

# ***Operation Protective Edge* 2014: Holding Language and Gaza Hostage**

GARY BRATCHFORD, *Manchester Metropolitan University*

## **ABSTRACT**

Examining the Israeli military operation against Gaza during the summer months of 2014, this paper firstly examines how Israel ‘took language hostage’ to justify the multifaceted punishment of the Palestinian. I will identify how this use of language helps to frame Israel’s actions as democratic by acting in defence, a process articulated throughout previous military operations. Such a process is implicit within the dominant political imaginary that constitutes much of the popular discourse that shapes the Israeli relationship with the Palestinian. Secondly, I will draw attention to the critical documentary photography practice of Gianluca Panella’s 2013 World Press award winning series *Black Out*. Making comparisons to work produced in the West Bank by Israeli Photographer Gaston Ickowicz, I will highlight how Panella’s work goes some way to addressing how to visually articulate a society brought to the ‘brink’, while also being artifacts that communicate the trace of ongoing-catastrophisation.

## **KEYWORDS**

*Operation Protective Edge*; Visibility; Photography; Politics; Occupied Palestinian Territories; Israel

## Introduction

*'Go, go, go, said the bird: human kind cannot bear very much reality. Time past and time future, what might have been and what has been point to one end, which is always present.'*

These, the last lines of the opening paragraph of T.S Eliot's *Burnt Norton* were prescient as I sat thinking about this paper. For the Palestinian in the Occupied Territories, time past and time future do indeed point to an end that is always present: the occupation. Since the establishment of the Green Line in 1967, Palestinians within the Occupied Territories have been subject to a temporality that is open-ended.<sup>1</sup> The bird of Eliot's poem acts as the narrator of truth within the imaginative space of Eliot's *rose garden*. The tweet of Eliot's bird, much like the tweets that flooded the social media platform Twitter, drew our attention to a reality that often became hard to bear. The tweet became constitutive of how the visibilities of war in recent years are mediated, attesting to how technology and the journalistic environment undergo change in form and function. Here one can look to David Campbell's (2009) analysis of the Israeli incursion into Gaza during 2009 where it can be suggested that social media and citizen journalism helped to construct a public visibility of a social reality (Couldry 2000) that would otherwise remain largely unseen were it not for those on the ground, in the immediacy of the event.<sup>2</sup>

In what follows, this paper will seek to outline some of the issues related to the production of visibilities in Gaza in response to the 2014 bombardment of Gaza. After exploring the rhetorical approach taken by Israel in the build up to the bombardment of Gaza, I will shift my attention to the analysis of the documentary practice of Italian photographer, Gianluca Panella. By employing Jacques Rancière's notion that 'politics is first of all a battle about perceptible and sensible material' (Rancière 2004), I will assert that Panella's *Black Out Series* (2013) can be understood as an effort to reconfigure the distribution of the sensible in relation to what is visible and invisible, sayable and unsayable. Knowing that power is closely aligned with visibility I will assert that Panella's work, enables us to see the effects of the occupation through a new set of configurations; in doing so, altering the spectatorial expectation of the viewer and our understanding of the occupation in a day-to-day context.

## Operation Protective Edge

On the 8<sup>th</sup> July 2014, Israel launched '*Operation Protective Edge*', a 50-day fully-fledged military attack upon the Gaza Strip that included bombardment launched from

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<sup>1</sup>Taken from Ariella Azoulay's *The Darkroom of History* (2005), the *Fourth Geneva Convention* (1949) regarding the status of an occupation, a territory is considered occupied when it is de facto under the authority of the hostile army (Fourth Geneva Convention, Paragraph 42). The occupation of inhabited territory, then, is always temporary, and not only because the regulations point to the horizon of its conclusion – "when peace shall be made" – but because of the presence in the occupied territory of a population that cannot be occupied. "It is forbidden," says Paragraph 45, "to force the inhabitants of the occupied territory to swear allegiance to the hostile ruling power" (Azoulay, 2005: 74).

<sup>2</sup> During the first two weeks of Operation Cast Lead, 2009, international journalists were banned from entering the Gaza Strip.

the sky, sea and the land, combined with a short ground incursion. *Operation Protective Edge*, or ‘Strong Cliff’ in Hebrew, concluded on 26<sup>th</sup> August 2014 after an Egyptian-brokered ceasefire. The subsequent 50-day barrage resulted in the death of 2,100 Palestinians and one ‘other’.<sup>3</sup> As of the 5<sup>th</sup> August, a report from Amnesty International stated that 86 per cent of the Palestinian loss within the Gaza Strip were civilians.<sup>4</sup> The report, which drew data from the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), also noted that more than 9,400 people had been injured, many of them seriously, while an estimated 485,000 people across the Gaza Strip had been displaced. Such figures attest to the military wrath that besieged the Palestinian enclave, while the Israeli loss of life came in at 66, all of whom were IDF (Israeli Defense Force) combatants. The ‘displacement of the displaced’ points to a tragedy that is almost beyond visibility; however, interesting and informative infographics, maps and videos helped to visualize the scale of the destruction.<sup>5</sup> One such video from the independent Palestinian production company MediaTown depicts the devastated urban topology of Al-Shejaiya, a suburb of Gaza City, which, between the 19-20<sup>th</sup> July 2014, underwent one of the heaviest bombardments of the operation<sup>6</sup>. The haunting footage shot from a drone and uploaded to YouTube invites the spectator to *see* the scale of the damage. The 50-second clip surveys the wounded landscape, adding to the multiple optics of war visibilities and mediations, which contribute to the burgeoning archive of visual material related to Gaza. Techniques like this help to shift how the visual is used, marking what Meg McLagan noted as a move from ‘documentation through photojournalism to a means of strategic communication’ (McLagan 2007). This means of producing counter visibilities promotes a widening of the space in which politics can be conceived, performed and seen; visibilities that challenge the attempts by the Israeli state to control the visual field, as was the case in 2009.

According to Rancière, “politics is a question of aesthetics, a matter of appearances” (1999, 74). In Israel/Palestine, regimes of visibility and the relationship between politics and aesthetics, concerning what is possible to see and how that visibility is constructed, are closely aligned with the distribution of power. In an asymmetric context, such as the occupation of Palestinian Territories by the Israeli State, order is imposed upon the inhabitants by means of military force, changing them from citizen into subject. As such, the construct and mediation of visibilities within Gaza and the West Bank are always contingent on how political action is framed and made visible. Although the conditions of both geographies differ in how they are controlled, the former is remotely or ‘digitally occupied’ by Israel (Tawil-Souri, 2014) and is without any permanent Israeli presence, while the latter is managed through a combination of administrative and military rule. Yet, dominating the field of visibility, specifically within a security discourse, is the notion that Israelis are neighboring a society that is immersed in a pathological culture of violence. This neighbouring ‘culture of violence’ goes some way to explaining the Israeli hostility towards the immediate and long-term effect of their most recent military operation.

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<sup>3</sup> A Bedouin Palestinian died during rocket fire from Gaza; however, Bedouin communities within Israel are denied basic services or recognized as citizens of Israel, yet it was reported that Israel attempted to claim the loss for their own statistics. For more information: <http://972mag.com/israels-bedouin-civilians-in-death-alone/93965/>

<sup>4</sup> Figures accessible from: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/MDE15/023/2014/en/c931e37b-a3c2-414f-b3a6-a00986896a09/mde150232014en.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Examples of which can be found here: <http://visualizingpalestine.org>

<sup>6</sup> The video is accessible here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jBEFBixO1ck>

Close to Hebron on the 15<sup>th</sup> June 2014, the kidnapping of three Jewish-Israeli teenagers sparked a multi-narrative justification for what became *Operation Protective Edge*. Responding to the kidnapping and discovery of the three dead Israelis, the IDF prepared for a manhunt of the Palestinian city; blocking the main access routes to the city with concrete blocks and setting up a large number of checkpoints (Levy 2014). In the wake of the kidnappings, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was quick to suggest that Hamas was responsible, with the IDF official blog claiming “Hamas terrorists kidnapped three Israeli teenagers in Judea and Samaria...meanwhile *Palestinians* (emphasis added) have been calling for further abduction”<sup>7</sup>. The use of the term ‘Palestinians’ generalises the population, marking one of the first of many instances where the Israeli government utilised language to make a collective distinction between ‘us and them’ in the run up to their military operation, mobilising the imaginative political binaries of ‘good and evil’, ‘democratic and terror-state’. Thereafter, the focus shifted west to the Gaza strip where the IDF responded to Hamas rocket attacks fired into Israel. Drawing comparisons with the Blitz, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu stated that “Israel is undergoing a similar bombardment”, claiming that “there's only been one other instance where a democracy has been rocketed and pelleted with these projectiles of death, and that's Britain during World War Two” (Spencer 2014). Finally, on the 17<sup>th</sup> July Israel invaded Gaza with a ground incursion aimed at destroying the ‘terror tunnels’ that linked Gaza with Israel. Although, the original Israeli statement that Hamas was responsible for the kidnapping was subsequently proven unfounded, Israel had already shifted the attention to a victim and security discourse that justified their ensuing actions. The latter typifies what Simon Faulkner (2009) refers to as the ‘political imaginary’ of the occupation that affects both the political and social aspect of Israeli culture. Over the three narratives that underpinned each Israeli military action, culminating in *Operation Protective Edge*, the use of emotive language that drew on a discourse of terror, defense and democracy in opposition to a neighboring terror state helped to anchor the rhetoric and action of the IDF and Israeli state. As Dr. Mads Gilbert noted when interviewed on the BBC’s political show *HARDtalk*, Israel takes language hostage.<sup>8</sup>

The apathetic nature of the Palestinian is born from a long established perceptible reality, which is organized around a fundamental opposition between Israelis and Palestinians living in the occupied territories, and which obfuscates the nature of the occupation as an occupation. As such, Israel is often seen to be at war with Gaza; the connotations and popular mediations of which assert that such a position is purely defensive. The political imaginary functions on a number of levels.

Firstly, the designation of Gaza as a ‘hostile entity’ prefigures Gaza and Hamas as the perpetrator, ensuring that Israel is often a victim. The tunnels are one such instance where the long tentacle of terror reaches deep beneath the civil society of Israel. Secondly in responding to the kidnapping, the rocket attacks and the ‘terror tunnels’ help Israel frame their conduct in ‘response to’ Palestinian action, helping to disassociate itself from the wider geo-political frame of the longstanding occupation of Palestinian territory. This point has been noted by Craig Jones who asserts that

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<sup>7</sup> An area more commonly known as the West Bank, Judea and Samaria are biblical references to the land.

<sup>8</sup> The full interview can be accessed here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H9O3EcuuLuk>

Israel's visual representation of the assault on Gaza during 2008 can be summarized by a simple typology: 'it's their fault, not ours' and its corollary: 'they started it', thus recycling old tropes of victimhood (Jones 2010, 7). The Israeli Defense cabinet officially declared the creation of Gaza as a 'hostile enemy' in 2007; thus feeding into the political imagination of cultural 'othering', through various practices, including designating Gaza and all those that inhabit the political space as 'hostile'. Such a representation helps create a conceptual framework that Lisa Bhungalia (2010) argues is based upon "an ontological distinction of 'us' and 'them'", a distinction clearly articulated by the IDF tweet in Figure 1 on the 15<sup>th</sup> July, in response to the kidnapping. The threat of Gaza is also affirmed through the rhetorical discourse used by popular Israeli figures such as the historian, Benny Morris who claimed in the Israeli newspaper *Ha'aretz*, during an interview in 2004, a need for the Separation Wall in the West Bank because it 'quells the revenge culture central in the Arab tribal customs with no moral inhibitions' (Shavit 2004). This sentiment is not a marginal reaction within the Israeli public sphere; more recently, on the 28<sup>th</sup> July 2014, Moshe Feiglin, Deputy Speaker for the Israeli Knesset and member of the Prime Minister's Likud party, remarked that 'the only innocents in Gaza are the IDF Soldiers' while Gazan's were 'savages in the desert'. Furthermore, on the 4<sup>th</sup> August he posted to his verified Facebook account a desire for electricity and water supply to Gaza to be disconnected before being 'shelled with maximum fire power' (Reilly 2014).

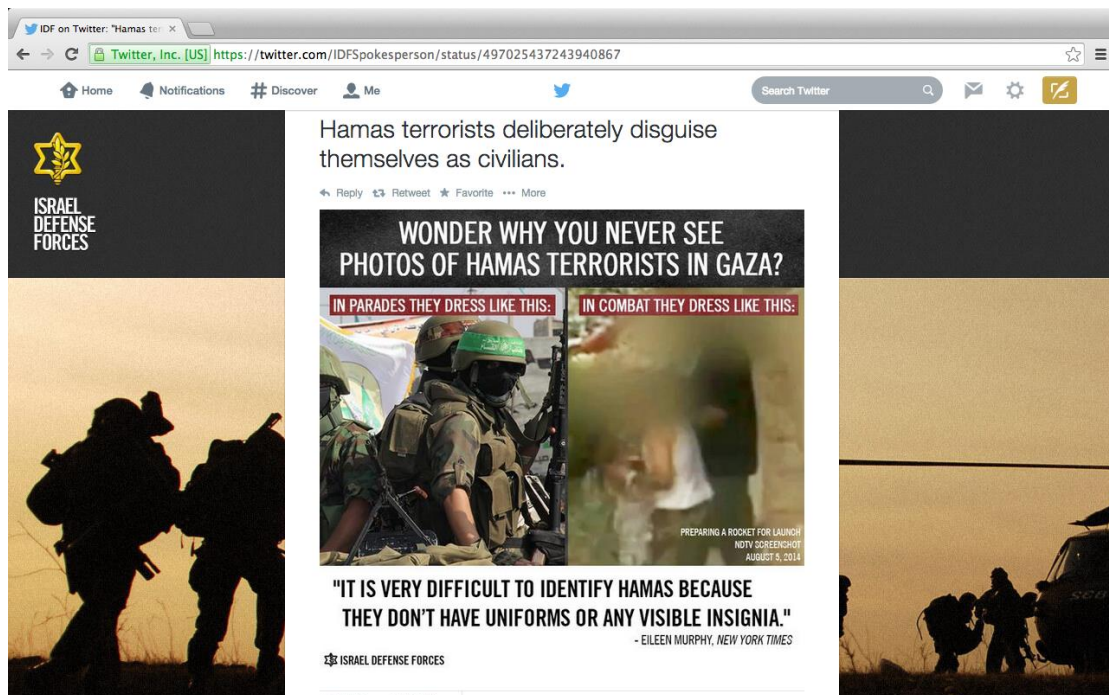


Figure 1: IDF Twitter account '@IDFSpokesperson' Image from *Operation Protective Edge*: The invisible enemy of Hamas – the tweet was retweeted 784 times with 354 'favourites'.

The calls for the elimination of Gaza, while extreme, are consistent with a narrative that Gaza is first and foremost, a hostile space. Crucially, as Jones notes, Israel is always already the victim, and Gaza and Hamas are always-already the perpetrators (2010, 8). If Gaza is the aggressor then accordingly *they started it*; Israeli action is

prefigured as a *response* to (rather than an instigation of) violence. Moreover, the language of war is just as significant as controlling the image that is incumbent with it. While political rhetoric and press conferences reiterate a symmetric engagement – a conflict that responds to a ‘hostile enemy’ – the media management of the operation begins with the name – specifically the ‘English translation’ in this instance, ‘Protective Edge’ (Arnaout 2014). The connotative rhetoric of defense is assimilated into the topology of the space in question. However the figures tell a different story; in 2008 through to early 2009 ‘Operation Cast Lead’ resulted in 1391 Palestinian deaths, while in the 2012 operation ‘Pillar of Defence’, 167 Palestinian lives were lost.<sup>9</sup> Yet the representational framing of such loss is lessened due to the visual economy<sup>10</sup> of the Palestinian image, because what constitutes an “eligible” human life reflects, at base, configurations of sovereignty, which Ophir and Hanafi (2009) refer to as “inclusive exclusion”. Delineating who or what is included in (or excluded from) the juridical-political realm – as a terror state – the Gazan, and more broadly the Palestinian, becomes an apathetic entity through Israeli political discourse. In doing so, an interdependency and understanding of Israel existence is built on wars that justify their actions based on democracy and defence, and shape how we read and accept the images and rhetoric they produce. As Slavoj Žižek (cited in Jones 2010, 9) has pointed out, actions taken on the part of Palestinians are prefigured as ‘acts of terror’ and cited as ‘proof’ that Israel is in fact dealing with terrorists, thus their image is affected as such and any such loss of life, including civilian loss, is masked to fit the narrative of defense and the battle against terror.

This paradox, Žižek argues, “is inscribed into the very notion of a ‘war on terror’, a strange war in which the enemy is criminalized if he defends himself and returns fire” (cited in Jones 2010, 9). And thus it is no surprise that while the U.S is fortifying their borders (Brown 2010), so too is Israel, because the war on terror is a universal war that besieges ‘every democracy’. Such a sentiment was echoed by Chicago Rabbi Gary Gerson, who, in the immediate aftermath of the Al-Qaida 9/11 terror attacks in New York 2001, attempted to console a nation coming to terms with an act of terror upon the U.S. by commenting that...

Humanity came apart in Lower Manhattan today, and each of us is wounded. We mourn the loss of our innocent...We are all Israelis now (Lubin 2008).

In an effort to align the historical persecution of the Jewish community both biblically and specifically since the birth of Israel in 1949, ‘we are all Israelis now’ sought to

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<sup>9</sup> Information related to deaths and casualties related to the above mentioned operations can be found at <http://www.BTselem.org>

<sup>10</sup> For more on this see Gil Hochburg’s forthcoming book about the visual politics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict titled *Visual Occupations: Violence, Visibility & Visuality at a Conflict Zone*. Hochburg suggests that the visual economy of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can be understood as the outcome of an interchange between several competing visual fields: the state-controlled (Israeli) visual field; the counter-visual fields produced in direct response to military occupation from within and outside the occupied territories; and the global visual field produced by various different networks e.g. Human Rights Organizations (HROs) and disaster tourism. In the context of this article, the focus is on ‘eligible’ life in direct relation to Israeli life and by proxy, cultured and democratic Western life which Israel stands in for, within the middle-east. Within a HRO framework, Lori Allen suggests that the Palestinian body has been used as a vehicle to support HRO funding, often reproduced in a limited cache of representations, either as a victim or as helpless (See Allen’s *The Rise and Fall of Human Rights*, 2013).

share the burden of the contemporary ‘western assertion of threat’ against Islamic terror and bio-political self-importance. Here, Benedict Anderson’s notion of the ‘spectre of comparison’ is apt because the comparison becomes an inverted telescoping of the idea of self and image through the gaze of a dominant culture (Anderson 1998). For the Rabbi, this spectacle of terror represents a coalescence of identities, firstly as a Jew and secondly as an American citizen. Such an inversion is glaringly obvious when one examines the political rhetoric of America who fails to lament Israeli behaviour with any vigour. When the BBC reported the news that Israel had shelled a UN-run school in Rafah on the 4<sup>th</sup> August, the US response was that it was ‘appalled by the disgraceful shelling’<sup>11</sup>. Thus the conceptualisation of a democracy or “island of freedom” helps to further contextualize Israel’s war on terror within the wider frame of global terror. “Located in a region controlled by military dictators, feudal kings and religious leaders, Israel should receive unreserved support from western liberal states interested in strengthening democratic values around the globe” (Gordon 2004), and, as such, collateral damage is permissible when the life of the Palestinian is already lost before it even begins.

With all this in mind, a third justification for the attack on Gaza, within the context of terror, democracy and victimhood linked to the political imagery, is the necessity to actively maintain a terror threat. In doing so, such a threat becomes a distraction from the basic fact that Israel is occupying Gaza and the West Bank. Traumatism, Derrida wrote in the wake of the 9/11 terror attacks, is produced by the future, by the threat of the worst to come, rather than by an aggression that is “over and done with” (Borradoria 2003, 97). Returning back to Eliot’s *Burnt Norton*, ‘time past and time future and the always present’ also reflects the omnipresent threat of Palestinian terror, the worst to come. This threat is validated by the political rhetoric of the Israeli security discourse that is underpinned by a reassuring need to produce the iconography of a definable and defensible border.

### The In/visibility of Regime-Made Violence

While the security wall makes the occupation ostensibly visible, specifically across western media and print journalism, other aspects of the occupation, namely the systemic violence incumbent with the daily nature of life under occupation, are often less visible. Whereas images of the aftermath of *Operation Protective Edge* were made widely available across mainstream media and narrowcast through independent news agencies and social media platforms, each conflict only has a limited shelf-life in terms of media interest, and the occupation of Gaza and the effect it has upon Palestinian life is largely unseen outside the frame of war. Like the previous Israeli military operations into Gaza, *Operation Protective Edge* was abound by the typical visual tropes associated with that specific political space; footage of Israeli aerial strikes from mid-range vantage points, Hamas rockets into Israel, the destruction of Gazan infrastructure, and the gory politics of immediation<sup>12</sup> related to Palestinian

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-28635031>

<sup>12</sup> Lori Allen (2009) writes that “immediation” is a particular approach to making political claims that foregrounds natural life as the ground of a particular set of rights. Specifically, Allen adopts (as do I, in the context of this paper) this notion in relation to the power dynamic of visibility related to the occupation and the representation of the ‘Palestinian’. Thus the linking of human rights, visibility and

human life. While mainstream British media featured Palestinian ambulances shuttling across scarred landscapes and faces wrought with emotion, demonstrating how British broadcasting, on the whole, operates within an economy of 'taste and decency', *Al Jazeera*, as well as blogs, Twitter and Facebook, demonstrated with unrelenting pace, the horror of the Israeli strikes. The display of Palestinian bodies in all their visceral reality became the visual vehicle through which Palestinians have reliably, time and time again, sought to communicate their suffering at the hands of the Israeli State in an effort to engage a humanitarian discourse. As Lori Allen notes (2009: 161), the display of Palestinian death during clashes from the outbreak of the Second Palestinian Intifada became a form of testimony, but also constitutes irrefutable proof of injustice.

In the opening page of one of her articles, Allen (2009) describes how she is confronted with a series of graphic images from a Red Crescent Doctor: "where are the human rights...the person who cares about humanity, it would affect them, and they could judge...let the world see and it will do something". This sentiment asserts, in the midst of this montage of traumatic words and images, that when presented with death and destruction, the world will act in defense of those who are subject to such disproportionate violence. The self-representation of the Palestinian, Allen writes, is lost in a self-mediated saturation of symbolic representations that focus on suffering, rather than them as politically active (Allen 2009), though of course the actions of the 2012 Freedom Rides, as well as the on-going nonviolent resistance during the Friday protests in the village of Bil'in, do seek to alter this perception. Yet for Gaza, the visibilities and circulation routes of knowledge related to Gaza are often limited in their contextual value. Critical of news authorship in the U.S where the occupation is made visible through the repetition of readily understandable scenes and scenarios, Amahl Bishara (2012, 252) suggests that such mediations belong to the 'fantasy of immediation'. While the general American audience is led to imagine that they have the full story at their fingertips, meanings are not so transportable (Bishara 2012, 252). Writing in relation to anti-occupation demonstrations, Bishara notes that the significance of 'graffiti, quotes, and even oppositional postures' assumed during demonstrations [and recorded as images] shift when they are removed from the flow of events and recontextualised into news texts. Similarly, David Campbell (2009) has observed that during the bombardment of Gaza in 2008/09, the coverage of the 'conflict' and its mediation by the Western press exacerbated the normal conditions of the occupation as temporal and exceptional. By outlining the tension between the international media's demand for access – a demand driven by immediacy – to a particular 'time and space' limited by the Israeli military censorship, problems arise in how the media communicate the unseen and ever-present challenges faced by Palestinians.

As such, much of the journalistic approaches to the 2009 *Operation Cast Lead* were premised on the idea that the truth of the conflict could be found on the streets of Gaza, when access was eventually granted. With this in mind, Gianluca Panella's

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affect are common to Palestinian political and social life, structured around an ideal of "immediation." Although human rights (an ideology, language, and system of institutions), visibility (a sensory perception, aesthetic system, and range of image objects produced and circulated in large part by broadcast media), and affect (a way of feeling, experiencing, and reacting to experiences) are distinct dimensions, together they make up a "politics of immediation".

2013 World Press award winning series *Black Out* sought to challenge the immediacy and stock reportage of press-photography associated to conflicts, helping to reframe a space that is 'always on the brink'. Unpublished by the press, the images were later presented as a 12-photo collection that addresses the reality of life under occupation when fuel shortages, due to the Israeli imposed siege on the Gazan borders and harsh weather conditions, forced the closure of Gaza's only power station in November 2013. Taken without a flash, each image faithfully records the reality of a 21-hour Gazan blackout (see Figure 2). Across the 12 images very little is visible, yet we know we are looking at an urban environment. The occasional light from a window, be that a torch or a candle, the red brake light of a car or just the natural light from the night sky breaks up the darkness and gives the images a sense of depth, slowly revealing the space within the frame. The homogeneity of the images reinforces the effect of abject darkness in a cityscape that should otherwise be bright and vibrant. Like a series of stills from Ridley Scott's neo-noir dystopian epic, *Blade Runner* (1982), the series communicates a sense of discomfort produced by the limiting darkness. As such, each building is black, each street devoid of any light except the odd flicker, informing the viewer that not only is there no electricity for the street lights, but no fuel for the cars; time and space has again stood still; the ongoing catastrophisation of Gaza.



Figure 2: Gianluca Panella: 2013 A Gazan street, the only light is from the inside of a car.

Time and space, as Ariella Azoulay (2012) has pointed out, is required for the fabrication of an outbreak of violence. Disasters, she writes, 'do not usually break out' – rather they exist and persist, below the threshold of perceptibility. Unlike disaster par excellence, the spectacular event that besieges a city or a community, regime-made disaster is an ongoing process that consistently impacts a defined part of the population under a regime that differentiates groups of citizens and non-citizens (Azoulay 2012, 126 or 30). For the inhabitants of Gaza, this is visible in their inability to move freely; however, the hidden impact of this mode of control, specifically upon their technological and communicative growth, conveys the asymmetric nature of the power dynamic in play (Tawil-Souri 2014). To make such a process visible, as I have

argued, is by definition hard to represent. Moreover, because those that the slow violence affects often lack any means or capacity to halt its spread, they become a captive audience for this slow development. As a captive audience of the ongoing disaster and its expanding damage, the necessity to read both the disaster and its representation through the notion of time and space underpin the redolence of Israeli landscape photographer, Gaston Ickowicz's Gaza and West Bank landscape series, *Settlements* (2003-2006).



Figure 3: Gaston Ickowicz – Illegal settlement routes (2005)

A long, wide-angled panoramic shot, the photo entitled, 'Illegal Settlement Routes' (Figure 3) can be mistaken for the seemingly ordinary scars upon the landscape that have become indicative markers of modern living in rural communities. Ickowicz's compositional style, like Panella's is simple and centred, directing the gaze of the viewer to the object in the middle of the frame. Working across three subjects, the landscape, Israeli settlers and Israeli outposts, Ickowicz chooses to depict the 'elements that are simultaneously embedded in the landscape and estranged from it' (Ickowicz 2005), the subtle suggestions of the occupation and the questionable use and role of space are always in frame. Consequently, Ickowicz's photographs seek to

draw attention to aspects of the occupation that would otherwise be viewed as arbitrary spaces, buildings or topological scars. This multi-functional duality between landscape image and political documentary photography allows the images to operate on various axes, both horizontal and vertical, as aesthetic images and as a form of critique. Both Panella and Gaston's work consciously rebuff the crucial component of 'spectacular disaster' that both defines and upholds the environment each photographer represents. As such, the duty to contend with this type of disaster is presented as totally uncontroversial. A lack of power, or a series of roads etched into the landscape, each photo and the images in the photographers' respective series, appear as nothing more than that which is visible on screen. Yet, understood as images that include traces of another time, one might deduce that a regime-made disaster provides both a 'trace of past violence and a future disaster emerging as a possible outcome of the present' (Hariman 154, 2012).

### Representational Intent

The assault on Palestinian infrastructure is nothing new, nor is the calculated management of Gazan life through systemic violence and 'deliberative targeting' of specific sites, which 'places a logistical value on targets through their carefully calibrated, strategic position within the infrastructural networks that are the very fibre of modern society' (Gregory 2014). Thus the 'symbolic' attack on the Gazan power station during *Operation Protective Edge* that brought Gaza into darkness once more, while more long-term concerns arise as sewage plants and water pumps fail, refrigeration systems stop and essential surgeries and life-support systems are interrupted<sup>13</sup>. While the bombed out streets of permissible societies and 'non-democratic' spaces are repeatedly mediated to the point of visual exhaustion, and juxtaposed with 'tribalistic displays' of public mourning and calls for revenge, Panella's images make apparent, through a visual strategy that effectively denies vision, how for Gazans the basic necessities of daily life are endlessly tied to the politics of life under occupation; fuel represents one of the most fundamental examples of this entanglement.

Similarly, albeit in the West Bank, the documentary photography practices of the Palestinian, Rula Halawani also sought to challenge the paradigm of immediacy, commonly associated with press photography, creatively engaging with seemingly banal space, darkness and conflict. Photographing her hometown of Ramallah in 2002 during *Operation Defensive Shield*, Halawani spoke of her shock as the entire city had been transformed into a 'dark and scary place'. In an effort to communicate the darkness, Halawani took photos of the invasion and chose to exhibit the images as negatives in order to 'express the negation of our reality and of her people' (Halawani 2012). Like the work of Panella, Halawani invites the spectator to enter the imaginative space of war and conflict by shifting the paradigm of spectatorship related to the Israel-Palestinian conflict. Only by producing the images as she did, did Halawani feel it was possible to tell the larger story of just one 'specific period of the Palestinian experience of Israeli repression and destruction of our lived reality' (Halawani 2012). Halawani's images, like Panella's, are produced with a different

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<sup>13</sup> For more on this, see Human Rights Watch and their report on the widespread impact of the Gaza power plant attack. <http://www.hrw.org/news/2014/08/10/gaza-widespread-impact-power-plant-attack>

representational intent and with a different spectatorial expectation. As documentary photographs, their images differ in what they are expected to communicate within the frame. As such, all three photographers adopt a more nuanced and denotative approach to the visualizing occupation than conventional reportage.

## Conclusion

In world of easily and rapidly mediated visibilities, the making visible of action and events, including the mediation of language, either written or spoken has become a significant component in the battle over information and opinion, particularly in the case of Israel/Palestine. The visibility of the occupation, like anything, is contingent upon the ways that it is framed and the ways that it is translated into texts. How we see or perceive the nature of the occupation and the adopted language used to help sustain and test its limitations also reflect the asymmetric power relations within the region as to who is heard and seen, when and how. As such, John Thompson's contention that seeing is never 'pure vision' can be aptly applied. Seeing, he writes, "is never a matter of simply opening one's eyes and grasping an object or event. On the contrary, seeing is always shaped by a broader set of cultural assumptions and frameworks, and by the spoken or written cues that commonly accompany the visual image and shape the way in which the images are seen and understood (Thompson 2005, 36). Gianluca Panella's 2013 series, *Black Out*, invites contemplation, helping us to think about the effect and processes of the occupation in different ways; opening up new conversations about the implications of living under occupation, as well as its precarious nature. In this regard, Panella, it can be argued, is trying to produce 'pure vision' against the dominant visibility produced by Israel. The images help us to think about life in a markedly different way to the typical images produced within or related to the highly politicized arena that is Gaza. Looking at the images, the viewer enters a space that is devoid of atrocity, where the photographer oscillates between the investment in the capacity of documentary photography as a truth-telling medium for a specific moment frozen in time, and the generality of a broader reading related to the asymmetric nature of the occupation. By not showing the act of violence itself, but rather alluding to it by depicting its consequence, the photographer engages our imagination. By addressing the problem of illumination and the difference between looking and seeing, Panella's images help communicate telling aspects of the occupation that are otherwise less visible. As such, his images function as a practical challenge for the viewer as much as they do a metaphor for Gazan life.

This leads me onto the concluding point about how specific aspects of the occupation might be made visible. As noted, visibility is subject to power, those who are without visibility are the least likely to be heard or seen. This notion was clearly demonstrated during *Operation Protective Edge* whereby the Israeli media machine quickly galvanised the rhetoric of a democratic nation responding to Islamic terror. As such the Palestinian was framed through a nationalised way of seeing, grounded in the dominant Israeli discourse of national security and victimhood. Yet for events outside of *Operation Protective Edge*, the everyday realities of the occupation are often unseen. While the representational cache of the occupation is drawn from a stock of easily identifiable images bound by a specific event such as military operations, that produce images of Palestinian destruction and death, the ongoing catastrophisation of

Gaza is much less visible, especially outside the frame of a newsworthy event. Panella, as well as Ickowicz and alongside conventional press photography, contribute to a growing archive that details the varying pace of regime-made disaster inflicted upon Gaza and the West Bank. As such, it might be suggested that each form of image production, photojournalism and more nuanced documentary photography, compete for a meta-physical representation of the greater whole. The visual record of the Occupied Palestinian Territories is, by necessity, one of fragmentation and trace, made up of a number of ongoing contributions from a range of actors, ranging from HROs and activists to vernacular snaps held in family albums. Each form of visibility-making addresses a different type of experience for those living with the Israeli occupation, making visible varying types of violence that are produced at different speeds, yet share the same ultimate goal – to make life under occupation unbearable; be it overtly obvious and immediate, such as the images that flooded social media during the summer of 2014, or an archive compiled, slowly over time.

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**Gary Bratchford** is a fully funded [AHRC](#) PhD candidate at [Manchester Metropolitan University](#), based at the [School of Art](#) and more specifically within [MIRIAD](#). His thesis is concerned with examining the politics of visibility, expressly related to nonviolent Palestinian and international activist practices carried out in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

**Website:** <http://www.garybratchford.info/>