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Coerced migration: mobility under siege in Gaza

Caitlin Procter^{a,b}

^aMigration Policy Centre, European University Institute, Florence, Italy; ^bCentre on Conflict, Development and Peacebuilding, Geneva Graduate Institute, Geneva, Switzerland

ABSTRACT

This article, based on field research conducted between 2018 and 2019 centres the role of Israeli state coercion in the migration of young Palestinians from Gaza. In recent years, migration from Gaza has been described by journalists and policy analysts as an ‘emerging phenomenon’, with many Palestinians leaving with the intention to seek asylum in Europe and beyond. In this article, I map existing data on international migration from Gaza, which has been under siege since 2007. I then draw from qualitative data gathered during fieldwork in Gaza to explain how migration in a context of a siege can best be understood. I apply a framework of coercion to explain the migration decisions of young people in Gaza, arguing that the siege has created an environment so coercive that it forces them to leave, while limiting them primarily to dangerous routes in doing so. Circumstances for leaving remain key to accessing international protection regimes. This article therefore contributes to the current debate of definitions and ways of understanding migration, in the context of Gaza.

ARTICLE HISTORY

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Introduction

Shireen¹ is 25 years old and works as an English teacher in Gaza city. Every day, she commutes from her home in a refugee camp in the south of Gaza, to different civil society organisations where she runs language classes. For the vast majority of these classes, she is a volunteer teacher, despite her two university degrees. Her husband works freelance in project coordination for a number of different NGOs. He finds his work interesting and important, but it is also predominantly on a volunteer basis. The money Shireen makes from her one paid language class barely covers her travel costs for the commute – but she prefers to continue working and stay busy. She explained that having a job also helps to distract her family from constantly asking her when she is going to have a baby:

We are not going to try and have a baby as long as we are here in Gaza. I can’t imagine trying to care for a child here when there are so many risks that we can barely care for ourselves. Our goal is to leave, and go to Europe, so anyway having a baby would only make the journey to Europe more difficult.²

CONTACT Caitlin Procter  Caitlin.procter@eui.eu

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Shireen and her husband are saving the necessary money to coordinate their travel out of Gaza, with the intention of travelling to Turkey and onwards to Europe. In the same discussion, she later commented:

The funny thing is that when we get to Europe we'll be refugees for a second time: we're already refugees here, living under siege, and now we are going to be refugees again. What do you even call that, when you're a double refugee? What will they call me?³

This exchange took place during an interview in Gaza city in 2019. At that time, the migration of young Palestinians out of Gaza had begun to capture the news, with a number of media outlets framing this migration as being economically driven.⁴ In asylum processes in different European states there has been a lack of clarity over how to define or understand fleeing a long-term siege. Attempting to make clear cut delineations of volition in migration decisions masks the nuance and complexity that migration projects entail (Crawley and Skleparis 2017). Yet, European migration management has long required the sorting of people into categories, which can broadly be understood as a difference between forced (asylum seeker; refugee) and voluntary (labour migrant; student; family reunification) migration. When decisions over people's lives and futures are at stake, as Erdal and Oeppen (2018) have argued, it is irresponsible for scholarship to deal only in the complexity of these experiences.

Gaza is 41 km long and 10 km wide. This small area of Palestine is home to over 2 million Palestinians, 1.4 million of whom are refugees. Of these refugees, 600,000 have – until recently – lived in one of the eight refugee camps in Gaza, which were established following the 1948 ethnic cleansing of Palestinians by Zionist militias, referred to in Arabic as the *Nakba* (catastrophe) (see Pappé 2007; Saleh 2020). Until recently, there were 5,900 Palestinians per square kilometre in Gaza (OCHA 2023, 11), making this one of the most densely populated areas of the world. Under an Israeli-Egyptian⁵ blockade for 16 years, Palestinians in Gaza have long been living without access to clean water, and without adequate access to food (WFP 2023). Health services have been vastly overstretched and under resourced, suffering a lack of adequate supplies and equipment, and a lack of electricity needed to provide life-saving treatments (WHO 2014; HRC 2022). COVID-19 had a devastating impact on Gaza, as resources to fight the pandemic were scarce and prevention measures almost impossible to implement (Hart, Procter, and Al-Rozzi 2021). Regular rocket fire and military assaults on Gaza, coupled with an extremely slow rate of reconstruction due to resources being prohibited from entering Gaza by Israeli authorities mean many have lived for years without adequate housing. Unemployment in Gaza has been regularly recorded as among the highest in the world, reaching 46% in 2023 (Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics 2023). This is a direct result of Israel's de-development of Gaza (Roy 2016), restricting the indigenous economy to a point where it has been unable to function.

At the time of finalising this article for publication, Shireen's entire family – and many other individuals whose words appear in what follows – have been forcibly displaced. In the three months since early October 2023, at least 23,000 Palestinians have been killed by the Israeli military, around 70% of whom are women and children (UNRWA 2024). The actual number killed is unknown, owing to the numbers of bodies trapped under the rubble of buildings that have collapsed under bombardment. Israeli military operations have damaged over 250,000 housing units in Gaza, with a further 50,000 units destroyed

entirely (NRC 2024). More than 1.9 million Palestinians (85% of the population of Gaza) have been forced by the Israeli military into internal displacement (OCHA 2023). The vast majority of those displaced are now crowded into Rafah, the southernmost area of Gaza which previously was home to 170,000 people. The scale of this displacement significantly out shadows the ethnic cleansing which took place in mandate Palestine in 1948 during the establishment of the state of Israel, and UN experts have repeatedly called upon the international community to prevent genocide (OHCHR 2023). Indeed, the statements of intent to remove Palestinians from Gaza altogether have been so explicitly made by senior Israeli officials that the Republic of South Africa has instituted proceedings requesting an interim measure by the International Court of Justice to prevent Israel from committing acts of potential genocide.⁶

As I write, Israeli military operations are forcing Palestinians ever closer to the border with Egypt, and many fear the possibility of mass deportation with no guarantee of return (NRC 2024). The migration to which this article relates preceded all of this. While mass displacement is rightly capturing the world's attention during this defining moment in history, it is vital that this is understood in terms of the long-standing violent and coercive processes to which Palestinians in Gaza have been subjected for decades. In the reading of this article, it will become increasingly apparent that the events of recent months have thrown these findings into even starker reality. First, because they highlight that migration at scale was taking place without this bombardment, and that forced displacement cannot only be considered and understood through contexts of widespread direct violence and armed conflict. Second, because they make clear that the coercion exerted over Palestinians in Gaza long pre-dates the atrocities witnessed in recent months. The intensity of what is happening now is shining a much-needed spotlight on Israel's intentions towards Gaza, but this needs to be understood in context. Doing so also contributes to understanding the underlying politics of what is happening today. As such, the aims of this article are threefold: to provide critical context to the on-going, mass forced displacement of Palestinians in Gaza; to address questions on the scope of migration from Gaza in recent years; and to build on the existing scholarship surrounding coercion and migration (Anderson 2010; Ali 2023), arguing that the migration of Palestinians from Gaza in recent years should be understood as a result of the same coercion being exerted today.

The article proceeds as follows. I first outline the concept of mobility under siege, situating this in the history of migration in Palestine and debates around volition in migration studies. The second section presents the available data on international out-migration of Palestinians from Gaza. The third section draws from interview data gathered in Gaza to build a grounded understanding of migration, particularly from the experiences and perspectives of young people. Circumstances for leaving are still considered key to accessing international protection in other countries. Working with Ali's (2023) conceptualisation of displacement, I argue that in the context of Gaza, migration journeys should be understood as a result of coercion by the Israeli state. The political agenda behind the siege on Gaza has been to contribute to the overarching Israeli state settler colonial project, which is premised upon the removal of Palestinian people from the land.⁷ The function of a long-term siege has been to create an environment so coercive that it forces Palestinians to leave. At the same time, a siege – by design – makes it almost impossible for anyone to do so. Would-be migrants are subject to

unaffordable bribes and dangerous routes in their efforts to leave. Such is the disregard for Palestinian lives, most clearly evidenced by military actions in Gaza today, that the Israeli state makes no consideration for the safety of Palestinians in this process.

Methodology

This article is primarily based on qualitative fieldwork conducted in Gaza between 2018 and late 2019, during which time I lived with a family in Gaza city. Since 2017 I have worked with the same research assistant⁸ in Gaza. Although I conducted my own interviews and research meetings in Arabic and English, and established my own interview contacts, they accompanied me to the majority of these interviews and meetings, and provided translation where needed. While they have requested to remain anonymous, I would like to acknowledge from the outset of this paper that this work would not have been possible without their support and guidance. I arranged initial access to interviewees through civil society groups, community organisations, and NGOs, and subsequently through the friends and connections of other interviewees.

Semi-structured interviews and informal conversations were my principle research methods, although a significant time was also spent doing participant observation among groups of young people and their families. Over the duration of this research, I interviewed 50 young women and men (aged 18-25) who were engaged in the process of leaving Gaza, and in many cases conducted subsequent interviews with their family members throughout different refugee camps, villages and towns throughout Gaza. I chose in this research to focus on young people because my understanding from the outset of this research was that this was primarily the demographic of Palestinians who were trying to leave Gaza. I remained in contact with some of these individuals after I left Gaza and held many follow-up conversations and discussions with them by phone and through online platforms. In addition, I interviewed 22 Palestinian and foreign policy makers, humanitarian aid workers, and diplomats working in Palestine. Navigating fieldwork in Gaza is challenging, and required building meaningful relationships of trust with my interlocutors and often with their families who welcomed me into their homes and lives. I relied entirely on the depth and long-term nature of the relationships built over a prolonged period to navigate fieldwork in this setting. In addition to research participants I remained in contact with in Gaza, I conducted subsequent research with 15 of the young people I met there through their process of seeking asylum in different European countries.

Conceptualising mobility under siege

Migration has had an immense impact on the lives of generations of Palestinians, and it is impossible to discuss out-migration in the context of Gaza specifically without grounding this in the scale, history and enduring nature of emigration and displacement of Palestinians from Palestine as a whole. Palestinian emigration has been well documented during the British Mandate, and before that when Palestine was under Ottoman rule during the nineteenth century (Taraki and Giacaman 2006; Hilal 2006), although the population transfer that took place during the 1948 *Nakba*⁹, during which 750,000 Palestinians were forced from their land and homes as the Israeli state was established, remains the

most discussed context of the mass forced migration from Palestine. There is a vast, multi-disciplinary literature on the experience and consequences of the 1948 *Nakba* (for select examples, see Sayigh 1979; Imseis 1999; Farah 2009; Salih 2013; Erakat 2014; Abourahme 2014; Lilly 2018; Albanese and Takkenberg 2020). The political history of Palestinian migration following the *Nakba* includes the different kinds of mobility that followed the 1967 war, the gulf war and expulsion of Palestinians in its aftermath, the impact of the war in Iraq in 2003 on Palestinians and the efforts made to expel Palestinians from Libya in the mid-1990s (as has been clearly documented by Hilal 2007). The focus throughout this scholarship has tended to be either on internal migration and displacement; or on the situation facing Palestinian refugees either in the West Bank and Gaza, or in neighbouring Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and Egypt.

A core premise of a siege is that it is designed to preclude mobility of any kind, and to create inescapable prison-like conditions for those individuals living under it. Gaza has been under siege since 2007, when Israel declared the enclave to be a 'hostile territory' following a Hamas coup.¹⁰ Under this blockade of air, land and sea, life in Gaza has become increasingly stifling. While movement within the enclave is heavily surveilled and regulated through checkpoints operated primarily by Hamas and Islamic Jihad, freedom of movement beyond Gaza is almost exclusively prevented by the siege. Under blockade, leaving and returning to Gaza has become almost impossible, but movement restrictions in Gaza in fact long pre-date the Hamas takeover in 2007.

Since the start of Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza in 1967, Israeli policies have consistently limited the possibility of domestic economic development, as part of a bid to preclude the possibility of a Palestinian state (Roy 2016), within which movement restrictions have played a key role. Later, in June 1989, Israel introduced a card system to restrict the movement of Palestinians in Gaza, limiting the number of individuals who could leave Gaza. After the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1994, Israel built a barrier around Gaza. Although it was still possible to get in and out, this access was conditional on permits and the crossings would regularly close without warning, leaving Palestinians trapped on either side. The bombing of the airport and seaport in Gaza in 2001 intensified the need for access to goods and materials, which was made possible by a tunnel network managed by different political factions between Gaza and Egypt, that had existed infrastructurally since the early 1980s (for a detailed history, see Pelham 2012). Although Israel made efforts to disrupt the tunnel network during Operation Cast Lead (2008–2009), it was not until Operation Protective Edge in 2014 that this network was substantially destroyed and largely ceased to be used for the movement of people. Under siege for well over a decade, Gaza is widely described by those who live there as an experience akin to living in the largest open-air prison in the world.¹¹

Since the beginning of the siege, there have been two operational crossings for people to move in and out of Gaza: the Beit Hanoun/Erez crossing from the north of Gaza, and the Rafah crossing from the south of Gaza into Egypt. The Beit Hanoun/Erez crossing is controlled by Israel, and is a highly securitised process limited to trade permit holders, medical patients, travel facilitated by diplomatic missions, sometimes for students taking up scholarship or training opportunities abroad. After leaving through the north, Palestinians travelling abroad are escorted to the Jordanian border. However, even the limited number of Palestinians granted permits often have them denied at

the last minute, typically on account of a ‘security block’ stating, with no requirement of evidence, that the applicant would pose a threat to the Israeli state.

The southernmost crossing out of Gaza, located in Rafah, borders Sinai and has been predominantly closed since the blockade of Gaza began.¹² To use the Rafah crossing on the occasions that it is open, Palestinians are required to meet Egyptian travel criteria, subject to pre-registration with the Hamas authorities in Gaza. Palestinians are required either to prove foreign residency or present a foreign passport; to be in possession of a medical referral for treatment in Egypt; or to hold a visa for work, study or tourism in another country. Many who cross Rafah do so because they have been denied the possibility of crossing Erez for undefined security reasons. According to all the participants involved in this research, there are thousands of names registered to leave through the Rafah crossing. Individuals will often pay a bribe to an intermediary travel agent in order to move their name up the list, known as *tansiq*, and translating as a process of coordination (Procter 2021). The amount of money required for documents to accelerate the process of leaving depended on how frequently the crossing was open. Interviewees reported that in early 2017, the amount required for *tansiq* was around \$5000; but by late 2019 the crossing was open more regularly (as seen in Figure 1), reducing this amount to around \$1200–1500. Once on the other side, the next stage in the journey of those I interviewed was typically to fly to Turkey, before continuing to Europe.

Migration governance and public debates on migration alike continue to rely on dichotomies (regular-irregular; temporary-permanent; skilled-unskilled; forced-voluntary), despite the wealth of scholarship which urges the framing of migration as a spectrum of experiences (Richmond 1993; Fussell 2012; Castles, De Haas, and Miller 2014). Where delineations between forced and voluntary migration exist, they tend to focus on the ‘trigger point’ at which an individual decides to travel; combined with a consideration of the perceived acceptable alternatives to not migrating; and critically, the agency of an individual to act upon such options (Ottonelli and Torresi 2013). A growing number of ethnographies of displacement have problematised the assumed relationship between agency and subjectivity in displacement, which holds that voluntary (economic) migrants choose to cross borders in search of opportunities, while involuntary migrants (refugees) are forced by circumstance to flee (Yarris and Castañeda 2015).

Similarly, labels that are imposed on individuals as a result of circumstance often contrast with how individuals might choose to self-identify (Erdal and Oeppen 2018). In contexts of conflict affected migration and refugee settings, this is arguably even more complex (Lubkemann 2008; Lindley 2010). Much of the discussion has evolved around whether individuals are ‘forced’ to seek protection under grounds covered by the 1951 Refugee Convention, and those who are ‘forced’ by broader environmental or economic factors (Hathaway 2007). Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2012) has taken this further in discussions of protracted refugees who engage in ‘voluntary migration’ to find employment who, she argues, must not be conceptualised as having lost their claims to the refugee label or the protection it entails. The de-classification of Palestinians with refugee status into ‘economic migrants’ risks embracing a monolithic narrative of identity and legal status, negating their agency as refugees, and with the practical implications of losing a variety of rights of international protection that technically accompany refugee status (2012: 274). She advocates instead for a new conceptual framework of overlapping and multiple



Figure 1. Access and Movement in Gaza. Source: OCHA (2023).

refugeehoods. This is particularly pertinent in settings where protracted refugees have frequently experienced secondary and tertiary displacements from host countries, and are likely to continue to do so for the foreseeable future. The context of Palestinians in Gaza is however different, in that there is no involvement of a ‘host country’. In this context, attention therefore needs to be brought back to the authority behind these processes of displacement.

As Ali (2023) has recently explored in this journal, there has been surprisingly limited engagement with coercion in refugee and forced migration studies (5). In one of the few explicit discussions of coercion in the context of migration studies, Greenhill (2010) suggests the existence of strategic, or coercive engineered, migration through which the principal objective is ‘... the appropriation of the territory or property of another group or groups, or the elimination of said group(s) as a threat to the ethnopolitical or economic dominance of those engineering the out-migration ... including what is commonly known as ethnic cleansing’ (14). It is in this light, she argues, that coercion can be seen as a driver of migration. This leans on the historic understanding of coercion being based on threats and pressures as explained in Wertheimer (1987). However, as Olsaretti has argued (1998), this does not do much to draw attention to the role of the coercer in the process, nor to questions of how, and by whom a context of coercion occurs in the first place (75).

Anderson’s (2010) discussion of coercion focusses on the idea of power imbalance leveraged by a coercer against an individual or community. Building on this, Ali (2023) has developed a conceptual framework of displacement that highlights the diverse forms of coercion that can be at play in any displacement process. He draws here on the existing body of literature in migration studies (Mollett 2014; Celestina 2015; Vaz-Jones 2018) that argues that displacement is a process that begins *in place* – particularly in relation to involuntary immobility (Carling 2002; Penz 2006; Lubkemann 2008). In discussions of coercion, contexts of power imbalance first manifest *in place*. Using coercion therefore becomes a way to push back against discussions of event-driven forced migration, instead highlighting cumulative acts of injustice and oppression on the part of a coercer, and the power dynamics that can underpin a process of displacement (Ali 2023, 2).

Ali conceptualises displacement as ‘processual, coercive and disruptive to valued ways of living and functioning ... preced[ing] the potential outcome of the process – forced migration – with which it is misleadingly conflated’(2). Ali builds a conceptual framework for displacement highlighting the many different forms of coercion that constitute displacement, underpinned by a power imbalance. This might include threats to personal safety; threats to valued ways of living and functioning; and constraints on people’s capacity for action. Ali argues for the moral imperative of identifying the coercer, since: ‘... displacement, forced relocations, and forced migrations, are often linked to acts of injustice and oppression by the coercers. Too often, media and policy discussions and representations of displacement are made without reference to the power dynamics behind displacement’ (18).

Any analytical description of a process of migration decisions are part of a broader political landscape, within which the normative weight of migration labels must be understood, given the critical implications this has on the treatment of individuals by receiving states (Cole 2018, 5; Erdal and Oeppen 2018, 993). Based on the experiences of interviewees from Gaza who had reached Europe by irregular means and were claiming asylum, this was precisely the problem: that since they were not fleeing a direct war, nor were they experiencing persecution by their own government, their cases were ‘unclear’.¹³ During interviews and presentations of this research with the representatives of European delegations in Palestine¹⁴, this lack of clarity was often explained as resulting from a lack of clear evidence or documentation on the context and extent of migration from Gaza. The following section is therefore designed to establish this record.

Mapping existing data on international out-migration from Gaza

In Gaza, the intention to leave was regularly described by young interviewees¹⁵ as their intention to become *muhajirin*, implying in Arabic a process of mobility with the intention of settling permanently. This was contextualised by the father of one interviewee, who grew up in Morocco before his family returned to Gaza shortly after 1967:

Thirty years ago there was so much stigma connected to the idea of leaving Gaza and seeking residency elsewhere. Now, it is the opposite. I'm pushing my own children to migrate. Our family paid bribes in order to go through a process of family reunion after 1967, so we could all be together in Gaza. Now we are paying bribes to get our children out again, and this time they should never come back.¹⁶

Over the past two years, migration has been described in policy circles in Palestine as well as in the media as an emerging 'phenomenon'. There is, however, no comprehensive data source on international out-migration from Gaza. During the course of this research, the question I have most been asked by international organisations, policy makers and journalists about the findings is for an estimate of the scale at which this is happening. What follows is an effort to map the available data sources from which we can glean different understandings on the scope and scale of international out migration, with some limited reference to youth specifically, through border monitoring data; public opinion poll data; and data on Palestinian asylum applications in Europe.¹⁷ A key limitation to the existing available data is that most of it is in relation to Palestine as a whole. I include here all of the available data sources found in relation to migration from Gaza here, to emphasise that what exists in quantitative terms is extremely limited.

In 2020, the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics produced the first Migration Census Atlas based on the 2017 census data, presenting indicators on the return of migrants from abroad to Palestine, and internal migrants at various geographical levels (PCBS 2019). While there is no available data on the current levels of outgoing international migration from Palestine, estimates from the Palestinian Centre for Policy and Survey Research (PSR) suggest that the annual average of emigration during the past ten years might be more than 10,000 (PSR 2020). According to unconfirmed reports cited by PSR, the opening of the Rafah Crossing with Egypt in 2018 led to as many as 24,000 emigrants from Gaza in 2018, while Israeli governmental sources believe the number to be 35,000 (2–3.). The majority of my 50 research participants within Gaza estimated that between January 2018 and late 2019¹⁸ 80,000 individuals had left without the intention of return. There is, however, no quantitative evidence to back up this claim.

Border monitoring data is collected by both OCHA and the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR), but both of these data sets only monitor the numbers leaving Gaza and the numbers returning through the two different crossings. From these figures, we know by year the number of days that the crossing has been opened in a 12 month period (Figure 1), and the number of Palestinians who have gone in and out of Gaza (Figure 2). However, there is no disaggregation regarding the circumstances or reasons for these journeys; their foreseen length of time; or any demographic breakdown.

Another source of data on migration from Gaza is opinion polls. Since 2018, the Centre for Popular Opinion Studies of Al-Aqsa University in Gaza have been conducting

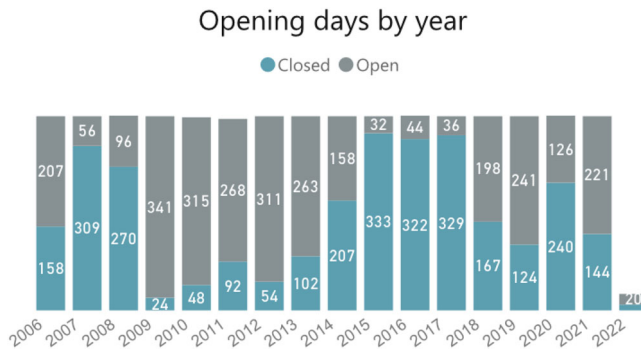


Figure 2. Rafah Crossing openings from 2006 to 2022. Source: OCHA (2022).

polls on migration intentions in Gaza specifically.¹⁹ In 2019, the survey specifically targeted 21–30 year olds (n:1000) and found that 61% of respondents were considering to migrate internationally themselves. When questioned on the factors motivating their consideration of migration, 75% of respondents cited the combination of the lack of basic elements of life in Gaza, rising unemployment, and the political division between the West bank and Gaza. When asked explicitly if the occupation, the siege on Gaza and the continued threat of war played a prominent role in encouraging people to migrate, 88% of respondents agreed.²⁰ Another recent public opinion poll, conducted by the PSR (2020) addressed the migration intentions of Palestinian Christians, but this study included participants throughout Palestine with just 10% of the sample (n:995) located in Gaza. Although the focus of the poll was on religion as a defining driver of migration, the findings suggested instead that migration was primarily connected to educational opportunities; a lack of safety and security; the belief that the occupation sought to expel them from their homeland; economic factors; and the absence of rule of law and spread of corruption.

An alternative way to look for data is through the number of asylum claims made in Europe by Palestinians from Gaza. Using EUROSTAT data, Figure 3 shows the total number Palestinian asylum applicants in Europe from 2011 to 2020 overall, as well as the number of applications made by Palestinians under 35 years of age to give a sense of the proportion of youth that make up this demographic. From the data available,

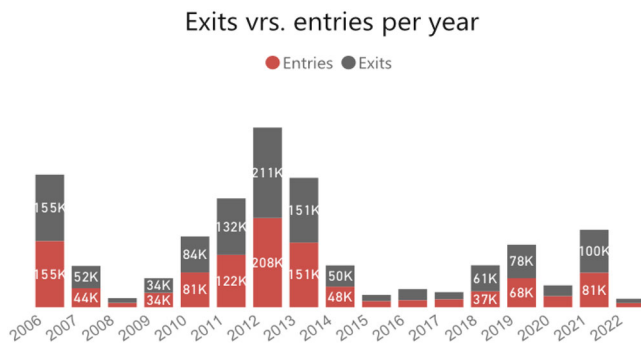


Figure 3. Rafah Crossing entries vs exits per year from 2006 to 2022. Source: OCHA (2022).

we can see that 2018 and 2019 saw a substantial rise in the number of Palestinian asylum applications, and referring to Figure 1, we know that 2018 and 2019 were years in which the Rafah crossing in Gaza was open significantly more than previous years. However, Palestinian asylum applications are not disaggregated by place of origin within EUROSTAT data, so although a link between these figures and border monitoring data seems plausible, it is impossible to know how many of these applicants were Palestinians from Gaza specifically (Figure 4).

Figure 5 below shows the four highest receiving countries of Palestinian asylum applications in Europe, which, as highlighted in the discussion which follows, clearly aligns with the intended destinations of the majority of my 50 research participants in Gaza. The high number of applications in Greece also aligns with the narratives of young people engaged in this research, many of whom stated in interviews that they planned to travel first to Turkey, and then to Greece by boat. However, these figures cannot be disaggregated to account for the number of applicants from Gaza specifically.

From the available data on asylum applications taken together, there are two peaks in the number of applications made in 2015 and in 2018. This could, perhaps align with the aftermath of the war in Gaza in 2014, and the increased opening of the Rafah crossing in the south of Gaza in 2018 (see Figure 1). However, this data does not disaggregate Palestinians based on where they are arriving from, and includes Palestinians from both Gaza and the West Bank, as well as those Palestinians who have been living in protracted displacement in Lebanon, Syria and Jordan. Neither does it tell us anything about

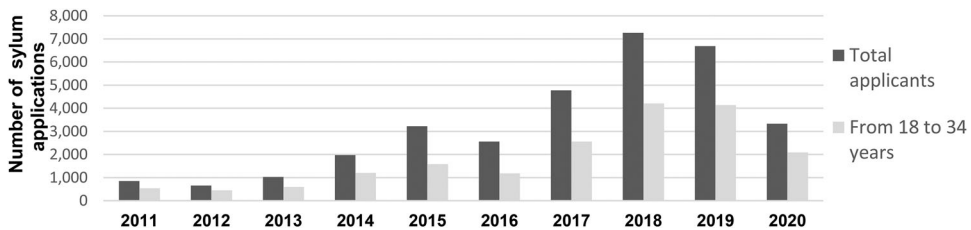


Figure 4. Total Palestinian asylum applications in Europe 2011–2020. Data: EUROSTAT.

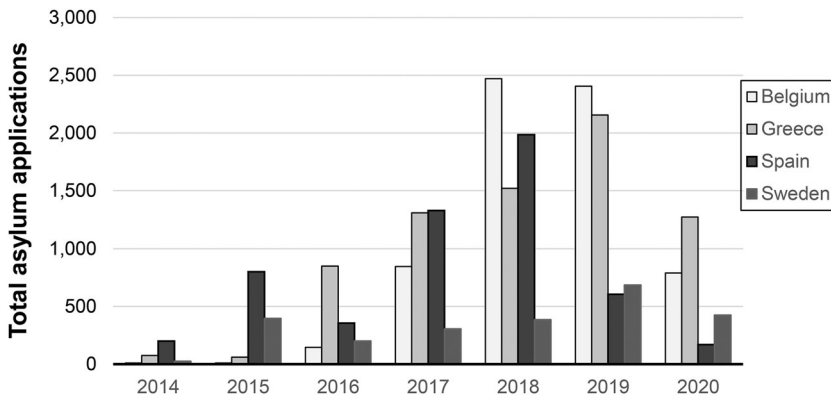


Figure 5. European countries receiving highest number of Palestinian asylum applications between 2011 and 2020. Data: EUROSTAT.

Palestinians who left Gaza without the intention of return, but through non-asylum seeking routes; nor those who are irregular migrants who have not claimed asylum, or have had their claims rejected but chose to stay.

The lack of clarity in this data is leading to serious protection gaps for Palestinians from Gaza who leave to seek asylum elsewhere. Scholars have highlighted the difficulties faced by Palestinians in accessing protection and other rights otherwise allocated to those who are stateless (Akram 2018; Beversluis 2016), and indeed, there is a remarkable range of approaches taken in Europe to decisions surrounding asylum applications from Palestinians who have left Gaza. For instance, Belgium has received the highest number of Palestinian asylum applications of any European country in recent years, and for the overwhelming majority of my 50 interviewees in Gaza, Belgium was the hoped for destination country. Belgium used to accept the asylum claims of Palestinians from Gaza *de facto*, but since 2017 the Office of the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons publicly announced the start of a dissuasion campaign to limit the number of Palestinians from Gaza seeking asylum in Belgium.²¹ Among the arguments for refusing asylum applications of Palestinians from Gaza was that increased opening of the Rafah crossing meant that it was easier to return Palestinians (if asylum claims were not granted) than previously (Van Doren and Lejeune 2020, 311). The Council for Alien Law Litigation²² (CALL) opposed this campaign for a long time, on the grounds that return through Egypt was neither safe nor possible; and that the humanitarian situation and continuing threat of violence and insecurity in Gaza were severe enough to prohibit all returns.²³ However, the General Assembly of the CALL subsequently overturned jurisprudence, declaring that

... although the security situation in Gaza is precarious, a return for Gaza residents is possible; that there is no systematic persecution of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip; and that not all inhabitants of the Gaza Strip live in deplorable conditions. The CALL concludes that not all former Gaza residents are eligible for international protection,²⁴ while specific individual circumstances may give rise to such protection.²⁵ (Van Doren and Lejeune 2020, 312).

Another argument of the CGRS in Belgium is that if asylum applicants are registered refugees with UNRWA, protection can only be granted if they can demonstrate that the protection of UNRWA does not suffice.²⁶ Similarly, in Bulgaria in 2018 it was concluded that where an individual from Gaza holds Palestinian refugee status and has travelled from a place where UNRWA is present, the individual cannot be granted asylum and should instead be returned.²⁷ In the Netherlands, on the other hand, a recent case (2020) pertaining to an asylum claim from a Palestinian from Gaza ruled that Palestinians registered with UNRWA and receiving assistance from the agency should *not* be excluded from refugee status in Europe, when it can be clearly established that their personal safety in Palestine is at risk and that UNRWA cannot guarantee their living conditions, forcing the individual to flee. From the evidence presented in this case, the court concluded that overall UNRWA was not able to provide adequate protection to Palestinian refugees in Gaza.²⁸ Notwithstanding that UNRWA's mandate has always been operational, unlike the legal protection mandate of UNHCR, it remains unclear what in any of these contexts would constitute 'adequate protection'.

These diverging approaches create major protection gaps for Palestinians from Gaza and it is therefore vital to establish a clearer understanding of migration from Gaza today.

To do so, I draw from 50 interviews, discussions and observations made during qualitative fieldwork conducted in Gaza among Palestinian youth, as well as those already undertaking migration journeys. Working with Ali's (2023) conceptualisation of displacement, I argue that the decision of Palestinians to leave Gaza should be understood as a coerced choice: as such, constituting a form of forced migration that is deserving of international protection through asylum processes.

Coerced migration

In legal terms, a coercive environment means the intentional creation of an environment where it is 'practically impossible' [for a civilian population] to remain..²⁹ The vital element is that the displacement in question is involuntary, and that the 'relevant persons had no real choice'.³⁰ Jurisprudence from the International Criminal Court (ICC) and other international criminal tribunals is consistent in holding that the forcible nature of the displacement must not be limited to simple indications of physical removal (see BADIL 2017). The 'forcible' dimension of the displacement can be interpreted broadly, and 'is not restricted to physical force, but may include threat of force or coercion, such as that caused by fear of violence, duress, detention, psychological oppression or abuse of power'.³¹ Although this analysis has not yet been used in the discussion of migration from Gaza, elsewhere in the occupied Palestinian territories, the establishment of a coercive environment has been used to explain process of forcible transfer of Palestinians. This has included the transfer of Bedouin communities throughout Area C; Palestinians forced to leave their homes following punitive house demolitions or residency revocation in East Jerusalem; the transfer of Palestinians out of the southern West Bank city of Hebron, where an illegal Israeli settlement has been established in the centre of the old city; and the persistence of extreme Israeli settler violence that leaves individuals with no choice but to move away from their homes and land (BADIL 2017; OCHA 2017; OHCHR 2019).

Despite UN human rights³² and humanitarian³³ bodies acknowledging that Israeli acts and policies in the West Bank contribute to a coercive environment for Palestinians, analysis of the situation in Gaza falls short of asserting a clear connection between Israeli practices and policies and forced displacement. Consequently, the criminal nature of Israel's actions and policies receives no consideration, and the driving factors behind Palestinians decisions to leave Palestine, and their 'deservingness' of protection status are questioned. Deeper attention to coercion, and specifically the role of the coercer in wielding a power imbalance over a population can go some way towards correcting this. Where other scholars have explored coercion in relation to settings where choice is completely absent (as discussed in Anderson 2010), Ali (2023; building on Wertheimer 1987) argues that when a choice to migrate is present, but is made under duress, this should also be understood to be a result of coercion. It is vital to acknowledge choice in this context because it would be untrue to suggest that all Palestinians are trying to leave Gaza. It is not that Palestinians in Gaza are deprived of any choice but to leave, rather they are limited to dire choices by Israeli authorities in a way that seems engineered to coerce them into leaving. The following discussion centres on the coercive processes facing Palestinians in Gaza as identified through my interviews.

At the start of this article, Shireen explained her reason for not having a family in Gaza because there were too many risks associated with doing so. Having a family, for her, was precluded by the fact that she no longer believed that she – as an adult – could stay in Gaza, let alone raise a child there. This relates to being left worse off in relation to a fundamental baseline (Wertheimer 1987), or a valued way of living and functioning (Ali 2023). The coerced choice here imposed on Shireen could be described as, either remain in Gaza and live a life so difficult and dangerous that you cannot bear to have a family of your own; or leave Gaza on a potentially dangerous journey, so that you can (hope to) start a family in another country. A number of female interviewees echoed the comments of Shireen. This resonates with the growing body of literature in migration studies that illustrate the ways young people growing up in contexts of forced displacement, political violence or conflict are required to migrate in order to start families, and otherwise establish themselves as young adults (Monsutti 2007; Crivello 2011). Deliberate policies of Israeli authorities seeking to depopulate Gaza of its Palestinians challenge this fundamental baseline for young adults in Gaza.

A second coercive process is a history of violence that makes it credible to a population that severe violence may happen again (Ali 2023, 14). The blockade on Gaza is widely recognised as a form of collective punishment in breach of international law, preventing civilians from securing basic needs and rights.³⁴ Israel has a long history of military attacks on Gaza, and since the beginning of the siege there have been six such attacks (2008–2009, 2012, 2014, 2021, 2022, 2023). The threat of violence is also present in the debris that remains in the aftermath of each of these attacks. Under international law, Israel is bound by certain obligations under the law of occupation, which, as detailed in Article 55 of the fourth Geneva convention, includes ensuring that the civilian population receives food, medicines, and other basic goods.³⁵ Israeli authorities have a track record of tightening access via Gaza's main commercial crossing following a military attack, limiting the entrance of construction materials, generators, and water, as well as essential humanitarian supplies (NRC, Oxfam and Premiere Urgence Internationale 2018). This has made it difficult to remove debris following bombardments, let alone to reconstruct damaged infrastructure. This exposes Palestinians to a host of additional threats, including limiting access to health care and education facilities (owing to a lack of infrastructure and necessary supplies); overcrowded living circumstances (owing to a lack of available accommodation); and dangerous public spaces (for the impact of this on children specifically, see Procter et al. 2024). In an interview in 2019, Rania, a 22-year-old woman living in a refugee camp in the middle area of Gaza said:

You just never know when it will happen again, another attack. It could be today, it could be tomorrow – I wake up every morning wondering how my day will end, we live constantly on the edge. When they attack, it is so fast, everything can change so quickly from here from one day to the next. I really like to go to the beach at night, to breathe, and be thankful for the day because you never know here what tomorrow will bring.³⁶

A third coercive process emerges through the constant threat of violence in Gaza. The Israeli Air Force use Unmanned Aerial Vehicles throughout Gaza, also known as drones, both for monitoring and intelligence, and for missile strikes.³⁷ Colloquially, the noise of drones is referred to in Gaza as *zanzana* (meaning buzz, evoking the sound of a swarm of bees), owing to the threatening sound they make. The volume of

drones was another way that the threat of violence was often referenced among interviewees. Saleh, a 19-year-old living in the north of Gaza said:

The buzzing is constant – you wake up with the sound, you go to sleep with it. Sometimes you can zone out of it during the day, but it is always there, always giving you a headache. Sometimes the sound is louder, then you know to be more worried, they are looking for something close to you. It makes you nervous.³⁸

In addition to the constant threat of violence, Ali's discussion of 'amplifier coercion' (2023, 16) is also relevant in the context of Gaza. This is a kind of coercion is '... targeted at a specific group with the intention of coercing another, usually larger and interdependent group' (Ali 2023). Attacks on healthcare infrastructure in Gaza can be understood in this light. The denial of fuel, water and electricity all have serious consequences for the ability of healthcare services to function in Gaza. In recent years, many hospitals in Gaza have been forced to close their emergency departments and operating theatres due to power cuts and a lack of fuel for backup generators (Human Rights Council 2022). There have also been regular attacks on healthcare infrastructure in Gaza. For example, during the 2008 Israeli attack of 'Operation Cast Lead', an estimated 34 health facilities were damaged or destroyed in 22 days (The Lancet 2009). During the 2014 Israeli attack known as 'Operation Protective Edge', 73 hospitals and primary health clinics in Gaza were damaged and 45 ambulances were destroyed (WHO 2014). The Al-Wafa Rehabilitation Hospital was also completely destroyed by an aerial bombardment (Dyer 2014). Such attacks coerce healthcare staff, and consequently the much larger population they serve into seeking essential medical care elsewhere. Efforts to do so are however frequently denied, owing to the complexities of the Israeli-imposed healthcare permit regime in Gaza. For instance, in 2022, more than 20,000 patients who applied for medical permits to leave Gaza for treatment were denied (B'TSelem 2022). The criteria for approving these requests is unknown, and the grounds for denial are never explained to the patient.

A fifth, and more introspective form of coercion can also be found in Gaza through exemplary violence: that which is used to set an example to a larger number of the same group of people. Walking down a street, even in a densely populated city in Gaza, it is not unusual to see one building that has been completely destroyed by an airstrike, while the rest in the street remain standing. These single strikes constitute a form of amplifier coercion by serving as a reminder to the wider community of what could happen. Talking about one such building on his street in Gaza city, Jamal, a young man in his early 20s explained:

Last year they [an Israeli airstrike] destroyed that building across the street – there were families in that building, children were living there. They didn't die, they got a short warning to evacuate but they were left with nothing, their whole home destroyed. And nobody gives a shit, there is no accountability. We are not living anymore here in Gaza, we are simply not alive. Living here, it's like watching dead people walk the streets. Migration is the only option now. What is there to be afraid of? The worst that can happen is that I die. Well, I live every day of my life thinking I might die here, so does everyone in Gaza. I know people say the journey can be hard, but it's better to try it and see than to just stay here and wait for them to decide to destroy my family home like that, or to kill me with an airstrike.³⁹

The fears generated through the long history of Israeli military attacks on Gaza, combined with the effects of both amplifier and extemporary coercion are further brought into focus by regular experiences of extreme, direct violence. These deep fears were cited repeatedly in different ways by research participants that led to a collective feeling that continuing to live in Gaza was becoming unviable. By 2021, Rania was pregnant with her first child. In a Whatsapp exchange during the attack in May 2021, she said:

Wallahi it was a bad night – the bombs were everywhere, so close to my house. Every explosion, I'm holding my belly, as if that will protect her. I just keep thinking that as soon as this is over, we have to go, we have to find our way to leave this place.⁴⁰

A different kind of coercive process emerged through interviews in discussions of collective political repression, and the perception among young people that it was impossible to try and change the situation in Gaza by any other means. This had much to do with the timing of this research, which was during the Great March of Return – a series of demonstrations held on the fence between Gaza and Israel that started in March 2018 and continued every Friday throughout 2019. The march brought civilians from across the social and political spectrum in Gaza together, peacefully walking towards the fence, and often with banners bearing the names of the villages, towns and cities from which they families had been displaced in 1948. According to OCHA 2020, between the first protest and November 2019, more than 36,100 demonstrators were injured by the Israeli military, over 8,000 of whom were shot at with live ammunition. Israel also used drones during the protests not only for surveillance, but to drop tear gas grenades on unarmed Palestinian civilians and journalists taking part (Bellingcat 2018). The Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights Commission of Inquiry into the Great March of Return found 'reasonable grounds to believe that during these weekly demonstrations, the Israeli military killed and gravely injured civilians who were neither participating directly in hostilities nor posing an imminent threat to life', and that the use of lethal force in response was rarely necessary or proportionate (HRC 2019). A number of interviewees who had taken part in the March explicitly linked its failure to bring about change to their desire to migrate. One 20-year-old woman explained:

I went to the demonstrations at the beginning as a citizen, with my family. It was a really unifying moment, everyone in my neighbourhood went together. It felt like there was so much momentum, that something could really change. It was like the last chance – I really felt hopeful at the start. But it has died just like everything else here, our lives only got worse because of it. In my own family, two of my cousins were injured so badly that now they cannot work – I don't know honestly how they are going to survive. Enough, it is clear to me that the situation here is not going to change. So the only thing to do now is to try and leave⁴¹.

Her reflection illustrates the perception shared by many of my interviewees that it was not possible to change their situation through non-violent protest. Indeed, they risked serious injury or death at the hands of the Israeli military for doing so. This also illustrates a form of coercive political repression. The 1951 Geneva Convention provides five reasons for persecution on the basis of which refugee status is recognised, including political opinion. Those who took part in the Great March of Return, engaging in civic protest as a means to change their circumstances faced credible threats of physical harm or death for doing so.

A final coercive process that emerged through this research with young people was in relation to lack of opportunities to earn a living in Gaza. Roy's framing of the de-development of Gaza arose from a lack of adequate development theories to explain the relationship between Israel and Gaza. Framed in economic terms, de-development is defined as 'a process which undermines or weakens the ability of an economy to grow and expand by preventing it from accessing and utilising critical inputs needed to promote internal growth beyond a specific structural level' (Roy 1987, 56). She argues that de-development is characterised by: 'the negation of rational structural transformation, integration and synthesis, where economic relations and linkage systems become, and then remain, unassembled' (2016, 129). De-development is not necessarily a planned process, but rather is one which arises as the outcome of a distinct set of policies designed to secure military, political and economic control (135). At the core of de-development is an effort to deprive a place of its own economic resources, thus using economic policies as a mechanism of state control. De-development not only 'distorts development but forestalls it entirely, by depriving or ridding the economy of its capacity and potential for rational structural transformation and preventing the emergence of any self-correcting measures' (128). Policies that contribute to de-development include *inter alia*: low levels of government investment in social and economic infrastructure; the absence of financial support structures; prohibition of economic activities; myriad restrictions on research and training; prohibition of institutional development, coupled with prohibition of uses of land; inability to determine trade or planning regimes; and a political, social, and economic isolation from other groups. In her analysis, Roy groups these processes under the frames of expropriation and dispossession; integration and externalisation; and deinstitutionalisation. Taken together, these policies have led to what Roy describes as 'the progressive dismemberment of the economic structure' (132) of Gaza.

Understanding this political agenda that has engineered this economic situation is vital to making sense of choices to leave. Anderson (2010) refers to the coercer as both creating and using a context of power imbalance to constrain the possibilities of action among the intended targets of their coercion. In this context, the deliberate debasing of Gaza's economy can be understood as a tool through which Israel wields its power over Palestinians in Gaza, forcing them into a decision to leave. One interviewee, Haneen, was preparing to travel to Sweden, with the intention of claiming asylum there. She was in her late 20s and was unmarried. She held two university degrees in education and further teacher training qualifications, but had been unable to find any paid employment in Gaza. She was the oldest of her siblings, three of whom had already left Gaza and the remaining two were unemployed, as were her parents. Primarily, she made a modest income for her family by cooking meals for families around Gaza, advertising her services through social media. She explained that, of her group of friends, the majority of them were still unmarried and living with their parents:

You have to make a calculation here. You need at least 5000 dinars [around \$7000] to marry and establish a family home in Gaza. Of course, few people have this money, so instead they rely on marriage debt agencies here in Gaza who loan you the money – but you have to pay it back. But this is the same cost as migrating in the end, crossing Rafah and going to Europe. So it is a calculation, marriage or migration. And if you choose marriage, this will lead to more responsibilities, and the re-payments here in Gaza, where there are still no jobs. So it is better to migrate first – then the marriage can come later, when you are already abroad⁴².

The vast majority of the young people I interviewed during this research, and many of their family members, could only find work on a voluntary basis in Gaza. Despite undertaking multiple university degrees, diplomas or professional training courses, often in a variety of fields, securing paid employment in Gaza was extremely difficult and had significant social consequences.

The analysis of 50 interviews with young people in Gaza reveal a number of coercive processes at play in the decisions surrounding migration. These processes pose a threat to valued ways of living; involve experiencing daily life amidst different kinds of violence; and include forms of political repression all contribute to the political agenda of the siege on Gaza. To return to Greenhill's (2010) framing of coercion discussed earlier, coerced migration can be a product of ethnic cleansing. Anderson (2010) also refers to a coercer as using a power imbalance to constrain the possibilities of action of the intended arguments of coercion. While it has been the choice of Palestinians from Gaza to migrate, this choice has been made as the result of the actions of more powerful actors. The way that Israeli authorities, with the support of Egypt, wield their power through the siege is through the creation of a coercive environment, in which the choices of Palestinians in Gaza become limited to a very narrow set of unpalatable proposals: stay in Gaza, living in constant fear for your life, in wholly inadequate living conditions, with low prospects for work and unable to build a life or imagine a future; or leave, knowing both the journey and destination will be out of your control.

Conclusion

As things stand at the time of publication of this article, the futures of the Palestinians in Gaza who survive the ongoing genocidal violence are deeply uncertain. Israeli government officials insist that this 'war' will continue for months to come, while many analysts suspect and fear a regional escalation. In the meantime, Palestinians in Gaza are struggling to survive day by day. Many research participants I have remained in contact with are now living in tents in Rafah, having lost everything as their homes were bombed. Some are trying to gather the required funds to pay a bribe to cross the border into Egypt. The amount currently required to do so is \$8,000 per adult. Others say that they will never leave Gaza, and would prefer to be killed on the land than to be displaced by force. It remains entirely unclear how European governments will respond to Palestinians from Gaza who do leave under the current circumstances, if they apply for asylum.

This article has developed a map of the existing quantitative data on migration from Gaza, which is clearly inadequate, and is revealing of the challenges of quantitative data collection in a context of blockade. Providing an overview of all of the available data has been in part an effort to quieten the preoccupation with figures, and to make space instead for a deeper understanding of the reason for this movement. Economic factors are often discussed among those planning to leave Gaza, and this narrative has been quickly snapped up as one of economic migration both in the media and by policy makers. Combined with a lack of clarity over asylum decision making in multiple European states, this has led to a worrying tendency to lean on the alarmist narrative of unknown numbers of Palestinian economic migrants arriving on the doorstep of European countries. Based on extensive interviews undertaken in Gaza, I have tried in this article to correct this narrative.

Migration from Gaza in recent years contributes to the long and enduring history of displacement and emigration from Palestine. Under fifteen years of siege, in the largest open-air prison in the world, specific processes have emerged to facilitate the movement of individuals through the limited openings of the Rafah crossing. Despite four major Israeli military attacks on Gaza in the past two decades, these have not primarily been the moments when people have chosen to try and flee. The same is true of the current situation. Instead, I have suggested that it is a result of coercion that Palestinians from Gaza are now seeking asylum in Europe. Using coercion as a framework to examine the suffocation that a lack of dignity and hope can bring, perhaps particularly among young people striving for their futures is not exclusive to the context of Palestine. Attention to the roles of coercion and coercers can provide a useful lens to better understand mobility under different types of political violence that similarly preclude the possibility of a dignified life, and the likelihood of significant change to their circumstances in the near future.

By centring coercion, I suggest that the siege has been designed to depopulate Gaza by making the situation so dire that Palestinians are forced to leave. The use of coercion, in its different and often hidden guises stems from a desire to move communities, seemingly of their own volition. Focussing on coercion in this process avoids a piecemeal approach that homes in on individual factors that might lead to a decision to leave, and instead offers precision in understanding displacement from Gaza as a process underpinned by oppression. This tells us that this is more complex than a story of economic migration alone. Fundamentally, it centres attention back on the Israeli government as the coercer in question, and should provide clarity, and critical context to European asylum decision making processes for Palestinians from Gaza.

Notes

1. All individuals mentioned in this article have been anonymized with any identifying characteristics changed.
2. Interview with author, Gaza city, February 2019.
3. Interview with author, Gaza city, February 2019.
4. For examples, see 'I want to get the hell out of here: thousands of Palestinians are leaving Gaza' NPR 04.06.2019 [<https://www.npr.org/2019/07/04/733487137/i-want-to-get-the-hell-out-of-here-thousands-of-palestinians-are-leaving-gaza?t=1645551128146>]; 'By 2020 the UN said Gaza would be unlivable. Did it turn out that way?' The Guardian 28.12.2019; 'Israel actively pushing Palestinian emigration from Gaza', Times of Israel 19.08.2019 [<https://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-actively-pushing-palestinian-emigration-from-gaza-official-says/>]; 'Israel pushing Gazans to migrate to change demographics' The Arab Weekly 19.10.2019 [<https://the arabweekly.com/israel-pushing-gazans-migrate-change-demographics>];
5. Egypt has been complicit in the conditions facing Palestinians in Gaza for the past 16 years, working with the Israel to seal the air, land and sea borders around Gaza. Egypt closed its border with Gaza in 2007, when Hamas came to power. Despite both domestic and regional moral and political outrage over the blockade, successive Egyptian governments have cited security threats and concerns over the precedent that Hamas' political electoral success in Gaza could set. They have systematically chosen to prioritise relationships with Israel and the US over Palestine, and indeed there has long been heavy suppression of pro-Palestinian activism, or any activism specifically against the blockade in Egypt. Most importantly, Egypt has long signaled that they have no interest in being seen as a 'solution' to the 'problem' of Gaza, something which has been contemplated by Israeli strategists for decades. Around

15,500 Palestinians fled to Egypt during the 1948 *Nakba* (Brand 1988, 46). They were never recognized as refugees, and instead under Gamal Abdel Nasser's rule they came to be treated on a par with Egyptian citizens, receiving basic rights, access to property and public sector employment without the need for work permits. The signing of the Camp David Accords between Egypt and Israel in 1978 signaled an abrupt change to this treatment of Palestinians in Egypt. These rights were revoked, and ever since they have been assigned the category of 'foreigner' (for a detailed history, see El-Abed 2009, 536–543).

6. International Court of Justice Press Release, December 29th 2023: <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/icj-southafrica-israel-genocide-29dec2023/>
7. For a critical overview of a wide body of work on settler colonialism in Israel and Palestine, see Salamanca et al. (2012).
8. I have worked with the same research assistant on a number of different studies since 2017. The safe conduct of all of this work would have been impossible without this individual, who has requested to remain anonymous.
9. It is estimated that three-quarters of a million Palestinians left their homes in 1948: 39% went to the West Bank; 26% to Gaza; 14% to Lebanon; 10% to Syria; 10% to the East Bank of Jordan; and 1% to Egypt (Hilal 1992, 40). This displacement led to an increase of the West Bank population by 60%, while in Gaza the total population tripled in 1948 as a result of Palestinian refugees arriving from elsewhere in the country (Kossaifi 1980).
10. For a history of Hamas's thirty-year transition to governance, see Baconi (2018).
11. Interviews, November 2018–August 2019.
12. See Figures 1 and 2.
13. Interviews with author, August–December 2019.
14. Interviews with author, October 2019–February 2020; presentations and discussions conducted in Jerusalem with delegates of ten EU member states in October and December 2019.
15. Multiple interviews with author, October 2018–December 2019
16. Interview with author, Gaza City, August 2019.
17. This does not account for Palestinians who migrate through other means (such as with work or student visas), nor those who travel to Europe and for a variety of reasons maintain an irregular status.
18. Reported in multiple interviews with policy analysts, academics and NGO staff with the author in 2019–2020
19. Available in paper copy only; this poll is currently unavailable via the online Al-Aqsa University Library database.
20. The methodology followed in this poll has not been made public. It should be noted while considering these results that survey research in Gaza comes under close scrutiny of the Hamas government, and many of the questions included in this survey were leading in nature.
21. For discussion of this dissuasion campaign, see <https://www.knack.be/nieuws/de-block-gaat-palestijnen-ontraden-om-naar-belgie-te-komen/> and <https://www.mo.be/analyse/driedingen-die-de-ontradingcampagne-tegen-palestijnen-ontleert-over-asielbeleid>
22. The Council for Alien Litigation Law is an independent administrative court authorized to process appeals against decisions taken by the Office of the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons and the Immigration Office.
23. App No 182.381, 16 February 2017 (Council for Alien Law Litigation) <<https://www.rvv-cce.be/sites/default/files/arr/A182381.AN.pdf>>; Raad voor Vreemdelingen-Betwistingen App No 190.280, 31 July 2017 (Council for Alien Law Litigation) <<https://www.rvv-cce.be/sites/default/files/arr/A190280.AN.pdf>>.
24. Council for Alien Law Litigation 228.889 (n 66)
25. App No 228.888, 18 November 2019 (Council for Alien Law Litigation), available via: https://www.rvv-cce.be/sites/default/files/arr/a228888.an_.pdf.
26. This issue has endured an extensive back and forth in Belgian asylum decision-making, for details on this context see the AIDA country report available via: https://asylumineurope.org/reports/country/belgium/asylum-procedure/differential-treatment-specific-nationalities-procedure/#_ftn3

27. Serin Alheto v Zamestnik-predsedatel na Darzhavna agentsia za bezhantsite. 2018. 'A Palestinian who has refugee status from UNRWA cannot obtain refugee status in the EU while receiving effective protection or assistance from that UN agency'. Court of Justice of the European Union. Available via: <https://curia.europa.eu/jcms/upload/docs/application/pdf/2018-07/cp180112en.pdf>.
28. Court of the Hague (unpublished), 24.08.2020. Available via the European Database on Asylum Law: <https://www.asylumlawdatabase.eu/en/case-law/netherlands--court-hague-unpublished-24-august-2020>.
29. ICTY. Prosecutor v. Krajisnik. 2006. Case number IT-00-39-T. Trial Judgement. (hereafter 'Krajisnik'). Para. 729
30. ICTY. Prosecutor v Krnojelac. 2002. Case number IT-97-25-T. Trial Judgement. Para. 475; Case number IT-97-25-A. Appeal Judgement. Para. 233
31. The Rome Statute Elements of Crimes. Article 6(e)
32. OHCHR: 'Palestinians trapped in a coercive environment says UN rights official', available via <https://news.un.org/en/audio/2018/12/1028241>
33. OCHA: 'Coercive environment intensified on herding communities in Southern Hebron', available via <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/coercive-environment-intensified-herding-communities-southern-hebron>
34. *Inter alia*, see 2010 International Committee of the Red Cross conclusions on the closure as a form of collective punishment, available via <https://www.icrc.org/en/doc/resources/documents/update/palestine-update-140610.htm>; 2016 UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, Michael Lynk '... as a form of collective punishment imposed upon an entire population, the blockade is contrary to international law'. Report to the UN General Assembly A/71/554, 19 October 2016, para.45.
35. Article 55, Convention (IV) relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. Geneva, 12 August 1949 (see: <http://ihl-databases.icrc.org>).
36. Interview with author, Nusierat, June 2019
37. For a detailed discussion of the use of drones in Gaza, see Abu Saif 2014.
38. Interview with author, Jabalia, May 2019
39. Interview with author, Gaza city, March 2019
40. Whatsapp communication with author, May 2021
41. Interview with author, Khan Younis, February 2019
42. Interview with author, Gaza city, January 2019

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