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This article studies Israeli news coverage (chiefly via newspapers and television) of the Gaza war of 2008—2009, with a focus on what the national media withheld from its consuming publics — namely, depiction of the extent of Israeli-inflicted violence upon Gazan people and infrastructure. At the core of this article is a study of an anomalous instance of Palestinian testimonial which was broadcast live on Israeli national television — this in an Israeli media context in which Palestinian eyewitness accounts were largely occluded from public view. How, the article asks, are we to make sense of this scene of televised Palestinian trauma and the enormous attention it garnered among Israeli publics? The author's reading detours through the work of Israeli cultural theorist Ariella Azoulay with her insistence that the study of images and visuality in the Israeli context be attentive to the inextricable interplay between ways of seeing and national ideologies. In conclusion, the author proffers a reading which folds this scene of televised testimonial back into the hegemonic Israeli field of perception.

The images under discussion are evidence, incontrovertible evidence, of destruction, humiliation, injury, manslaughter, abuse, suffocation, suffering, misery and injustice. They are the basis for seeing everything, despite the case that not everything could be seen. There is a decisive rift, however, between the substratum of visual facts that have been compiled and the gaze that will rest on them. This gap prevents the gaze from seeing the visual fact that is disclosed. (Azoulay 2008, pp. 195—196)

On 16 January 2009, Israeli tanks shelled the Gaza home of Dr Ezzedin Abu al-Aish. Three of his young daughters and a niece were killed instantly, and one daughter was severely wounded. Risking injury from ongoing Israeli army fire, the family walked nearly a quarter mile carrying their dead and wounded

until they found transport to the closest hospital. The Israeli army defended their actions, citing provocation from sniper fire on the roof of the residence. Dr Abu al-Aish and neighborhood residents disputed this claim.

This attack occurred in the context of the Israeli military incursion into the Gaza Strip in 2008—2009, code-named by Israel "Operation Cast Lead". Within this context, neither the shelling of Abu al-Aish's civilian home by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), nor the army response that followed, was remarkable. Yet, what distinguished this event was the way it was communicated to, and consumed by, Israeli publics. This particular incident of IDF-inflicted violence was captured live on Israeli television by means of a telephone call from Dr Abu al-Aish to an Israeli television anchorman in the immediate aftermath of the bombing. The anchorman broadcast the anguished cries on the evening news, and thus many Israelis watching the popular newscast witnessed the doctor's lament in real time. Many more would screen the footage on YouTube, where it quickly went viral, or read accounts of it on the Israeli blogosphere. In the words of one Israeli journalist: "all of Israel heard that frantic call" (Media Line 2009).

This article is a study of the ways that the traditional Israeli news media reported the Gaza War of 2008—2009, focusing chiefly on mainstream newspapers and television journalism.[1] My analysis pays particular attention to what the national media withheld from its consuming publics — namely, consistent depiction of the extent of Israeli-inflicted violence upon Gazan people and infrastructure. In the first part of this investigation, I will focus on the conditions of constrained media coverage, with attention to the ways that mainstream journalism rendered the Palestinian toll invisible. The second part will scrutinize invisibility claims more closely, particularly those made by the Israeli left, with attention to what this critique forecloses. The article's final section will return to the scene of army violence described above, querying its anomalous status as a Palestinian testimonial at a moment when Palestinian eyewitness accounts were largely occluded from public Israeli view. I will ask: How, within this context, does one make sense of this scene of Palestinian trauma and the enormous attention it garnered among Israeli publics? My reading detours through the work of Israeli cultural theorist Ariella Azoulay, with her insistence that the study of images and visuality in the Israeli context be attentive to the inextricable interplay between ways of seeing and national ideologies. In my conclusion, I proffer a reading which folds this scene of televised testimonial back into the hegemonic Israeli field of perception.

Media and Militarism

On 27 December 2008, Israel launched a series of air strikes against targets in the Gaza Strip with the stated aim of ending rocket attacks by Hamas and

1. For a review of Israeli and Palestinian media, including demographics of consumption by source, see Keshev (2009a, 2009b and 2009c).

affiliated armed groups from Gaza into Israeli territory. Some 1400 Palestinians were killed during the course of Israel's land and air campaign, civilians comprising the majority of the dead and injured, with massive damage wrought to the Gazan infrastructure, including the razing of large swaths of populated territory (Amnesty International 2009). Israel's actions were roundly criticized by the United Nations and international human rights organizations, which accused the IDF of a failure to abide by principles of proportionality and distinction. Contra such critique, Israel insisted that international law had been upheld, and argued that the incursion be understood both as an act of self-defense and an instance of the West's "War on Terror" — its justifiable war against Islamic extremism and terror.[2]

From the outset, the Israeli state labored to control Israeli and international media coverage of the operation — an effort which some state ministries deemed as vital to Israel's political future as the military operation itself. This calculation was, in large measure, a response to Israel's failed military campaign in Lebanon in the summer of 2006, a campaign which generated vociferous international condemnation for its indiscriminate and disproportionate killing of Lebanese civilians. The internal Israeli investigation which followed was also pointed in its criticism, castigating the Israeli army for a failed and bungled military effort, and contending that lack of media coordination and preparedness had been among the war's chief secondary failures. Indeed, some critics credited Hizbullah with decisive victory on the media stage — in part, due to superior usage of cyberspace to deliver its political message to international audiences — while the IDF was faulted with an erroneous focus on traditional modes of information dissemination and psychological warfare (for example, dropping leaflets, jamming broadcasts, etc.) (Caldwell *et al*. 2009, p. 6; Kalb & Saivetz 2007). For their part, Israeli soldiers on the battlefield were accused of compromising national security by means of casual cellphone usage, which was thought to contribute to successful Hizbullah intelligence-gathering. Many of Israel's internal critics would argue that the national media had collaborated in the military failure through public criticism of IDF strategy, thought to harm army morale, and by means of lax coverage that publicized sensitive information about IDF coordinates and strategies, some of which was broadcast to viewers in real time (Schiff 2006). That Israeli left-wing critics and non-governmental organizations found these critiques lacking in factual basis did little to temper public Israeli rage against a media which had, in their estimation, fostered this defeat (Keshev 2008).[3] As a cor-

2. This argument was frequently made by the media (see, for example, Shavit 2009). This linkage between Israeli assaults in its occupied territories and the global 'War on Terror' has been articulated since the beginning of the second Palestinian uprising in 2000 (see Beinin & Stein 2006).

3. The Israeli non-governmental organization Keshev: The Center for the Protection of Democracy in Israel, a civic organization that researches Israeli media conduct, argued that the Israeli media largely supported the state-sponsored narrative in support of the war effort, save at the campaign's ill-fated end. It also points to the difficulties that journalists faced when they endeavored to part ways from this narrative (see Keshev 2008).

rective, Israel established the National Information Directorate to "synchronize the content and tone of Israel's message" (Gur 2008).

When Israel launched its Gaza offensive, the machinery of synchronization and control was already in place. The central tool in the state's arsenal was a ban on both foreign and Israeli journalists from physically entering the Gaza Strip through the Israel—Gaza crossing — a ban that remained in place for the first 12 days of the operation, despite an Israeli supreme court ruling against it, and which the IDF deemed essential to protect soldier and information security (Orgad 2009, p. 253). Those journalists who chose to violate it — Israelis among them — faced severe penalties.[4] Yet state efforts to "control the message" also took more proactive forms, particularly in the domain of social media (Kuntsman & Stein 2010). During the first few days of the incursion, the IDF inaugurated its own YouTube channel which showcased drone footage of the Israeli attacks filmed from the vantage point of the bombardier — footage which functioned to sterilize and justify the air campaign through a video game-cum-war logic that rendered all persons and buildings seen from above as proto-targets.[5] The station boasted more than 4000 subscribers two days after its launch. By war's end, some of the videos would be viewed more than 2 million times — their popularity unflagging in the face of questions raised by Israeli human rights organizations about the IDF's targeting justifications (*Wired* 2009).[6] Simultaneously, Israeli officials began delivering private briefings to international bloggers and launching personal video blogs,[7] even as private pro-Israeli organizations organized undercover Internet volunteers to disseminate the state's message on the Internet through the informal language of the "talkback" (Kuntsman & Stein 2010). When employed alongside the ban on foreign reporting, these and other social media efforts were remarkably successful — or so they initially appeared. In the first 10 days of the offensive, the state claimed a decisive victory on the public relations front, arguing that the international media had, indeed, followed the state's cue where wartime information was concerned, by focusing its narrative on Israel's military objectives and the suffering of its southern citizens in the face of incoming Hamas rocket fire, rather than on the Palestinian toll.

When coupled with overwhelming Israeli support for the war effort, which polled as high as 90% at some moments, and a national media eager to remake its public image in the aftermath of Lebanon 2006, what resulted in the

4. Amira Hass and Shlomi Eldar were among those journalists penalized on these grounds. Journalists were only able to enter through Egypt on 15 January 2009. Indeed, the Israeli Government Press Office went so far as to suggest that 'any journalist who enters Gaza becomes a fig leaf and front for the Hamas' (Bronner 2009). Human rights organizations argued that press freedom was being grossly violated — particularly when coupled with the strict reporting guidelines imposed on Israeli publications by the Israeli military censor (see, for example, Simon 2009).

5. On the history of this mode of capturing war images, which many critics have traced to the US attacks on Iraq in 1991, see Azoulay (2008, pp. 187—188) and Sontag (2003).

6. The popularity of this footage was either despite or because of the fierce criticism launched against it by human rights organizations.

7. The first vlog was uploaded to YouTube on 3 January 2009 (see Israel Defense Forces 2009).

national media was not only unabashed enthusiasm for the military operation, but very selective and partial coverage of events on the Gazan battlefield (S. Cohen 2009; JPost.com Staff 2008).[8] Few Israeli journalists working in the realm of the traditional media raised questions about the necessity of the incursion or its potential human cost. Expressions of criticism were sparse, relegated to back pages or less popular left-wing publications (Keshev 2009).[9] Tallies of Palestinian civilian deaths and hardships were infrequent, as were discussions of Israeli culpability for them. When images of Palestinian suffering did appear before the Israeli lens, they were mitigated by discussion of military justifications for the operation and by framing victims as Hamas supporters – and thereby, in popular Israeli eyes as legitimate targets. By contrast, Jewish Israeli pain and suffering in southern Israel was covered heavily – enabled by the presence of an Israeli media center in the southern town of Sderot, adjacent to the Gaza Strip, which aimed to showcase the devastation to the Israeli physical and human infrastructure; in tandem, voices of Jewish Israeli protest against state policies, deemed both marginal and treasonous were grossly understated (Ophir 2009).[10] At issue was not merely a generalized failure within the national media to attend to Palestinian suffering, but a propensity to invert the story of the incursion. What resulted was a narrative that posited Israeli citizens as the war's penultimate victims and Hamas as chief aggressor (Blondheim & Shifman 2009, p. 210). Indeed, Hamas was frequently blamed for Palestinian civilian causalities, charged with using its own people as human shields (Keshev 2009a). For Israeli journalists, the cost of departing from the national consensus was relatively high.[11] Some anchormen and anchorwomen who used television airtime to inquire about numbers of Palestinian dead and wounded, for example, or to comment upon the humanitarian emergency which the Israel foreign ministry so vociferously denied, became targets of national hate campaigns that decried their "anti-Zionist sympathies " (Orgad 2009, pp. 250–251).

International media coverage of the incursion was also severely impacted by the state-imposed ban, with journalists unable to reach the Gazan battlefield and thereby to testify to the state of the Palestinian disaster. But the restriction's secondary effects often undercut the state's aims in ironic ways. As a result of the ban, journalists increasingly called upon local Palestinian and Arab

8. Such enthusiasm was a measure of the widespread public support for the incursion.

9. As Keshev (2009a) notes, a headline for an article describing Israeli air strikes which killed at least 225 Palestinians read: 'Shock Therapy: The Surprise Was Perfect'. It was only within the newspaper's back pages that a journalist noted that civilians were the majority of those killed.

10. On 5 January 2009, following the IDF shelling of a Gaza school, Israeli daily newspapers featured fallen Israeli soldiers on their front pages. For discussion of the media's wartime 'cheerleaders', see Alhaleem (2009) and HaCohen (2008). On representations of the Israeli left within the media, see Ophir (2009).

11. Gideon Levy, one of the few Israeli journalists who consistently criticized the IDF assault, made the following observation in the early days of Cast Lead: 'Because that's how it is in Israel … [W]e get a unified chorus throughout the television studios, calling on Israel to keep pounding and expanding and obliterating, waxing enthusiastically over every bombardment and gaping in admiration over every shelling, a war that is never enough' (Levy, 2009).

sources in Gaza, contacted by phone or via digital technologies, to provide the eyewitness accounts that they could not secure. The constraints on traditional media coverage that the ban produced also propelled new media to occupy the vacuum.[12] As a result, the voices of citizen-journalists and bloggers were given greater prominence — voices nonetheless muted, it should be noted, by the extremely difficult working conditions within the Gaza Strip, where frequent electricity outages made online work difficult at best. In the Twittersphere, which helped to fill the gap left by the traditional media, the hashtag "#gaza" ranked among the world's top 10 throughout the war, with six new posts on the topic per minute. While most Israelis had access to these alternative sources, either the new or traditional media, they tended to regard them with considerable suspicion. Thus, although international television coverage of the Israeli incursion was screened on a daily basis on the Israeli evening news, such coverage was usually offered to viewers as self-evident instances of anti-Israeli bias, rather than credible examples of alternative wartime reporting.

What Could Be Seen

I have argued that the Israeli media of this period, in its efforts to avoid portraits of Israeli army violence, tended to favor stories about Israeli suffering and defenses of just war. It also favored a particular visual vantage point where the battlefield was concerned: the landscape of incursion seen from a distance.[13] In some sense, this stance was the product of actual conditions on the ground, given that the effects of the ban meant that most Israeli and international journalists were only afforded a first-hand view of Gaza from its seams. As a result, many photojournalists and television crews opted to cluster in the hills of Sderot to take advantage of the observation point that this height provided, with its view of the neighboring air campaign (Lagerquist 2009). What the ban then produced was a recurrent discourse of remote violence — a discourse about violence happening elsewhere, as perceived through a distant lens. This discourse, as manifest in photographs of smoke rising from distant bomb sites or eyewitness accounts of bombings heard from afar, proffered a story about Palestinian suffering at a considerable remove from Israeli homes and lives. There was considerable comfort in this stance, as it removed the spectator from the scene of violence, with no culpability for its effects. This narrative of war at a distance also bolstered state claims about a justifiable war — claims that more proximate images, littered with dead and wounded civilians, could not as easily support. One could argue that the ban

12. In the word of Ethan Zuckerman, a senior researcher at the Berkman Center for Internet and Society (2010, p.): 'when countries close themselves to international media, there's a tendency to report stories relying heavily on social media'.
13. Scholars disagree on the characterization of the Israeli media's reporting on Gaza during the incursion. While most on the left (for example, Keshev 2009a, 2009b and 2009c) stressed the relative absence of such reporting, Blondheim and Shifman (2009) disagreed.

functioned as something of an alibi for an Israeli way of seeing that had long been dominant where Gaza, and indeed Palestinian society more generally, was concerned — a narrative that presumed both its distance and difference from the Israeli metropolis, and therein cosmopolitan modernity.

Indeed, within the mainstream Israeli media of this moment, discussions about the war's visual field were often made explicit. One storyline predominated in this regard: *the pictures are damning*. The following comment from a senior official in the Israeli foreign ministry quoted in the Israeli press during the early stages of the incursion when the state's Israel's public relations operation was still deemed hegemonic, was typical in this regard:

> The relative success in conveying Israel's message "won't last for long", predicts Shir-On [deputy director general of the foreign ministry], if only because *"the pictures are not good*. We're finding the *problem* that whenever a television station puts on an Israeli spokesperson, they put alongside him in split-screen pictures of carnage in Gaza". (Gur 2008; my emphasis)

A reversal is at work in the language of the state's representative: the images, themselves, are blamed for damning international media coverage of the war, as if they were independent "actants", in Latour's sense. Moreover, the suggestion is made that the "problem" at hand is chiefly the symbolic violence inflicted upon Israel's international reputation by a damning visual field — a symbolic field that seems disassociated from Israel's actions and therein the material violence of the incursion. What concerns the state is primarily the circuit, prevalence and volume of the images in question. There is no attendant disclaimer by the state official where such violence is concerned; even the term "carnage" is not accompanied by statements of military rationale or apology. There is a sense in which the visual field of Israeli violence signifies chiefly as a composite crime against the Israeli state itself, as a blight on its public relations record. Interestingly, in this instance, the official raises no questions about the veracity of the images in question — although such debates would proliferate in the pro-Israeli blogosphere (Kuntsman & Stein 2010).

The discussion of what could be seen within the media of this moment was also alive within the Israeli left in the context of their critiques of the military operation. Two narratives predominated. First and foremost was the claim that, due to media bias and politically motivated obfuscation, accurate wartime data on Palestinian fatalities and causalities was simply invisible to the Israeli public. In other words, Israelis were being systematically denied access to the violent effects of the incursion on Gaza's Palestinian population.[14] Some contended, in this vein, that while "the internet is full of alternative news, and emails with descriptions of the horrors in Gaza are distributed regularly",

14. This assessment was widespread. Israeli scholar Yosefa Loshitzy (2009) wrote: 'The designation of the Gaza Strip and south Israel as a "closed military zone," and the ban on media coverage … contributes to the sanitized view of the Gaza story as manufactured by Israel. The real horror and gore is reserved for Al Jazeera's spectators, particularly the Arab ones. *Ghetto-under-siege Gaza remains almost silent and partly invisible to the rest of us. We hardly hear or see in mainstream media, testimonies from the ground*' (my emphasis).

it is "not clear how many [Israelis] are exposed to this kind of information" (Ophir 2009). A second argument framed wartime invisibility a bit differently, proposing that the problem lay less in access or obfuscation by the media than in an unwitting public that had been successfully duped by the state, unaware that facts had been concealed from view. As one variant of this critique, some left-wing critics lamented the fact that the voice of the army was being streamed directly to the public via the Israeli media without adequate attribution or critical distance — a fact of which most of the Israeli population, they contended, was unaware.[15]

While neither of these left critiques is surprising, what does merit consideration is the kinds of assessment of the media field that they foreclose. Building on the work of Israeli cultural theorist Ariella Azoulay, one could frame the question of media visibility differently by moving beyond questions of duping or obfuscation to consider the complicated ways that ideology impacts upon sight and the terms of what can be seen. To say this differently is to propose that visibility is not an inherent attribute of a particular visual field, but an extension of the ideological field itself. This is to suggest that, in the Israeli context, conditions of visibility are linked to national logics and therein vacillate depending on the demands that nation, state and occupation impose at particular moments. Visibility is not a constant.[16] Rather, its terms are highly mobile and changeable.

Consider, for example, Azoulay's (2008) work on the hegemonic photographic archive of the 1948 war — what Israelis know as the War of Independence and Palestinians as the Nakba or "catastrophe", resulting, as it did, in the dispossession of the Palestinian people. Within this archive, as Azoulay notes, the visibility of both Palestinians and Israeli violence against them is highly circumscribed. Yet such circumscription is not merely a by-product of the images' content or scarcity (images of the expulsion being the scarcest). Rather, it is also the effect of state classification — namely, of the ways such images have been made intelligible and put to work for state projects. In other words, rather than positing that Palestinians and Israeli violence are wholly absent from the 1948 state record, she returns to this dominant archive to read against its grain, considering the ways that classification can alter the semiotics of this visual field without necessitating wholesale expunging of such subjects and histories from the photographs' frame. She offers, as but one example, a reading of a 1948 image of Israeli soldiers sitting with goods — notably, a phonograph and records — looted from Palestinian homes (Azoulay 2011). This image has been positioned by the state as evidence of wartime

15. This is not to suggest total media access to the army. Rather, only certified spokesmen were made available for comment. Moreover, as reported by the Israeli left media, many IDF personnel were aware that their phones had been tapped by security services, lest illicit conversations were had with the press. For discussion of how the military controlled the news for Israeli audiences during Cast Lead, see Persico (2008, 2009).

16. Scholarship on the politics of visuality and visibility in the context of the Israeli occupation, particularly the built environment thereof, has grown tremendously in recent years (see Makdisi 2010; Weizman 2002, 2007).

triumph rather than atrocity. Within the terms of dominant Israeli ways of see-ing, it fails to signify as evidence of Israeli violence, buried, as it is, beneath the semiotic weight of the state's classification. Yet, in Azoulay's reading, this semiotic chain can be broken and reconfigured in ways that run counter to the state's classificatory logic — namely, in ways that make the Nakba visible through a reclassification that tells a story of dispossession (here, via histories of looting), rather than of heroic nation-making. Taking this analysis seriously, we can rethink the hegemonic Israeli visual field of the Gaza war period with attention to all that has been supposedly foreclosed from view but which remains latent within the photographic image, despite the weight of ideologi-cal-cum-classificatory overlay. As such, we might reconsider the argument that images of both Palestinians and Israeli violence were categorically invisible within this field, the constraints on the media notwithstanding. Azoulay offers a methodology with the potential to rectify such images to visibility.

With Azoulay's critique in mind, consider a moment during the Gaza incur-sion when the Israeli media evidenced an intriguing split between image and text where the war was concerned. Such was the case on the front page of the popular Hebrew-language daily newspaper *Yediot Aharonot* on the incursion's second day (28 December 2008). The newspaper headline — "Half a Million Israelis under Fire" — spoke faithfully in the language of the state, and was marshaled as evidence by radical Israeli commentators of the ways in which the national media had parroted the state's narrative of victimization and "just war" (Persico 2008). But the accompanying photograph told a different story. Occupying almost the entire front page, the larger than usual photo-graph depicted Gaza under attack at a distance, framed by the caption, "Fire and Ruin and Shock and Destruction" — i.e. the language of wartime trium-phalism. A discrepancy is at play between the image and the classificatory nar-rative by which it is framed. Although the photograph's subject matter is Gaza — inhabiting the "landscape-at-a-distance" genre — the headline refers to the half million residents of southern Israel whose plight is rendered metonymic of the nation state as a whole. Some Israeli critics explained the disparity as the by-product of a search for dramatic imagery in an effort to sell papers (Persico 2008). But, perhaps more crucially, what this disparity makes evident is precisely the presence of Israeli-inflicted violence against Gaza within the mainstream media's visual field, albeit mitigated by distance and a headline that attempts to obfuscate its meaning as such. Indeed, given that the image of Gaza occupies nearly the entire front page, the scene of violence is not merely made visible, but also dramatized. Nor was this instance unique. The televised scenes of Palestinian devastation from international media sources, which were screened regularly on the Israeli television news, represented yet another instance of this constrained visibility — but visibility nonetheless. As I have noted, television commentators endeavored to read the footage for their viewers, casting it as self-evident images of anti-Israeli bias. But in so doing, this footage became an alternative record within the Israeli visual field. Note that, in this case, the accuracy of the images was not at issue (i.e. no charges

of digital tampering were leveled). Rather, what was at issue for commentators was the classificatory logic by which they should be understood — that is, the story to which the footage testified.

Indeed, it was precisely the issue of testimonial that marked the outer limits of Israeli media coverage of this period. For the invisibility of Gazan Palestinians within the traditional Israeli media of this period was matched, and arguably surpassed, by their inaudibility. To say this differently, the Palestinian population under siege was not permitted to *testify* to the violence to which they were subject during the incursion; not permitted to bear witness to their own victimhood. Their voices of dissent and eyewitness accounts were simply missing from both pro-statist accounts and even, remarkably, from many left critiques. Notably, this issue received little attention within left critiques — overshadowed, perhaps, by concern for what could or could not be seen. Little attention was paid to the question of who could or could not testify to the horrors of this moment; to the question of which testimonials were intelligible, and which unintelligible, within the terms of the dominant national protocol.[17] For most Israelis, these missing voices were not difficult to justify — they were simply not credible witnesses. How could a population so committed to Israel's destruction, the argument implicitly went, faithfully portray the scene of violence?

In some sense, the lack of Palestinian voices could be explained by the terms of the press ban — the same argument used to explain the missing images of Palestinian devastation. Journalists could not reach them, and thus their voices could not be heard. Yet, tellingly, there is little evidence in the traditional Israeli media of attempts by journalists to solicit Palestinian eyewitnesses by phone or via digital technologies — which was done with far greater frequency, as I have noted, in the international media. In other words, the press ban seems to have tempered journalists' investment in spanning this physical distance by other means, a fact that most Israeli critics did not stop to ponder. Given that logistical constraints were not an adequate explanation for these missing voices, the answer lies in a more ideological term, just as it did with the visual field. I would propose that within the mainstream media, the testimonials of Gaza's Palestinian population were marked as structurally impossible. In Agamben's (1998) terms, one might frame the issue this way: positioned as bare life ("zoe") rather than as political actors ("bios"), Gaza's Palestinian population lacked the human conditions necessary to make witnessing possible. This is not to suggest the categorical absence of Palestinian voices from the media of this moment, for indeed there were some, but to point to their highly anomalous and even treasonous status in the infrequent moments of their hearing. In most instances, they were both incredible witnesses and ontologically impossible ones.

And yet there were exceptions. The most dramatic was the instance with which this article began — namely, the case of Dr Abu al-Aish. How might one explain the phenomena of the footage ("all of Israel heard that frantic call")?

17. Elsewhere, I have described this protocol in terms of 'national intelligibility' (see Stein 2008).

What were the conditions of his anomalous testimonial? Considered in light of the invisibility imperative to which most of the Israeli media adhered during Cast Lead where Palestinians were concerned, the scene initially appears to constitute the counter-example — the exception to both incursion at a distance and the logic of the impossible witness. This is a case of real-time testimonial at the very locale of the violence — a testimonial widely consumed by Israeli publics, both during the event and in its subsequent reiterations on video-sharing platforms. Yet I will argue that the scene might be read otherwise — not as an exception to, but exemplification of, the dominant Israeli ethos of this moment, a fact which enabled its viral status on the Israeli Internet and widespread audibility among Israeli publics.

The Case of the "Good Doctor"

On 16 January 2009, the Israeli army shelled the Gaza house of Dr Abu al-Aish.[18] A Palestinian doctor with over 20 years of experience in Israeli hospitals, Dr Abu al-Aish had played a highly unusual role within the mainstream Israeli media landscape of this moment, for he had been frequently called upon to provide first-hand updates on the Gazan experience to Israeli television via his cellphone. In the midst of overwhelming Israeli support for the incursion, particularly in the early days of the ground operation, Abu al-Aish's Hebrew-language reports provided glimpses of Palestinian hardship and devastation that most Israeli news outlets chose to ignore.

It was with cognizance of the power of the media platform that Abu al-Aish called Israel's Channel 10 newsroom in the immediate aftermath of the shelling of his home. His call was intercepted by anchorman Shlomi Eldar and broadcast live on the 5 p.m. evening news.[19] The voice viewers heard was that of Abu al-Aish, who spoke — sometimes screaming, sometimes weeping — in both Hebrew and Arabic, his volume and cadence undulating with grief as he bore real-time witness to the aftermath of the bombing. Yet the image the public saw was that of Eldar sitting in the television studio, manifestly distraught as he heard the call, holding up his cellphone, from which the call was projected on speaker setting. One international newspaper captured the scene this way:

> "Oh God, oh my God, my daughters have been killed. They've killed my children … Could somebody please come to us?" Sitting at his news desk for one of Israel's

18. The bombing occurred during a period of heightened attacks on Palestinian civilians in the Gaza Strip, including, on 15 January, the shelling of several hospitals and a United Nations compound sheltering Palestinian families. Despite its relative invisibility within the Israeli mainstream media heretofore, the incursion had already claimed at least 1000 Palestinian lives, at least half of them civilians. Human Rights Watch put the number at 900; other media outlets, such as Democracy Now, cited figures of over 1000 (see 'Israel Pounds Gaza', 15 January 2009).

19. Within the left, Eldar is considered one of the serious reporters within the mainstream, traditional Israeli media context where coverage of the military occupation is concerned. His coverage of Cast Lead was praised in this regard (see HaCohen 2008).

main evening news broadcasts, Eldar held his phone up. For three minutes and 26 seconds, Aboul Aish's wailing was broadcast across the country. Eldar welled up. He put his head down. He looked at the camera. He looked at his phone. He made pleas for help for the family, but the doctor kept crying, his voice scratchy, like sand on paper, until Eldar took out his earpiece and walked off the set to try to arrange for help. The newscaster's bewildered face seemed to capture a bit of pause in a nation that has largely supported its military campaign and prefers not to question its course. (Fleishman & Sobelman 2009)

Israelis were captivated by this media incident — regardless, it seemed, of their political orientation or opinion about the ongoing incursion. Both the televised event itself and the story of the doctor's family were the subject of numerous articles in the Israeli print and online media, on television and radio programs.[20] Nor did coverage stop there. In the aftermath of the broadcast, Israeli television cameras were waiting for the doctor at the Israeli border with Gaza, where, in an event unprecedented during the course of the incursion, the army granted him transport to an Israeli hospital with his dead and wounded children. The cameras followed him, weeping, into the hospital, documenting his vigil at his injured daughter's bedside and his embrace by grieving Israeli colleagues. They televised his impassioned news conference on the hospital grounds, and the subsequent outburst of an angry "soldier's mother" (thus she identified herself), enraged that Palestinian suffering be granted airtime.[21] They covered the lengthy IDF inquiry that followed — an inquiry which culminated in a claim of IDF responsibility for the shelling, dispelling earlier army conjectures that Hamas gunmen might have been at fault (Harel 2009a). And they gave considerable airtime to the story of the anchorman Shlomi Eldar himself — himself (in)famous for his frank coverage of the Israeli military occupation — debating, and more often decrying, his loyalty to Israel in this time of perceived security crisis.[22] As one Israeli journalist noted: "the [television] station was flooded with critical feedback from viewers accusing the station of harming Israel's image abroad and the war effort" (Izikovich 2009).

How, given the Israeli media's nearly consensual refusal to entertain Palestinian suffering, did this story garner both widespread visibility and public displays of empathy within diverse Israeli contexts, this in the very midst of the incursion itself? In large measure, the answer lies in the singularity of the event in question. The Israeli media took refuge in the biography of a Palestin-

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20. On YouTube, as a measure of the footage's popularity, it was subtitled in several languages.

21. The mother in question also called into question the doctor's claim that he harbored no weapons. This incident was widely covered in the Israeli media, with many critical of her outburst (see D. Cohen 2009).

22. On 27 December 2008 — the first day of the Israeli assault — Eldar voiced criticism of the Israeli air strike on the police headquarters of Gaza City, which resulted in the death of 40 people, including several dozen police cadets at their graduation ceremony. He was later criticized in the Israeli mainstream media (*Ma'ariv*) for this dissident opinion: 'Shlomi Eldar of Channel 10 is currently the only one broadcasting who thinks differently [i.e. did not endorse the IDF's actions]. Eldar insists that the 155 [*sic*] persons killed in the bombings were entirely civil police, who direct traffic and write reports' (Keshev 2009a).

ian individual — more pointedly, in a highly selective version of his life story. Journalists focused on the doctor's years of service in Israeli hospitals and collaboration with Israeli colleagues; his dedication to the study of Hebrew; his pursuit of advanced education abroad; and his commitment to peacemaking with Israelis.[23] While these Israeli linkages were perpetually referenced in Israeli sources, the doctor's multiple affiliations with Palestinian communities and institutions tended to be downplayed or ignored. For Jewish Israelis critical of the incursion — a population small in number, as I have noted — the doctor's story was marshaled as an exemplar, an incident that typified Israel's indiscriminate assault on Palestinian civilians. Yet far greater numbers of Israelis embraced this story for precisely its *failure* to exemplify. In the context of an uncivilized and fundamentalist Gaza, or so popular Israeli discourse would construe it, the doctor was deemed a clear exception — not merely for his education and ties to Israel, but for his ability to forgive an otherwise humane army for its error (as indeed he did, at least publically) (Harel 2009a). Through the story of the exception, the biography of what some termed the "good doctor" who failed to typify the nation from which he came, larger political questions about Israeli-inflicted death and suffering in Gaza were effectively forestalled. It could also be argued that the incident, as a locus of Israeli empathy for Palestinian suffering, also appealed as a humanitarian alibi. It could be marshaled as evidence of Israeli care for Palestinian life in the face of fierce and frequent international accusations to the contrary.

Yet what of the incident's status as footage, as a scene of televised violence? Here, some context is needed. Azoulay (2008) has argued that the dominant Israeli visual field has long been saturated with photographs of Israeli-inflicted violence in its occupied territories, and, as such, Israeli viewers have grown desensitized to such images. She proposes that the sheer preponderance of such images has created neither empathy nor political understanding, but a population of viewers who now distrust not merely the photographs in question, but the visual field itself where issues of Palestinian suffering are concerned. The footage ruptures this logic. The voice rather than image of Abu al-Aish bypasses the desensitized Israeli eye by presenting evidence of violence in a sensorial register — namely, sound — that has not yet been saturated. In this sense, the clip had the potential to powerfully destabilize dominant Israeli modes of perception during the Gaza incursion by introducing evidence of Israeli violence into a media landscape from which it has been largely expunged.

Yet when one returns one's attention to the visual field, to the images which comprise this footage, another reading becomes evident — a reading which does more to account for Israeli fascination with this media event. What was chiefly visible to viewers on the evening news of 16 January 2009 was anchorman Shlomi Eldar in the television studio with his cellphone raised (see Figure 1). Although this image shared space on a split screen with a still photo-

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23. Abu al-Aish implicitly objected to this rendering by his insistence on identifying himself as a Palestinian from the Jabiliya refugee camp (as per the transcript from his press conference).

graph of Gaza City seen from an aerial distance, Eldar occupied the symbolic center of the visual field, looking alternately at the television lens and at his cellphone, sitting in obvious discomfort and distress. "I will not hang up on him", he told his viewers in Hebrew, in a declarative and somewhat defensive statement which breaks from common television scripts, as does the form and duration of the call itself. He tries to intervene in the disaster as it is unfolding, calling for ambulances, asking for the doctor's coordinates in the Gaza Strip and then, in the aftermath of the call, returning to his dressing room to plead with the IDF to grant the family safe passage to an Israeli hospital.

What does one make of these visuals, of this image of mediated testimonial in the broader context of both the prevailing visual field of this moment and the logic of the impossible witness? Didier Fassin's (2008) readings of the human rights industry are useful here, particularly his discussion of the increasing prominence of human rights workers in conflict contexts. He argues that this staffing shift has produced a corresponding change in the ways that conflict-related violence is conceptualized and treated. What is at work is a wholesale restructuring of political strife models — a rethinking which borrows the language, paradigms and subject positions of psychotherapy. Not only do "trauma" and the "trauma victim" come to the fore as the subjects within this new model, but the work of witnessing is also reallocated. The human rights worker is now endowed with the authority of the testifying subject, speaking

Figure 1 Anchorman Shlomi Eldar on the phone. The captions provided the translated text of the doctor's lament. The Hebrew caption above reads: "Live from Gaza".

in the first person about what she has witnessed. She is no longer a supplement within the scene of violence, but now a substitute.

A parallel structure of witnessing is at work in the televised scene of trauma on which I am focusing, albeit one with a different cast of characters. In turn, a set of related substitutions is at play, whereby emphasis on personal trauma replaces discussion of the broader terms of political conflict and the language of trauma replaces the language of political causation. It was claimed that "all of Israel heard that frantic call". Others argued that it was "the most difficult image of the war", the one for which the incursion would be most remembered within Israeli collective memory (Izikovich 2009).[24] The public story that attends such statements concerns the doctor and his plight, presuming that he was the center of public Israeli intrigue. Yet, following both Fassin (2008) and Azoulay (2008), another reading is possible — one which looks beyond the manifest scene of trauma towards the other stories this footage might tell. To what, precisely, were multitudes of Israeli viewers drawn when they saw this clip on the evening news? Perhaps, primarily, to images of Israeli distress, empathy and rescue efforts — images which, it should be stressed, occupied the visual although not the audial field. In this reading, Abu al-Aish's testimonial is not merely mediated within the studio context, it is also, to borrow Fassin's (2008) paradigm, rerouted. I am hypothesizing that Israelis were primarily drawn to the picture of Israeli humanity that Eldar conjured in the form of the humane witness in the midst of war. In the context of the Palestinian as both an incredible and also a structurally impossible witness, Eldar takes on the mantle of testimonial — not as supplement, but as substitute. As such, the scene rehearses in microcosm the larger substitution fantasy on which the Israeli state launched the incursion, and from whose vantage point the mainstream media reported it — that of the Israeli as its penultimate victim.[25]

Shooting, Crying, Seeing

This article has analysed the visual field produced by the traditional Israeli media during the 2008–2009 Gaza incursion, querying that which could and could not be seen within its terms. While most left-wing commentators attributed the con-

24. This incident, in the words of former Israeli parliamentarian Sarid (2009), had the power to 'brand itself on our consciousness and souls'.

25. Perhaps ironically, Abu al-Aish would subsequently enjoy hyper-audibility in the international context, becoming a coveted speaker about issues of peace and coexistence to worldwide crowds numbering in the thousands. Indeed, one could argue that he became the Palestinian witness par excellence — a fact again attributable, as in the Israeli instance, to his emphasis on biography rather than politics, and his history with Israeli institutions. As a measure of his global prominence and growing status as Palestine's most popular civilian representative, the doctor's story was referenced in Obama's famous 2011 Middle East speech, marshaled as an illustration of the ability of Israel and Palestine to overcome mutual enmity: 'We see it in the actions of a Palestinian who lost three daughters to Israeli shells in Gaza. "I have the right to feel angry", he said. "So many people were expecting me to hate. My answer to them is I shall not hate. Let us hope", he said, "for tomorrow" (US News 2011).

tours of this field to logistical constraints — chiefly, the media ban — I have argued that the terms of invisibility within the visual field are more productively understood as the by-product of sight and national ideology, an entanglement which renders certain subjects and histories unseeable even when they present within the photographic frame. Azoulay (2008) argues that the meaning of the image cannot be fixed, despite (in this case) attempts by hegemonic Israeli institutions and discourses to do so. As such, the image is always open to rereadings, ones with the potential to return seemingly unseeable subjects to see-ability. I have employed this reading strategy to rethink the left-wing account of what was missing from the Israeli media of this moment — the tangled Palestinian bodies and ruined Gazan homes. Contrary to Azoulay, whose rereadings tend to endow photographed Palestinian subjects with the authority they have been stripped of by classificatory logics, I have also used this reading method to rethink the Abu al-Aish episode, arguing that this scene of seemingly anomalous Palestinian testimony can be reread as an exculpating image of Israeli humanity — one that reiterates the central tenets of dominant Israeli discourses of this moment.

This episode of inverted empathy was not, it should be stressed, new within the Israeli context. Rather, it bears a strong family resemblance to an iconic Israeli wartime paradigm originating in the aftermath of the 1967 war, and recurring in the aftermath of Israel's 1982 Lebanon war — a paradigm so widely recognizable within the Israeli context as to have acquired a colloquial shorthand: "shooting and crying". The term describes the dilemma of the soul-searching Israeli soldier, the humane and moral fighter with a (in Israeli parlance) "beautiful soul", who reflects ambivalently on the horrors of the war in which he has participated. Perhaps most crucially, it is a paradigm in which the humane narrator is positioned as the locus of the listener's empathetic gaze. By means of a cleansing narration, the perpetrator becomes not merely the narrative's sympathetic protagonist, but also its victim — the victim of the injustices and horrors of war. This cleansing narration is the condition of possibility for the Israeli "purity of arms" mythology. As such, many internal Israeli critics argue, this seemingly benign structure of feeling is itself a pillar of the nation state's military project.[26] To the "shooting and crying" appellation, we might thus add an additional gerund: "seeing". This is to remind us that sight and visibility are practices and attribute with far-reaching political conse-

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26. There were other Israeli witnesses of this period whose accounts did not resonate sympathetically — indeed, they were met by charges of treason. Most (in)famous were those of Israeli soldiers who provided testimonials about what they witnessed, and participated in, during the Gaza incursion. This testimony, provided in a closed session, would be leaked to the press and then met by widespread media attention in Israel and internationally (see Harel 2009b). An IDF inquiry followed, finding that 'crucial components of their descriptions were based on hearsay' and thus no disciplinary action would be taken (Kershner 2009). Other former Israeli soldiers — chiefly, members of the Israeli non-governmental organization Breaking the Silence, founded in 2004 — chose to publicize testimonials about the atrocities in which they participated during the 2008—2009 incursion. Their accounts were met with widespread incredulity and vitriol, including charges that their statements were both false and treasonous (see Breaking the Silence 2009; Haaretz Service 2009).

quences. In times of heightened military conflict, they can be marshaled both to fortify the nation state and cleanse its collective consciousness, both on the battlefield and in the pages of the media.

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