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Palestine and the Habeas Viscus: An Autoethnography of Travel, Visa Violence, and Borders

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Borders have been a political tool to control, manipulate and affect the lives and movements of individual and groups. These borders can also work as barriers designed to discriminate against specific ethnic, religious, or linguistic groups and individuals for political reasons. In specific cases, borders can create an entire generation of exception, where the lives of a particular age group matter less than others. Palestinians in Gaza have been living in a state of exception, where their lives have been animalized and constrained both within the Gaza Strip and also outside the Gaza Strip, at border points of entry in many places. This paper is an autoethnography of the lives of Palestinians as a state of exception, visa violence, airports and borders. Borrowing Weheliye's concept of habeas viscus, the paper examines and describes experiences such as visa applications, rejections, travel, and encounters with border officials. The article starts with describing the state of exception of Gazans who were born and grew up under Israeli occupation. The paper then examines and analyzes the process and ritual of traveling as a quasi-citizen through various border points of entry. This article is an anthropological narrative of how a continuous state of exception turns individuals into homo sacer.

Departing Point

On 3rd December 2019, I woke up after a long night of travel from Sweden to Beirut, to the sudden news of my father's death in Gaza. Although I was just a few hundred kilometers away, I could not travel to pay my last respects to him, nor attend his funeral. Mourning my father abroad, away from my family and friends and unable to say farewell in person was one of the most heartbreaking moments of my life. The experience of not being able to say goodbye to a loved one is not unique for Palestinians of Gaza. Many of my fellow Palestinians have lost family members and friends and have been unable to see them one last time. I therefore knew that this might be my fate, long before my father died, which is not a humane way for anyone to live.

At the end of June 2018, I was about to enter the official opening of the WARM festival (an international arts and human rights festival) in Sarajevo. I received an unexpected call from my brother in Gaza, telling me that my father had been hospitalized with a suspected brain stroke. The sound of my brother's cries on the phone brought back memories of my father's stroke in 2006, just before I left the Gaza Strip, with no idea that I would not be able to return. Since then, I have obtained a new nationality, and a new passport, changing my stateless status as a Palestinian from Gaza to Swedish.

Upon hearing of my father's hospitalization in 2018, the first thought that came to my mind was that I

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would travel from Bosnia to Cairo, and then to Gaza via the Egyptian-controlled Rafah border crossing, which was open for authorized travelers at that time. However, I no longer had the Green ID card issued by the Israeli military that would allow me to enter Gaza. The psychological progression that I had to go through as I contemplated how I could possibly return to Gaza to see my father was enormous. At that moment and in many similar moments throughout my life, my vulnerability can best be described as an animalization by borders due to my imposed role as a border transgressor. For both the Egyptians and the Israelis, without the possession of my Green ID, I would be the transgressor. Contemporary border politics exposes border transgressors to death rather than directly using its power to kill (Agamben, 1998; Mbembe, 2003).

After the death of my father in 2019, many fellow Palestinians from Gaza who have had similar experiences shared with me how borders, walls, and travel restrictions have affected their lives. The Israeli siege and borders enforced on Gaza and the lives of its inhabitants have become an anthropological and sociological phenomenon that has not been thoroughly examined either scientifically, nor through literature.

This paper has three goals. The first is to stress the importance of autoethnographies for borders studies; second it shows how Israel, as a controlling power created the notion of "Gazans", where it treated Gazans as bare life, and also as *habeas viscus* using technological assemblages to control their lives; and third to provide a new perspective on how borders affect stateless people's lives in conflict conditions.

Approach

The shortage of theoretical literature and previous studies on borders from an anthropological perspective is due to the restrictions on access imposed primarily by Israel, resulting in the inability of foreign researchers to conduct research in Gaza. For that reason, most anthropological and sociological studies on Gaza have been neglected in favor of desk research and field visits to the West Bank (Roy, 2016:9). For the last thirty years, Israel has imposed increasingly strict restrictions on travel in and out of the Gaza Strip, which has negatively affected research collaboration and field visits (HRW, 2017). According to a Palestinian researcher, this is compounded by the difficulties researchers face in gathering personal stories from Palestinians in the Gaza Strip due to high levels of trauma they have experienced (Azez Al Masri, interview with author, Gaza, November 2019).

This paper discusses some aspects of my own personal experience in an attempt to reflect on the experience of the Palestinians from the Gaza Strip. My story by no means represents the collective Palestinian experience. Rather, it is a self-narrative that places the individual within a social context (Gregory & Reed-Danahay, 2000). Individuals who have left or fled the Gaza Strip might however identify with several aspects of my ethnographic experiences. This article offers a new perspective on the effects of borders on humans in the context of Palestine in general and Gaza in particular. Previously, Ramzy Baroud and Yousef Aljammal have used storytelling in their journalistic and scholarly work, discussing Palestinian collective experiences (Baroud, 2018; Aljamal, 2014). In this regard, autoethnographies ask "readers to feel the truth of their stories and to become coparticipants, engaging in story telling emotionally, aesthetically, and intellectually" (Ellis, Carolyn & Bochner, 2000).

The originality of this article is its ability to capture first-hand experience of borders, with the author placing himself as the subject matter and case study of a broader community of Palestinians of Gaza. Secondly, this article is distinct for utilizing autoethnography to discuss to discuss borders, violence, and siege as anthropological phenomena in Palestine. This article focuses on the experience and narratives of the Gaza Strip, and is not representative of all the Palestinians who live in the West Bank, Jerusalem, or the diaspora (including refugees, post-1948, when the state of Israel was established). Methodologically, I rely on my own experience as well as archival data. In cases where no data are available, I have returned to some people who are experienced or witnessed the issue I am searching.

The article frames the Palestinians of the Gaza Strip within the *viscus*/flesh lenses, recognizing the severe violence the people are subject to (instrumentally and psychologically). Although the article makes use of *homo sacer* theory as a description of the Palestinians of Gaza, especially the 'state of exception,' it articulates that the Palestinians of Gaza are caught between *homo sacer* and *habeas viscus*. The use of *habeas viscus* reflects the racialized use of knowledge and technology to affect and manipulate human life and environment, particularly with respect to Gazans (Palestinian who live in Gaza) who are borne to violence and have long been under oppression, siege, military attacks and strict borders and restrictions on movement (Weheliye, 2014:11-12). As *homo sacer*, without sovereignty over their movement, borders, travel, death and life, amid severe violence, they continue to live in a continuous state of exception. Simultaneously, they live as experiment for the use of technology and knowledge made by Israel (Dana, 2020). Such technologies maintain the state of exception and the production of Palestinians as a *homo sacer*.

I will go back and forth between travel events, always coming back to the primary theme of this paper, namely that of borders. Each section focusses on a specific theme, including, respectively, Gaza's borders and the creation of border zones, the state of exception and immigration from the Gaza Strip, visa violence, rituals of travel, statelessness, and finally *habeas viscus*. This paper is not in chronological order of events; rather it allows the reader to grasp the essential thematic difficulties Palestinians face with respect to real and virtual borders that affect the lives and psychology of Palestinians.

This autoethnography represents the violence of borders that Gazans face, especially the youth of the Gaza Strip. It provides an alternative story of the sufferings of Palestinians from borders. Based on my own experience, travels, and refuge, as an individual with a Palestinian green-colored ID, accompanied with a Palestinian travel document, and later as a European citizen, I offer a narrative of the nature of borders, politics, suffering, self-exile, and the ritual of border controls. The stories of borders, occupation, and violence in Palestine deserve serious attention by scholars and researchers. This article contributes to the conversation on Palestinian struggle, sharing a sense of the trauma associated with crossing borders under siege and occupation.

Gaza Borders: From Rhodes to Oslo

The Gaza Strip has been the focus of most academic and non-academic writings on Palestine, particularly after the 1993 Oslo Accord (Nofal, 1996), the second Intifada that began in 2000 (Collins, 2010), the Hamas elections in 2006 (Klein, 2007), Gaza's blockade, the Hamas-Fatah division (Alijla, Masri, & ElMasri, 2019; Rose, 2008) and three large-scale Israeli military operations in Gaza in 2008-2009, 2012, and 2014 (Finkelstein, 2018; Manduca, Chalmers, Summerfield, Gilbert, & Ang, 2014). While it is beyond the scope of this article to provide a detailed history of the Gaza Strip and how its current borders and shape came into being, this section offers a brief sketch.

Prior to the creation of the State of Israel in 1948, Gaza and its district had 53 villages, and three main cities (Majdal, Gaza, and Khan Younes) with a size of 1111.5 sq km. The Gaza district was situated with the eastern coast of the Mediterranean to the west of Gaza, the Sinai desert to the south, the Ramla district to the north, and the Beer Sheba and Hebron districts to the east (Az'ar, 1987). It was under British colonial rule since the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in World War I. After the British withdrawal and the establishment of Israel in 1948, the Gaza district reduced in size significantly, pursuant to the Rhodes Armistice agreement of 1949, which ended hostilities between Israel and its Arab neighbours, Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon and Syria (Waage, 2011). In the Rhodes agreement, the Green Line was established, separating Israeli controlled areas from the Egyptian-controlled Gaza Strip and the Jordanian-controlled West Bank.

After the Rhodes agreement, the Gaza district reduced in size to 365 sq km, just 20% of its original size (Ghazi, 2011). In 1948, the population of the Gaza Strip increased from 90,000 to 249,603, including refugees who were forced to leave their homes from other areas in Palestine, with most of these refugees settling in eight refugee camps (Az'ar, 1987: 16). The Arab League mandated the Egyptian government to administer the Gaza Strip in 1949, as there was no Palestinian political entity that could represent the Palestinians (Abu Amro, 1987). The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) was established in 1949, serving the refugees in the Gaza Strip as well as those in other parts of the neighboring countries, providing UNRWA cards as identification documents, while the Egyptians provided travel documents for Palestinians, including the Palestinian refugees (Bocco, 2009).

In June 1967, amidst heightened tensions, Israel attacked Egypt and Syria, taking over the Gaza Strip and the Sinai dessert, as well as the Golan Heights from Syria and the West Bank (including East Jerusalem) from Jordan. As soon as Israel took over the Gaza Strip, it established military rule over the Palestinian Occupied Territories (Roberts, 1990). From 1967 until 1987 Israel allowed Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank to travel to Israel without permission as cheap labor forces. However, the restrictions intensified in the following years, along with hostilities, isolating the occupied territories, especially the Gaza Strip, gradually in the early 1990s, and more completely in 2000 (Loewenstein, 2006).

From 1967 until 1994, the Palestinians of Gaza were allowed to travel abroad through the Rafah crossing into Egypt for education and medical purposes, only after obtaining military permission. The whole territories and bordering politics were redesigned to ensure consistent and strong control mechanisms over the mobility of the Palestinians (Latte Abdallah, 2019). In some cases, Israel would issue laissez-passers for Palestinians from Gaza who were unable to obtain travel documents from the Egyptian authorities (Palestinian CSO activist, interview with author, in Gaza, November 2019).

They usually had to apply to get one from the *al-Idara al-Madaniya* (civil adminsitration of the Israeli army). In most cases, Gazans who were planning to study abroad would ask for one since they were unable to obtain Egyptian or Jordanian refugee travel

documents. The Israeli laissez-passer allowed the Palestinians to travel. According to Sami Abu Salem, a journalist from Gaza, there were two types. One allowed for travel and return within a week, month, or year (based on the application), and if one did not return within the stipulated period, they would not allow them to enter the Gaza Strip. This kind of laissez-passer was hard to obtain, and only given after meeting with the Israeli Shabak (internal security). The second laissez-passer was mostly given to students, and they could not return sooner than nine months or a year. In many cases, laissez-passers were simply denied and hundreds of students lost scholarships in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Gazans were allowed to travel through Egypt or Jordan (after obtaining Israeli military permission) if they intended to travel abroad, and in some cases such as travel to Europe and the USA, through ben Gurion Airport. For the most part, Palestinians of Gaza were not allowed to travel by air from Israel, and to this day are forced to travel through Egypt as the only way out of the Gaza Strip to the world.

After the Oslo Accords, the Palestinian Authority (PA) was established as a semi-autonomous governing body in the Gaza Strip and parts of the West Bank . According to the Oslo Accords, the PA issued travel documents to the Palestinians who were born in the occupied territories, although Palestinian IDs are still issued by the Israeli military. The PA executes a secretarial role, but the final decision is made by the Israeli military. After 1967 and the occupation of the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and East Jerusalem, Israel issued colored ID cards. Gazans were issued red, and West Bankers were issued orange, while Palestinians in East Jerusalem had azure blue ID cards and the Palestinians in Israel had light blue IDs (Parizot, 2017; Tawil-Souri, 2012). In 1994, when the PA came into being, they changed the color of IDs to green to identify anyone who was 18 years old in 1994 and any renewed ID cards. My parents, older brother, and three of my sisters had red IDs while I, and the rest of my siblings, had green IDs. The ID proliferation has a psychological effect. It cuts Palestinians into different populations: generationally and geographically. It has pushed me and many of my fellow Palestinians to adopt categories and labels that contribute to our own othering from the outside world and from each other.

Palestinians of Gaza are only allowed to travel through Egypt and Palestinians of the West Bank through Jordan. Until 2005, the Israeli military controlled the Rafah crossing, blacklisting, arresting and banning many Palestinians from returning to Gaza once they left. Even today, the registry of the Palestinians who can enter the Gaza Strip is managed by the Israeli military, working with Egyptian security services (Palestinian civil worker, interview with author, Gaza, November 2019). Egyptian border police would not

let me into the Gaza Strip if I sought to return, even though I have an expired Palestinian passport and a copy of my Palestinian birth certificate. Although Israel has no control over the Rafah crossing, the inherited mechanism of control which has lasted since 1967 continues to affect the Palestinians of the Gaza Strip. Between 2012 and June 2013, I could have entered the Gaza Strip through the tunnels across the borders, but at that time, I did not have Swedish citizenship, and it would be a losing game that would return me back to block zero, as I was starting my doctoral studies; I would be an "illegal" person in Gaza.

Since June 2006, Israel imposed a blockade on the Gaza Strip, forcing the EU police monitoring mission to not access to the Rafah crossing which closed. Since then, it was opened periodically from time to time. For instance, in 2007, it was completely closed for 199 days where as of January 2008, the last opening time was in June 2007 (UN, 2008). As Hamas took over the Gaza Strip in 2007, Egypt, Israel, EU and the USA imposed total boycott of Hamas de-facto government, which led to the ongoing closure of Rafah crossing, tightening the siege on the inhabitants of Gaza. Travel arrangements in and out of Gaza since 2007 are not clear and depend on both the changing relationships between Hamas in Gaza and the Egyptian intelligence services, and the security situation in Sinai Peninsula in Egypt. Egyptian military convoys would accompany travelers who were authorized to come and go from the Gaza Strip. The names of Gazans traveling outside the Gaza strip would arrive on the Egyptian sides after being sent by the Hamas government or through connections, usually with bribes paid by the travelers (Al-sharq, 2016; Aljazeera, 2019).

Palestinians continue to be stateless. Many have travel documents from Egypt but are not Egyptian, therefore the Egyptian state is not responsible for protecting or securing the safety of their travel. Palestinians of the West Bank with Jordanian travel documents are also not Jordanian. More importantly, the Palestinian travel document issued by the Palestinian Authority retains the statelessness of Palestinians, as it encourages countries to keep treating Palestinians as "Palestinians" without a political and legal identity. Most recently, the USA closed its consulate for the PA in East Jerusalem and opened a department for Palestinians Affairs within the US Embassy in Israel.

Until today, many Palestinians struggle with bureaucratic issues in Europe and North America as Palestine and the occupied territories are not found in systems, such as banks, immigration offices or communes. These policies are strategically developed for political reasons, but in reality, such policies dehumanize Palestinians and

sustain their statelessness despite having a travel document.

Despite the fact that nation-states and border control have become a normality in most people's lives, for Gazans it is much more complex than merely crossing a border. Normally, the outline of states on a globe resembles "neat flat surfaces … clearly separated from each other … and there is little if any ambiguity or overlap" (Khosravi, 2007). Borders are however not that simple. They have become a separation mechanism that excludes and includes, not only based on citizenship, but also place of birth. According to Rumford, "borders shape our perception of the world … border thinking is a major component of our consciousness of the world" (Rumford, 2006). Borders and bordering often shape the future, lives, deaths, mourning, love, studies, relations and other aspects of people's lives. This is especially true for the people of Gaza.

When I received the news about my father's sickness, my first instinctive thought was to go back to Gaza, but then, my consciousness of borders that would impede my return home halted me from the

continuation of that thought. Borders are not only an obstacle, but they are also an ongoing mechanism that changes our perceptions and experiences of the world. They are "based on a capitalist-oriented and racial-discriminating way of thinking [and] regulate movements of people. However, borders are also the space of defiance and resistance" (Khosravi, 2007).

State of Exception: Immigration, Society and Violence

A state of exception is reflected in the extreme violence that my people have been subjected to from multiple actors. The state of exception is understood as "essentially extrajudicial," something prior to the law or beyond the law (Humphreys, 2006). It also reflects a maintenance of the vocabulary of war to justify actions outside the law. I grew up surrounded by a violent environment on both sides: of the society and the occupation. There was a hierarchy of authoritarian violence, beginning with the Israeli occupation; crime and trauma were the norm. As Sara Roy puts it, "children in the Gaza Strip are increasingly incapable of conceptualizing authority in traditional terms since parents and teachers, unable to protect the youth from constant abuse and threat, have ceased to exist as authority figures. Authority is now the enemy and is inherently evil. Law and order do not exist in Gaza, in concept or in practice, and therefore children have no boundaries and no markers for distinguishing good behavior from bad. Children are fearful in Gaza, but they are also feared" (Roy, 1993). The authority over my life, death, and behavior was essentially, a control of a bare life, which is expressed in the state of exceptionalism.

I was born and raised in Gaza City and lived through both the First and the Second Intifadas. As the ninth of eleven siblings, I experienced what it means to come from a big nuclear family as well as being part of an extended family. My family live in the neighborhood of Shejaia, a tribal rural neighborhood of Gaza with a population of around 200,000 (2016). In Gaza, families are part of a bigger network, known as a "*hamula*" in Arabic. The *hamula*, is a patrilineal group where its members
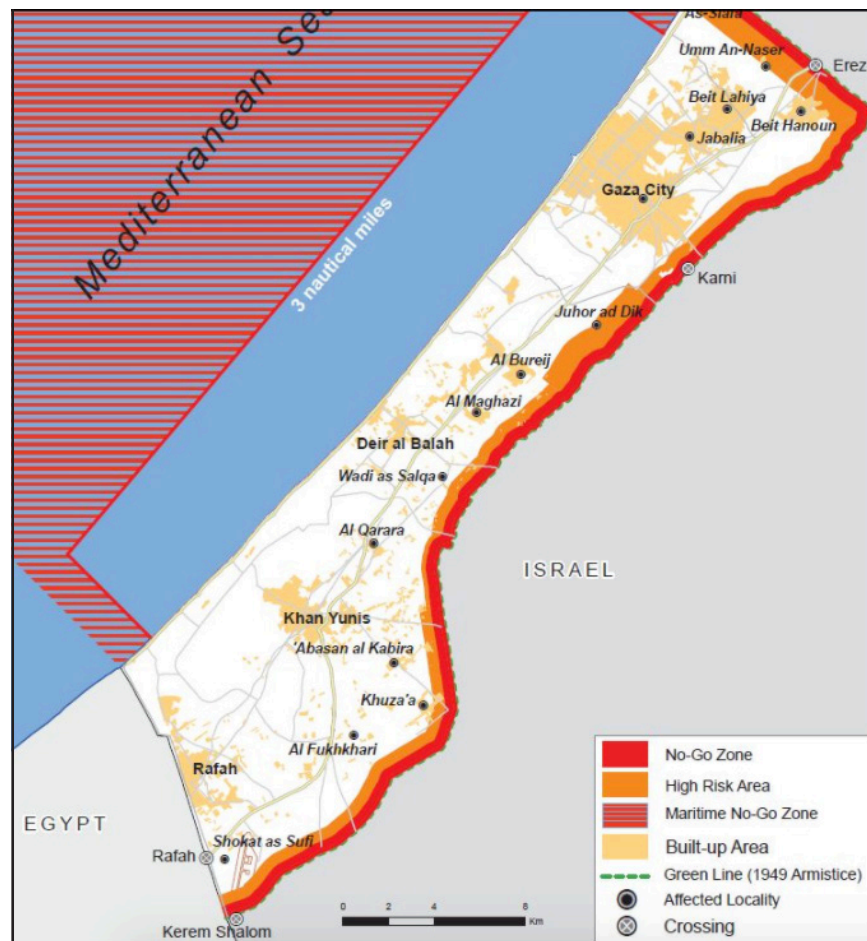

Figure 1. Gaza Strip. Map source: UN OCHA (2010).

are related by blood to one great grandfather, and all the members share the same surname. However, in the early 1990s, after the arrival of the Palestinian Authority, many families started to form coalitions, referring to themselves as *hamulas*. They relate themselves to each other socially and tribally by fictive relatedness to obtain advantages of protection, rights of solidarity, and shared responsibility against other *hamulas* and the state's institutions (Rosenfeld, 1974).

Although I belong to a big *hamula*, I grew up isolated from the majority of its members. From 1967 to 2000, the majority of men in Gaza would work in Israel in the agricultural and construction sectors. In my *hamula* especially, most men worked in Israel. My two brothers worked in Israel in the summer, and if one had not graduated with a college degree in Engineering, he would have continued working in the construction fields of Israel. My second eldest brother was sixteen years old when he started working in the agriculture fields. I used to wait for him every day to bring us corn. The rest of my *hamula* also worked in Israel. My brother-in-law, my two uncles, and almost every house in the family and the neighborhood had at least one worker in Israel. It was not exceptional for me, as a child, to know that Saturday was the day of families. Family visits used to be on Saturdays. In such an environment, emigration was not an option. Although opportunities may arise, socially binding structures discouraged youth and men to emigrate outside Gaza, setting aside the complexity of obtaining an Israeli laissez.

In 1967 my paternal uncle left to study in Egypt, then in the UAE, where he was in forced exile until 1993. My second paternal followed my first uncle to the UAE and remained there until he died in 1999. We were not able to bring his body to bury him in Palestine. The last time I saw him was when I was a child. My maternal uncle was in Egypt and we could not meet until I was sixteen. All of them left Gaza for political reasons after 1967. My father's cousins left for Saudi Arabia and the UAE for better financial prospects and conditions. Kinship was central to the migration in the family. There is a consensus among migration scholars that social networks, kinship, and family ties are crucial to the migration system (Boyd, 1989; Fawcett, 1989; Gurak & Caces, 1992). It is about having a

community in "*al-gorba*", which means foreignness or alienation, to facilitate shared responsibility and solidarity similar to the experience in Gaza. Social networks of multiple generations would provide financial support, as well as provide wisdom and guidance to individuals in their journeys in the diaspora. In the majority of cases, newly arrived immigrants in their host communities would not need to look for accommodation, and jobs would already be secured before their arrival. Such a system minimizes the risks and costs of immigration (Kandel & Massey, 2002).

Despite this, it was very rare for an individual to leave our neighborhood in Gaza to study abroad, especially for those born in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. As a child, I knew only three people from the neighborhood who succeeded in leaving to study in Russia and Romania. I remember my father installed a landline for our house, which was the only telephone in the neighborhood. Therefore, once a week, each of the students abroad would call our home, and I or one of my siblings would run to tell their relatives to come and receive the call. It was a kind of social networking strategy for my mother and the relatives of the students, who spent some time socializing at my home after each call.

In immigration studies, there are several types of immigration that range from voluntary to forced (Chimni, 2009). Forced migration means that individuals are left without any option but to leave their homes, neighborhoods, and countries because of socio-political conditions. According to Richmond (1994), migration can be categorized into two sets: a reactive (forced) and proactive (voluntary). However, Turton (2003) argues that even in forced

Figure 2. Growing up in Gaza. Source: personal records.

migration, people have more options. I argue that Turton may have missed the case of the Gaza Strip or cases where economic opportunities and political oppression mount against the young generations that leave them without options. He opposes many theories which argue that forced migrants have limited options. In the case of the Gaza Strip, the state of exceptionalism rises from the complexity of the situation. Firstly, Gaza did not have a history of migrants or refugees moving en-mass to form a community that can encourage others to join, except most recently with the new waves of forced migration and refugeeness from Gaza after 2007 due to the Hamas takeover of Gaza and the three Israeli military operations in Gaza, which led to the severe deterioration of the socio-economic situation in the Gaza Strip (RefugeesPS, 2017). Secondly, the financial burdens of travel were so high that the idea was abandoned, and alternatively, working and building a family was the other option, following the social structure of the *hamula*. The third and most important reason is the Israeli authorities made it complex for the youth in Gaza to leave, due to fears that they would join the Palestine Liberation Organization. Therefore, obtaining an Israeli laissez-passer was time consuming, at times taking several months to a year to be obtained. Although Israel had plans after 1967 to force the Palestinian Arabs to leave Palestine, the strategy did not begin to work as expected in Gaza until 2007 when Hamas took over the Gaza Strip (Shafer Raviv, 2018). As a group of my colleagues in Belgium and Sweden who left Gaza between 2007 and 2018 said, We are jumping from a sinking ship. We had no other options.

The forced migration of Gazans has been rising since 2007 for several reasons, mainly, the deteriorating socio-economic situation, Israeli military operations, high unemployment rate, and above all, parents who are looking for new future for themselves and their children. Although there are now many Gazans who leave to study abroad, their defined period of study and limited immigration for study has consequences once they finish their studies. The future prospects for those in the Gaza Strip after completing their higher education is limited; therefore these young people look for new opportunities in Europe or North America. Another reason behind the forced migration of Gazans is the limited freedom of speech, torture and persecution of young activists who are a strong voice against Hamas' role in the Gaza Strip (Alijla, 2019b). The internal violence exercised by Hamas de facto government in Gaza, as well as the external violence exerted by Israel through the siege and military attacks, created a motive for migration, reflecting a state of exceptionalism where national practices and external wills lead to the forceful exile of Gazan youth. Forced migration, or *muba'ad* (exiled) was a phenomenon used to describe persons who are forced by Israel to leave

their hometowns for other countries or regions with borders that ensure a physical separation between the person and his community. Although *muba'ad* describes a human and political condition, it was not used to describe persons who were forced to leave the Gaza Strip by Hamas. In these instances, forced migration is softened linguistically and conceptually by not using *muba'ad* and instead using *hajer/muhajer* (emigrated) to avoid labeling or equalizing Hamas with the Israeli occupation and its military.

The first time I was able to leave Gaza was in the early 1990s, when I was taken to visit my mother in Tel Aviv's major hospital after she had an operation. As a child, I saw first-hand the check points and the Israeli soldiers asking for ID cards. My father had to take my birth certificate with him as my ID card. In the hospital, I was required to go through security gates in the form of pedestrian portals. As we lived near the Israel-Gaza fence and my sister lived just a few hundred meters from it, I always walked to her house, as a teenager looking towards the street lights on the other side of the fence, an area that my friends and family called "the settlements." If, as a child, I walked for 20 minutes toward the east, I would be walking under those lights, but that was impossible because there were soldiers and a fence. I still remember that I spent many times as a child just looking at the lights , a sense that I loved for no obvious reason. As Gazans, we live in the state of exceptionalism. When Israel upholds the law and suspends the law against us, it declares a state of exceptionalism targeting specific populations who were born in Gaza. Every child in Gaza, as I was, is *homo sacer*.

Homo sacer is Agamben's term that describes 'when the rights of the man are no longer the rights of the citizens, then he is truly sacred, in the sense that this term had in archaic Roman law: denied to die' (Agamben, 1998). We were completely de-politicized bodies, who were left vulnerable not only to the violence of occupation, but through daily practices, such as regulations and political arrangements. We were also left to the violence of ordinary citizens, the Palestinian adults, without being able to protect or defend ourselves. In short, children in Gaza are left to navigate alone a suspended life under oppressive forces and authoritarian, unescapable control. As children and later as adults who were born and live in Gaza we represented permanent bare life, excluded from rights and sovereignty.

Visa Violence

The lack of a visa is not only a restrictive control mechanism on freedom of movement, but also a mechanism of humiliating people. The neurosurgeon, the professor, many students, professionals,

and others do not pose a threat to Egypt. They were coming from Germany, USA, Italy, Hungary and many other developed countries. However, in the eyes of a security agency, we were all from Gaza, and therefore we should be treated as security threats.

In 2006, I was invited to the International Telecommunication Union's global meeting in Hong Kong. I applied for a Hong Kong special visa at the Chinese Embassy in Tel Aviv by sending my passport via DHL courier service. Although I sent the application on time, I only received the passport with the visa on the same day of my flight, which was departing from Cairo Airport. It was impossible to travel to Cairo. Sometimes, delaying a visa-issuance and complicating the bureaucratic mechanism is a subtle mechanism to exert control and power over the applicant of a visa.

Israel uses technology to limit the access of Palestinians of Gaza to their territories. Borders can have a mental impact as well as political significance (Bigo, Bocco, & Piermay, 2009). The border system creates a politicized human being, but at the same time, it produces a by-product: a politically unidentified 'leftover,' a 'no-longer-human being' (Schütz, 2000). For many Arab states such as Egypt, Jordan, and the Gulf countries, Gazans were the leftover. Gazans' public and private events, political, and biological life, all have become indistinguishable, as they are seen as belonging to a defined spatial area (Agamben, 2000).

Between 2005 and early 2007, I submitted applications to the French Consulate three times. Two were to work at an organization that had already sent me all the necessary documents as part of a European Volunteering Services (EVS). The second was as a participant in a youth peace conference. In both of these cases, I was denied a visa without any explanation. After these incidents, I felt humiliated and rejected. At that time, I was told by my friends that the embassy consular thought I may have had plans to stay in Europe. That was not my intention. I decided to take another direction; I wanted to pursue my studies.

Malaysia did not require a visa for the new Palestinian Passport that was issued according to Oslo agreement. In fact, several of my friends from Gaza were studying at the time in Malaysia. My first idea was to go to Malaysia to get my MA degree then come back to work in Gaza. I sent my documents to one of my friends in Kuala Lumpur with a Western Union transfer of $50 USD for the registration. Two months later, I received admission by email, and I was ready to travel to continue my MS in Information Technology, continuing on the path that I started as a software engineer. However, this was not my choice; I wanted to study social sciences,

which I always loved, but the Malaysian education system did not allow for that. It is clear that visas can be violent to the extent that they can change lives and career trajectories. However, the visa only arrived after I had already started the process of a new visa application to Italy.

A passport is not only a piece of paper, as my father used to tell me, but is one of the most (if not the most) important pieces of paper for Gazans. Palestinians of Gaza see their exclusion amid the humanitarian, political, and social crises as a sinking ship, and for that matter, salvation of the individual is the one and only way out. Passports are the first step on that path because passports play a major role in deciding our spatial limits and surplus of mobilities. Without passports, individuals cannot cross borders. Therefore, passports are the tool that governments use to govern the movement of its population (Torpey, 1999). Yet, passports also represent the strength and vulnerabilities of nations and states. This is why people are classified as safe travelers, desirable, or non-desirable, which is also linked to foreign policy (Salter, 2004). When Gazans are treated through the security lenses of Egypt because of their position under Hamas as a de-facto ruler of Gaza, it affects the whole population and not only Hamas or those associated with it.

After receiving my Italian visa, which I can safely say was the miracle of my life, I began my efforts to get a Jordanian "Persona Grata," which is a visa for Palestinians from Gaza. As distinct from the Egyptian side, the Jordanians informed applicants of the visa decision within one month of application. In 2005, I applied once and was rejected without being given reasons for the rejection. However, in 2007 with an Italian visa already in hand, I was granted the Jordanian Persona Grata. For the first time in my life, I had two visas on my passport. It was rare for a Palestinian of my age to have one visa (two visas were a dream). To my dismay, the Rafah crossing was closed. So, the two visas were of no use and once again I could not travel. My travel was then rearranged through international organizations and the Italian embassy, signifying me as a special case and therefore again as a state of exception and bare life (Alijla, 2019a). In my call with the UNESCO director in Jerusalem, I had explained my situation and how such obstacles may turn ambitious Palestinians into fighters who look for death as the only escape from life without hope. The director forwarded my case to the Italian ambassador himself and the exceptional request for urgent travel was granted.

Instrumental Violence and Borders

Visa violence is used to ensure that Gazans are kept as leftover. Its major political significance is to ensure

discontinuity with the rest of historical Palestine, including the West Bank. Significantly, the use of term *Ghazzawi* was intensified and increased since 1990, and policies designed towards Gaza were different than those in the West Bank. The territorial re-configurations of Gaza and Gazans aims to deepen the space and time asymmetry within the whole population of historic Palestine (Handel, 2009; Parizot, 2017; Peteet, 2008). In that regard, Handel describe these as mechanisms of control to keep people "inclusive-exclusive" through a matrix of control (Handel, 2009).

It was not until the early 1990s, when I was eight years old, when I crossed a border for the first time. It was the visit to my mother who was hospitalized after a surgery at Assuta hospital in Israel. At the time, the Erez checkpoint between Israel and the Gaza Strip was already in place, with soldiers and barriers, slowing and scrutinizing passage. After we crossed the Green Line, signs of the occupation disappeared; clean streets, highways, modern cars, and taller, greener trees. The second time I crossed a border was at the age of 16 when my father took me to Jerusalem for Friday prayer. Again, my father used my Birth Certificate as an ID, since I was under 18. This time, the crossings had changed, and my visa was my birth certificate. Security checks were more intense and queues were longer. Until 2000, it was a straightforward process to get military permission to travel to Jerusalem for prayer on Fridays if you had an electronic ID card issued by the Civil Administration of the Israeli military. We waited for twenty minutes before we were in front of a female soldier who addressed me in broken Arabic with the infamous question: "*shu ismak*?" meaning 'what is your name?'. This question is routine, despite the soldier having the ID in hand. It is perceived as a way to show power and authority over Palestinians passing through borders or checkpoints. The ritual of the Erez crossing was known to nearly everyone in Gaza; the rush hours, the soldiers who worked there, and which lines were faster than others were common conversation points. The crossing was a frustrating experience, where over 150,000 individuals from Gaza had to cross in just few hours to go to work inside Israel.

After the Second Intifada began in 2000, however, the borders were tightened, and siege-like conditions were imposed on the Palestinians of Gaza. As a youth activist and member of a Scout group in Gaza, I was nominated to represent Palestinian youth in the Arab Youth Camp in Alexandria, Egypt in the summer of 2001. Fortunately, the Palestinian Ministry of Youth and Sport arranged a bus for us directly from Gaza to the Rafah crossing. At the crossing, we then had to get off of the bus and find a taxi, paying additional fees to be taken for a ride only 10 meters to where the Israeli soldiers were

Figure 3. Childhood Scout. Source: personal records.

stationed. These fees were paid to the Israeli military. The sufferings of Gazans worked as a financial asset and money-making machine for the oppressor. The Israeli soldiers checked us, instructing us to take another bus to the main departure hall. At the main gate, there was an Israeli soldier in uniform, and armed Israeli civilian personnel. We handed over our PA travel document to a Palestinian civil policeman. The Palestinian police handed the collected travel documents to the Israeli police behind a reflective glass behind him. They stamped our passports, allowing us to leave to the other side, to take yet another bus. When the bus was filled with more than 80 passengers in a space that fits only fifty, we were driven to the Egyptian side. There, we waited for almost three hours until one officer told us that we needed a security visa. Despite the fact that we were invited by the Egyptian Ministry of Youth and our names were handed to them prior to our arrival, as Gazans, we needed security permission from the Egyptian intelligence. We waited for 16 hours in a filthy, inhumane location without any facilities. When they stamped our passports, the Egyptian officer told us, "you are welcome to your home." I was 17 years old then and this was my first encounter with a visa related situation of this sort. The officer's remark was cynical to say the least. Looks of dissatisfaction and disgust replaced the joyful cheers we were expected to deliver. What a welcoming gesture to receive at what the officer proudly called "our home" meaning Egypt, as a good gesture after the mistreating behavior and waiting 17 hours.

Between 2001 and 2004, I applied several times for visas and *tansik* to enter Egypt. *Tansik*, literally meaning coordination, has a different procedure which only includes adding the name of the traveler on the travelers' list on the Egyptian side, and does not go through the Egyptian embassy in Gaza or the normal visa procedures. In other words, *tansik* was securitization of the process of traveling as it occurred only between security agencies. The coordination usually occurs between the Egyptian intelligence and the Palestinian Intelligence, or the Preventive Security, which each have quotas for the number of *tansik* they can arrange. However, adults above the age of 40 were allowed to cross without visas. Such regulations that discriminate against gender, age, and class (privileging VIP card holders and businessmen) are embedded within the regulation of Palestinian mobilities by the Israelis, Egyptians, and Jordanians. The social profiling of travelers starts long before they reach the border (D. Wilson & Weber, 2008). As Rumford (2006) argues, bordering can be selective and targeted (Rumford, 2006). Whenever I asked about why there was a delay, officials usually answered with, "you need a good reason to travel through Egypt." The *tansik* reflects a state of exception where normal travel laws and regulations are suspended and two security agencies and militaries are responsible to manage border zones and individuals seeking to cross. If one agency denies the entry of one passenger, the other does not interfere, and the passenger then has to ask another agency to handle the matter in order to remove his name from the blacklist.

In 2006, I was selected as one of the dozen Youth Peace Ambassadors by the Anna Linda Foundation in Alexandria. I was required to travel to Egypt. I applied in the Egyptian embassy in Gaza, but never heard back. A visa does not work only as a means to facilitate and govern movement, but also as a means to restrict movement and violate rights in many cases. In my case, there was no reason that would prohibit me from getting a visa to enter Egypt, but my application had never been examined and I assume that is why I never received an answer. I then was told I need *tansik* by a security apparatus rather than applying for a normal Egyptian visa. Almost every application for men under age of 30 is dumped before looking at the application.

Also, in 2006, I was selected to participate in the first Euro-Med Youth Parliament, comprised of one preparatory course in Egypt and another in Germany. I applied for a visa to Egypt, but I never got an answer from them and thus had to abandon the idea. However, I did receive the German visa months prior to the dates of the event in Berlin. It was simplified for me because the invitation was from the German Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs. They booked my flight from Cairo Airport to Berlin,

knowing that I could not travel from Ben Gurion Airport in Tel Aviv, which is just a two-and-a-half-hour drive from my home in Gaza. Palestinians are not allowed to travel or arrive through Israel under the pretext of security threats. The struggle to obtain an Egyptian visa for me was mounting. I did not get the visa, but I was advised that I would be granted entry if I took all the papers and invitations with me to the border.

At the Rafah crossing, I helped an old lady and her daughter carry their bags; I did not know them. My flight was at three in the morning, and it was almost four when the lady called her brother, who happened to be a police officer at the crossing. He came and asked for the woman and her daughter. Luckily, the woman and her daughter told him that I am was them too. He stamped all of our passports and put us on a VIP mini bus to the Egyptian side. The officer told me that if I had no visa and wanted to make sure I had no further trouble, I should just leave $50 USD inside my passport when I hand it to the officer. I did as he advised. In less than 30 minutes, the Egyptian officer called my name, and handed me my passport. Border crossings are zones of culture production, spaces of meaning making and meaning breaking (Donnan & Thomas, 1999). Border crossings are conflict zones, where coded systems are in full effect. The Gaza-Egypt border and crossing operate according to their own laws and regulations, subject to Egyptian and regional power considerations. The case of Rafah's crossing has been changing over the last decades. Egypt asseses the situation strategically as they securitize the crossing from their side. They mostly keep the border closed, in line with Israeli interests, and also to maintain disengagement with Gaza. The Egyptian government's main aim is to avoid the burden of having Gaza under its administration (ad-hoc or even reliance) (Feldman, 2015).

A week later, after I finished my program, I flew back to Egypt. In the line, as soon as the border officer saw my passport, he yelled, "*Ghazzawi*! Stay aside. Sit down there." After one hour, an intelligence officer took me to a side office to interrogate me. They did not let me into Egypt. I had to be deported to Gaza. Perhaps Egypt is the only country on earth that deports people collectively based on their geographical area of living, irrespective of religion, ethnicity, or political orientation. "*Tarheel*," or deportation, means that one cannot enter Egypt, and that they will be detained in the airport and deported to the Rafah crossing when it is open. Palestinians of Gaza are subject to the constant risk and fear of deportations, more so than the act of deportation itself. Deportability therefore defines the Gazan state of mind (De Genova, 2002). Palestinians of Gaza experience multiple borders in the region (Egypt, Jordan, and Israel) multiplying socio-spatial

division. It is the governmentality of territorial limits and their access, and all the elements of borders that surround them (Szary & Giraut, 2015).

The conditions in the Cairo Airport detention center where I was confined in was inhuman. I slept there for one night. The following day, the bus was filled with Palestinians from Gaza and we headed towards *al-Arish* airport, where we were detained for four nights. Sitting next to me was a chemistry professor who was coming from the USA, and a neurosurgeon who was coming from Germany to visit his family. We slept on carton boxes, shared fish and chip meals, paying double the price to the officers as a bribe to let us eat and drink. They allowed us only once to leave the *al-Arish* military airport building for a walk outside. The fourth day, they took us in a prisoner convoy to the Rafah crossing. That was the first, and last time I hope, that I looked from the window of a prisoner convoy.

Rituals of Stateless Palestinians at the Borders

As a Palestinian born in Gaza, entry to the Egyptian side of the Rafah crossing is the most challenging part of any travel for any Gazan. The ritual of traveling from Gaza usually starts months before the travel date is known. In the context of occupation and siege, the traveler is not the one who decides the date of travel; rather it is the agency of rulers, namely Hamas' de-facto government, the Egyptian government, and above all, the Israeli military. Each of them has a blacklist of travelers. The ritual of travel for Gazans begins by contacting a senior Hamas official through a tribal network, in order for them to contact Hamas' border police to let the traveler onboard the first buses. Another choice, which is very common, is the *tansiqat*. It is a mechanism of essentially buying your travel by bribing

senior Egyptian officers. The border experience is sharpened by political affiliation and one's position in the hierarchy of the political party and society (Löfgren, 1999). Therefore, a rich family who is able to bribe the border police can have much smoother travel, while a student who is linked to any political party and not wealthy will be deprived of this privilege. In 2016-2017, the price for one-person reached $3000 USD. The Rafah border is a great business at the account of Palestinian suffering (Lofgren 1999).

In 2007, when I was travelling by air for the first time, I did not know the procedures, and therefore, I waited in the departure hall without checking in or passing the security checks. When the airport announced that the flight was boarding, I approached a senior security officer, asking him how I could reach the gate. He asked me, "where are you from and where are you going?" I answered, "Gaza and to Germany." Then, he said to me, "follow me." He was a colonel. On the way to the gate, he took me through security checks without checking my bags under the x-ray. Before we reached the gate, he asked me if I have "*halwan*," which I did not understand. *Halwan*, in my dialect, is "something sweet." Then, he was clear, and aggressively asked me if I "have dollars." I gave him $50 USD. My travel through Rafah and bribing the officer seemed to be a norm, as almost everyone who had the chance to enter Egypt paid somehow. When I was detained at the Cairo Airport waiting for my deportation to Gaza, and then in Al Arish airport waiting for the borders to open, I had to bribe the Egyptian guards to buy us drinkable water and food, double the normal price. Arab airports for Palestinians are not only settings for late-capitalist human mobility (juxtaposing consumption, class division, and racialized sorting), but also places of fear, humiliation, and interrogation (Adey, 2004).

Figure 4. Erez Crossing. Photos source: Rima Merriman (2005) "Photostory: The Erez Crossing Point in Gaza", *The Electronic Intifada* (May 29). https://electronicintifada.net/content/photostory-erez-crossing-point-gaza/9507

After my terrible experiences travelling to Arab countries with a Palestinian passport and my first travels with a Swedish passport, I learned how to better deal with such troubles. The ritual began with changing my name to one that would not make it easy to guess my origins. I was lucky enough that my place of birth was documented as my neighbourhood "Shejaia" and not "Gaza." My friends, who are Swedish citizens with their place of birth written as "Gaza" face tremendous trouble every time they travel to any Arab country. In early 2017, I travelled to Egypt and the officer asked about my origins. I told him that I am Swedish. He questioned that I have a Muslim name and I told him that I am originally Turkmani to avoid more questions (the suburb in which my family lives in Gaza is called al-Turkmani). He opened his mouth and rose his eyebrow, and stamped my passport, believing what I told him. The rituals of crossing borders for a Gazan call for some deliberate clichés (like avoiding answering questions or offering half-truths) to avoid further harassment in the Middle East.

I also learned that the way I dress and the kind of job I hold matter. In most Arab countries, the entry and exit cards require writing your profession beside other details. When I travel wearing business attire, usually a suit, and write in the entry and exit card, "doctor," meaning PhD holder, I give the impression that I am not traveling illegally and have a certain social status. In Lebanon, I look for the happiest-looking border officer, and line up in front of him/her. They usually start a little chat, and I learned that this little chat often makes it easier to break the barrier and gain their trust, despite travelling legally. In Jordan, like Lebanon, little chats make it easier to avoid further questioning. In 2016, I traveled to Abu Dhabi with a suit. The border police did not send me to the intelligence office. A few months later, I travelled wearing a T-Shirt and jeans, and I was escorted to the interrogation room. When I told the officers that I am a doctor and researcher, they replied: "we thought you were an illegal worker because of your clothes." At the Sarajevo Airport in March 2018, I was asked for my Bosnian ID because my family name sounded Bosnian. I had to prove to them that I am not Bosnian, and that I am a researcher, in order for them to let me into the country. My job and my clothes were my saviors in that journey.

The fear of statelessness and border harassment continues to affect me. Whenever I travel, in Europe or abroad, I worry as I get closer to the border police. This feeling has never left me, which is a result of the first traumatic experiences in Egypt and Erez. In countries that have had some restrictions on Palestinians, like Lebanon, my fear is usually doubled, not because of a bad experience, but because being Palestinian may affect me as a "Swedish traveler." I sweat quite a bit when I reach

the officer and hand him my passport along with the boarding passes. The sound of hearing the stamps hitting my passport is so relieving. The queues at police borders are time-based prisons. My experience is one of many in situations similar to mine. With nothing to hide, traveling to conduct research and attend professional meetings, I spent the majority of my lifetime studying at universities. Statelessness is a state of mind; not a piece of paper in your pocket. Once robbed of such basic human rights, your life is reduced to a state of suspended reality. Your psyche is stamped forever.

During my travels in the Middle East, Europe, and elsewhere, I learned that travel rituals can be different for each country. However, they all share one thing; if you are of Palestinian origin, then you are an exception compared to other travelers. Further, if you happen to be from Gaza, then you are even more of an outsider, and need special conditions to enter or leave. For instance, a Palestinian from the West Bank can enter Jordan relatively easily and can travel to many Gulf countries if he has visa. A Palestinian from Gaza would be stopped and interrogated even though he has visa or foreign passport.

Statelessness Chasing Me: A Quasi-citizen

A Swedish passport in my hands does not change the status of statelessness or my identity, which is mainly defined as quazi-Swede. My name sounds Middle Eastern, always triggering the border police in the Arab world to inquire about my original ethnicity and nationality. They do not view me as Swedish, but rather they view me only through the lenses of my ethnic background and heritage. "Bare life is no longer confined to a particular place of a definite category. It now dwells in the biological body" (Agamben, 1998).

The Egyptian border police's treatment of Palestinians who are holders of the Palestinian passport is no different. However, they leave a mark in bold red on the exit/entry card: "Palestinian." My past unfortunate experiences as a stateless *Ghazzawi* continue to contribute to and worsen my PTSD symptoms at borders across the world. In April 2014, I was attending the International Political Science Students Association in Thessaloniki, Greece. At the departure gate on my way back to Milan, the border police stopped me for twenty minutes to make sure that I was the person I claimed to be. It seemed the border police were suspicious of my passport. In June 2014, I was traveling from Doha to Milan after attending the US-Islamic World Forum. The border police did not ask me any questions. However, the airline officers asked me if I lived in Sweden, and then proceeded to inquire about my exact address in Sweden. They demanded I speak basic sentences,

which I did with a smile on my face. It was a silly, yet terribly humiliating request to prove myself as a legitimate Swedish resident. My Arabic name on the passport, my face, my skin color, and my travel documents tended to make me a target for racial profiling and to raise suspicion far more than any of my fellow European citizens.

Interestingly, after being naturalized as a Swedish citizen, my life did not get any easier, especially at borders, airports, and crossings. During my first trip to Egypt since then, the border police held me for five minutes inquiring about my "real origins" and "roots" as he put it. Whenever I answered with "I am Palestinian," they asked if I was from Gaza. They also asked to see my Palestinian passport. I have learned that manipulating my origin, while crossing the borders, is the a good strategy to deal with the many overwhelming questions, police harassment, suspicious looks, and unnecessary challenges in Arab airports. When I told the Egypt border police, "I am a Swede, as you can tell from the passport," he replied, "I asked about your origins, not your passport." His statement was an indicator that my biological body is the only determinant identifier of myself in this part of the world, where my Swedish nationality will not identify me as a complete citizen with equal rights and privileges as other fellow Europeans. In the eyes of the border police, my passport and myself are two different entities. This continues to be the case in Egypt every time I visit the country.

In Jordan, the situation is different, where I am treated as a Swedish citizen at the passport stamping desk. However, I am treated as Palestinian from Gaza in the security section. One day, by mistake, I showed my Palestinian passport from Gaza. The visa fees of a European passport are $60 USD, while for the Palestinian passport it is approximately $10 USD. I asked the police officer at the border if I could have the stamp on my Palestinian passport and enter the country as a Palestinian from Gaza. Surprised, he replied, "enta *Ghazzawi*?!" meaning, "are you from Gaza?" I said, "yes." He said, "okay, wait right there." After a couple of hours of interrogation by the secret police, I left to enter the country and paid the visa fees for my Swedish passport. The officer remarked in Arabic, "*El-marra el-Jaiyye eshtari Rahit Rasak ib 40 dinar*!" which translates into "Next time, buy your peace of mind for 40 Jordanian Dinar." He was suggesting that I should not show that I have a Palestinian passport from Gaza. Unlike Palestinians from Gaza, like myself, who need "Persona Grata" approval, my fellow Palestinians in the West Bank do not need any approval or permission to cross Jordanian borders, although they face mobility challenges within the West Bank and also difficulties in obtaining visas to Europe and North America.

In 2015, I was supposed to visit a few universities in the West Bank. After trying to enter the West Bank with my Swedish passport from the Allenby bridge, which is the only crossing to the West Bank from Jordan, I was detained for nine hours by the Israeli border police. The shouting, insults, and harassment toward me were common practice of the officers. Various security and military agencies interrogated me for several hours. I was then informed that unless I provide them with my Palestinian ID, I would be held as a prisoner. I did not have my Palestinian ID or passport on me. I told them so. Colleagues at my university in Sweden called the Foreign Affairs Department who spoke directly to the embassy in Tel Aviv. After nine hours of detention, and against my free will, I was forced to sign a document that withdrew my Palestinian registry number based on a 1952 Israeli law that deprives the Palestinians from their right to live and enter the country. At that exact moment, my statelessness was resurrected and reconfirmed yet again by an imperial power that caused my first statelessness.

I was deported back to the Jordanian side of the border, where I was welcomed in the usual way. I was subjected again, to interrogation by an intelligence officer. In that moment, I was Palestinian, stateless, yet with a Swedish passport. My first demand to the officer was to treat me as Swedish. He said he just needed some further information clarifying the reason behind my deportation. Because I carried an Arab name, and came from Gaza, it was determined that I should be interrogated, I was told.

Between 2015 and 2017, I lived in Beirut conducting research and fieldwork. Every time I departed from or arrived in Beirut, the history of the Lebanese civil war and the Palestinians' crisis in Lebanon strangled me. I filled out entry and exit forms with a strong nostalgic feeling and a haunting thought that this may be the last time I do so, or at best that it may well take me several hours to do so. The typical questions were, "do you have a Palestinian ID?" and "do you visit Palestine?" In fact, I did not have the ID, so my answer was naturally "no." Beirut's airport was the only airport in the region where being from Gaza did not render me stressed and nervous. In Tunis, they always inquired about my "origins," where it had to be stated on the passport regardless of showing them any evidence that I am Palestinian. In 2015, I had to travel to Kuwait for the American Political Science Workshop on the MENA region. At the airport, I was stopped for an hour of interrogation about how I acquired Swedish nationality. Between 2016 and 2017, I visited the UAE twice; both times, I was stopped, and I had to fill out a special application to get secret police approval.

These experiences are not mere coincidences. The Arab governments have institutionalized the state-

lessness of the Palestinians. Whatever nationality a Palestinian acquires, statelessness remains their main identity. Statelessness is a status of Palestinian travelers in the MENA region, depriving them of the privileges of crossing borders without being stranded for questioning or interrogation. To Arab border police, I am not completely Swedish. In the same way the Israelis see me as a Palestinian from Gaza, the Arab border police see me as a stateless Palestinian. My place of birth has stamped me with the birthmark of statelessness. Statelessness is not just my status; it is engraved in my genes. It is in my DNA.

Final Remarks: *Habeas Viscus*

The suffering of the Palestinians of Gaza exercised by Israel and other countries against the Palestinians is extreme political violence. Suffering has become the defining feature of the Palestinians of Gaza who are excluded from the normality of law and humanity. Gazans are degraded and animalized around borders and in border areas. The Palestinians of Gaza are not seen as individual humans but rather as political subjects who hold a specific passport and should be treated accordingly. Although some Palestinians of Gaza have foreign passports, they are identified by their flesh (origin). The conjoining of "flesh and habeas corpus in the compound *habeas viscus*" (Weheliye, 2014:11) shows how the Palestinians of Gaza became borne of political violence. Being treated as flesh works as a dehumanization mechanism expressed by the term "*Ghazzawi*." The Palestinians of Gaza were subject to dehumanization by changing their human environment, especially borders. If we consider the Gaza Strip's small size, every part of it can be considered a border zone. Israel has used technology and the development of knowledge to change the Palestinian human environment, lives and movement, which frames the lives of Palestinian of Gaza as *habeas viscus*.

Today, I am a Swedish citizen. I can cross the borders of the majority of countries in the world, with two exceptions: the place where I was born, and Sweden. My color and my name stand as a border between me and the institution that made me "Swedish." Being Swedish does not guarantee me equal treatment or rights within the country based on both my name, which does not sound western, and my color. I find myself in the position of either being "in" or "out." I am "in" when I am perceived to do the tasks that most immigrants do, such as low wage jobs, dependence on social security, exploitation of the system, and criminal activities. I am "out" when I opt for respect, self-esteem and self-realization in my domain. It is the inclusive-exclusive discourse of Agamben, where we are perceived all the same, and positioned as undesirable people between the "in" and the "out" as quasi-citizens (Khosravi, 2007).

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