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Letter from Palestine: Rebranding Gaza-side

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The “Gaza Riviera” project, circulated through meetings and policy conversations associated with Donald Trump, Jared Kushner, and Tony Blair, represents a colonial program that seeks to finish, by finance and spectacle, what the Zionist military devastation began, namely, the eradication and uprooting of Palestinians from Gaza, so that this Palestinian territory can be repackaged as an investment frontier. The American and Israeli fantasy of artificial islands, tourist districts, and industrial zones announces the dispossession of Palestinians in the seductive, colonial language of leisure, turning ethnic cleansing into an architectural mood board and forced transfer into a development pitch. A leaked document reported by *The Guardian* described the “Great Trust” (Gaza Reconstitution, Economic Acceleration and Transformation Trust), which proposed relocating Palestinians outside the enclave, through digital compensation tokens and temporary housing, thereby transforming coerced displacement into a technocratic narrative of modernization that treats an indigenous population as a removable obstacle to profit (Holmes, 2025). The BBC’s reporting that human rights experts have already condemned the trajectory as “ethnic cleansing” strips the plan of any moral cover: leisure architecture becomes a propaganda skin for displacement, selling a project of removal as development (BBC, 2025). Trump’s AI generated “Dubai style Gaza” imagery performs the same laundering through spectacle, transforming genocide produced ruins into real estate fantasy, while Palestinian survival is erased from the visual grammar of the future (Al Jazeera, 2025a).

Interpreting the war of 2023 to 2025 as an exception conceals the continuity of the ongoing Nakba, because Gaza is being reorganized through a colonial logic that treats displacement as governance and uninhabitability as strategy. Reported figures indicate that more than 70,000 Palestinians have been killed since October 2023 and that more than 1.9 million, approximately 90% of Gaza’s population, have been displaced, often repeatedly, through an enforced mobility regime that fractures community life while producing administratively manageable bodies (Reuters, 2025). The destruction of nearly 92% of housing, alongside institutions that sustain collective life, indicates a policy trajectory that manufactures emptiness, since the built environment is being dismantled in ways that obstruct and erode the possibility of collective recovery (Médecins Sans Frontières, 2025). Calls for a “second Nakba” by Israeli politicians place expulsion in the register of intention, rather than accident, with elimination op-

only articulated as a desirable outcome (Middle East Monitor, 2023). Wolfe's (2006) formulation of settler colonialism as an eliminatory logic clarifies the structural stakes, because removal and replacement require not only force, but narratives that portray disappearance as rational, inevitable, and beneficial.

Tantura exposes leisure as an instrument of concealment and profit built upon atrocity: after Israel depopulated the Palestinian village of al-Tantura, its coastline was reconfigured into a beach leisure zone (Dor/Hof Dor and the adjacent Nahsholim resort landscape). Massacre is followed by engineered suppression of memory and the installation of recreational infrastructures that normalize the theft of land through pleasure. Ilan Pappé (2006) documents that during the twenty-second and twenty-third of May, 1948, Israeli soldiers massacred more than 200 Palestinians after they had surrendered, forced survivors to dig mass graves, and then proceeded with executions, producing a landscape anchored in unacknowledged burial. Forensic Architecture (2023) details how the site was later transformed into Nahsholim Kibbutz and the Dor Beach Resort, with leisure infrastructure placed atop unmarked graves, thereby materializing erasure through construction and everyday use. The institutional pressure directed at Theodor Katz after he documented the massacre, as discussed by Pappé (2006), demonstrates that historical truth is treated as a threat to the leisure façade, while Forensic Architecture's reconstructions corroborate testimony and expose concealment as an organizing method, rather than a by-product. Tantura, therefore, functions as a warning inscribed into the land, because it demonstrates how colonial regimes produce leisure spaces that depend upon silenced graves, and because it discloses the political purpose of turning massacre sites into leisure destinations.

Ayn Hawd's transformation into "Ein Hod" shows how Israeli cultural appropriation functions as a technology of settler-colonial domination: it aestheticizes dispossession, sanctifies theft as "heritage," and erases Palestinian identity, while enforcing the denial of return. Khalidi (1992) records that in April, 1948, Israeli naval and ground brigades expelled Ayn Hawd's inhabitants, many of whom resettled nearby in Ayn Hawd al Jadida, thereby remaining close enough to see what was taken, while being excluded from re-entering. Susan Slyomovics (1998) details how Marcel Janco appropriated the architecture by transforming houses into studios and the mosque into a bar and restaurant, a refunctioning that turns sacred space into consumption and transforms dispossession into lifestyle. Slyomovics argues that the erasure of Palestinian traces was not incidental, but an artistic project, which means that culture, here, operates as a technology of disappearance that rewrites a stolen village into a cosmopolitan scene. Patrick Wolfe's (2006) eliminatory logic explains why such projects are structurally coherent: replacement requires both material seizure and representational rewriting, with leisure and art providing the soft language through which colonial domination seeks legitimacy.

Akkur exposes the weaponization of environmental discourse in the service of erasure, because the rhetoric of ecological improvement becomes a method for hiding ruins, neutralizing memory, and naturalizing theft. Irus Braverman (2009) describes how pine forests planted by the Jewish National Fund covered

the ruins of depopulated villages, including terraces, foundations, and cemeteries, thereby concealing evidence of Palestinian life under a landscape marketed as environmental achievement. Nur Masalha's (2015) concept of "memoriciding landscapes" captures the political effect: the land is redesigned to sever the displaced from place, while producing leisure sites, such as trails and picnic areas, across prohibited ruins. Oliver Holmes (2025) reports that the Riviera proposal includes eco-tourism zones and luxury villas marketed as sustainable development, which reveals how "green" language now accompanies the transformation of destruction into investment, extending the same colonial technique from forests to luxury redevelopment.

The present destruction of Gaza supplies the precondition for the Riviera discourse, because the project depends on a population reduced to forced mobility and a territory represented as a blank slate for capital. Reuters (2025) and HRW (2024) report killing and displacement at immense scale, with more than 90% of residents forced from homes. Middle East Monitor (2023) attributes statements to Israeli officials that frame a "second Nakba" as an objective, which places demographic expulsion at the center of the political horizon rather than at its margins. Al Jazeera (2025a) shows how Trump's AI generated imagery attempts to transform this devastation into futurist seduction. BBC (2025) and HRW (2024) identify the trajectory as ethnic cleansing and forced transfer.

Blair and Kushner exemplify the global elite mediation through which eradication is translated into governance frameworks and investor presentations, as colonial violence is laundered through the language of administration, development, and business opportunity. Holmes (2025) links the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change to components of the proposal, including governance designs and industrial zone plans that exclude Palestinian self-determination, demonstrating how technocratic governance becomes a weapon against sovereignty. Achille Mbembe's (2003) necropolitics clarifies the structure, because death zones are managed as sites of accumulation and populations become variables to be removed, so that profit can be announced as peace.

Condemnation of the Riviera plan has exposed it as a colonial project of moral laundering, rather than reconstruction; major media, human rights organizations, and regional actors have described the scheme as a plan for permanent expulsion, packaged as redevelopment. *The Guardian* framed the project as an attempt to cover ethnic cleansing with hotels and beaches, while the BBC reported denunciations by diplomats and aid workers, who read the plan as permanent expulsion in the language of reconstruction (Holmes, 2025; BBC, 2025). HRW (2024) warned that forced transfer constitutes a grave crime, which places the plan in the register of prosecutable violence, rather than in the register of visionary planning. Carnegie analysts argued that the proposal misunderstands the region by mistaking elite bargains for public consent, thereby exposing its dependence on authoritarian deals, rather than legitimate political settlement (Carnegie Endowment, 2025). Reuters (2025) reported that Egypt vowed to resist resettlement schemes, which further exposes the demographic ambition embedded within the leisure narrative. TRT Arabia (2023) captures

Palestinian critique that reads the Riviera fantasy as an inversion of survival needs, because luxury developments are imagined in place of homes, hospitals, and schools, while the displaced are treated as obstacles, rather than as rights bearing subjects.

The “Gaza Riviera” project, therefore, belongs to a longer colonial archive in which massacre, expulsion, concealment, and commodification appear as interconnected techniques, rather than as isolated episodes, with Tantura, Ayn Hawd, and Akkur demonstrating how leisure, culture, and ecology are mobilized to make erasure appear normal, even admirable. The project demands rejection, not only on moral grounds, but on analytic grounds, because it attempts to transform genocide into an investment narrative and forced transfer into a lifestyle promise, while treating Palestinian absence as the condition of profitability.

Biography

Bilal Hamamra has a PhD in Early Modern Drama from the University of Lancaster, UK and is currently an associate professor of English literature in the Department of English Language and Literature, An-Najah National University, Nablus, Palestine. His research interests are in Early Modern Drama, Shakespeare, Palestinian literature, women’s writings and gender and trauma studies.

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