ISRAELI COLONIAL CONTRACTION: THE CASES OF THE SINAI PENINSULA AND THE GAZA STRIP

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Israeli Colonial Contraction:

The cases of the Sinai Peninsula and the Gaza Strip

Maha Samman Mansour

1. The case of the Sinai Peninsula

As a result of the Israeli-instigated 1967 war, the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, the Sinai Peninsula and the Golan Heights came under Israeli control. The Israeli government began building settlements in these newly conquered areas to create new realities on ground. The Sinai Desert had its share of Israeli settlement construction, based on the ‘Galili document’, named after Minister without Portfolio Israel Galili, and adopted as part of Labour's programme in 1973. The document, which “affirmed the annexation of north-eastern Sinai,” paved the way for the construction of several dozen settlements after Ariel Sharon, then head of the Southern Command of the Israeli army, expelled the region’s Bedouin inhabitants.\(^1\) They were expelled because the spaces they inhabited were seen to be the most strategic locations. Israel also invested in a network of roads and fortifications linking the Sinai with other parts of Israel. It aimed to attract settlers to a calm place with access to cheap labor, seeking to transform the Sinai desert into an Israeli populated area and to create a new border with Egypt. As the area offered various kinds of potential, the motive behind building settlements was not only ideological but also strategic and economic. Two major goals were important to Israel: the control of the Tiran Straits and the provision of a belt that would cut off the Gaza Strip from Egypt.\(^2\) The economic goal was exploitation of the geographical strengths of the area. The territory was rich in resources, with oil fields in the western coastal area, and good land for agriculture. It also had a potential for attracting tourism, and a strategic geographical location facing the Mediterranean, the Suez Canal, and the Red Sea. New streets, buildings, and other economic, social, cultural, and touristic amenities were constructed, creating infrastructure well suited for implementing all the plans proposed for the area under Israeli sovereignty.

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\(^1\) Adam Keller, *Terrible Days: Social Divisions and Political Paradoxes in Israel* (Holland: 'Uitgeverij Cypres', 1987), 118.

\(^2\) Shmuel Sandler, *The State of Israel, the Land of Israel: The Statist and Ethnonational Dimension of Foreign Policy* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1993), 188.

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Although the area was annexed by a Knesset decision in 1973, construction of Israeli settlements had already begun in 1968. The 18 settlements which were built, mostly on Bedouin lands, were Yamit, Talmei Yosef, Pri’el, Merkaz Avshalom, Netiv Ha’asara, Ogda, Sufa (Succot), Holit, Sadot, Nir Avraham, Dikla, Haruvit, Sinai, Yam, Kadesh Barnea, Neviot, Di-Zahav, and Ophira (Fig. 1). Construction of the largest settlement, Yamit, started in May 1974; it was often described as a town, and 13 of the other settlements were located around it in the northeastern part of Sinai and south of Rafah town. Most of them were cooperative settlements, particularly moshavim. Most of the settlers there worked in agriculture, while others worked in fishing, in small services, and in tourism and beach resorts, in addition to military activities (Fig 2).

The extent of thinking and planning that preceded the approval of the building of the Yamit settlement complex was vast. A few individuals were key actors in the effort to populate the Sinai area with settlers. Moshe Dayan and Israel Galili from the Labour party were the architects of building Yamit. Dayan was the Defence Minister in the government of Golda Meir between the years of 1969 and 1974. Galili was Minister without Portfolio in both the Meir and Rabin governments. They viewed building settlements in Sinai as establishing an important line of defence that would strategically separate Gaza from Sinai. The building of Yamit developed after they took initiatives on several levels. To get approval from the government to build, Dayan requested a study in 1971 for developing a city in northeastern Sinai. He worked to convince the government that it was important to populate the area with Israeli settlers. The Galili document actually emerged from a cabinet meeting in which Dayan suggested the building of Yamit. The document, which basically aimed for the annexation of northeastern Sinai, was approved on September 4, 1973 and adopted as part of Labour’s programme.

Another method to pressure the government into approving the construction was to find a settler group that would want to settle in Yamit. Dayan thought that finding a settler group would pressure the government, and improve the chances of getting Yamit approved. First, a Russian immigrant tried to gather some Russians and convince them of the idea. Then Americans Dina and Frank Wrightman worked on gathering Americans, and convincing them about the future of a settlement named Yamit. To implement his settlement policy Galili worked together with the representatives of Yamit on building projects in it, seeking, for example, to get

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4 Fig. 2 is a table listing all Sinai settlements with basic information on each of them, 19.


6 Ibid., 54.

7 Ibid., 55.
them to agree with the Minister of Tourism on building tourism services there.\(^8\) Thus, enormous efforts preceded approval of the building of Yamit and the other settlements even before they were inhabited. These settlements represented a security buffer first and foremost; the motivations or needs of potential settlers were not the primary factor for building settlements in Sinai. Likewise, as we shall see, the decision to evacuate the settlement was based on state aspirations, overriding settlers' opinions and desires.

### 1.1. Colonial contraction from Sinai

At first after the 1967 war, Israel regarded the possibility of peace with Egypt as distant. Normalization of relations with Egypt and the exchange of diplomatic missions seemed inconceivable at the time. While there were discussions on a unilateral withdrawal from Sinai and the Golan Heights, "the overwhelming majority of the Jewish public, and accordingly of its Knesset electees, ha[d] been determined since 1967 not to relinquish any territory except if forced to do so."\(^9\) Israeli colonial contraction from Sinai took place only after the peace treaty between Egypt and Israel in 1978 was signed. It came after Israel's power weakened as it became more dependent on the U.S. superpower. On this front, diplomacy replaced war after the 1973 war. There was international pressure on both Israel and Egypt through the UN and the U.S.\(^10\) As part of the peace treaty between Egypt and Israel, several restrictions were imposed on Egyptian sovereignty over the evacuated territory. These restrictions included details about the stationing of Egyptian forces in the whole area according to subdivided zones. United Nations forces were also to be stationed in some of these divided zones, and the use of airfields was limited to civilian purposes for all nations.\(^11\) On the Israeli side, the process began with complete uncertainty\(^12\) among actors within the state. Decisions were therefore made as an outcome of the dynamics of interaction on different levels between mainly the **Israeli government**, **influential individuals**, and the **Israeli settlers** who had inhabited the area.

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\(^8\) Ibid., 55. For details on building a motel, 270-272.


\(^10\) Sadat viewed it as in Egypt's interest, on the other hand, to shift Egypt's strategic alliance from the Soviet Union to the United States, as the Soviet Union had decreased its supply of weapons. Sadat's major concern was to normalize the relations with the powerful U.S. as a new link with the superpowers.


The Israeli government wanted to neutralize the southern border and to develop diplomatic relations with Egypt. The party in power was the right-wing nationalistic Likud Party headed by Menachem Begin. As part of its strategic planning, it adopted a bilateral approach to agreements, in contrast with the multilateral agreements in the Arab region, aiming for relations which could guarantee Israel’s existence in the region. With the peace agreement with Egypt, the largest Arab country bordering Israel, the Israeli government pressured Egypt to persuade other countries in the Arab world to normalize relations with it. It sliced potential relations with the Arab world into separate bilateral ones so that the various territories it had occupied would become separately negotiable. The other goal was to exclude from the bilateral negotiations any discussion on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. If peace was not reached with Egypt, Israel would face a continuous threat from all the surrounding Arab states. The government saw peace as a necessary condition for its external survival (with the Arab world) and internal survival (continued occupation of the West Bank). This is also illustrated in Israel’s insistence on discussing security. During the negotiation process with Egypt, Israel based its discussion on the protection of its security, constantly raising this as the most important theme. The demilitarization of the larger part of Sinai, the persistence of settlements, the retention of two airports in Sinai, the installation of Israeli warning stations, and the limitations on the Egyptian forces, were all part of its security. It was therefore "a policy, a strategy, a means, and an end."\(^{13}\)

The key individuals associated with demolishing Yamit were Menachem Begin and Ariel Sharon from the Likud party, who played a leading role in the evacuation and demolition. They were military men, and often known to change their positions according to the political context. Before starting with the peace negotiations Begin met the representatives of the Sinai settlements and promised that if “signing a peace agreement depended upon returning the settlements, he would pack up his bags and return home.”\(^{14}\) But he went back on his word, deciding in the end to approve the return of the settlements. As a tactic he was ready to give up the Sinai area, in exchange for closing the discussion on the West Bank, which in his view was the important territory. Sharon was appointed as Defence Minister by Prime Minister Begin to implement the mission of evicting the settlers from Yamit. It was strange that Sharon accepted this mission, because he was the one who evacuated the Bedouins from the Sinai and had been committed to the development of the settlements there. "On April 25, 1982, Sharon proceeded to raze Yamit to the ground, as ruthlessly as he had destroyed the Bedouin dwellings which stood in the same place ten years before."\(^{15}\) His strategy towards the settlers could be


\(^{15}\) Keller, *Terrible Days*, 143.
summarized by “wearing them down and then suddenly collapsing them in a surprise attack.”

At the time it was evacuated, the settlers had used it for nearly seven years. It was the last to be demolished among the surrounding settlements. The settler population then was around 6,000: around 500 settler families in Yamit and another 600 families in the dozen or so farm villages that surrounded it. The context and the evacuation itself were considered unprecedented by the Israeli public, causing much tension during the process. The settlers protested against the decision to evacuate them, but eventually gave in and accepted compensation.

Sharon’s acceptance of this task implies that the benefit from this action was huge. Begin and Sharon mutually benefited from their collaboration on the evacuation. For Begin, Sharon was the ideal person to implement the eviction as he was familiar with the settlements and settlers, and had the necessary skill. Sharon had puzzled the settlers; on the one hand, they trusted him and could not think he could ever betray them by supporting the evacuation; on the other, he urged them to try to benefit as much as possible from compensation. For Sharon it was rewarding to occupy the post of Defence Minister and to work closely with Prime Minister Begin. Sharon, in fact, seems to have positioned himself well enough with Begin to influence the objectives of the 1982 war in Lebanon which began a few weeks after the demolition.

The settlers were the third main actor in the process of evacuation. There were large protests by the settlers, and the issue dominated the attention of the Israeli public. “The Sinai settlements, after all, were evacuated and ploughed under ... even though the process brought Israel, according to several scholars, almost to the brink of civil war.” For the settlers, who were composed of the Russian group, the American group, and others from older Israeli settlements, the dismantling of Yamit was considered a disaster, as it could become a precedent that could be repeated in the West Bank. All their attempts to prevent the dismantling of Yamit failed. In the end they adopted a strategy to gain the maximum compensation possible by increasing their actions against the evacuation. In their struggle against the government’s decision, the settlers were represented by four groups; each had a different strategy and attitude in dealing with the media and the Israeli government. The first were the farmers, who were the first to protest against the withdrawal, but gradually changed their strategy to opt for the maximum

20 The classification of the settlers is compiled from Wolfsfeld, “Collective Political Action,” 368-369, and “Sinai- Slow March from Yamit.”
compensation possible and a good resettlement deal. The second group, organized out of frustration with the government decision, considered it part of a business, and aimed specifically for the maximum compensation. The third group, consisting of three of the villages, was a quiet group that gave up peacefully and agreed to relocate in a new region within Israel. The fourth group was a coalition between religious and secular Israelis who rejected the whole idea of the evacuation. This ideologically motivated group was composed of members from outside the Yamit area, and was the largest group of the four. It was the group which protested the most and used violent tactics so that the media would depict a ‘tragic trauma’ that the government would be reluctant to repeat. But in the end, like the other groups, they accepted the decision. The Israeli government was able to go ahead with its decision to evacuate despite settler discontent. While there had been disagreement in the cabinet between the Israeli Ministers, “the agriculture minister, Mr. Simha Erlich, worked out an agreement to hand over compensation to the settlers worth more than $270m.”

1.2. Purpose of demolition

During the period of negotiations between the Egyptians and the Israelis, selling the settlements to the Egyptians was one item put on the table in which suggestions of prices were discussed. Israel's final decision was to demolish the settlements and to deliver this as a fait accompli to Egypt. The reasons behind the demolition of the Yamit settlement complex could be grouped into three: strategic state security considerations, psychological considerations of the settlers, and the desire to gain international sympathy for the pains of peace. Overall, it seems that the first aspect of state policy was the decisive one. The Israeli government, and specifically Sharon, feared that the Egyptians would move to settle in areas near the borders. Israelis were confident they had made peace with the Egyptian government, but not that they had done so with ordinary Egyptians, whose presence in the Sinai area was therefore considered a threat. There was a fear that settlers could secretly go back to the settlements if they were not demolished so they wanted to get them eventually to accept the move. A scorched earth approach was also adopted, that is, not to leave anything for the Egyptians. Another motive for this approach was...

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21 “Sinai - Slow march from Yamit.”

22 Israel asked for $125 million for the installations; Egypt agreed to pay only $57 million. However, it was expected that Egypt would finally compromise on $80-90 million. Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov, Israel and the Peace Process 1977-1982: In search of Legitimacy for Peace (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1994), 320, originally cited from Maariv, April 30, 1982.


to prevent settlers from seeing the "painful" scene of Egyptians residing in their previous homes. Israel also sought to portray itself as making a traumatic sacrifice to achieve peace.\textsuperscript{25}

The Egyptian side, represented by Sadat, aimed at shifting its strategic alliance from the Soviet Union to the United States, as the Soviet Union decreased its supply of weapons. Sadat’s major concern was to normalize relations with the U.S. superpower. By signing the peace treaty with Israel, Egypt had achieved a restricted sovereignty. It could not achieve the power to fully control the territory of Sinai. Strategically, restrictions imposed by the peace treaty limited Egyptian plans for the Sinai. Military activity was restricted and thus the Egyptian military could not fully control the area, as Egypt bound by the Camp David agreement to keep its forces within a range of 50 kilometers east of the Gulf of Suez. This in turn affected, and still affects, Egyptian sovereignty over the area. However, the territorial spaces could be used for other purposes; the Sharm el-Sheikh area, for example, became an important and thriving tourist site. Each evacuated territory had a different post-evacuation function, but these functions were mostly of a public, not a private, character. "Neviot, a small cooperative agricultural settlement of the Moshav type, has become home to Egyptian police personnel and their families. The evacuated Moshav settlement and desert retreat of Di Zahav provided the infrastructure for the expansion of the tourist Bedouin village of Dahab".\textsuperscript{26}

The situation in Egypt following the Israeli-colonial contraction can be understood as neo-colonial in character because the area is subject to regulation by a peace treaty rather than fully under Egyptian sovereignty. Years after the peace treaty between Egypt and Israel, its neo-colonial content clearly appears in the position of Egypt on the borders with Gaza after the developments in Gaza after the Disengagement Plan. Egypt’s lack of ability to control the borders, and the interference from Israel and the U.S. are obvious. The closure of the Rafah Gate by the Egyptian government and the destruction of the Rafah/Egypt and Rafah/Gaza tunnels, and recently the construction of the underground wall to destroy any access to the tunnels, all show the pressure on Egypt to implement Israeli and American objectives. This all shows the inability of Egypt to fully control its borders and territory.

The process of peacemaking and settlement evacuation in the Sinai Peninsula had a direct impact on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Gradually, both the West Bank and Gaza Strip were excluded from the discussion. It turned out that the 'precedent' of Yamit had a negative impact on both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. This is clear in the settlement construction that followed. On September 5, 1982, a ministerial committee approved the establishment of five new settlements in the West Bank and one settlement in the Gaza Strip for the Yamit

\textsuperscript{25}There had been enormous coverage of the evacuation of Yamit and its destruction by the Israeli television.

evacuees. The cabinet further decided to continue a vigorous program of Jewish settlement in the Occupied Territories – the first move in what became a clear pattern of action following every new peace initiative.27

The Gush Emunim settler group took advantage of the story of Yamit to implement their plan to set up new settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. They felt that the Israeli government's emphasis on peace over settlements threatened their settlement programs in the West Bank. Their idea was to implement a broad scheme of annexation of territories and settlement building as a way of incorporating these lands into Israel. They aimed to construct settlements in strategic locations which would form an important and natural continuity with Israel. These construction activities were also accompanied by educating settlers about the ideological importance of what they call Judea and Samaria to the idea of historic Israel. The trauma image the media had created during the eviction of the settlers and the demolition of the settlements carried a clear message that this should not happen again. “Having seen that the IDF eviction of 17 Yamit yishuvim ‘traumatized the nation,’ steps had to be taken to create additional capabilities for possible future major evictions without having the IDF brutalize Israelis on television.”28

The Israeli government’s rational political decision to give up the Sinai is quite distinct from what happened in the other territories occupied in 1967: a drive for settlement construction after the Camp David Accords, powered by the settlers’ ideological motives. The Sinai was a territory which could be given up, and was eventually given up, to achieve a peace deal; in contrast, the other territories occupied in 1967 were gradually seen as being incorporated into the Israeli ‘motherland’ as part of the Israeli state-building project. The prospect of evicting settlers from the West Bank and Gaza was and is seen to be more complicated because the settlers are more aware and more politically organized, and could be mobilized against eviction proposals or against eviction itself. Also, in some areas, a generation of settlers has been born and raised in these settlements. The Gush Emunim settler movement founded many of the settlements in the West Bank, claiming it as part of historic Israel. In contrast, the Yamit settlers were driven by the search for a better quality of life as much as by ideological motives.

In assessing the benefits and losses of a peace treaty that included territorial evacuation, the Israelis made a decision based on the long-term interests, aims, and benefits of the Israeli government and state as a whole. General Dan Shomron (then the outgoing Israeli chief of staff) explained this: "Certainly, territory is important in wartime, he said. But if there is peace,

28 “Sharon’s Outpost Strategy,” 3.
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territory is less important, and demilitarisation, arms control and advance warning systems are higher on the list.29

The Israeli government and the group of individuals who gave up the settlements and demolished them were from the Israeli right wing, showing that political concerns had superseded ideological ones. The evacuation demonstrated that Israel would do anything, even oppose its people – even Israeli settlers – if the plans of those settlers posed a security threat to the state. Yamit was expendable when a profound strategic advantage was to be gained by abandoning it, one that made it possible to achieve other strategic objectives.

One can conclude that, at one time, the survival and security of a state of Israel in the region – on any size territory – was more important than control over a specific piece of territory, even if that piece was larger than the total area of 1948 Israel, the West Bank, Gaza Strip and the Golan Heights combined. But later on, was Israel still able voluntarily to evacuate territory in order to achieve other goals? After Yamit, prospects of any other settlement evacuation had seemed for a long time to be diminishing; and yet in Gaza in 2005, clearly the answer was yes.

2. The case of the Gaza Strip

The case of colonial contraction from the Gaza Strip affects the core of the Israeli presence on the Palestinian land. The evacuation and demolition of the Israeli settlements in Gaza was a result of the implementation of Sharon’s unilateral Disengagement Plan. The Israeli government realized the importance of evacuating Gaza and demolishing the settlements, with the involvement and backing of the Israeli High Court. The fact that this was a unilateral move, without a peace process from which anything appeared likely to be gained, sets a precedent regarding the future of the Israeli settlements in the West Bank. This is because it reflects the strengths and weaknesses of the Israeli colonial state. For more than thirty years after 1967, all Israeli governments, supported by Zionist organizations worldwide, worked extensively to build and develop settlements in the West Bank and Gaza. However, in 2004-2005 the right-wing government changed this policy in Gaza, and proceeded to evacuate and demolish the settlements. This created, went against the grain of the Zionist ideological motive within Israeli society and made many question the path taken.

The Gaza Strip has an area of 365 km², 45 km long and 5-12 km in width. It is divided into five main districts: Jabalya, Gaza, Deir Al-Balah, Khan Younis, and Rafah (Fig. 3). The building of settlements in the Gaza Strip started in 1970 and continued till 2001. By 2004, there were 21 Israeli settlements with a population of 8,692 settlers. The biggest settlement was Neve Dekalim, built in 1983 and located with most of the other settlements in the area of Khan Younis. The second biggest settlement, Nisanit, was

established a year later in 1984, and was located in the northern Gaza Strip in the district of Jabalya. Table 1 lists settlements in the Gaza Strip as of the end of 2004.

Table 1: Gaza Settlements Population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kfar Darom</td>
<td>1970</td>
<td>491</td>
<td>Nisanit</td>
<td>1984</td>
<td>1,064</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netzarim</td>
<td>1972</td>
<td>496</td>
<td>Rafiah Yam</td>
<td>1984</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morag</td>
<td>1972</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>Katif</td>
<td>1985</td>
<td>404</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netzar Hazani</td>
<td>1973</td>
<td>461</td>
<td>Bedolah</td>
<td>1986</td>
<td>219</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ganei Tal</td>
<td>1979</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>Pe’at Sade</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atzmona</td>
<td>1979/82</td>
<td>646</td>
<td>Dugit</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gadid</td>
<td>1982</td>
<td>351</td>
<td>Tel Katifa*</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gan Or</td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>351</td>
<td>Shirat Hayam*</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kfar Yam</td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Slav*</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neve Dekalim</td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>2,671</td>
<td>Kerem Atzmona*</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elei Sinai</td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>407</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>8,692</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


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The Israeli settlements built in Gaza were a clear example of the Israeli colonial spirit. There was a clear dissimilarity between the Palestinian community of Gaza and the Israeli settlers residing there. The relationship between Palestinians and settlers, and between Palestinian built-up areas and Israeli settlements, was characterized by domination and separation. There was clear political, social, economic, and territorial control by Israeli settlers. Before evacuation, the settlers formed less than 1% of the population of Gaza with a population density of 665 settlers per km², yet occupied one third of the land in the Strip, and enjoyed the best of conditions and the best quality facilities. These included wide security strips of land for roads for settler use. The confiscated lands and checkpoints, which narrowed and reduced land available to Palestinians, fragmented the Gaza Strip and isolated main Palestinian population centres from each other. In contrast, the Palestinians were about 1.5 million, with more than 99% living in the worst of conditions, with the highest population density in the world; and more than two thirds were refugees. The following is a list of the UNRWA registered refugees in camps in Gaza:

Table 2: Distribution of UNRWA registered refugees in Gaza. \(^{32}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Refugee Camp</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Jabalia (1948/1949)</td>
<td>192,258</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Rimal</td>
<td>170,118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Zeitun</td>
<td>135,281</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Nuseirat</td>
<td>123,838</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Deir El-Balah</td>
<td>88,048</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Khan Younis</td>
<td>179,199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Rafah</td>
<td>170,842</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,059,584</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Thus more than one million of the 1.5 million people are refugees. Since 1967, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank have been under Israeli military rule, with an Israeli military commander empowered to make and renew military rules. The continual issuance of new military laws gave rise to 1,000 military orders which damaged the economic and social structure of the daily life of the Palestinian people of Gaza. The more than 70% of the population of Gaza under 25 years old were born into a region already under colonial domination, and they have seen the suffering their families and society have faced. This has affected them psychologically, so that Gaza has become a "society devoid of childhood". With Palestinians’ concentration on trying to overcome the consequences of their damaged everyday life, little possibility remained to strengthen Palestinian planning to improve economic and social conditions.

Furthermore, successive political events led to further deterioration in Palestinian daily life in Gaza. During the first Intifada in 1987, despite the social cohesiveness of the society which strengthened Palestinian unity and visions of the future, the economic situation started to deteriorate as trade with Israel fell and Gazan workers became increasingly unable to work inside Israel. After the Oslo Accords, Israel held in its hands complete control of all Gaza entry-gates to the outside world. This made Gaza a big prison with little movement by Israeli exit permits. Colonial control of the Gaza Strip became tighter, and its spaces became more enclosed and divided by fences and military paths. In the Taba negotiations of 1993, the Israeli proposal for the Gaza Strip was to have the settlements grouped into three blocks under full Israeli control. This included all lands and bypass roads between the settlements, altogether forming one third of the Gaza Strip. Israel implemented this as facts on the ground, and officially legalised it with the signing of the Oslo II agreement. By the time of the Camp David negotiations in 2000, the Israeli settlements in the Gaza Strip had expanded, and settler and military existence and control had increased. No agreement was reached at Camp David to halt this trend. Surveillance, segregation, and boundary construction between Palestinian areas increased the cantonization of Palestinian spaces and thus intensified the deterioration of the Palestinian ability to live in appropriate conditions. This diminished any quality of the occupation of space, and the economic and social status declined. Thus it became more and more difficult for Palestinians to control their own spaces.

The result was that Palestinian resistance intensified, especially in the second intifada, which started two months after the failure of the Camp David negotiations in July 2000. The Israeli spatial control of

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Palestinian areas enabled them to further block areas and roads, dividing them into smaller units that were surrounded by tanks or easily bombarded from the air. Israeli forces also restricted or cut off the supply of food, electricity, and fuel. Palestinians have suffered loss of life (with leaders often especially targeted), injury, and imprisonment, as well as damage to infrastructure and buildings, and destruction of agriculture. The Palestinian resistance, on the other hand, has fired locally made rockets onto the surrounding Israeli populated areas. The continuation of rocket-firing provoked Israel to increase collective punishment by killing more Palestinians and demolishing more houses. Between 2000 and 2005, Israel increased the territory around the settlements in the Gaza Strip and their security zones. By the end of 2004, 1,710 Palestinian houses had been razed, and another 1,474 partially demolished. Consequently, 18,000 Palestinians became homeless, most of them already refugees and thus homeless for a second time. By 2005, the well-being of the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip was destroyed as they have suffered from severe urban, social, and economic de-development.

2.1. The Disengagement Plan

Because conditions became less favourable for Israelis within the Gaza Strip with the rise of the Palestinian resistance in Gaza and the high costs of protecting the settlers, the Israeli state increasingly turned to strategic political planning rather than relying simply on Zionist ideological motivation. A new strategic plan was announced in December 2003. In his speech, Sharon, then prime minister, proposed his own unilateral view of the future of the "peace process". Known for his military mentality, he was the architect and implementer of the new strategy, the Disengagement Plan. He viewed this step as a crucial one for Israel. The plan envisioned removing settler families from the Gaza Strip, and then withdrawing from the whole area. The decision to withdraw unilaterally came about because the settlements in Gaza had become a financial burden on the Israeli Government, especially because of the high cost of providing security to the settlers, but also because the settlements had not fulfilled the goals for which they were built. The demography of the Palestinian people in Gaza was also perceived as a threat since the settlers could not compete with the increasing density of the Palestinian population. The Unilateral Plan opted for a situation that not only was better politically, economically, and demographically, but also fulfilled other goals, decreasing the potential for violence, and relocating settlers to safer places since Palestinian resistance and the firing of rockets on settlements could not be stopped. Apparently Israel also needed to close the Southern Front so that it could focus on preparing for war on the Northern Front (the Lebanon war of 2006). According to Sharon, the disengagement was meant to decrease the

37 Reinhart, Road Map, 53.
39 The concept of de-development is developed by Sara Roy. In her book, The Gaza Strip: the Political Economy of De-development (Washington, DC: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1995), 4, de-development is ... "the deliberate, systematic deconstruction of an indigenous economy by a dominant power. It is qualitatively different from underdevelopment, which by contrast allows for some form, albeit distorted, of economic development. De-development is an economic policy designed to ensure that there will be no economic base, even one that is malformed, to support an independent indigenous existence."
friction between the Palestinian population and the settlers and army personnel who were stationed in the area to protect the settlers.”\(^{40}\) Sharon held that there was no Palestinian partner with whom Israel could negotiate. Thus initiating the withdrawal unilaterally led to the freezing of the peace process. This had two implications. First, there was no declaration from any side, nor any recognition that the Israeli occupation of Gaza had ceased. In fact, the boundaries and border checkpoints, as well as all land, sea and air passages in and out of the Gaza Strip remained, and still remain, under Israeli control. As a result, Gaza became like a big prison. Second, Israel could at any time go back into Gaza. There was no clear commitment that the land in Gaza was now definitively Palestinian; this meant that the Israelis still regarded the land as part of Israel, and the Palestinians as merely a group of people living on it.

The plan dealt with Palestinian areas in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank separately, meaning that different strategic policies were adopted for each area. While the plan aimed at gaining international acceptance and aid by directing attention towards evacuation of settlements in Gaza, it also aimed at gaining time, and at diverting the attention of the international community from building the wall, as well as strengthening the settler presence in the West Bank and Jerusalem by building more settlements.

Although the Disengagement Plan gave Sharon international acceptance and aid, internally he faced considerable criticism from within the Likud party. His critics viewed the Plan as contradicting the party line, and party members opposed it fiercely. To evacuate settlements, and especially in the absence of any peace process, was seen as setting a precedent, and many in the Likud Party regarded it as illegitimate. Many even accused him of making up the whole idea with another purpose in mind. "His opponents argued that the plan was a ploy to divert public attention from the criminal investigations in which he was embroiled."\(^{41}\) He was therefore pressured by senior Likud politicians and settlers to take the plan to a referendum among 193,000 registered Likud Party members.\(^{42}\) In May 2004, the majority of Likud members rejected it. Nevertheless, Sharon went on to present the plan to the Government for approval. Before the vote, he fired two ministers in order to secure acceptance for the plan. In June 2004 the plan was approved by the Knesset and was put into action in spite of its rejection by the Likud party, the public, and the settlers.\(^{43}\)

Objections to the Disengagement Plan did not stop after Knesset ratification; it was challenged before the Supreme Court, and a legal battle followed. The Supreme Court had an active part in the process because every decision related to the Disengagement Plan was petitioned. Despite the political character of the plan, the High Court stood behind it and defended all its stages: "it confirmed and legitimized all of the decisions, and was a full and active partner to the Disengagement Plan, defending both its legality and its constitutionality at all stages."\(^{44}\) Three


\(^{42}\) Tsfat and Cohen, “Presumed Media Influence,” 796.

\(^{43}\) The Knesset ratified the plan in a vote by a majority of 67 against 45, with 7 abstentions.

\(^{44}\) Navot, “Israeli Withdrawal,” 19.
major aspects were tackled by the Court. The first concerned the contradiction between the settlement evacuation and the Basic Guidelines of the Government. This was overcome by giving the Prime Minister the authority to make decisions according to the changing needs of state. It was up to Prime Minister Sharon to decide.

President Barak noted that despite the importance of the Guidelines, they do not bind the Prime Minister. Changing realities may compel changes in the goals and targets. ‘Subordinating the Prime Minister’s discretion to the Guidelines means neutralizing his ability to map out the Government’s course in its functioning as the executive branch of the State, and in accordance with its changing needs.’

The second aspect concerned the legal status of the lands to be evacuated. This was dealt with by considering the status of the lands of the whole of Gaza and the West Bank. These lands, according to the Supreme Court, had a legal status as lands held under a ‘belligerent occupation’, and that meant they were not subject to the rules of the State of Israel but rather to the rules of public international law. This gave the Disengagement Plan the legality to be accepted and executed. This legal point had never before been acknowledged by the Israeli state, for example with respect to building settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Settlements under international law are a violation of Fourth Geneva Convention and UN Resolutions. The authority of international law was brought to the scene only to legalise Israel’s strategic plans. The Court thus took the position of legalising the Israeli state’s politically motivated strategic planning despite its contradiction with Israeli ideological motivation.

The third aspect the Court considered was violation of what were perceived to be the “evacuees’ basic rights”. The Supreme Court ruled that although the Disengagement Plan “did violate” the “basic human rights” of the evacuees, this should not prevent execution of the plan. The logic was that since the land was considered under “belligerent occupation”, the Israeli evacuees would receive compensation subject to the Evacuation-Compensation Law. While the plan considered the evacuees’ basic rights, there was no recognition at all of the rights of the indigenous population, who since 1967 had suffered losses in all aspects of their lives due to the existence of the settlements, the military occupation, and their ramifications in the years since 1967.

In the end, the Court decided that it was in the “Greater Good” that they approve the plan. The influence of the High Court decision was great, as it provided “broad Constitutional protection” for the Disengagement Plan; in fact, it has been said that, “[t]he Disengagement Plan could not have been executed without the legal backing of the Supreme Court.” In this sense it also set a precedent for possible future such evacuations from territories it considered under “belligerent occupation” such as the West Bank and the Golan Heights. On this basis the High Court legitimized the Disengagement Plan in

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46 Ibid., 22-24: “Summing up, the ruling affirms the claim that the Evacuation-Compensation Law violates the right to dignity and the right to property of the Israelis slated for evacuation. Nonetheless, against the background of the temporary nature of belligerent occupation and provided that the statutorily guaranteed compensation is granted (subject to certain changes introduced by the High Court) this violation of rights is constitutional.”
47 Ibid., 33.
48 Ibid., 32.
Israeli law. Yet this also revealed a contradictory role of the High Court, in that it judged that government policy overrides what it perceives as “human rights” of Israelis according to Israeli law, in land under “belligerent occupation”. This role of the court fits within the colonial paradigm, since the human rights of the indigenous population in these areas are excluded altogether from the High Court’s legal considerations.

The evacuation process in itself was much easier and took much less time than expected, and was completed in September 2005. All the settlements of the Gaza Strip, including 1200 houses, were evacuated and demolished. About 50-55,000 soldiers were involved in the evacuation process, arranged in six circles inside and outside Gaza. There was an unarmed group of soldiers who implemented the evacuation, a ring of armed soldiers, and outer circles surrounding the boundaries to deal with any emergency, especially settlers coming from outside Gaza to demonstrate against the evacuation.\(^49\) The arrangements were therefore well planned and the evacuation process cost $1.7 billion.\(^50\) The scenes of evacuating the settlers were covered by the media and were portrayed as traumatic in order to send a message internationally that Israel was paying a high price by evacuating the settlements.

When talk of evacuation from Gaza first began, as in the case of Sinai, the settlers were confident that it could never be implemented, and viewed it as a very unrealistic idea. When the settlers realized that the evacuation had become a reality, they were in a state of denial; they were pressured to choose how to react, and were pulled between their personal interest in accepting relocation and receiving compensation on the one hand, and their ideological beliefs on the other. The settlers all had to decide what was more important: acting in the group interest or in their own individual interest, dealing with the whole problem collectively or individually. The settlers were very confused, swinging between following their ideological beliefs, denying the whole process, considering the compensation they ought to get and the place to which they would be relocated, and wondering how to organize their protests. The contradiction was how to be loyal to the state, and at the same time to disregard what they had grown up with. In short, the settlers found themselves in the midst of a political problem, an ideological problem, and a psychological problem.

The quick evacuation process implied that although the settlers tried to oppose the evacuation, they ended up looking for a better quality of life. In a way, they knew that there was no way to stay in these areas forever. They could foresee the outcome of their strange existence in these areas, in light of the higher growth rate of the Palestinian population and the inability of their government to provide them with security. There was no other choice but to cooperate with disengagement.

The settlers were subject to the Compensation Law approved by the Knesset in February 2005. It was said that the compensation would amount to about $665 million: $1100 per square meter of built-up land.

\(^49\) *Al-Quds Daily Newspaper* August 14, 2005 (in Arabic).

\(^50\) Tawfiq Al-Madini, *Al-Quds Daily newspaper*, August 31, 2005 (in Arabic). (The number mentioned is according to Government of Israel source).
and $700 per square meter of unbuilt land.\textsuperscript{51} It was said that "Families who live[d] for more than 25 years [in Gaza] would get $\text{300,000-400,000} and temporary housing and other facilities until they decide where to live."\textsuperscript{52} But until the day of the evacuation, there were no final plans or schedules for relocation and compensation. Two years later,

... there have been many heartbreaking reports about the evacuees' difficulties. The Gush Katif Committee claimed 49 percent of them are unemployed (the government’s employment service, by contrast, reported 25 percent); that 500 families are experiencing a difficult economic situation; that there were ten cases of eating disorders and 12 cases of attempted or contemplated suicide...\textsuperscript{53}

Among the evacuees, by two years after the evacuation, “no single family ha[d] moved into the permanent housing being prepared by the state.”\textsuperscript{54} The evacuees were therefore discontented and faced many difficulties.

\section*{2.2. The aftermath of the Disengagement Plan}

As far as Sharon was concerned, the Disengagement Plan was a success because it enabled Israel to continue constructing settlements and building the wall in the West Bank and Jerusalem, and physically integrating these areas with Israel. The remaining lands of the West Bank were being further cantonized, in a way similar to Gaza before the Disengagement Plan. The plan, however, was not perceived in the same way by other Israeli officials, people, or settlers. This is because the plan had to confront the Zionist ideology and undo 30 years of Israeli Zionist practice in the Gaza Strip. It had to work against the will and beliefs of the settlers. The state could not sustain the situation it had spent decades working to achieve. It had to evacuate areas outside the Green Line and take nothing in return, and with no recognition that the occupation in Gaza had ended.\textsuperscript{55} The plan and its implementation affected internal Israeli politics. Supporters of the Likud Party were divided, and the result was that a new party, Kadima, was formed involving supporters for Sharon from the Likud and other parties. In addition, the plan was a financial burden, as the total cost of the disengagement was much higher than expected.\textsuperscript{56} Above all, violence continued to evolve after disengagement, the ‘headache’ of Gaza still remained, and rockets continued to be fired on Israeli areas even after the evacuation. Sharon, however, did not see the longer term

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{51} \textit{Al-Quds Daily Newspaper} August 13, 2005 (in Arabic), 15, 17.
\item \textsuperscript{52} David Harris and Philips fredson, "Painful separation, but..." \textit{Al-Quds Daily Newspaper} August 14, 2005 (in Arabic).
\item \textsuperscript{54} Hadar Horesh, “Gov’t agency: Cost of disengaging from Gaza has climbed to NIS 20b.” \textit{Haaretz}, August 8, 2007.
\item \textsuperscript{56} Horesh, “Cost of disengaging” \textit{Haaretz} August 8, 2007. At the beginning of 2007, the treasury estimated that the total cost of the disengagement would be NIS 7 billion, including compensation for business and infrastructure. However, it was said that the total cost will exceed NIS 12 billion.
\end{itemize}
consequences of the plan, as his political life ended after he had a stroke in 2006 and went into a coma, which he has been in ever since.

This is another case that shows that political/strategic factors superseded ideological considerations with regard to dealing with the colonized space. It also shows that, had the Zionist project been exclusively an ideological one, based on ideological attachment to the land, then it would have found other means to maintain hold of the Gaza Strip. But the fact that the withdrawal was founded on the changing political/strategic needs of the state shows that the main focus is on control rather than ideology.

The decolonization of the land in the Gaza Strip illustrates what can happen when colonial control of a territory becomes such a burden that it is more convenient to end this form of territorial control rather than face the downfall of the whole colonial project on that territory. From the Palestinian side, the disengagement was an Israeli need, and then to a certain extent a Palestinian attainment. The settlements in Gaza were evacuated and demolished; thus, the idea of the settlements being a fait accompli or an immovable reality on the ground was no longer valid. The case of Gaza showed that things could be changed, even by the people who made these realities in the first place. The disengagement affected surrounding areas, as many Israelis began to leave settlements and towns adjacent to the Gaza Strip such as Sderot and Ashkelon, escaping the rockets being fired on these populated Israeli areas.

The advocates of the disengagement claimed it would improve our security situation. It is true that from the narrow military aspect the present deployment is more convenient for the IDF, but our overall security situation has worsened in the wake of the disengagement. There is no saving in manpower or in money, as was promised. There is no calm and no stability. There is a serious blow to the civilian infrastructure of Sderot and Ashkelon. There is a process of population deserting those areas.57

The inability of the State of Israel to provide security for its citizens, or to control the resistance movement in Gaza, led to military re-occupation of several areas within the Gaza Strip after the evacuation. Two years later Israel decided to declare the Gaza Strip “hostile territory” in an attempt to absolve itself from the responsibility for the occupied population. This was an attempt to legitimize collective punishment of the civilian population of Gaza, as the Israeli cabinet decided to increase sanctions on the Gaza Strip. These sanctions included limiting the supply of fuel and electricity from Israel to Gaza, the transfer of goods through the crossings, and the movement of people to and from the Strip. The Israelis also stopped visits to prisoners, and increased monitoring of funds.58

The unilateral Disengagement Plan was a phase of an ongoing colonial project. There is no Israeli commitment to resolve the conflict; although the evacuation took place the colonial-military occupation is still there. The space on the ground has been evacuated, but Palestinian sovereignty has not been achieved. The form of control has changed from living on Gaza’s land to control over Gazan territory. The

Israeli contraction from Gaza was followed by a strict embargo on all basic human essentials, which severely affected the lives of the people of Gaza. Israel has control over boundaries, over transfer of goods, over sea and water, over the airspace, and over all access to the essentials of life. In the first year after the disengagement, "Gaza was cut off from the outside world 42% of the time." Israel still holds military control over the Gaza Strip and can enter and leave whenever it wants.

The reasons for demolishing the Gaza settlements were similar to those behind the demolition of the settlements of Yamit. They can also be grouped into three: (a) strategic state security considerations, (b) gaining international sympathy by emphasizing the 'trauma and pain' that Israeli settlers 'suffered' to advance the cause of peace, and (c) the government’s desire to limit the psychological effect on the settlers. The settlers eventually had to accept the evacuation. They could not think of secretly going back, and could not bear to see Palestinians residing in their previous homes. The lands of the evacuated settlements are located in different parts of Gaza and are different kinds of land. While the Palestinian Authority had several scenarios on how to re-use the evacuated spaces, political developments in Gaza led to the inability to use them. In the evacuated space of former Nisanit settlement, as an example, the basin built by Palestinians for a water reserve is full of sewage due to lack of infrastructure. Another example is Neve Dekalim (Fig. 4), which was located between the Palestinian city of Khan Younis and the Mediterranean Sea. The Palestinian Al-Aqsa University (Fig. 5) opened a campus inside the partly damaged buildings of the former Khan Younis campus shortly after the Israeli evacuation. However, during the War on Gaza the University was partly demolished.

2.3. Political dynamics after the evacuation

The continuous deterioration of the daily lives of the people of Gaza and the tight embargo on almost everything has left no space for a Palestinian revival strategy; thus strategic and spatial planning could not be applied. Colonial practices in Gaza and continuous embargoes on Gaza have led the people into a situation accurately described by Honaida Ghanim:

Drawing the line between dieting and starvation becomes a political issue, making it crucial to understanding the delicate differences between dying and death. The distinctions between dying – a process – and death, which intervenes between dying and being dead – help us understand that the power used against the Palestinians is not about killing them, eliminating them or pushing them collectively into their graves. Rather, it is about managing them as biological subjects through localizing them in the luminal zone between life and death, between dieting and starvation – not really dying but


60 There had been enormous coverage of the evacuation of Gaza settlements and its destruction by the Israeli and other televisions.

61 Decolonizing architecture website. www.decolonizing.ps/site
being one step before that, where 'a decision on life becomes a decision on death. Biopolitics can turn into Thanatopolitics'.

Palestinians in Gaza theoretically do have control of space and time but are void of resources to use them for fulfilling their own perception and conception of spaces, since the priority is on simply staying alive. Thus the Israeli control has been transformed from a spatial existence on the Strip to control of the resources of Gaza.

When Hamas won the Palestinian elections in 2005, the Israeli and international response was to enforce an economic embargo on the Palestinian Authority and people. There were attempts to form a national unity government involving Fateh, Hamas, and the other political parties, but these failed, and internal conflict emerged between Fateh and Hamas. There were several attempts to reconcile both parties, but they did not last; the most significant was the Mecca agreement, and what followed was armed internal fighting which culminated in Fateh leaders fleeing from the Gaza Strip into the West Bank in summer of 2006. This has increased the division between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, with two different governments governing each area. Essentially, the differences over political programs became manifested openly under the pressures and effects of the sanctions over Palestinians and the siege over Gaza in particular. The international community, "at Israel's behest, has been making three demands of the Hamas government that supposedly justify the throttling of Gaza's economy. The conditions are now well known: recognizing Israel, renouncing violence, and abiding by previous agreements." Israel saw that these sanctions, which include fuel, medicine, and food supply, are essential to keep the Palestinians of Gaza in poverty and despair which would prevent them from engaging in political resistance. Despite this, and with the continuation of rocket firing, the new situation has increased the Israeli perception of threat. The inability of Israel to maintain colonial security made it opt for a new strategic action.

In December 2008 Israel took military action against Gaza. It waged an all-out war on Gaza as a hostile foreign entity. The need for such a war revealed that the disengagement plan did not fulfil its main aims of retarding violence and of controlling the Gaza Strip from behind the wall surrounding it. The war had a devastating impact on the Palestinians; more than 1400 people were killed while on the Israeli side 13 were killed. Thousands of buildings were demolished, including houses, schools, hospitals, health centres, agricultural lands and greenhouses, farms, and all kinds of infrastructure. In addition to the severe embargo on the people of Gaza, the war had further destroyed any remaining Palestinian life to reach a condition of living short of death.

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64 Reinhart, Road Map, 133.
Israel, despite inflicting all these causalities on the Palestinian side, did not achieve the goals of the war. The war could not stop the launching of rockets on Israeli areas. It was hoped by Israel that after this war, the people of Gaza would rise up against Hamas, but this did not happen. In addition, the kidnapped Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit was not found or released. “Winning militarily but losing politically” is how Israel was described after the war. This was because of its international image, as a state waging war on people under siege, thus committing war crimes. Israeli diplomatic relations were also affected, as during the war Venezuela expelled the Israeli Ambassador, Bolivia broke ties with Israel, the Turkish Prime Minister suggested expelling Israel from the United Nations, the Malaysian Parliament called on the UN to establish a special war crimes tribunal, and there were demonstrations worldwide against the war. Israeli politicians and military generals who were involved in the war are now subject to arrest in European countries on charges of war crimes, filed by protest groups in those countries. This has limited the diplomatic movement of these people, including Tzipi Livni, Ehud Barak, Gabi Ashkenazi, and others. On the level of academic and cultural exchanges, in several places it has become practice not to host Israelis. And in September 2009, a UN mission headed by Richard Goldstone released a report accusing the Israel Defense Forces of war crimes and recommended bringing those responsible to justice.

To conclude the case of the Gaza Strip, it is important to emphasize that the Disengagement Plan fits within the colonial paradigm in which emphasis is on control rather than holding territory. The territorial evacuation from the Gaza Strip was a ground contraction process, which restructured colonial control over this area. In addition, the outcome of the evacuation from the Gaza Strip shows a contradiction. There are more Palestinians being killed in Gaza now than when the settlements were there (Fig. 6), not fewer, as one would have expected.

3. Sinai Peninsula, the Gaza Strip and colonial contraction

Both cases, Sinai and Gaza, represent colonial contractions of one colonial project. The main strategic difference between these two contractions is that the evacuation of Yamit stemmed from a peace treaty

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67 Falk, “Winning and losing.”
with a neighbouring country, while the evacuation of Gaza was a unilateral move within an ongoing and unresolved conflict in a colonial project. In Sinai the colonial contraction came after a period of no more than 14 years of settling the area, and with a peace agreement that ended conflict between the two parties. In Gaza, the settlers were removed after spending possibly 30 years (meaning that a generation of settlers were born and raised in the Gaza settlements), and without an end to the conflict. It must have been more self-defeating to evacuate the Gaza settlements without an end to the conflict, than the evacuation of settlements “half its age” and within a peace agreement.

While the evacuation from Sinai could be considered a de-colonization process as Israel no longer has direct control over these lands, the evacuation from the settlements of Gaza Strip is a colonial contraction within a phase of an ongoing colonial project in which control is restructured within the hands of the Israeli colonial state. This is represented by Israeli control of aspects of life within the Gaza Strip through the siege it has imposed, and the control it exercises over access to and from the Gaza Strip, as well as by military actions such as the War on Gaza in 2008/2009. The Gaza Strip after the Israeli colonial contraction in 2006 has provided a rare case, with some post-colonial characteristics, yet still very much under colonial control.

Both the evacuations of Sinai and of Gaza stemmed from the strategic need of the Israeli government to close a front. In Sinai, it was important to ensure security for the whole frontier with Egypt, which neutralized the largest Arab country bordering the state of Israel. In Gaza it stemmed from a failure to achieve secure lives for Israelis, though even after the evacuation from Gaza, this was not achieved. Israel had to opt for a new strategic military action and to launch a war on Gaza later, in December 2008, and kill and destroy in large parts of the Strip. In this war the rocket launches were actually intensified. On January 1, 2009, it was reported that “Hamas rockets have struck the large southern cities of Be’er Sheva and Ashdod, home of Israel’s largest port, for the first time since the militant group broke its cease-fire with Israel on Dec. 19, [2008]”.

In both cases of decolonization in Sinai and Gaza, Sharon was involved. Despite his continuous role in building settlements since 1967, he was the one to implement both withdrawals. However, both were attempts to calm one front and to implement strategic military plans on another – basically the invasion of Lebanon. While the first war was launched in 1982 just one month after Sinai decolonization, the second war on Lebanon was launched in summer 2006, a year after the Gaza evacuation in 2005. One of the intended effects was to portray Israel as a peace-making party while using this to cover its military actions which followed. It was also important for Israel to convey that its withdrawal from Gaza had been done out of strength, not weakness, and that Israel was still capable of making war.

After the 1973 war, Israel became more dependent on its superpower ally, the United States, which influenced it to end conflict with Egypt through a political process. The need to maintain this alliance meant that Israel had to give up the Sinai Peninsula. This went against the Zionist approach of settling in the colonized space, and against its view that the Sinai desert was part of the ideological identity of

“returning” to the area. Consequently, the Israeli settlements established after 1967 had to be destroyed. In this sense, considerations other than Zionist ideals implied backtracking to dismantle the Zionist settler existence in Sinai. Efforts at planning and control of space were redirected toward Palestinian lands in East Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip; this was an attempt to compensate for the inability to deliver and maintain a permanent Zionist existence in the Sinai.

In the case of Israeli colonial contraction from the Gaza Strip, maintaining a continuous presence in the Gaza Strip amidst a much larger population prepared to resist, seems to have mandated giving up the aim of achieving a ‘permanent’ Zionist settler existence in Gaza Strip.

The problem was that Zionism, with its initial ideas of achieving a state on "a land without people for a people without land," held that the Palestinians did not exist, while on the ground in Gaza, those engaged in the Israeli existence on the land and in the strategic, political, and military actions and planning, had continuously to deal with the resistance of the Palestinians, who in fact did and do exist, there. If Palestinians did not exist, Zionists would not have to both exist and resist in the same place. Given that Palestinians do exist, and resisted the presence of settlers, these settlers had little choice but to reproach the Israeli army for not delivering the “obvious” calm that Zionism promised. In this context, one can re-read the Sharon Disengagement Plan, which in essence recognized the need to modify a principle of Zionism. The new realization was that there are Palestinians on the colonized land and that not all land can be lived in, but all land colonized can be controlled by means other than directly living on it. Consequently, Sharon formed a new political party based on this modified version of Zionism – the Kadima Party, on whose platform he won the 2006 elections. Yet on the level of Zionist achievements, it still had to be proven that the rest of the territory in Palestine in the West Bank and East Jerusalem could still be Zionized and a “permanent lived Jewish existence” achieved. This explains the extensive Israeli efforts made to control all aspects of Palestinian life and impose Israeli settler existence in the West Bank, using other means of control such as the Separation Wall.

The evacuation from Yamit in 1982 led to an increase in settlement of the West Bank and the establishment of settlements in Gaza for the Yamit evacuees. The evacuation of settlers from the Gaza settlements led to an increase in settlement construction and continued construction of the Barrier in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Sharon's unilateral plan was a result of the failure of the military to produce Palestinian capitulation. The Separation Wall was another attempt to produce the same effect while simultaneously enabling the army to concentrate more force on any one location than before. Once the unilateral withdrawal was completed and the Palestinians were left in isolated concentrations throughout the occupied territory, the Israeli army would be released from having to sustain Israeli internal security and so be able to focus on other strategic priorities. After evacuating one area, the Israelis acted to offset the reduction in the settler population by stepping up building of settlements in other places.

Whether there might be a phase of settlement evacuation in the West Bank (WB) depends on the evolving strategic critical conditions that could overshadow the settling process. If there were a unilateral evacuation from the WB, the purpose would be to restructure control over the WB rather than maintain control over the whole of the territory. This is why completing the wall was essential in order to realize
this new matrix of control, with access points for entering and exiting at any time. There is still a denial of Palestinian rights.

The dynamics of the two contraction processes are related. The Sinai decolonization which led to a neocolonial stage affected the dynamics of Gaza after Israeli contraction. Since Egypt is subject to the conditions of the peace agreement rather than its own political and strategic considerations, it does not have full control over the terms on which it might open relations with Gaza. In the Palestinian struggle for life’s basics, Israel and the US could pressure Egypt to close its gates to Palestinians, including the supply of basic goods such as food and medicine. The indirect control by Israel and US has reached a stage where Egypt was pressured into building a wall beneath ground level. This was said to be necessary to prevent essential supplies and weapons from reaching Hamas members via underground tunnels through Rafah.

It is important to conclude that Israeli strategic interests and needs were the engine that shaped the dynamics of the evacuation processes. In the 1970s, the main Israeli strategic interest was to remove Egypt, a main Arab power, from the Arab-Israeli conflict, and then to launch war on Lebanon. The settler groups who left were compensated. In 2005 the strategic interest behind the Disengagement Plan was to keep Israeli forces needed in waging the war on the northern front, from being distracted by the need to protect settlers in Gaza. Consequently, the ideological project of settling the “Land of Israel” in the Sinai and Gaza was sidelined. This outcome was influenced by the military’s assessment of the state’s strategic interests at the time. Consequently, one notices that the government, and the individuals within it, were more powerful than the settler groups.

It is interesting to note that, of the governments and the group of individuals who were involved in Yamit as a whole, it was right wingers, known to be more ideologically bound and motivated by the Jewish idea of the “Land of Israel” who not only gave up the settlements but also demolished them. In fact, the Sinai case showed that Israel would do anything, even oppose its people, and even oppose the settlers themselves, if it faced a security threat on a state level. Both colonial contraction processes became conceivable only when a profound strategic advantage was foreseen that would enable achieving other strategic objectives.

As was shown in the two cases of the Egyptian Sinai and the Gaza Strip, changes occurred in the Israeli colonial power. In both cases, different kinds of threats could and can alternate the synergy of the ideologically motivated approach, the actions to achieve it and the actual existence and settling on the colonized space. With regard to Zionism itself, it too is affected by unanticipated effects. It is unable to move away from its motivations and restrictions and actions to achieve a phase of permanency of a settler existence in the area. Instead Israel has found itself having to back-track from what it aims to achieve in terms of actual existence on the colonized space, to re-modify its goals and then to re-draw plans and strategies towards maintaining an existence. This dynamic of being unable to uphold the ideological motivation, the actions to achieve them, and the gradual permanency of existing on the space has resulted in a mesh in which the actual settling phase is pulled back as a process. Thus the outcomes of this process are stages of temporary settling rather than a permanent existence. In other words, a regressive condition in the Zionist project that could be repeated in other areas such as the WB were the
circumstances of the colonial state, the indigenous people, and the international pressure to produce such a context.
4. List of References


Harris, David and Philips fredson. “Painful separation, but..” *Al-Quds Daily Newspaper* August 14, 2005 (in Arabic).


Fig.1: Israeli Settlements in Sinai⁶⁹

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<td>11</td>
<td>Dikla</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Haruvit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Neviot</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Di-Zahav</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Ophira</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lesch, “Israeli Settlements,” 37-38; information in table is re-written to reflect a past existence.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Settlements in Sinai</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Date Founded</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Original landowners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yamit</td>
<td>1973; first settlers in 1975</td>
<td>Pithat Rafiah: on coast 7km. South of Rafah town</td>
<td>Urban Settlement, the plan was for 1500 units (6000 people) by 1980</td>
<td>Bedouin lands: most evicted 1971-73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Talmei Yosef</td>
<td>1977</td>
<td>Pithat Rafiah: near Yamit</td>
<td>Moshav; Farmers' Union (HaHUD Hahaklai)</td>
<td>Bedouin lands, including almond groves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Pri'el</td>
<td>1977</td>
<td>Pithat Rafiah</td>
<td>Moshav</td>
<td>Bedouin Lands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Merkaz Avshalom</td>
<td>1977</td>
<td>Pithat Rafiah, junction of Gaza - Sinai highway</td>
<td>Rural center</td>
<td>Adjoins area where the Bedouin were settled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Netiv Ha'asara</td>
<td>1973</td>
<td>Pithat Rafiah: 7km. South of Rafiah, on south side of highway</td>
<td>Moshav</td>
<td>Bedouin lands, including a school and cement houses (demolished)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Ogda</td>
<td>1975</td>
<td>Pithat Rafiah: 1km. South of Netiv Ha'asara</td>
<td>Moshav</td>
<td>Bedouin lands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Sufa (Succot)</td>
<td>1974</td>
<td>Pithat Rafiah: between Yamit and main highway</td>
<td>Nahal until Jan. 1977, then Labour kibbutz. First kibbutz in Pithat Rafiah</td>
<td>Bedouin lands; almond and peach groves uprooted in 1974-75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Holit</td>
<td>1977</td>
<td>Pithat rafiah: on highway east of Sufa, north of Sadot</td>
<td>Nahal; later became a Moshav</td>
<td>Bedouin lands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Location Details</td>
<td>Type</td>
<td>Land Type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Sadot</td>
<td>June 1971</td>
<td>Pithat Rafiah: just west of Netiv Ha'asara</td>
<td>Labour Moshav</td>
<td>Bedouin lands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Nir Avraham</td>
<td>1977</td>
<td>Pithat Rafiah: 1km. South of Sadot; adjoins Ogda</td>
<td>Moshav</td>
<td>Bedouin lands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Dikla</td>
<td>Feb. 1969</td>
<td>Pithat Rafiah: 11km. South of Rafiah, on coastal side of highway</td>
<td>Nahal until March 1971, then Herut Moshav</td>
<td>Site of a former Egyptian desert development company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Haruvit</td>
<td>Dec. 1975</td>
<td>Sinai: 18 km. south-west of Dikla</td>
<td>Herut Nahal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Sinai</td>
<td>1968</td>
<td>Sinai: 12km. South west Haruvit; (site moved from south-west of El-Arish in 1974)</td>
<td>Nahal became civilian Moshav in 1977 when construction of permanent site was completed</td>
<td>Part expropriated from El-Arish former site was an Egyptian government plantation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Yam</td>
<td>Oct. 1967</td>
<td>Sinai coast: Lake Bardawil, 70 km. south-west of El Arish, near Bir al-Abed</td>
<td>Nahal until May 1973, then Labour kibbutz</td>
<td>Egyptian fishing site</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Kadesh Barnea</td>
<td>Planned in 1977</td>
<td>Sinai: Oasis near the 1967 border</td>
<td>Naha</td>
<td>Bedouin Oasis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Neviot</td>
<td>Feb. 1971</td>
<td>Gulf of Aqaba: coast road, 60km. South of Eilat</td>
<td>Moshav</td>
<td>Nuweibeh Oasis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Di-Zahav</td>
<td>Sep. 1971</td>
<td>Gulf of aqaba: coast road, 60 km. south of Neviot</td>
<td>Moshav</td>
<td>Ghahab, at mouth of Wadi Nasib</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Ophira</td>
<td>1970</td>
<td>Gulf of Aqaba: Sharm al-Sheikh</td>
<td>Urban Settlement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Fig. 3 The Gaza Strip. Source: B'tselem- adapted from UN-OCHA
Fig. 4 Neve Decalim 2005, 2006, before and after its destruction. Source: www.decolonizing.ps/site, original source: ARIJ

Fig. 5 Al-Aqsa University before and after War on Gaza. Source: http://www.ccis2k.org/ccis/images/gaza/alaqsa.jpg, www.gaza.ws/vb/showthread.php?t=24657