



The informal roots of Gaza

URBAN MUTATIONS ON THE EDGE

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Roots of the Informal City

1. AIM OF THE STUDY

With this study we aim to investigate the network of an informal city in extreme external conflict. We will focus on the tunnel network underneath the Philadelphi Corridor in Gaza as a prime example. How does the informal city evolve underground? What new urban structures are formed? Can the subterrrestrial city exist within the cycle of destruction and regeneration? Through this investigation we hope to gain a better understanding of the different layers and scales of the city in constant collapse.

2. INTRODUCING THE SITUATION (placing tunnels into context)



[1] The Philadelphi Corridor

Is the name given to the 14km strip of land between Gaza and Egypt. It was established as a demilitarized bufferzone between the two countries in accord with the 1979 Israel-Egypt Peace Treaty. The corridor's main crossing-point is the small town Rafah. It straddles the two borders and is divided by a 18ft metal wall that was put in place by Israel during the Palestinian uprisings of the early 2000.

Today the Corridor is under strict surveillance by Israel. It imposed a blockade after Hamas' violent takeover in 2007. Their primary concern was the militarization of Gaza and the threat this would pose to Israel security. In accordance with CBS news 'Israel aim was to dry up Hamas's weapon industry by keeping out steel and fertilizers that can be turned into explosives'-2. Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs even announced that the 'Hamas terrorist organization utilized Rafah to arm its members through the entire Gaza strip'-9.

[2] Gaza in Collapse

Israel, under the pretence of limiting threats to its national security, restricted its exports to Gaza to only a few basic materials after the Hamas victory in 2007. Now out of the '9,000 commodities that were entering before 2006, only 20 were allowed in.' – 11. The 1.5 million Palestinians living in Gaza are entirely cutoff from any crucial supplies. For example, the livestock and materials needed to build barns and irrigation systems cannot be legally imported into Gaza-1. In May 2010 the United Nations Development even estimated that 75% of agricultural land is damaged-15 and Sari Bashi of the Israeli right group Gisha says that 'the blockade has wiped out over 100,000 jobs in Gaza by banning raw materials and stifling trade.'-2.



The effects are particularly great on the construction industry, as cement, bricks, steel reinforcement and any other building materials are banned by Israel to prevent Hamas military advancement. This had the effect that since December 2008, when Israel launched a 3 weeks assault on Gaza in response to rocket attacks, only 25% of the damages have been repaired.-1 A correspondent of CSB news observed that only three years after the blockade in 2010, Israel is shipping in the U.N. building materials needed to construct 151 apartments for Gaza's residents'-2. Chris Gunness a U.N. spokesman also criticized that they still have not been able started the regeneration of 2,500 homes that were destroyed during the war:—2.

[3] Border opening

The immense shortage of staple products and desperate need for supplies in Gaza was illustrated by the temporary boarder opening in January 2008. Over half the 1.5 million people of the Gaza Strip crossed into Egypt. They spend some US \$250 million in Egypt's North Sinai Governorate's capital of Arish alone-20. It was estimated that the food brought across from Egypt during the 11days would last Gazans about three months, fuel about two days and cement for two weeks-15.

Gaza's infrastructure and economy is in crippling condition, and since the blockade the people have been cut of from any possible way of reconstruction and independent income. 'Over 90% of the Gaza population are completely dependent on humanitarian assistance to survive' -1.



3. Moving the Informal City underground

1] The blockade has created a downward spiral that has forced Gaza literally into the ground. Gaza, in a desperate hope to bypass the blockade enforced by Israel, has created a complex web of smuggling tunnels directly underneath the Philadelphi corridor.

According to Michael Borgstede from Die Welt over 200 to 1000 tunnels have been dug in the past three years-19. The exponential boom in tunnel construction is easily explained as they provided the only gateway in and out of the beleagued territory-1.

Many people fall into the trade out of desperate need for money, as the tunnel provide the primary source of income for entire families-16. It is the tunnel network that keeps Gaza afloat economically-18. In the tunnel a construction worker can earn up to \$100 a day-19, that is a small fortune enough to feed an entire family. The business is profitable, cigarettes in Gaza will cost five times that of the ones in Egypt and live-stock can easily be up to ten times more expensive-17.

Even though Israel's Defence Force, the IDF is constantly seeking and destroying tunnels the network remains and grows steadily. As an anonymous source said to Die Welt 'Israel can bomb as many tunnels as they like. The system won't disappear as we are dependent on it to survive'-19.



4. The Network (Hierarchies, merchandise, profits)

[1] Movement of Goods. The tunnels provide Gaza with a huge variety of goods, and like any travelling salesmen, the smugglers vary their cargo to meet demand. In an interview with NRD a tunnel worker explained that his merchandise often 'include cigarettes, cooking oil, glass bottles, sugar, cement and occasionally even coca-cola'-22. The correspondent Paul Martin of The Times also discovered that since Israel cut off much of the trade to Gaza petrol has become one of the most profitable commodities being smuggled in-21.

However, it is not only such harmless goods that are taken across the tunnel network. The Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs argues that the area rapidly became the main pipeline for transporting weapons and ammunition into the Gaza Strip-9. The weapons come from a variety of sources including Egypt, Iraq, Sudan and the Salom area in Libya-21. According to figures from the Ministry an AK47 rifle from Egypt would bring around 2,000 Egyptian Liras and a bullet around 0.5 Egyptian Liras. From a Times article in June 2008 we know that the weapon itself will have cost less than \$200 from the desert Beduin community-17. The tunnel works will share the \$250 for each gun. The profit margin is great and consequently so is the rate of smuggling. However, according to the NRD documentary, it are very rarely civilians that operate the weapons tunnels, and Hamas controls them exclusively-22. This is in part to gain a percentage of the profit but also to keep an eye on who receives the weapons.



The question of who controls and benefits from the new system is as complex as the web of tunnels itself. There are many competitors, on both the Egyptian and Israeli side, all trying to take their cut. Peter Beaumont from the Observer described a shadowy network of relationships between a number of businessmen, including some Hamas officials-18.

It is important to understand the hierarchy and systems within the tunnels to gain an insight into 'where the money goes'. According to the Observer the big winner from the enterprise will always be the tunnel owner or "snake head"-18. This comes

at considerable cost, as the price of constructing a tunnel lies between \$90,000 and \$120,000 depending on its size-15. The tunnels are then dug by individual contractors, from the basement of homes close to the border. The owners of the house will always enter into a business arrangement with the tunnel builder. It can easily cost a further \$50,000 to buy the house and the tunnel entrance-7.

To bring across an item the Egyptians and Palestinians smugglers will work hand in hand. The Egyptians will leave the merchandise at the entrance of the tunnels and depart. The Palestinian will collect the product from the Egyptian side-8. Each item is further taxed by Hamas, who demand between 15-30% of the selling price, depending on the nature of the product-19. The operators also speak of corrupt Hamas security officials who accept considerable bribes to allow some of the more dubious goods to pass through-18. Yet it are not only Hamas officials that profit from the illegal operation, the Egyptians equally need to turn a blind eye and expect to be paid accordingly. 'I pay a police official \$2300 in a year. That is twice the amount of his years salary, I promise you he won't say anything'-19. Once each side has taken their cut the leftover profit is shared out between the Egyptian and Palestinian smugglers.

On the Egyptian side, bribes and an unwillingness to close off Gaza keep open the tunnels and smuggling routes. Analysts say that Israel knows this full well, but finds their existence convenient because they take pressure off the argument for reopening the Gaza crossings-18.

What impact do they have for the territory?

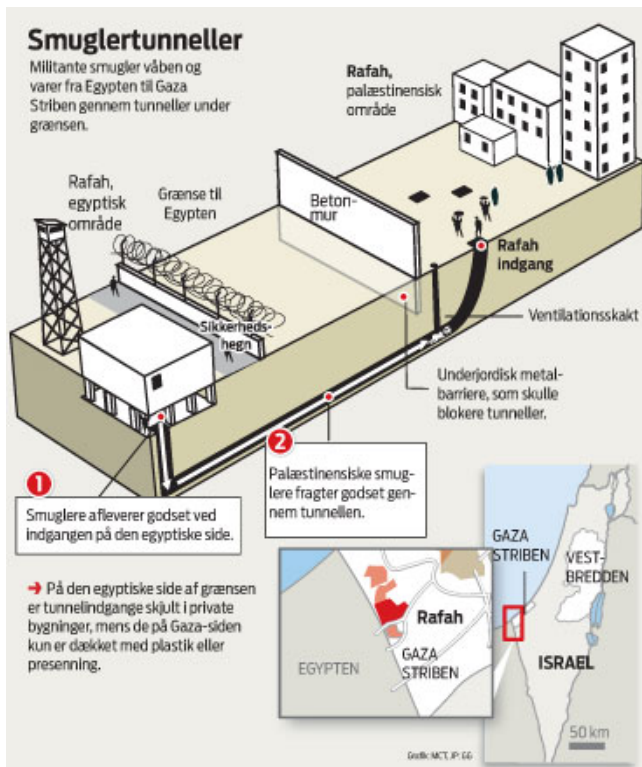
The tunnel systems is a lifeline to Gazans and a profitable business to both sides. It has become a mayor operation and has developed accordingly. Electric tools have replaced digging by hand. Telephone and electricity cables pass through the tunnels, many of which have air pumped in and winches to carry people and goods across. Vacuum cleaners remove loose soil-21. Most tunnels now have ventilation shafts every 200 meters and can be up to 20meters deep.

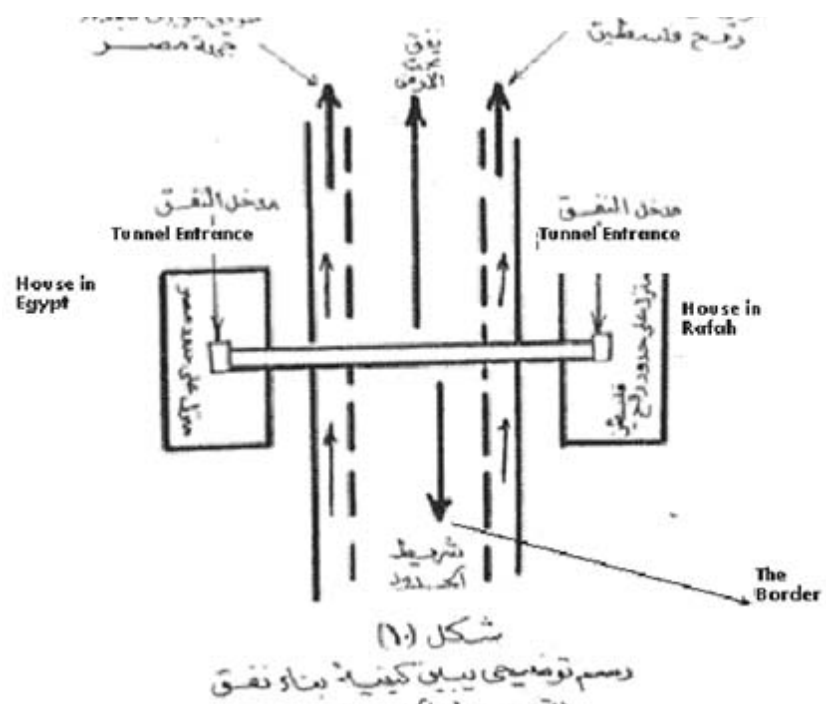
Smuggling via a network of underground tunnels beneath the eight-mile Egypt-Gaza border known as the „Philadelphi Route“ or „Philadelphi Corridor“ has become particularly widespread due to Israel total blockade of Gaza. Hamas's demand for weapons and the lack of viable economic alternatives to black market activity on both sides of the border. At the same time the demand for commercial items inside Gaza has skyrocketed due to the international aid boycott of the Palestinian authority that followed the formation of the Hamas-led government in 2006 and Israel's closure of the Gaza Strip following Hamas's 2007 Gaza takeover.

The landscape is not only signify or aestheticize power relations, but is the medium of a constituted power. This landscape is not just the site of war, but it's very tools.

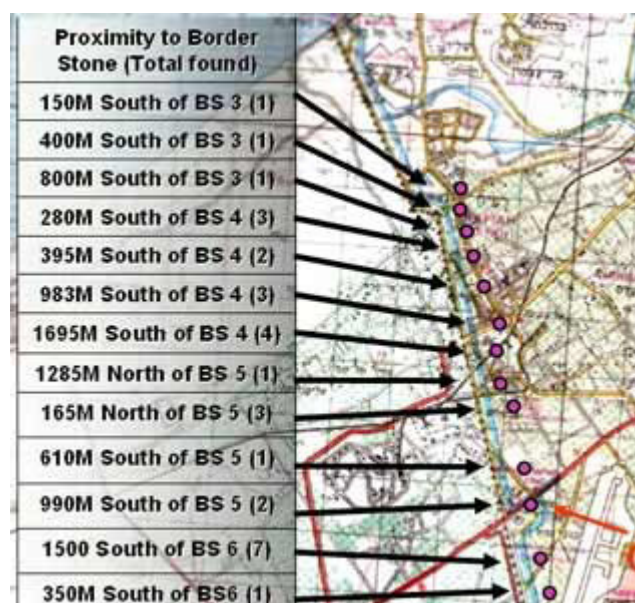
It's the relation between these two types of transformation - the mediatized punctuating event of spectacular violence - bombing, rocket fire, bulldozers and the more processual and slower events - building, paving, tunneling. These two types of violence are related and they interact.

The spatial conflict over Palestine has re-articulated a certain principle: to be governed the territory must be constantly redesigned. This goes beyond a search for a stable and permanent „governable“ colonial form, but rather points to the fact that it is through the constant transformation of space that this process of colonization has played out. Unpredictability and the appearance of anarchy are part of this violent logic of disorder. Violence is a kind of performance that does not take place within the fixed grids of space but actually reshapes it. The nature of the transformation of the built environments includes the complementary act of strategic form making: construction and destruction.





Chematique map of the smuggling



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