



From the River to the Sea: The Genocide in Palestine is a RJ Issue

Rachel Utz, If/When/How Reproductive Justice Fellow

What's Happening in Palestine?

Israel has been relentlessly bombing and attacking Gaza in Occupied Palestine with airstrikes and bombardments since October 7th, 2023 under the guise of finding “terrorists”.

The history of Palestine and Israel is not as complicated as some wish to portray. Between 1918 and 1947, the Jewish population in Palestine increased from 6 percent to 33 percent.¹ Palestinians became alarmed and tensions rose, leading to “The Great Palestinian Revolt” from 1936 to 1939.² During this time, Zionist organizations continued to campaign for a homeland for Jews in Palestine and armed militias started to attack the Palestinian people.³ The Nakba took place in 1948, leading up to Israel’s creation.⁴ The Nakba, meaning catastrophe, describes the mass exodus of more than 750,000 Palestinians that were ethnically cleansed from their homes by Zionist militias.⁵ To sum the history up, Israel and their militia have remained in control of Palestine since, using horrible military tactics and holding countless Palestinians in “prisons”. The size of Palestine has shrunk dramatically, the size of Gaza, home to about 2.3 million Palestinians, is about the size of Detroit, Michigan.⁶

¹ Haddad, Mohammed and Chughtai, Alia, *Israel-Palestine conflict: A brief history in maps and charts*, Aljazeera (2023), <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/27/palestine-and-israel-brief-history-maps-and-charts>

² Haddad, Mohammed and Chughtai, Alia, *Israel-Palestine conflict: A brief history in maps and charts*, Aljazeera (2023), <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/27/palestine-and-israel-brief-history-maps-and-charts>

³ Haddad, Mohammed and Chughtai, Alia, *Israel-Palestine conflict: A brief history in maps and charts*, Aljazeera (2023), <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/27/palestine-and-israel-brief-history-maps-and-charts>

⁴ Haddad, Mohammed and Chughtai, Alia, *Israel-Palestine conflict: A brief history in maps and charts*, Aljazeera (2023), <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/27/palestine-and-israel-brief-history-maps-and-charts>

⁵ Haddad, Mohammed and Chughtai, Alia, *Israel-Palestine conflict: A brief history in maps and charts*, Aljazeera (2023), <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/27/palestine-and-israel-brief-history-maps-and-charts>

⁶ Haddad, Mohammed and Chughtai, Alia, *Israel-Palestine conflict: A brief history in maps and charts*, Aljazeera (2023), <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/27/palestine-and-israel-brief-history-maps-and-charts>



In response to Israel's occupation, a group called Hamas was founded in Gaza in 1987.⁷ Hamas stands for the Islamic Resistance Movement.⁸ On October 7th, Hamas launched an attack in Israel.⁹ Hamas killed hundreds and took hostages.¹⁰ Hamas spokesperson Khaled Qadomi told Al Jazeera that the group carried out its military operation in response to atrocities that Palestinians have faced over decades.¹¹ This attack is what Israel is using to try to justify the current Palestinian genocide. Israel has refused to ceasefire, despite the fact that Hamas has offered, many times, a return of the hostages.¹²

To date, nearly 30,000 Palestinians have been murdered and over 67,000 have been injured by Israel and its occupation forces, with millions being displaced.¹³ These numbers do not even include the hundreds or thousands still stuck under the rubble.

Why it is a Reproductive Justice Issue

The racist ideology behind Zionism contradicts reproductive justice at every level.¹⁴ Reproductive justice is based on a human rights framework which operates to uplift all relevant issues, meaning also those outside of the United States. A main

⁷ Al Jazeera Writers, *What is Hamas? A simple guide to the armed Palestinian group*, Aljazeera News (Oct 2023), <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/8/what-is-the-group-hamas-a-simple-guide-to-the-palestinian-group>

⁸ Al Jazeera Writers, *What is Hamas? A simple guide to the armed Palestinian group*, Aljazeera News (Oct 2023), <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/8/what-is-the-group-hamas-a-simple-guide-to-the-palestinian-group>

⁹ News Writers, *What happened in Israel? A breakdown of how Hamas attack unfolded*, Al Jazeera News (Oct. 7, 2023), <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/7/what-happened-in-israel-a-breakdown-of-how-the-hamas-attack-unfolded>

¹⁰ News Writers, *What happened in Israel? A breakdown of how Hamas attack unfolded*, Al Jazeera News (Oct. 7, 2023), <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/7/what-happened-in-israel-a-breakdown-of-how-the-hamas-attack-unfolded>

¹¹ Al Jazeera Writers, *What is Hamas? A simple guide to the armed Palestinian group*, Al Jazeera News (Oct 2023), <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/8/what-is-the-group-hamas-a-simple-guide-to-the-palestinian-group>

¹² Al Tahhan, Zena, *How Israel has repeatedly rejected Hamas truce offers*, Al Jazeera (Jan 2024), <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2024/1/22/how-israel-has-repeatedly-rejected-hamas-truce-offers>

¹³ OCHA, *Hostilities in the Gaza Strip and Israel | Flash Update #118*, United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (Feb 14, 2024), <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/hostilities-gaza-strip-and-israel-flash-update-118>

¹⁴ Syed, Rimsha, *We Won't Have True Reproductive Justice Until Palestine Is Free*, Truthout (Dec. 2023), <https://truthout.org/articles/we-wont-have-true-reproductive-justice-until-palestine-is-free/>



underlying cause to many RJ issues is white supremacy and colonialism, issues that are very closely associated with the Zionist movement. RJ was created to uplift all of the barriers that Black and Brown birthing people are faced with and it was created to center the most marginalized in our societies, because all oppressions impact our reproductive lives.¹⁵ The pillars of Reproductive Justice state that, (1) we have the right to have children; (2) we have the right to not have children; (3) we have the right to raise our children in healthy environments; and (4) we have the right to bodily autonomy.¹⁶ Each of these rights have been violated in Palestine.

Outside of many Palestinians being brutally murdered, the living conditions in Palestine have become absolutely unbearable. Israel is actively blocking food and other aid from entering the Gaza strip, effectively starving thousands, and this is a war crime.¹⁷ Israel officials have made it clear and public that they aim to deprive civilians of Gaza of food, water, and fuel.¹⁸

Because of the ongoing bombing and ground airstrikes from the Israel Defense Force (IDF), countless lives have been taken. Many of these innocent lives have been Palestinian children. Children (18 and under) make up almost half of the population in Gaza.¹⁹ Palestinian parents are forced to bury their children, witness their children have surgeries and amputations with no anesthesia. Children are sometimes given gauze to bite on to reduce the pain.²⁰ Those surgeries and wound dressings are only able to happen assuming they can find a functioning hospital that has not been bombed or doctors that have not been murdered. There are only 8 functioning hospitals left in Gaza

¹⁵ <https://www.law.berkeley.edu/php-programs/courses/fileDL.php?fID=4051>

¹⁶ <https://www.sistersong.net/reproductive-justice>

¹⁷ HRW, *Israel: Starvation Used as Weapon of War in Gaza*, Human Rights Watch (Dec. 2023), <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/12/18/israel-starvation-used-weapon-war-gaza>

¹⁸ HRW, *Israel: Starvation Used as Weapon of War in Gaza*, Human Rights Watch (Dec. 2023), <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/12/18/israel-starvation-used-weapon-war-gaza>

¹⁹ Mohammad, Linah; Ermyas, Tinbete; Chang, Ailsa, *Half of Gaza's population is under 18. Here's what that means for the conflict*, National Public Radio (2023), <https://www.npr.org/2023/10/18/1206897328/half-of-gazas-population-is-under-18-heres-what-that-means-for-the-conflict#:~:text=Of%20the%20more%20than%202,Israeli%20ground%20invasion%20are%20children>.

²⁰ Al-Mughrabi, Nidal, *In Gaza, hospital procedures without anaesthetics prompted screams, prayers*, Reuters (Nov 2023), <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/gaza-hospital-procedures-without-anaesthetics-prompted-screams-prayers-2023-11-10/>



out of the 36 that there used to be, as of December of 2023.²¹ Since that time, many more have been attacked and countless doctors and medical personnel killed.

Many menstruating Palestinians were taking menstruation-delaying pills because of the dire and unsanitary circumstances.²² There is an obvious lack of access to period and menstrual products, so many were left with using scraps of tent and other fabrics in place of sanitary pads.²³ Gaza journalist, Bisan Owda, spoke directly on this issue. She said period supplies are nearly impossible to find.²⁴ Many menstruating folks are forced to use strips of cloth that they can't wash due to the significant lack of water, they improvise and use *plastic bags*, and “if they're lucky enough”, they use cut up diapers.²⁵ In an interview with a hospital worker, Bisan uncovered that there are “numerous instances of fever directly linked to vaginal yeast infections, arising from inadequate hygiene and absence of feminine products”.²⁶ Because of the unfathomable amounts of stress, suffering and anxiety, many are now getting their periods multiple times a month.²⁷

When thinking of all the pregnant people in Gaza, it's important to think in depth about the lack of access to extremely important prenatal and postnatal care. In October, it was estimated that there were at least 50,000 pregnant people in Gaza.²⁸ Mothers in

²¹ Mahase, Elizabeth, *Gaza: Death toll rises to nearly 20 000 as attacks on hospitals and staff continue*, BMJ (Dec 20, 2023), <https://www.bmj.com/content/383/bmj.p2973#:~:text=Only%20eight%20of%2036%20hospitals,World%20Health%20Organization%20have%20reported>.

²² Alsaafin, Linah and Amer, Ruwaida, *No privacy, no water: Gaza women use period-delaying pills amid Israel war*, Aljazeera (Oct. 2023), <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/31/no-privacy-no-water-gaza-women-use-period-delaying-pills-amid-war>

²³ ActionAid, *Women in Gaza resort to using scraps of tent in place of period products and go weeks without showering amid dire humanitarian conditions*, Actionaid (Jan 2024), <https://actionaid.org/news/2024/women-gaza-resort-using-scraps-tent-place-period-products-and-go-weeks-without-showering>

²⁴ Cheung, Kylie, *Miscarriages in Gaza Have Increased 300% Under Israeli Bombing*, Jezebel (Jan 2024), <https://jezebel.com/miscarriages-in-gaza-have-increased-300-under-israeli-1851168680>

²⁵ Cheung, Kylie, *Miscarriages in Gaza Have Increased 300% Under Israeli Bombing*, Jezebel (Jan 2024), <https://jezebel.com/miscarriages-in-gaza-have-increased-300-under-israeli-1851168680>

²⁶ Cheung, Kylie, *Miscarriages in Gaza Have Increased 300% Under Israeli Bombing*, Jezebel (Jan 2024), <https://jezebel.com/miscarriages-in-gaza-have-increased-300-under-israeli-1851168680>

²⁷ Cheung, Kylie, *Miscarriages in Gaza Have Increased 300% Under Israeli Bombing*, Jezebel (Jan 2024), <https://jezebel.com/miscarriages-in-gaza-have-increased-300-under-israeli-1851168680>

²⁸ Cheung, Kylie, *Miscarriages in Gaza Have Increased 300% Under Israeli Bombing*, Jezebel (Jan 2024), <https://jezebel.com/miscarriages-in-gaza-have-increased-300-under-israeli-1851168680>



Palestine are miscarrying from stress, there is a shortage of blood to treat postpartum injuries and surgeons have performed C-sections with no anesthetic.²⁹ Health care workers report a 300% increase in the miscarriage rate among pregnant people in Gaza since Israel's attacks began.³⁰ Additionally, malnutrition and dehydration have exacerbated the risk of maternal deaths.³¹ "There is no doctor, midwife, or nurse to support women during labor.³² There is no pain medication, anesthesia, or hygiene material when women give birth," said Hiba Tibi, CARE's Acting Deputy Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa.³³ Very shortly after the IDF and Israel began their mass destruction, many global health groups raised alarms that there was nowhere safe for pregnant people to give birth.³⁴ This has only gotten worse.

In the first 100 days of the genocide, approximately 17,000 women gave birth.³⁵ Maternity, trauma, and emergency care services are highly limited and the deaths of at least 310 medical staff, hundreds of attacks on health facilities, and a lack of supplies are further exacerbating an already impossible situation.³⁶ At health centers, pregnant women are only admitted "when fully dilated and are dismissed within a few hours after giving birth, due to the overcrowded facilities and extremely limited resources."³⁷ One

²⁹ Syed, Rimsha, *We Won't Have True Reproductive Justice Until Palestine Is Free*, Truthout (Dec. 2023), <https://truthout.org/articles/we-wont-have-true-reproductive-justice-until-palestine-is-free/>

³⁰ Cheung, Kylie, *Miscarriages in Gaza Have Increased 300% Under Israeli Bombing*, Jezebel (Jan 2024), <https://jezebel.com/miscarriages-in-gaza-have-increased-300-under-israeli-1851168680>

³¹ Syed, Rimsha, *We Won't Have True Reproductive Justice Until Palestine Is Free*, Truthout (Dec. 2023), <https://truthout.org/articles/we-wont-have-true-reproductive-justice-until-palestine-is-free/>

³² CARE International, *100 days of darkness in Gaza: Urgent focus on maternal and reproductive health needed*, CARE (Jan 2024), <https://www.care-international.org/news/gaza-100-days-urgent-focus-maternal-and-reproductive-health-needed-4>

³³ CARE International, *100 days of darkness in Gaza: Urgent focus on maternal and reproductive health needed*, CARE (Jan 2024), <https://www.care-international.org/news/gaza-100-days-urgent-focus-maternal-and-reproductive-health-needed-4>

³⁴ Cheung, Kylie, *Miscarriages in Gaza Have Increased 300% Under Israeli Bombing*, Jezebel (Jan 2024), <https://jezebel.com/miscarriages-in-gaza-have-increased-300-under-israeli-1851168680>

³⁵ CARE International, *100 days of darkness in Gaza: Urgent focus on maternal and reproductive health needed*, CARE (Jan 2024), <https://www.care-international.org/news/gaza-100-days-urgent-focus-maternal-and-reproductive-health-needed-4>

³⁶ CARE International, *100 days of darkness in Gaza: Urgent focus on maternal and reproductive health needed*, CARE (Jan 2024), <https://www.care-international.org/news/gaza-100-days-urgent-focus-maternal-and-reproductive-health-needed-4>

³⁷ Cheung, Kylie, *Miscarriages in Gaza Have Increased 300% Under Israeli Bombing*, Jezebel (Jan 2024), <https://jezebel.com/miscarriages-in-gaza-have-increased-300-under-israeli-1851168680>



hospital, Al-Emirati field hospital in Rafah, was initially designed to receive 30-40 outpatient consultations from pregnant women on a daily basis and is now handling 300-400 cases *daily*.³⁸ The hospital has just one operating room and is designed to have two to three c-section deliveries per day, now delivering 20.³⁹

C-Sections, a surgery involving cutting through tender skin and muscle, are being performed without basic medical supplies or anesthesia.⁴⁰ And the many people forced to undergo emergency c-sections also face cesarean wound infections due to lack of clean medical tools for the procedure.⁴¹ An article in *Jezebel* outlines the story of a woman going into labor and was turned away from the hospital because the delivery rooms were full.⁴² She was forced to give birth to her son in a bathroom close to her tent and her son died while she was giving birth.⁴³ Many newborns are dying from “lack of sterile environment and specialized staff.”⁴⁴

This being a reproductive justice issue is not the only reason people should pay attention. These are human people, people experiencing such a significant loss that we can never fully grasp. Entire family lines have been completely wiped out. Not only is this a humanitarian crisis, our American tax dollars are funding this genocide. The United States has sent billions of dollars in weapons to kill Palestinian civilians.

Reproductive Justice rights have been completely stripped from Palestinians. Palestinian women and birthing people have no place to have children, they are forced to remain in an inherently dangerous environment, forced to raise their surviving children in an active genocide, and they are afforded no bodily autonomy and no

³⁸ Cheung, Kylie, *Miscarriages in Gaza Have Increased 300% Under Israeli Bombing*, Jezebel (Jan 2024), <https://jezebel.com/miscarriages-in-gaza-have-increased-300-under-israeli-1851168680>

³⁹ Cheung, Kylie, *Miscarriages in Gaza Have Increased 300% Under Israeli Bombing*, Jezebel (Jan 2024), <https://jezebel.com/miscarriages-in-gaza-have-increased-300-under-israeli-1851168680>

⁴⁰ Cheung, Kylie, *Miscarriages in Gaza Have Increased 300% Under Israeli Bombing*, Jezebel (Jan 2024), <https://jezebel.com/miscarriages-in-gaza-have-increased-300-under-israeli-1851168680>

⁴¹ Cheung, Kylie, *Miscarriages in Gaza Have Increased 300% Under Israeli Bombing*, Jezebel (Jan 2024), <https://jezebel.com/miscarriages-in-gaza-have-increased-300-under-israeli-1851168680>

⁴² Cheung, Kylie, *Miscarriages in Gaza Have Increased 300% Under Israeli Bombing*, Jezebel (Jan 2024), <https://jezebel.com/miscarriages-in-gaza-have-increased-300-under-israeli-1851168680>

⁴³ Cheung, Kylie, *Miscarriages in Gaza Have Increased 300% Under Israeli Bombing*, Jezebel (Jan 2024), <https://jezebel.com/miscarriages-in-gaza-have-increased-300-under-israeli-1851168680>

⁴⁴ Cheung, Kylie, *Miscarriages in Gaza Have Increased 300% Under Israeli Bombing*, Jezebel (Jan 2024), <https://jezebel.com/miscarriages-in-gaza-have-increased-300-under-israeli-1851168680>



privacy. Newborns are dying, hospitals are not available, diseases and infections have taken over. This is one of the most significant reproductive justice issues many of us will see in our lifetimes.

Most Recent Updates & What to do next

To make matters worse, many countries, including the United States, have pulled their funding from the UNRWA. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees, UNRWA, provides healthcare, relief, and other services to the people in Palestine.⁴⁵ This is the main supplier of food, water, and shelter during the war on Gaza and because of this loss of funding, they may be forced to suspend its work.⁴⁶

During Super Bowl Sunday, a date where many Americans were slated to be “distracted” by the big game, Israel and its IDF took the opportunity to unleash one of the most violent attacks to date in Rafah. Rafah was supposed to be the ‘safe zone’, the area in Gaza that innocent Palestinians were told to flee to.⁴⁷ Half of Gaza’s population is already crammed into Rafah.⁴⁸ During the brutal attack, one hundred and sixty four innocent people were killed and another 200 were wounded.⁴⁹ These are the types of things Zionists and Israel sympathizers will ask you to believe are justified. At the time these attacks were happening, Israel was airing an advertisement at the Super Bowl, painting themselves as the victims.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ <https://www.unrwa.org/>

⁴⁶ Cook, Lorne, *Chief of UN aid agency in Gaza calls EU funds ‘absolutely critical’ but the bloc wants an audit*, AP News (Feb. 2024), <https://apnews.com/article/eu-israel-palestinians-unrwa-investigation-b3edc7a480a91082f3ec32ff2a700d79>

⁴⁷ Parvaz, D. & Baba, Anas, *Rafah was supposed to offer refuge. Now, the city waits for a possible Israeli attack*, NPR (Feb 2024), <https://www.npr.org/2024/02/14/1231310479/rafah-cease-fire-gaza-israel-hamas-cairo>

⁴⁸ Berger, Loveluck, & Harb, *Panic mounts in Rafah over looming Israeli offensive after night strikes*, The Washington Post (Feb 2024), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2024/02/12/israel-rafah-strikes-panic-offensive/>

⁴⁹ Berger, Loveluck, & Harb, *Panic mounts in Rafah over looming Israeli offensive after night strikes*, The Washington Post (Feb 2024), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2024/02/12/israel-rafah-strikes-panic-offensive/>

⁵⁰ The New Arab Staff, *Israel super bowl commercial: Thousands complain to FCC about ‘pro-genocide ad covering up Gaza massacre’*, The New Arab (Feb 2024), <https://www.newarab.com/news/israel-superbowl-ad-pro-genocide-gaza-ad-reported-fcc>



Many people are *still* choosing to turn away, to ignore the death and the violence. Palestians on the ground are asking that we watch and that we educate and that we continue to post about this genocide. The least we can do is to talk about the significant losses so many have experienced, and to bring awareness. Staying silent is NOT an option. If you are interested in attending rallies in solidarity with Palestine, visit this website: <https://www.gazaispalestine.com/protest>.

Call your representatives and demand a ceasefire. Read and learn as much as you can about the ongoing genocide so you can advocate for a ceasefire and encourage others to demand, not only a ceasefire, but also demand an end to the occupation of Palestine. Here is a link for reaching out to your legislators: <https://ceasefiretoday.com/>.

Know that when a ceasefire finally happens, the fight is not over. Homes, places of worship, hospitals, and schools and universities will need to be rebuilt. Many will be searching under the debris and the rubble, looking for the bodies of loved ones. We must keep these in mind and never stop paying attention.

One more important thing to note is that the Black and Palestine liberation movements are closely intertwined. Many Black activists and icons have been speaking out about Palestinian liberation for decades. I encourage each reader to do their research and learn why all of our struggles are connected. There are some great books on this topic, including *Freedom is a Constant Struggle* by Angela Davis.

“If we say we abolish the prison-industrial complex, as we do, we should also say abolish apartheid, and end the occupation of Palestine!” - Angela Davis⁵¹

We will not stop until we see a free Palestine, from the river to the sea.

⁵¹ Black Women Radicals, *SOLIDARITY WITH PALESTINE - A RADICAL BLACK FEMINIST MANDATE: A READING LIST*, Black Women Radicals (2023), <https://www.blackwomenradicals.com/blog-feed/black-feminist-perspectives-on-palestine-a-reading-list>