupation."<sup>28</sup> It might be expected that in the context of the most lethal

assault on Gaza in forty years, funerals would have been emotive events consistent with the premises of international media assumptions. Nonetheless, a page one photograph from such an event (Figure 16), portraying a relative holding a deceased girl aloft, shows a passive crowd. As such, other photographs portraying public grief can be read in ways that conform to orientalist understandings of the ‘emotional (and hence irrational) Arab’ (Figure 17).



Figure 16: *The Guardian*, 30 December 2008, 1. Caption: “A relative holds up the body of one of the five girls killed when a bomb targeted at a mosque destroyed her family’s home. Photograph: Mohammed Salem/Reuters.”



Figure 17: *The Guardian*, 9 January 2009, 18-19. Caption: “Shock and grief. A Palestinian woman breaks down after discovering the bodies of relatives killed during an Israeli air strike in Beit Lahiya yesterday. Five people were killed in the attack. Photograph: Khalil Hamra/AP.”

In the coverage of conflict the presentation of images of death is often among the most controversial of issues. News managers are often reticent to use graphic images, as *The Independent's* picture editor explained in relation to Gaza:

In this job I frequently find myself drawn to the less horrific images, as they can tell us more about the people and their suffering than pictures which are more graphic and visceral. You may feel that this is sanitising the story, but it can be hard to feel empathy for someone we do not recognise. This doesn't mean we should shy away from violent images, but that they should be used with discretion and compassion.<sup>29</sup>

While the paradigm of immediacy governs journalism's self-understanding (something amply articulated in "Unseen Gaza"), when it comes to the most immediate issue of life and death, much of western journalism abandons its commitment to the value of immediacy and installs 'taste and decency' as the criteria for judging which images to use. *The Guardian* was no exception to this rule, with only a handful of images (including Figures 13, 16, 17, 25) of war dead printed.<sup>30</sup>

This is especially paradoxical in the Palestinian context because for the Arab media "the unsanitized picture is the weapon" of resistance.<sup>31</sup> While American, European and Israeli media regard the use of graphic pictures of death and injury as (in the words of a *Jerusalem Post* editorial) "voyeuristic, nearly pornographic," the Arab media consider these visceral images to be a sign of accurate reporting and legitimate journalism necessary for the true presentation of war and its consequences.<sup>32</sup> This intersects with the fact that in the Occupied Territories throughout the second *intifada* Palestinian "martyrs – depicted as live people, dead bodies, individual faces, spilled innards, humans, and heroes – where the recurrent

object of representation” during the most violent periods.<sup>33</sup>

The recurrent representations of suffering by Palestinians demonstrate how the paradigm of immediacy is the basis of their claims on the international community. As Lori Allen writes (about what she calls “the politics of immediation”), the production and circulation of images of damaged bodies “reveals a philosophy of vision that understands this sense as one that can produce an effect outside the rational constraints of individual will and intentionality. Seeing can mean believing in an unmediated, direct connection with the reality being observed.”<sup>34</sup> As with the commitment of the global human rights movement to a model of exposure and visibility in the pursuit of justice, this goes beyond an objectivist ontology to an affective register. In this context, although there is plenty of debate amongst Palestinians about the wisdom of circulating images of suffering, the Palestinian media manifests an “emotional pedagogy” in which realist photographic images situated in “affect-laden narrations and displays” are regarded as having the potential to activate conscience and spur action.<sup>35</sup> This approach is driven by “human rights humanism” in which the figure of the individual is the subject of human rights universal to all people. In this formation of being human, pictures of a damaged corporeality ground claims of injustice and serve as “an index of others’ responsibility and low moral standing.”<sup>36</sup> Graphic photographs thereby enact Palestinians as a particular political subject – “the sympathy-deserving suffering human” – and present their claims to the international community in terms of how they naturally deserve the human rights others enjoy.<sup>37</sup>

### **Immediacy, affect, humanitarianism**

We have thus reached a curious conjunction in how the paradigm of immediacy and affective claims combine in the coverage of conflict like Gaza. The international media operates through assumptions about immediacy, but actually

embodies affect when it justifies the need for access to a particular time and space through concerns about what the absence of pictures from those zones might allow. These practices share much in common with the global human rights movement, which regards the exposure and visibility attained through witnessing as the basis of political action against injustice. However, when it comes to the worst realities of war, the international media, instead of wanting to show graphic images produced by the logic of immediacy, operates largely in terms of metaphorical strategies designed to mediate the immediate. In contrast, the Arab media regards the circulation of graphic images as something made necessary by a commitment to journalistic codes, and Palestinians have made these pictures the basis of their human rights claims.<sup>38</sup> In merging realistic photographs with affective narratives, they are operating in a manner akin to the practice of photojournalism, which, although often defined in terms of objectivity, is nonetheless regularly justified by the need to offer emotional testaments that can drive action for human rights.<sup>39</sup>

Despite the contradictions and limitations inherent in understanding coverage in terms of the visible versus the invisible, there is a great deal that we did not see from the conflict in Gaza. Absent above all else are pictures of the fighting taken at close quarters. We know that IDF ground forces entered the Strip on 3 January, but the only picture *The Guardian* had of them operating in the confines of Gaza is a picture released by the IDF of a patrol approaching the northern Strip (Figure 18). The IDF media restrictions were effective in curtailing the imagery of urban war, thereby helping to promote the impression they fought a remote and surgical campaign with any resultant destruction arising from the fact Hamas was deliberately dug in amongst the civilian population.<sup>40</sup> Equally striking is the absence of images of Hamas, fighting or otherwise. Although Israel's media supporters often argue that any image of a Palestinian victim in Gaza is implicitly a photograph of Hamas, *The Guardian* contained a solitary image showing Hamas members directly. Importantly,

this picture of “alleged Hamas militants” which featured on page one of the paper



Figure 18: *The Guardian* 14 January 2009, 14-15. Caption: “Foot soldiers. A photo released by the Israeli Defence Forces of a patrol moving towards the northern Gaza Strip on Monday, a scene belying the heavy fighting in Gaza City yesterday. Photograph: Neil Cohen/Reuters.”

(Figure 19) was also released to the media by the IDF. Photographs such as this also demonstrate that newspapers were not shy of using pictures sourced from either the Israel military or reporters embedded with them who were necessarily subject to censorship.

With these two photographs we see confirmation of Adi Ophir’s conclusion that “in the eyes of the Israeli sovereign” the Palestinian population “has lost its political status, and has become a mixture of terrorists, suspects, and clients of humanitarian aid.”<sup>41</sup> What I want to argue is that the IDF media restrictions in the Gaza conflict reproduced the Palestinians status as “terrorists [and] suspects” through the combination of access denied and photographs supplied. But I also want to argue that in the images those restrictions allowed to be circulated – the ones



emerging from within Gaza itself – we have the production of Palestinians as



Figure 19, *The Guardian*, 9 January 2009, 1. Caption: “A picture issued by the Israeli Defence Forces shows alleged Hamas militants under guard after being captured in the Gaza Strip. Photograph: Getty Images.”

“humanitarian clients” in a way that severely limits their political agency regardless of the intentions of those who took or published the pictures. I want to suggest that the Palestinian’s emphasis on graphic images of suffering as claims for human rights contributed to this construction, and that although newspapers like *The Guardian* might have thought the publication of photographs of personal and infrastructural devastation offered a critical perspective on the conflict, in the end these images reproduced a humanitarian subjectivity that is consistent with continued Israeli governance of the Occupied Territories. The issue here, then, is *not* about whether we should or should not see the consequences of conflict presented in this way. Rather, the fundamental question is about the effects of this particularly way of seeing.

'Humanitarian' in this context means being concerned about widespread human suffering and promoting transborder initiatives to provide what is necessary to sustain bare life. On that count, one could argue that the images from Gaza do not produce the Palestinians as clients of humanitarian aid because little if any such aid was permitted by Israel to enter the territory during the conflict, and there were few if any external actors in Gaza, thus offering little humanitarianism to photograph. However, the photographs do make the Palestinians into potential aid recipients through the demand for help contained especially in those that show people imploring the viewer (such as Figures 6, 8, 24). Moreover, the 'humanitarianization' of Gazans is most evident in the way specific appeals for relief either use or mirror the news images. Save the Children UK ran full-page advertisements during the conflict featuring a distressed mother and child, and their web site has a gallery of pictures that has much in common with the news coverage.<sup>42</sup> The Disasters Emergency Committee appeal for funds to aid Gaza – which involved a short film screened by some UK television networks, but was denied airtime by the BBC because the corporation feared it would damage their impartiality – began with a series of portraits reminiscent of *The Observer's* front page picture on the first day of the conflict (Figure 20).<sup>43</sup>



Figure 20: DEC Gaza appeal, January 2009, screen grab, second frame.

The voice over made clear the affect these photographs were meant to engender: “The children of Gaza are suffering. Many are struggling to survive, homeless and in need of food and water. Today this is not about the rights and wrongs of the conflict. These people simply need your help.” These people, therefore, are primarily victims awaiting humanitarian aid. The political context that has produced their conditions of life presents few visible traces and thereby passes largely unrecorded.

### **Gaza, periodic war and permanent catastrophe**

The aftermath of the conflict in Gaza was a humanitarian emergency. But it was neither an emergency previously unknown nor a condition beyond politics. Indeed, if we go beyond the humanitarian appeals and explore the “rights and wrongs of the conflict” – or, at least, the context from which Israel’s December 2008 military action emerged – we will find that managed disaster, far from being the exception, is the norm in Gaza. The question to be asked is whether in focusing on the exception we have not seen pictures of the norm.

One fundament of Israel’s 2008-09 military action in Gaza was that Gaza constituted an external threat. This fundament comes from Israel’s official narrative

about the 2005 “disengagement” in which Jewish settlers were removed, the IDF relocated and the military government ended. This was accompanied by a statement in which the Israeli government declared it was no longer responsible for the functioning of Palestinian life in Gaza – it argued that “effective control” was extinguished when its permanent military presence ceased – and this remains Israel’s public position (Figure 21).<sup>44</sup>

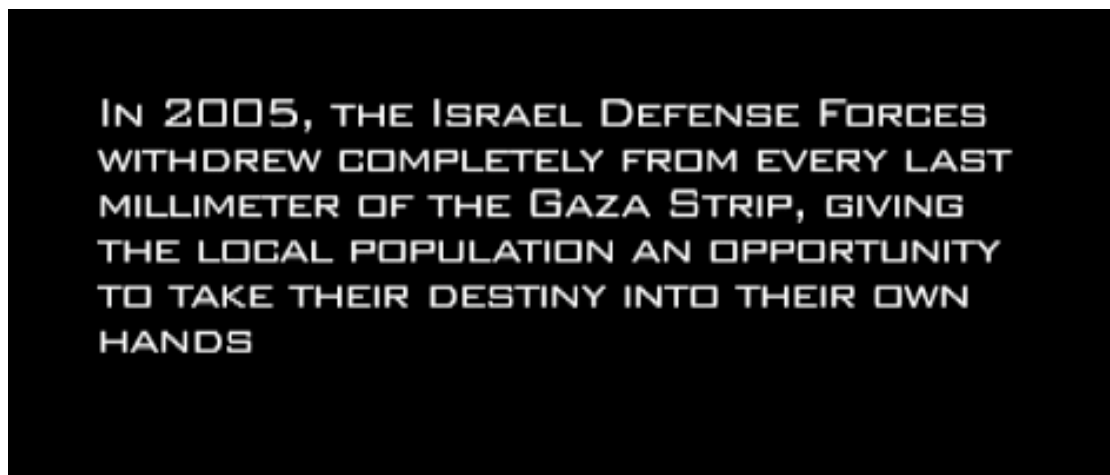


Figure 21: IDF, “3D animation illustrating the complex battlefield in the Gaza Strip,” 22 April 2009, screen grab.<sup>45</sup>

In contrast to this presentation, Israel retains near total control over the Gaza Strip through a series of governmental strategies. According to B’Tselem (the Israeli information centre for human rights in the Occupied Territories), after the “disengagement,”

Israel continued to control the air and sea space, movement between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank (also via neighboring countries), the population registry, family unification, and the crossing of goods to and from Gaza. Also, residents of the Gaza Strip rely solely on Israel for its supply of fuel, electricity, and gas. Until 28 June 2006, an independent electric-power

station operated in the Gaza Strip, producing about one-half of the electricity needed by the residents in the Strip. The station relied completely on fuel and gas from Israel. On 28 June [2006], Israel bombed the electric-power station. Since then, residents of the Gaza Strip have relied completely on Israel for their electricity.<sup>46</sup>

To be sure, in the aftermath of the “disengagement” there was an “appreciable improvement in the freedom of movement of Palestinians *within the Strip*,” and Palestinians with identity cards were able to move in and out of the Strip via the Rafah crossing when it was open. However, under the disengagement plan Israel retained ultimate control over the border between Gaza and Egypt and is able to close the crossing at will. This power has been extensively used, and since June 2007 Israel has kept the Rafah crossing “almost permanently closed.”<sup>47</sup> The sum of these on-going controls means Palestinians do not have their destiny in their own hands.

The persistence of governmental control under the guise of disengagement suggests that the relations of power linking Israel and the Occupied Territories require a new explanation.<sup>48</sup> Although the conventional view of the occupation from 1967 onwards has been that it is temporary, this stems from the official line that maintains the occupation is both external and exceptional. In this context, policies and practices that would normally be thought of as abhorrent to a democratic state are justified by their alleged necessity in extreme circumstances. However, the regime of power that governs both Israel proper and the Occupied Territories is organised around two systems of rule that appear separate but are radically interdependent. Through a structure that Azoulay and Ophir call “inclusive exclusion,”

the relatively liberal democracy of Israel proper, and the governmental production of the Occupied Territories as an emergency zone in which the population is reduced to bare life, are two modes of a single formation in which “the regime is not one.”

In this regime the neo-colonial power of occupation is exercised as both separation and submission. While developments like the “security barrier” give the impression that separation alone is the desired policy, most policies governing the Occupied Territories involve submission, and are designed to ensure Palestinians remain “non-citizens” who are politically beyond but territorially not outside the state.<sup>49</sup> Far from being a recent development, this form of rule emerged in the late 1990s and was accelerated by the second *intifada*. It has meant that Gaza is governed by controlled closures (Ophir calls these a “flexible siege”) in which the movement of people and commodities is strictly regulated so as to inflict collective punishment.<sup>50</sup>

Although this regulation ensures that life in the Strip remains bare, it also requires that life be sustained sufficiently to ensure the population does not descend into a full-blown humanitarian catastrophe. A democratic state can push people to the edge of disaster, but it cannot be seen producing a complete catastrophe. This means the Palestinians are permanently on “on the brink” of catastrophe yet never fully pushed over this threshold. The suspension of the population on the limit of complete catastrophe requires careful control. For example, the electricity supply for Gaza, which is controlled by Israel, is kept in permanent deficit through restrictions on the supply of industrial diesel to Gaza’s sole generating plant (Figures 22, 23). Those restrictions were intensified during the 2008-09 conflict, but they began in October 2007 as part of a new set of limits for fuel coming through the only supply

route, the Nahal Oz crossing.<sup>51</sup> These controls meant that during conflict 80% of Gaza's residents suffered regular blackouts restricting them to a few hours of electricity per day.

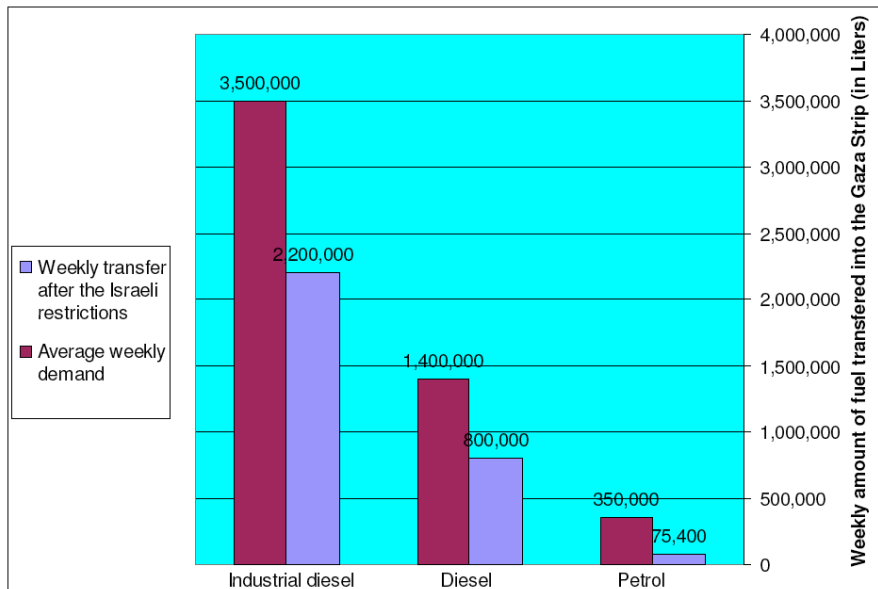


Figure 22: Gisha, *Gaza Fuel Restrictions, 2007*.

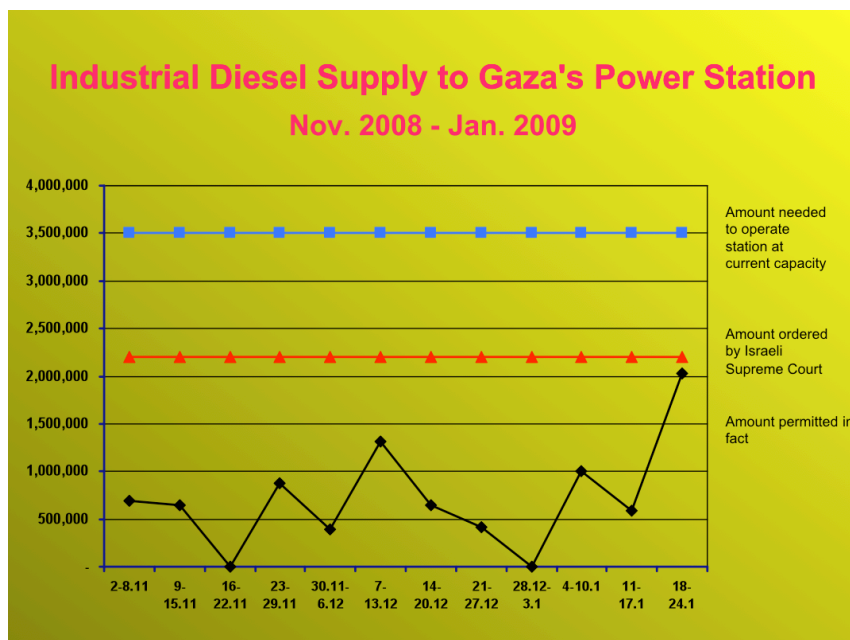


Figure 23: Gisha, *The Collapse of Gaza's Electricity System, 2009*, slide 7.

This supply data clearly demonstrates that resources are weapons of Israeli governance in the Occupied Territories, and that their restriction is not the result of an accident or unexpected failings, but the consequence of careful bureaucratic management about what is needed for basic sustenance without provoking a comprehensive catastrophe. For Ophir this makes Gaza a “laboratory of catastrophization” in which governmental strategies administer but never fully produce a total disaster. The “seasonal outbursts of direct military violence” which have been instigated annually since 2002, and are presented as retaliatory actions against an external threat, are part of the governmental catastrophization that maintains Gaza, at one and the same time, as both inside and outside.<sup>52</sup>

The idea that Gaza is “on the brink” of catastrophe is common to much media coverage (Figure 24). In one account during the conflict, it was reported that “much



Figure 24: *The Guardian G2*, 7 January 2009, cover.



of Gaza's public infrastructure has been destroyed and the territory is in a "critical emergency" after seven days of devastating bombing with air strikes averaging one every 20 minutes."<sup>53</sup> The problem with this reporting is that it locates the brink in exceptional or temporary moments like an all-out military conflict. In so doing they implicitly deflect attention from the way the exception is the norm, the temporary is permanent and the brink of catastrophe is a phenomenon produced by Israel's governmental strategy of catastrophization.

The issue, then, is how can the permanent emergency of catastrophization in Gaza be pictured? The coverage of the recent conflict, as evidenced by the images in *The Guardian* and *The Observer* discussed here, fails to reference the strategies of "inclusive exclusion" that have governed the Occupied Territories. That failure is partly an instantiation of the intrinsic limit common to the aesthetic strategy of documentary realism in much photojournalism. As Aric Mayer observes (speaking of Hurricane Katrina, but in a way applicable to Gaza) "to focus on anything specific, especially on stranded and abandoned citizens, meant shrinking the size of the event and delimiting the viewing experience...[this] betrayed the size of the event, making it more intimate and contained."<sup>54</sup>

In addition to a spatial limit, such an approach also compresses the time of the event. The international media's demand for access to a particular time and space, driven by the paradigm of immediacy regulating their conduct, was premised on the idea that the truth of the conflict could be found on the streets of Gaza during December 2008 and January 2009. However, even if journalists had gained timely access to the battle space they would not have seen the many components of

catastrophization assembled in disparate ways and diverse locations over a decade. What this discussion suggests, then, is that the truth lies less in a geographical location at one time than a set of political of political infrastructures over time. Is it possible to photograph this sort of truth, and if so, what would it mean for photography to go beyond the paradigm of immediacy in pursuit of this political narrative?

### **Re-thinking photography and the humanitarian subject**

Although the photographic record of the conflict in Gaza has come to us via the linked assumptions of visibility, exposure and action – and these assumptions are shared by the international media, human rights activists, the IDF and Palestinians – what the sum of the pictorial coverage in *The Guardian* and *The Observer* demonstrates is that photography constitutes a social field. More precisely, photography visually performs a particular understanding of the social.<sup>55</sup> In this case, the social field was organised around the idea of humanitarianism, obscured the permanent catastrophe, and at its core was made possible by the constructed visibility arising from the IDF media restrictions, which allowed some things and limited others. What we have then is a new onto-political understanding of photography that regards images as actors that constitute fields in which actions occur.<sup>56</sup>

Azoulay's important book *The Civil Contract of Photography* is part of this refiguration of photography, and is apposite to the argument here because of the way it intersects with her political critique of the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories. Azoulay makes clear her argument is derived from the need "to find refuge amid the loneliness of being a spectator who has been addressed every day by

photographs documenting the daily horrors of the Israeli occupation.”<sup>57</sup> Her central point is that the meaning of photographs is “an unintentional effect of the encounter” between all participants in the apparatus of photography, especially the camera, photographer, photographed subject and spectator.<sup>58</sup> Photographs are statements in which meaning is the property of neither the addresser nor the addressee but the product of mutual (mis)recognition.<sup>59</sup> Most importantly, the addresser and the addressee, the photographed subject and the spectator, are connected by a civil contract that gives rise to a political space that is not mediated exclusively by, or subjected completely, to the national logic that governs politics generally.<sup>60</sup>

Azoulay employs the idea of a contract because of her desire to move beyond ideas like empathy, shame, pity and compassion as “organizers of the gaze.” She recognizes that we are all governed, even if not governed equally, and our subjection to the global relations of governmentality establishes, at least temporarily, a virtual political community in which relations between others are not primarily mediated by the state or another sovereign.<sup>61</sup> As a result we do not have to simply “regard the pain of others” – we can develop our relationship to photographed subjects in terms of a mutual obligation that precedes the constitution of political sovereignty. This takes place in terms of a citizenry of photography, where the camera recognizes us, and to which we all belong even if we are stateless and without national citizenship.<sup>62</sup>

The impetus for this argument is clear. As Azoulay writes, this conceptualization means that “in the Israeli context, for instance, the Palestinians became citizens of the citizenry of photography long before there was any possibility of their becoming citizens in the ordinary meaning of the word,” and as citizens of the

citizenry of photography “they cease to appear as stateless or as enemies, the manners I which the sovereign regime strives to construct them. They call on me to recognize and restore their citizenship through my viewing.”<sup>63</sup>

In some places the articulation of the civil contract of photography overplays the freedom of the political sphere it produces (as in claims like “the civil contract of photography organizes political relations in the form of an open and dynamic framework among individuals, without regulation and meditation by a sovereign;” or that “the citizenry of photography has no sovereign and therefore no apparatus of exclusion”), although in other places the capacity for this sphere to be regulated in a discriminatory or oppressive manner is openly acknowledged.<sup>64</sup> But what Azoulay’s argument achieves above all else is a recognition of the limits of the photographic image and a recasting of how the meaning of the picture is produced. As she notes, the photograph is “an active sign that can never be completely and ultimately sealed” so the spectator must take responsibility for its meaning.<sup>65</sup>

This responsibility does not ensure a particular political position, however. Returning to the political environment from which her argument emerges, Azoulay states that under conditions of occupation, even a photograph’s engaged addressee can miss the enunciated position and regard the visual statement as confirmation of something already known. Because photographic meaning is structurally unstable, failing to be addressed is necessarily part of the apparatus in which the pictorial statement of horror is presented. I would argue this is especially the case when we consider how images reach us via global visual economy in which particular economic and political interests are heavily implicated. In this context – and I think this is what the above review of the photojournalism of the Gaza conflict shows – photographs of victims and destruction are most read as part of a “generalized

statement of horror” (such as “the Palestinian misery”) rather than a specific statement of the political context (the catastrophization of Gaza). As Azoulay concludes, “by transforming the emergency claim into a generalized statement, the addressee relinquishes her civil point of view and adopts one that has been created by the ruling power, the point of view from which this emergency claim has been contextualized.” As a result, “the generalized statement is always assimilated into the ruling national discourse.”<sup>66</sup>

Where, then, does this leave the photography of catastrophe in Gaza? Even though the prevailing logic suggests a simple relationship between exposure, image and action we have to work with the knowledge that pictures contain no preordained compulsion, just interpretations, counter-interpretations and reinterpretations. Yet we also have to recognize how humanitarian discourses that depoliticise conflicts, and national discourses that politicise events, have colonised visual understanding of the Occupied Territories.<sup>67</sup> Dealing with this situation requires us to appreciate that images do a lot of work: they visually perform the social field on which action can be made to occur, they testify to the conditions of the social field, and they can induce a responsibility in those concerned about the social field.<sup>68</sup> But photographs cannot do this alone, in both senses of that proposition: “a solitary image cannot testify to what is revealed through it, but must be attached to another image, another piece of information, another assertion or description, another grievance or piece of evidence, another broadcast, another transmitter. *An image is only ever another statement in a regime of statements.*”<sup>69</sup> That said, the apparatus of photography is a powerful component in this regime, even if it requires someone to look, read and care before an event is made available for understanding. The challenge is for the regime of statements in which images are situated to address the permanently managed catastrophe in Gaza, something that begins with reflexivity and proceeds in terms of multimedia.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

While all elements of the argument here remain my responsibility, this paper would not have been possible without the direct and indirect assistance of a number of people and places. Holding a fellowship with the Institute of Advanced Study at Durham University between January and March 2009 was pivotal for the paper's production. Aside from the time and space provided, the interaction with the other fellows, especially Adi Ophir, was instrumental in developing my thinking about Gaza and photojournalism. Ariella Azoulay, who was also in Durham during this time, was generous in her thoughts and helpful in providing relevant images, including those by Merav Maroody and Miki Kratsman. The participants in the informal discussion on this topic held on 4 March 2009 at the IAS – especially Fran Bartkowski, Chris Gollon, Eduardo Mendieta, Abye Tasse and Ed Welch, as well as Adi Ophir and Ariella Azoulay – helped develop many thoughts. Finally, thanks to Lori Allen for providing her most recent paper in response to my email request.

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> "Palestinians: 1,300 killed, 22,000 buildings destroyed in Gaza," CNN.com, 19 January 2009, <http://edition.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/meast/01/19/gaza.war/index.html>. For an earlier statistical summary see "FACTBOX-Israel's war in Gaza in facts and figures," Reuters UK, 17 January 2009, <http://uk.reuters.com/article/latestCrisis/idUKLH159960>, and for a discussion of the inevitable controversies surrounding casualty statistics see "Counting Casualties of War," BBC News, 28 January 2009, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle\\_east/7855070.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7855070.stm). For an assessment that records 2,692 destroyed or severely damaged buildings see "Satellite-Based Gaza Strip Damage Assessment Overview," UNOSAT: The UN Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) Operational Satellite Applications Programme, [http://unosat.web.cern.ch/unosat/asp/prod\\_free.asp?id=120](http://unosat.web.cern.ch/unosat/asp/prod_free.asp?id=120).

<sup>2</sup> Statistics on the American media demonstrate the extent, nature and cycle of coverage. In the first week of the war it was the major story, comprising 21% of the "newshole." As the Project for Excellence on Journalism remarked, "other than the Iraq war, that made Gaza the second-biggest overseas story for any week during the past two years." "War in Gaza Casts Shadow over Transition," *PEJ News Coverage Index: December 29, 2008 - January 4, 2009*, <http://www.journalism.org/node/14238>. The following week President Obama's inauguration was the lead story, though "the Gaza conflict was the second-biggest story last week (17%), dropping modestly from the previous week when it was No. 1. The war narrative seemed to evolve last week, with an increasing focus on the humanitarian situation inside Gaza." "Storyline Shifts from War to Washington," *PEJ News Coverage Index: January 5 - 11, 2009*, <http://www.journalism.org/node/14314>. By the third week, Gaza had slipped down the news agenda. "The No. 5 story (4%) was the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, most notably, the cease-fire that brought at least a temporary end to the Gaza bloodshed. With the violence easing, coverage was down markedly..." "Symbols and Substance of Obama's First Week Drive the Narrative," *PEJ News Coverage Index: January 19 - 25, 2009*, [http://www.journalism.org/news\\_index\\_report/new\\_administartion\\_is\\_the\\_dominant\\_story](http://www.journalism.org/news_index_report/new_administartion_is_the_dominant_story).

<sup>3</sup> "Unseen Gaza," *Dispatches*, Channel 4, at 4OD, <http://www.channel4.com/programmes/dispatches/catch-up#2870500>. This programme was originally broadcast on 22 January 2009. I heard this view expressed on more than one

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occasion at the Chobi Mela International Festival of Photography in Bangladesh at the end of January 2009. For one account that contains traces of this view, see Rahnuma Ahmed, “‘Still pictures are not still...’ Fore-seeing the effect of visual images,” <http://shahidul.wordpress.com/2009/02/15/still-pictures-are-not-still-fore-seeing-the-effect-of-visual-images/>. Although Ahmed ends this post by asking “Could pictures of Israel’s 22 day carnage in Gaza, which killed more than 1,300 Palestinians, have sown doubts in western minds about the Israeli claim of targeting only Hamas, and not civilians?” – a question I take to suggest that such photos either did not exist, were not widely distributed or were not widely seen – Ahmed contests my reading of those remarks in the Comments linked to the post.

<sup>4</sup> “Israel says Gaza periphery “closed military zone,” *AlertNet*, 29 December 2008, <http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/LT451140.htm>.

<sup>5</sup> For details on Israel’s media strategy during the Gaza war see “Israel ordered to let international media into Gaza,” *Guardian Unlimited*, 31 December 2008, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/dec/31/israelandthepalestinians-middleeast2>; “Israel puts media clamp on Gaza,” *New York Times*, 6 January 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/07/world/middleeast/07media.html>; “Israel explains Gaza media restrictions,” *CNN.com*, 14 January 2009, <http://www.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/meast/01/14/israel.gaza.media.restrictions/>; “Israel’s media strategy shows it is learning from its mistakes,” <http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/organgrinder/2009/jan/14/israel-media-strategy-shows>; “Latest on media exclusion from Gaza Strip,” *Reporters Without Borders*, 22 January 2009, [http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id\\_article=29899](http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=29899); and “Court to state: Let foreign media into Gaza when borders open,” *Haaretz.com*, 26 January 2009, <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1058574.html>. The Supreme Court ruling on 31 December 2008 required the IDF to allow up to twelve journalists to enter Gaza through the Erez crossing whenever it reopened for humanitarian reasons. “Lift ban on journalists, says supreme court,” *The Guardian*, 1 January 2009, 6.

<sup>6</sup> For details on Hamas rocket attacks on Israel throughout 2008 see “Hamas Rockets,” GlobalSecurity.org, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/para/hamas-qassam.htm>. This records 771 rockets and mortars fired at Israel between 27 December and 15 January 2009, killing four and wounding 285 Israelis.

<sup>7</sup> Jim Hollander, “War Paparazzi: Israel’s War Against Hamas and Still Photographers,” *Digital Journalist*, February 2009, <http://www.digitaljournalist.org/issue0902/hollander.html>. In addition to complaining about the controls imposed by the IDF Hollander also laments that the Israeli’s failed to stage photo opportunities: “During the entire war the IDF did not organize even one event for still photographers.”

<sup>8</sup> For the perspective of two Arab journalists in Gaza (Al Jazeera reporters Sherine Tadros and Ayman Mohyeldin, who were the only English-language reporters inside Gaza during the start of the war), see “Reporting from Gaza,” Frontline Club, 24 April 2009, <http://frontlineclub.com/blogs/frontline/2009/04/reporting-from-gaza.html>.

<sup>9</sup> The provenance of the statement “The first casualty when war comes, is truth” is usually linked to a 1917 speech by US Senator Hiram Johnson, who opposed America’s entry to World War One and thought debate on the issue was made impossible by newspaper coverage. It provided the title for Phillip Knightly’s classic account of war correspondents [*The First Casualty*, revised edition (London: Prion Books, 2000)], though there are competing claims about the statement’s original author dating as far back as the Greeks. See “Notes and Queries,” *Guardian Unlimited*, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/notesandqueries/query/0,5753,-21510,00.html>.

<sup>10</sup> Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000), 30-31. Emphasis added.

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<sup>11</sup> Hypermediacy refers to the “riots of diverse media forms” on screens where graphics, photos, video, text, and animation are all interlinked. It is something obvious on 24-hour news channels where the screen shows multiple media at once. In this context, “immediacy depends on hypermediacy.” Ibid, 5.

<sup>12</sup> Meg McLagan, “Introduction: Making Human Rights Claims Visible, *American Anthropologist* 108 (1) 2006, 191.

<sup>13</sup> Thomas Keenan, “Mobilizing Shame,” *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 103 (2/3) Spring/Summer 2004, 438.

<sup>14</sup> Wendy Kozol, “Domesticating NATO’s War in Kosovo/a: (In)Visible Bodies and the Dilemma of Photojournalism,” *Meridians: feminism, race, transnationalism* 4 (2) 2004, 4.

<sup>15</sup> “Inspiration from Focus Awards Lifetime Achievement Award winner Eliane Laffont,” MediaStorm Blog, 12 May 2009, at <http://mediastorm.org/blog/?p=1031>.

<sup>16</sup> Don McCullin, “Where are the images of horror from Sri Lanka? History shows us that there is always the need for a witness to war,” *The Times*, 18 May 2009, [http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/columnists/guest\\_contributors/article6307730.ece](http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/columnists/guest_contributors/article6307730.ece); Yannis Behrakis, “Heaven or Hell,” Reuters Blogs, <http://blogs.reuters.com/axismundi/2009/03/03/heaven-or-hell/>.

<sup>17</sup> A Keenan has argued, the idea that visibility and images of atrocities compel an active response to address the sources of violence founded in Bosnia. See Thomas Keenan, “Publicity and Indifference (Sarajevo on Television),” *PMLA* 117 (1) January 2002, 104-116.

<sup>18</sup> Keenan, “Mobilizing Shame,” 438.

<sup>19</sup> I am developing this argument in a new paper entitled “What, actually, is photography?”.

<sup>20</sup> Aric Mayer, “Aesthetics of Catastrophe,” *Public Culture* 20:2, 2008, 180.

<sup>21</sup> We can appreciate the scale of available war photography enabled by digital technology as follows. The photographers from one agency, Reuters, produce globally some 30,000 photographs per day. From those, the agency distributes about 1,700 photographs per day to its media clients. Those clients (newspapers and the like) subscribe to a number of agencies, and their picture desks will each have access to more than 7,000 photographs per day covering all issues. One newspaper – *The Independent* in the UK – had more than 300 photographs from Gaza to choose from within hours of the opening Israeli assault despite the IDF’s media restrictions. The data concerning Reuters comes from Ayperi Karabuda Ecer, “Looking Back, Looking Forward,” <http://blogs.reuters.com/photo/>, March 23 2009. The data from *The Independent* comes from the paper’s picture editor Sophie Batterbury, “IoS letters special: News photography (4 January 2009),” <http://www.independent.co.uk/opinion/letters/iiosi-letters-special-news-photography-4-january-2009-1224217.html>. For the casting of all Palestinian photographers working for international agencies as biased, see this remark from a conservative blogger: “We should not forget that every television image and every news photograph coming out of Gaza right now is filtered through Hamas. The photographers filing pictures for Reuters, Associated Press, and Agence France Presse are all Palestinians, and all propagandists for Hamas—or they wouldn’t be allowed to take pictures in Gaza.” See “Staged Photos Pouring Out of Gaza,” *Little Green Footballs*, 5 January 2009, [http://littlegreenfootballs.com/article/32360\\_Staged\\_Photos\\_Pouring\\_Out\\_of\\_Gaza](http://littlegreenfootballs.com/article/32360_Staged_Photos_Pouring_Out_of_Gaza).

<sup>22</sup> Ariella Azoulay, “Asleep in a Sterile Zone,” *Aperture Magazine*, <http://www.aperture.org/humanrights/azoulay.php>.

<sup>23</sup> Batterbury, “IoS letters special,” <http://www.independent.co.uk/opinion/letters/iiosi-letters-special-news-photography-4-january-2009-1224217.html>.



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<sup>24</sup> We can infer the empathetic response from one reader of *The Independent* who posted an Internet comment about her reaction to the photograph: "I am haunted by the image of the little girl with war all over her face. What kind of reaction lets you know your picture has been successful in its endeavour? When I opened the paper and saw this beautiful, sad and damaged child, my heart broke a little bit more. I am a mother, and as such, feel very strongly for all other children caught in the stupid wars of man." Joanna, at "IoS letters special," <http://www.independent.co.uk/opinion/letters/iiosi-letters-special-news-photography-4-january-2009-1224217.html>.

<sup>25</sup> In the US this is evident in the different accounts offered by CAMERA (Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America, <http://www.camera.org/>) and The Electronic Intifada (<http://electronicintifada.net/>). The desire to monitor coverage of Israel/Palestine has recently reached the UK with the formation of Just Journalism (<http://www.justjournalism.com/>), which aims to "promote accurate and responsible reporting about Israel in the British media."

<sup>26</sup> The first remark comes from *The Daily Mail*'s Melanie Phillips and is quoted in Peter Wilby, "When evil is a question of bias," *The Guardian*, 30 March 2009, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2009/mar/30/newspapers-pressandpublishing>. Wilby's report details the discourse of a public forum organized by Just Journalism on reporting Israel/Palestine. The second remark is from "Guardian Hits Bottom, Digs," *Little Green Footballs*, 5 January 2009, [http://littlegreenfootballs.com/article/32358\\_Guardian\\_Hits\\_Bottom\\_Digs](http://littlegreenfootballs.com/article/32358_Guardian_Hits_Bottom_Digs). Little Green Footballs was named "Best Israel Advocacy blog" by *The Jerusalem Post* in 2005 – see <http://info.jpost.com/C005/BlogCentral/JIB.2005/index.html>.

<sup>27</sup> Adi Ophir, "Reflections on Gaza from Tel Aviv," *ZNet*, 12 January 2009, <http://www.zcommunications.org/znet/viewArticle/20230>.

<sup>28</sup> Lori Allen, "The Polyvalent Politics of Martyr Commemorations in the Palestinian Intifada," *History and Memory* 18 (2) 2006, 113.

<sup>29</sup> Batterbury, "IoS letters special," <http://www.independent.co.uk/opinion/letters/iiosi-letters-special-news-photography-4-january-2009-1224217.html>. Despite the picture editor's view, the majority of readers' comments on her views demonstrated an appetite for the worst to be shown. For a discussion of the issues at stake in this oft-repeated controversy, see David Campbell, "Horrible Blindness: Images of Death in Contemporary Media," *Journal of Cultural Research* 8:1 (2004), 55-74.

<sup>30</sup> The strongest photograph of this type used by *The Guardian* was the page one picture, 6 January 2009, which showed a father grieving of the bodies of three young children from his family.

<sup>31</sup> "Arab media portray Palestinians as courageous victims," *Los Angeles Times*, 8 January 2009, <http://www.latimes.com/news/printedition/front/la-fg-arab-media8-2009jan08.0.3909316.story>.

<sup>32</sup> The quote and perspective comes from "Israeli media focus on Hamas rocket attacks; gore kept to minimum," *Los Angeles Times*, 8 January 2009, <http://articles.latimes.com/2009/jan/08/world/fg-israel-media8>. On the Arab media perspective, see Habib Battah, "In the US, Gaza is a Different War," *Aljazeera.net*, 7 January 2009, [http://english.aljazeera.net/focus/war\\_on\\_gaza/2009/01/20091585448204690.html](http://english.aljazeera.net/focus/war_on_gaza/2009/01/20091585448204690.html). The invocation of "pornography" as a limit term warrants more analysis. Carolyn Dean has argued that, in the context of images of suffering, pornography is a term deployed by critics to raise suspicions about particular representations. As she concludes, the term 'pornography' "functions primarily as an aesthetic and moral judgment that precludes an investigation of traumatic response and arguably diverts us from the more explicitly posed question that these

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narratives all address implicitly: how to forge a critical use of empathy.” Carolyn J. Dean, “Empathy, Pornography, and Suffering,” *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 14 (1) 2003, 108.

<sup>33</sup> Lori Allen, “Getting by the Occupation: How Violence Became Normal During the Second Palestinian Intifada,” *Cultural Anthropology* 23 (3) 2008, 462.

<sup>34</sup> Lori A. Allen, “Martyr Bodies in the Media: Human Rights, Aesthetics, and the Politics of Immediation in the Palestinian Intifada,” *American Ethnologist* 36 (1) 2009, 172.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 169, 170, 172.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 163, 167.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 162, 172.

<sup>38</sup> The video footage of a deceased baby being brought to a Gaza hospital demonstrates the contrasting approaches to graphic images. In the Channel 4 documentary “Unseen Gaza” (starting at 20:50 and running until 26:00) this is discussed as a case of how international agencies and British broadcasters show only heavily edited versions. In contrast, the complete clip, “Israeli war crimes: Burned Baby to death in Gaza,” from Sabbah TV, is available at <http://blip.tv/file/1679332/>.

<sup>39</sup> For example, Ayperi Karabuda Ecer, a senior Reuters executive, has described her company’s purpose in these terms: “Photography cannot explain the world, but it can do something extraordinary to inform you whilst appealing to your emotions... Thomson Reuters is the world’s largest source of intelligent information. We seek to provide ‘knowledge to act’. One can argue that no significant decision can be made without emotion, and that emotion is key for a story to reach out to its audience.” Ayperi Karabuda Ecer, “Looking Back, Looking Forward,” <http://blogs.reuters.com/photo/>, March 23 2009. Similarly, in writing about his work in Gaza, NPR photojournalist David Gilkey stated: “You try to capture emotion in it and show that this is a personal thing to the people here. It’s not just smoke on the horizon. I hope that maybe some of the chances that you take — or the risks that you take in order to get a picture like that — that somebody would understand, “Wow! These people are not that different from me.” From “NPR Photographer Gets Close-Up of Conflict,” NPR.org, 7 January 2009 <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=99084922>.

<sup>40</sup> For an IDF video that makes this case subsequent to the conflict, see “3D animation illustrating the complex battlefield in the Gaza Strip,” 22 April 2009, <http://dover.idf.il/IDF/English/News/today/09/4/2201.htm>. For a photograph of IDF troops asleep inside a Palestinian house in Gaza, and a discussion of the significance of this image, see Azoulay, “Asleep in a Sterile Zone.”

<sup>41</sup> Ophir, “Reflections on Gaza from Tel Aviv.”

<sup>42</sup> See Save the Children, “Gaza Conflict,” [http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/en/32\\_7306.htm](http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/en/32_7306.htm)

<sup>43</sup> See Disasters Emergency Committee, “Latest Appeal,” 22 January 2009, <http://www.dec.org.uk/item/200> to view the film. For a gallery of DEC photographs from Gaza, see “Photos: Gaza Crisis,” <http://www.dec.org.uk/item/318>. Although they lack the formal aesthetic qualities of professional photojournalism, these images are interesting for their repetition of common content (notably mothers and children), and for the reiteration of a common style – children peering out from behind fences, grates and railings that gives the impression they are imprisoned.

<sup>44</sup> For details of the Israeli position, and evidence that it nonetheless remains in control and subject to an occupier’s obligations, see Gisha, *Disengaged Occupiers: The Legal Status of Gaza*, January 2007, <http://www.gisha.org/>.

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<sup>45</sup> From "IDF Releases Information on Military Investigations," 22 April 2009, <http://dover.idf.il/IDF/English/News/today/09/4/2201.htm>.

<sup>46</sup> B'Tselem, "The Gaza Strip after disengagement," [http://www.btselem.org/english/Gaza\\_Strip/Index.asp](http://www.btselem.org/english/Gaza_Strip/Index.asp).

<sup>47</sup> Ibid (emphasis added); and B'Tselem, "Rafah Crossing," [http://www.btselem.org/english/Gaza\\_Strip/Rafah\\_Crossing.asp](http://www.btselem.org/english/Gaza_Strip/Rafah_Crossing.asp). Other parties – namely Egypt, the Palestinian Authority and Hamas – are not without blame for the closures of Rafah, but Israel retains ultimate control hence the greatest responsibility. See Gisha, *Who is Really Closing Rafah Crossing?*, March 2009, <http://www.gisha.org/>.

<sup>48</sup> This section relies on the work of Ariella Azoulay and Adi Ophir, especially their co-authored book, *This Regime Which is Not One - Occupation and Democracy Between the Sea and the River (1967 - )* (Tel Aviv: Resling, 2008). Although only published in Hebrew at present, the central themes of the argument are available via a podcast with the authors, *News from Within Podcast: This Regime Which is not One - Occupation and Democracy Between the Sea and the River, 1967 to the Present*, 25 September 2008, <http://tiny.cc/LPmBL>. Adi Ophir has also used these ideas in his presentation, *From Hannah Arendt to Ariel Sharon - Notes for a Political Theory of Man-Made Disasters*, Institute for Advanced Study Public Lecture, Durham University, 4 February 2009, <http://www.dur.ac.uk/ias/events/fellowslectures200809/ophir/>. Further related work will appear in *The Power of Inclusive Exclusion: Anatomy of Israeli Rule in the Occupied Palestinian Territories*, edited by Adi Ophir, Michal Givoni and Sari Hanafi (New York: Zone Books, forthcoming 2009).

<sup>49</sup> On the "security barrier," see *Against the Wall: Israel's Barrier to Peace*, edited by Michael Sorkin (New York: Free Press, 2005).

<sup>50</sup> Gisha, *Gaza Closure Defined: Collective Punishment*, Position Paper on the International Law Definition of Israeli Restrictions on Movement in and out of the Gaza Strip, December 2008, <http://www.gisha.org/>. This paper rejects the notion of the governmental controls being a sanctions or a siege.

<sup>51</sup> The significance of electricity supply has been cited by B'Tselem as vital; see note 45. Ophir, *From Hannah Arendt to Ariel Sharon - Notes for a Political Theory of Man-Made Disasters*, used this as a case for his argument, via materials from Gisha. See Gisha, *Gaza Fuel Restrictions: Walking Towards a Crisis*, Fact Sheet, 17 April 2008, <http://www.gisha.org/>; and *The Collapse of Gaza's Electricity System: Well Planned and Foretold in Advance*, 28 January 2009, [www.gisha.org/UserFiles/File/publications/Gaza\\_Electricity\\_28-01-09\(1\).ppt](http://www.gisha.org/UserFiles/File/publications/Gaza_Electricity_28-01-09(1).ppt).

<sup>52</sup> Ophir, "Reflections on Gaza from Tel Aviv."

<sup>53</sup> "'Critical emergency' after airstrike every 20 minutes," *The Guardian*, 3 January 2009, 7. For similar examples see "Shortages put hospital on the brink of collapse," *The Guardian*, 31 December 2008, 4; and "Officials warn: Gaza infrastructures near breaking point," 26 January 2009, *Ha'aretz.com*, <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1052984.html>.

<sup>54</sup> Mayer, "Aesthetics of Catastrophe," 180.

<sup>55</sup> The background to this idea can found in David Campbell, "Geopolitics and Visual Culture: Sighting the Darfur Conflict 2003-05," *Political Geography* 26: 4 (2007), 357-382.

<sup>56</sup> Azoulay argues we need to develop a new "ontological-political understanding of photography." See Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography* (New York: Zone Books, 2008), 23. I have modified this slightly by returning to the way the idea of the "ontopolitical" is preferable to notions of the ontological, especially when we want to dispense move on from debates about the ontology of the photographic image that are usually conducted in terms of indexicality and veracity of the image. See my earlier discussion of the concept in David Campbell, *National Deconstruction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota

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Press, 1998), 22-23. The second formulation combines Elizabeth Edward's statement (photographs are social actors "impressing, articulating and constructing fields of social actions in ways that would not have occurred if they did not exist") with Thomas Keenan's argument ("So the television image constitutes a field of action: not just a representation of actions elsewhere but a field in or on which actions occur – a public field, we could say, but only if we're willing to part with some of the cherished predicates of that concept"). See "Thinking Photography Beyond the Visual," in *Photography: Theoretical Snapshots*, edited by J.J. Long, Andrea Noble and Edward Welch (London: Routledge, 2008), 17; and Keenan, "Publicity and Indifference," 108.

<sup>57</sup> Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography*, 88.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 22-23.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 17, 22-23, 88-89. I have developed similar ideas of a political bond that arises from the recognition that we are all governed in David Campbell, "Why Fight: Humanitarianism, Principles and Poststructuralism," *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 27:3 (1998), pp. 497-521.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 85, 104, 109.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 131, 17.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 110, 128, 125-26.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 199.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 201-02.

<sup>67</sup> In this context, it is worth considering the animation "Closed Zone" which addresses continuing Israeli control over Gaza: see <http://www.closedzone.com/>. As *The New York Times News Blog* observed, "The resort to animation is perhaps a sign, after so many years of television images showing the suffering of Israelis and Palestinians — like those who appear in The Guardian's videos [on alleged war crimes during the conflict; see <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/mar/23/israel-gaza-war-crimes-guardian>] — that viewers in the region and in the rest of the world have perhaps lost some of their capacity to be shocked by those now-familiar scenes. Whether a short animated clip posted on the Web can really succeed in changing the way anyone sees the situation is an open question." Sari Bashi discusses how animation was a conscious strategy in the face of conventional imagery in a film on the making of "Closed Zone". She says animation was designed to overcome stereotypes because in their view only a cartoon figure would let people see humans living in Gaza. She wanted a figure who was universal and with whom all people could identify. See "Closed Zone: Behind the scenes," 4 March 2009, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sPhrsY6KRIA>, and the CNN report on the animation "Cartoon politics in Gaza "Closed Zone," 6 March 2009, <http://edition.cnn.com/video/#/video/world/2009/03/06/wedeman.gaza.animation.cnn>. This report ends with a critic that demonstrates perfectly how journalistic ideas of balance intersect with Israeli notions of reciprocity in the conflict.

<sup>68</sup> Keenan, "Publicity and Indifference," 114.

<sup>69</sup> Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography*, 191 (Emphasis added). This is akin to Aric Mayer's view: "In representing disaster, war, poverty, and human suffering, the causes of the events are frequently remote and invisible from the subjects/objects, and so they remain a topic for textual explication rather than existing within the image. How images perform alongside the text is frequently a determining factor in their political effectiveness. It is easy to

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evoke a sense of empathy in a photograph. We tend to feel compassion toward those who are suffering. However, it is difficult to effectively interrogate the causes of the suffering within that same photograph. The empathy in the viewer is real, but the meaning of it, malleable. If the causes are invisible, they can be assigned to whatever agency the audience imagines, whether real or not. " Mayer, "Aesthetics of Catastrophe," 180.