

On the Road to Gaza: The Freedom Flotilla Will Sail Again

What is Gaza to us but an Israeli missile, a rudimentary rocket, a demolished home, an injured child being whisked away by his peers under a hail of bullets? On a daily basis, Gaza is conveyed to us as a bloody image or a dramatic video, none of which can truly capture the everyday reality of the Strip – its formidable steadfastness, the everyday acts of resistance, and the type of suffering that can never be really understood through a customary glance at a social media post.

At long last, the chief prosecutor of the **International Court of Justice (ICC)**, Fatou Bensouda, has declared her ‘satisfaction’ that “war crimes have been – or are being – committed in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip”. As soon as the ICC statement was made on December 20, pro-Palestinian groups felt a rare moment of relief. Finally, Israel will stand accused, potentially paying for its recurring bloodbath in the isolated and besieged Gaza Strip, its military occupation and apartheid in the West Bank, and much more.

However, it could take years for the ICC to initiate its legal proceedings and render its verdict. Moreover, there are no political guarantees that an ICC decision indicting Israel would ever be respected, let alone implemented.

Meanwhile, the siege on Gaza persists, only to be interrupted by a massive war, like the one of 2014, or a less destructive one, similar to the latest Israeli onslaught in November. And with every war, more dismal statistics are produced, more lives shattered, and more painful stories are told and retold.

For years, civil society groups across the world labored to destabilize this horrific status quo. They organized, held vigils, wrote letters to their political representatives and so on. To no avail. Frustrated by government inaction, a small group of activists sailed to Gaza in a small boat in August 2008, succeeding in doing what the United Nations has failed to do: they broke, however fleetingly, the Israeli siege on the impoverished Strip.

This symbolic action of the Free Gaza movement had a tremendous impact. It sent a clear message to Palestinians in occupied Palestine, that their fate is not only determined by the Israeli government and military machine; that there are other actors who are capable of challenging the dreadful silence of the international community; that not all Westerners are as complicit as their governments in the prolonged suffering of the Palestinian people.

Since then, many more solidarity missions have attempted to follow suit, coming across the sea atop flotillas or in large caravans through the Sinai desert. Some have successfully reached Gaza, delivering medical aid and other supplies. The majority, however, were sent back or had their boats hijacked in international waters by the Israeli navy.

The outcome of all of this has been the writing of a new chapter of solidarity with the Palestinian people that went beyond the occasional demonstration and the typical signing of a petition.

The second Palestinian Intifada, the uprising of 2002, had already redefined the role of the “activist” in Palestine. The formation of the International Solidarity Movement (ISM) allowed thousands of international activists from around the world to participate in “direct action” in Palestine – thus fulfilling, however symbolically, a role that is typically played by a United Nations protective force.

ISM activists, however, employed non-violent means of registering civil society’s rejection of the Israeli occupation.

Expectedly, Israel did not honor the fact that many of these activists came from countries deemed “friendly” by Tel Aviv’s standards.



RIGHT TO SURVIVE? CORPORATIONS ONLY

A “**Right to Survive**” ordinance for people experiencing homelessness in Denver was voted on May 2019. Denver’s campaign was led by *Denver Homeless Out Loud*. Their initiative would have overturned a city law that bans resting and sheltering in public spaces. Beyond this, **The ‘Right to Survive’** initiative made it a civil rights violation for police, the city, *private corporations* and *private security* to violate the right to survive in public.

From the University of Denver came the assessment that the initiative “*would affirm the dignity of people experiencing homelessness, affording them basic constitutional rights such as protecting themselves from the elements and freedom from unreasonable searches and seizures.*” The American Civil Liberties Union of Colorado and others also supported the proposed law.

Wealthy interests, including large energy companies, spent a whopping \$2.4 million to defeat the measure at the polls in May. Many of Colorado’s most powerful interests, including *Downtown Denver Business Partnership*, the highly influential corporate campaign group *Colorado Concern*, energy companies, major law firms, investment firms, banks, real estate interests, as well as major national lobbies like the *National Restaurant Association*, *National Association of Realtors* and the *National Western Stock Association* contributed to defeat the measure.

Opposition from the corporate wealthy is easy to explain. The measure advanced a solution that was rooted in an understanding that the wealthy owners of large corporations are at war with the poor. Along with rights of **resting** and **sheltering**, it also established a right to offer and accept **free food** in a non-obstructive manner on public lands, as well as the right to **sleep in cars**, the initiative went on to make it a **civil rights violation** for police, the city, *private corporations* and *private security* to violate the right to survive in public.

THE THEORY & MYTH OF HERD IMMUNITY

The concept of “*herd immunity*” first materialized in the 1930s, when Johns Hopkins University’s Arthur Hedrich discovered that, after 55% of Baltimore’s population acquired measles (and thus immunity to measles), the rest of the population, or “herd,” became protected. This concept provides today’s rationale for insisting that everyone be vaccinated.

“If you only risked your own health by not getting vaccinated, that would be your business,” mass vaccination advocates state. “But when your failure to get vaccinated endangers me or my child, that becomes my business.” It’s a powerful argument, except for one thing — **herd immunity in vaccinated populations has been repeatedly disproven.**

Suddenly, the importance of *exposure* to an infectious disease was eliminated and replaced with *vaccination*, and the importance of *natural* immunity was diminished. That’s a problem, because both of those elements are key to Hedrich’s theory. Hedrich was not thinking about a vaccinated community or *vaccine-induced* — “temporary” — artificial immunity when he thought up his theory. He was thinking about the process of how a disease works its way through a community and how that community, eventually, naturally builds up a resistance to it as a result.

In November 1966, in announcing a mass vaccination program for measles that would exceed the 55% level reached in Baltimore, the U.S. Public Health Service confidently announced that “**Effective use of these vaccines during the coming winter and spring should insure the eradication of measles from the United States in 1967.**”

When measles failed to be eradicated, public health experts decided that a 70% or 75% vaccination rate would secure herd immunity. When that proved wrong, the magic number rose to 80%, 83%, 85%, and then it became 90%, according to a 2001 Health Services Research report. Later health experts commonly cited 95%.

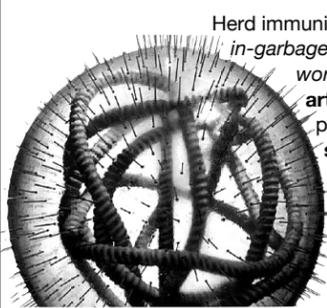
But that too was insufficient — measles outbreaks occur even when the vaccinated population exceeds 95%, leading some to say a 98% or 99% vaccination rate is needed to protect the remaining 1% or 2% of the herd. But even that may fall short, since outbreaks occur in fully vaccinated populations.

“But even vaccinating 100% of the population wouldn’t be enough, say scientists at the Mayo Clinic’s Vaccine Research Group, because the measles vaccine is a dud with some people, offering no protection at all, and its effectiveness wanes with others, even if they get boosters. According to Tetyana Obukhanych of Stanford University’s School of Medicine, the measles vaccine works as planned with only 25% of the population, leaving the majority of adults who have been vaccinated as children with little or no protection. Up to half of today’s cases involve adults.

Unlike childhood measles, adult measles is dangerous: 25% of cases require hospitalization. Measles is especially dangerous when contracted by expectant mothers. The dangers extend to infants who, as *USA Today* points out, are too young to be vaccinated. These entirely helpless members of “*the herd*” depend on antibodies inherited from their mothers. Yet previously vaccinated mothers have few antibodies to pass on, depriving their babies of protection. The only tried-and-true way for mothers to safeguard their infants — those most at risk of death from measles — remains nature’s way: **by ensuring that the mother had previously contracted natural measles.**

In fact, herd immunity — so elusive today — fully existed **prior to the vaccine’s introduction**. Virtually 100% of the population then contracted measles, typically as children, giving everyone lifelong immunity — and future mothers the means to protect their offspring. In mass vaccinating us, scientists of the 1960s didn’t realize that *infecting us* with the measles vaccine — a weak version of the natural measles virus — would give us a *weak version* of the defenses our bodies develop to the real thing.

Ironically, the Public Health Service considered measles generally benign in the pre-vaccine era. “Complications are infrequent and, with adequate medical care, fatality is rare.... Immunity following recovery is solid and lifelong in duration,” its chief of epidemiology, Alexander Langmuir, acknowledged in “Epidemiologic basis for eradication of measles in 1967.”



Herd immunity sounds fine in theory. But as Stanford’s Dr. Obukhanych concluded, “*As with any garbage in-garbage out type of theory, the expectations of the herd-immunity theory are bound to fail in the real world.*” Hedrich’s theory of herd immunity has been twisted by the myth that vaccine acquired artificial immunity is identical to **naturally acquired** immunity, which is **false**. That myth serves to perpetuate the idea that **only strict enforcement** of mandatory vaccination laws **will protect society** from disease, which is also **false**.

Lawrence Solomon

is research director of **Consumer Policy Institute**.
vaccinefactcheck.org
VaccineReaction.org

The killing of US and British nationals Rachel Corrie and Tom Hurndall in Gaza in 2003 and 2004 respectively, was just the precursor of Israeli violence that was to follow. In May 2010, the Israeli navy attacked the Freedom Flotilla consisting of the Turkish-owned ship ‘MV Mavi Marmara’ and others, killing ten unarmed humanitarian workers and wounding at least 50 more. As was the case with the murder of Rachel and Tom, there was no real accountability for the Israeli attack on the solidarity boats.

It must be understood that Israeli violence is not random nor is just a reflection of Israel’s notoriety and disregard of international and humanitarian law. With every violent episode, Israel hopes to dissuade outside actors from getting involved in “Israeli affairs”. Yet, time and again, the solidarity movement returns with a defiant message, insisting that no country, not even Israel, has the right to commit war crimes with impunity.

Following a recent meeting in the Dutch city of Rotterdam, the International Coalition of the Freedom Flotilla, which consists of many international groups, has decided to, once more, sail to Gaza. The solidarity mission is scheduled for the summer of 2020, and, like most of the 35 previous attempts, the Flotilla is likely to be intercepted by the Israeli navy. Yet, another attempt will likely follow, and many more, until the Gaza siege is completely lifted. It has become clear that the purpose of these

humanitarian missions is not to deliver a few medical supplies to the nearly two million besieged Gazans, but to challenge the Israeli narrative that has turned the occupation and isolation of Palestinians to a status quo ante, to an “Israeli affair”.

According to the United Nations Office in Occupied Palestine, the poverty rate in Gaza seems to be increasing at an alarming speed of 2% per year. By the end of 2017, 53% of Gaza’s population lived in poverty, two-thirds of them living in “deep poverty”. This terrible number includes over 400,000 children.

An image, a video, a chart or a social media post can never convey the pain of 400,000 children, who experience real hunger every single day of their lives so that the Israeli government may achieve its military and political designs in Gaza. Indeed, Gaza is not just an Israeli missile, a demolished home, and an injured child. It is an entire nation that is suffering and resisting, in near-complete isolation from the rest of the world.

True solidarity should aim at forcing Israel to end the protracted occupation and siege on the Palestinian people, sailing the high seas, if necessary. Thankfully, the good activists of the Freedom Flotilla are doing just that.

– **Ramzy Baroud**

palestinechronicle.com

This is why it struck such a nerve with corporate America—the same reason it represents a truly transformative, humanizing demand. It would have brought private corporations under the control of a local civil rights law. This digs at deep legal doctrine. Private corporations, including private security companies, would have been governed by this law. Though it seems perfectly sensible that civil rights would protect individuals from private corporations, this idea is actually tremendously radical in the context of American legal history. This is because of a lesser-known consequence of corporate “rights”—enshrined by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1883—that they effectively exempted corporations from respecting the constitutional rights of citizens.

Despite the fact that corporations are created by the state through the issuance of corporate charters, and licensed by the state to do business, the Supreme Court ruled that corporations are not “state actors.” They ruled that the Bill of Rights protects people against government violation of rights, but not against “private” businesses that violate those rights. Just three years after liberating corporations from public responsibility, the Court declared without argument that corporations were “persons” with constitutional rights of their own, which local, state and federal laws are forbidden to violate.

Denver’s “Right to Survive” initiative challenges these court-manufactured legal doctrines. And this is what we need, to correct the wrong-headed decisions of the Supreme Court, while simultaneously fighting alongside the most marginalized for systemic change in the law. Though the initiative lost at the polls, this idea of a real Human Right to Survive was born.

Ben Price

National Organizing Director of the Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund, which aided Denver Homeless Out Loud in drafting the ordinance.