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Captive Zoometric Operations in Gaza

Irus Braverman

[T]o live under biopolitics is to live in a situation in which we are all always already (potential) “animals” before the law—not just nonhuman animals according to zoological classification, but any group of living being that is so framed. Here, the distinction “human/animal”—as the history of slavery, colonialism, and imperialism well shows—is a discursive resource, not a zoological designation.

---Cary Wolfe, *Before the Law*, p. 10

In 2014, airstrikes aimed at Palestinian humans in Bisan City in northern Gaza hit the Bisan Zoo, resulting in the death of eighty of its one hundred nonhuman animals (*Ynet* 2014). A *CNN* article described: “The carcasses of dead animals, mostly monkeys, lay scattered across the scorched grass between the pens” (Pleitgen 2014). “In one of the cages,” the article reports, “a dead peacock lays in front of two hungry lions. In another, a crocodile lounges in the hot sun; there is almost no water in the enclosure, which also holds a pelican and a duck.” The zoo’s caretakers described the few surviving animals as traumatized by the missiles and as underfed.

The international media characterized the destruction of the Bisan Zoo as emblematic of the violence inflicted upon innocent life in Gaza, both human and nonhuman. Multiple media outlets in the United States and Britain reported the story, with at least one (Pleitgen 2014) making this connection explicit: “The heartbreaking conditions at the Bisan City Zoo only serve to amplify the human tragedy of the situation in Gaza.” The Bisan Zoo story followed several highly publicized photos and stories of Gazan children killed by Israeli missiles. Images of animal carcasses amid destroyed buildings, cages, and other rubble echoed the images of children’s bodies in similar sites; photos and videos of surviving animals that depicted their trauma from the air strikes paralleled the narratives of mourning and despair by the relatives of the dead children.

Bisan Zoo is the newest of Gaza’s five zoos. Veterinarian Dr. Saud Shawa is the founder and former director of Gaza’s oldest zoo: the Gaza Zoo. In multiple interviews I held with him before, during, and after Israel’s 2014 incursion into Gaza, dubbed “Operation Protective Edge” by Israel, Shawa reflects on the Israeli and international media coverage of this event. The media has been more sensitive to animal rights than to the Palestinians’ human rights, Shawa states warily (interview 2014a). He tells me: “we are [perceived as] terrorists. Even the five hundred kids, [some] infants no older than eight months of age, have been killed in cold blood by soldiers of the Israeli Occupation Army.” “They are not innocent, they’re terrorist kids,” Shawa explains the biopolitical interplay between innocence and terrorism often performed by the Israeli media. He concludes: “No one in the world is asking why these kids have been killed. But when a lion or monkey are killed at the zoo, I get money and journalists and people [are] asking why they have been killed.”

While Shawa’s statement about the apathy of the Israeli media “and everyone in the world” toward the death of Gazan children is clearly exaggerated, it nonetheless lays bare the biopolitical assumption that children’s lives are least deserving of dehumanization. The dehumanization of the Gazan child is arguably worse when that child is valued as less than an animal—namely, when the dehumanization of the child is accompanied by the parallel move of humanizing the

bombed zoo animals. “We are the only people in this world who are living under such total occupation,” Shawa laments. Under the occupation, he continues, “Israel sees us as being equal to our animals, and sometimes they even value us [as] less than our animals” (interview 2011).

* * *

My article is a bricolage of stories that relay how Gaza’s spatial confinement generally, and the Israeli siege on Gaza of summer 2014 in particular, has lent itself to a radicalized discursive interplay between the animalization of humans and the humanization of animals who live in this place. These stories—mostly from zoos but also from other sites in Gaza—rely extensively on my personal interviews with Dr. Shawa as well as on my investigative analysis of local and international media reports and commentaries. Such accounts highlight the slippages between bestialized and humanized bodies, exacerbated by their shared conditions of extreme captivity.

I will refer to the explicit or tacit deployment of a valorizing biopolitical metric, which positions instances of death and suffering as more or less worthy of concern by drawing on cultural and racial resonances of the human-animal divide, as “zoometrics” (“zoo” here derived from the Greek *zoion* “animal,” as in “zoology”). Conventionally, the “human” position is occupied by *Homo sapiens* and the “animal” position is occupied by nonhuman species; this is common sense. However, discursive zoometrics illuminate the relative valorization *among* humans and *among* nonhuman animals (herein, animals), as well as the *infiltrations across* these two categories. Zoometrics, in other words, is a biopolitical ranking technology (Foucault 1990; 2003) that operates through demarcation within, and association or differentiation between, the human and the animal. These two categories may intersect so that nonhuman species occupy a discursively “human” position, and so that *Homo sapiens* perform a discursively “animal” position.

The term “zoometrics” is useful in two ways: first, it enables a more specific focus on animal-human relations than the broader term “biopolitics” (especially that many object to the application of biopolitics to nonhuman populations in the first place); second, within these animal-human relations, the term zoometrics invites a more careful and nuanced account of how differentiation and hierarchization along human-animal lines actually measure value in specific situations (hence the “metrics” element). Identifying the particular zoometric that is being invoked in each situation helps expose the *extent* of the biopolitical degradation or valorization in that specific situation, which may then enable us to detect the underlying moral justifications for what is presented as a natural or scientific categorization. While I employ the term “zoometrics” to refer to the particular technology that enables the sequencing of human-animal life, similar metrics can be developed that include cross-sections between and among other forms of life.

I would like to clarify at the outset that my deployment of the terms “animal” and “human,” and of the related terms “dehumanization” and “animalization,” recognizes their roots in a liberal discourse that presumes human superiority and exceptionalism as a ground for devaluation (Elder, Wolch, and Emel 1998: 199). I do not endorse these terms, or their essentialization as such, but instead explore the work that they do. Moreover, I recognize that the division of sentient beings into the bifurcated categories of animal and human is not solely a behavioral or biological division but also a place-based, context-specific construction that changes over time (ibid.: 192; Wolfe 2012).

My article draws mainly on examples from Gaza’s zoos to demonstrate how zoometrics work and what this concept can do that the broader “biopolitics” cannot. But the article is not confined to

zoos: it also explores the zoometrics at play with “warrior” dogs, the Rwandan genocide, the Jewish holocaust, and Gaza’s farm animals. And the potential for the term zoometrics is even broader, encompassing a variety of institutions (e.g., prisons, hospitals, homes), spatial arrangements (e.g., nature reserves, cities, bodies), and events (war, peace, the Anthropocene, the dinner table). Indeed, animal studies scholars have been unraveling how animals and their bodies serve as a site of struggle over the protection of national and racial identities. Focusing on racially marginalized groups in the United States, Claire Kim (2015: 4) notes, for example, that “[b]attles have been joined over horse-tripping and cockfighting by Mexican immigrants, dog-eating by Asian immigrants, whale hunting by Native peoples, dogfighting by urban black folks, and animal sacrifice by the Santeria, among other practices” (see Anderson 2000 for a focus on Sydney’s aborigines). While these texts examine how racial differences are constructed and perpetuated by casting human populations as savage or uncivilized based on their animal practices, they typically do not draw comparisons with similar practices in other contexts, something that the utilization of a generic term for such practices—“zoometrics”—can do. Never a static construct, the human-animal divide, and the zoometric interplays of power that accompany it, is dynamic and shifting: “Animal practices are a powerful basis for creating difference and hence racialization—they serve as defining moments in the social construction of the animal-human divide. While universally understood in literal terms, the divide is a shifting metaphorical line” (Elder, Wolch, and Emel 1998: 184).

My article examines how animality and the animal-human divide have been invoked and experienced in the specific context of Gaza, especially during the summer of 2014. The historical, political, cultural, religious, and secular discourses that shape the concepts “human” and “animal” in this context are of course important, as in any other context; but foreshadowing these specific conditions is Gazans’ exceptional state of captivity and subordination, which makes for yet more radicalized expressions of the animal-human relationship.

Before I proceed, an additional note on my methodology. In summer 2011, I conducted fieldwork in the Jerusalem Biblical Zoo and in the West Bank’s Qalqilya Zoo. I tried to also visit the Gaza Zoo, but at that point it was rather difficult to even obtain reliable contact information for Gazan residents, let alone to enter Gazan territory (being an Israeli citizen made this legally and practically impossible). Finally, through some connections I had with the French Consulate in Gaza, I was able to obtain a telephone number for Dr. Shawa. Between 2011 and 2014, I conducted over a dozen telephone and e-mail communications with Shawa, most of which occurred in the summer of 2014 and its aftermath. This article draws extensively on these communications to expand on available media representations of the 2014 events in Gaza.

Doubly Captive

In Gaza, captivity occurs on multiple geographic scales, species’ registers, and temporalities. Since 1967, Gaza has been subject to the Israeli occupation. After the electoral victory of the Hamas in 2006, Gazans have also been subject to a strict blockade, which has rendered them even more dependent on the Israeli occupiers for their basic life necessities, including food, water, medicine, gas, building supplies, and electricity. During this period, the Gazans’ freedom of movement has been severely curtailed, with exit and entry limited only to the most extreme humanitarian cases (*Gisha* 2014). “We are living in the biggest prison in the world,” Shawa repeatedly stated in our interviews, echoing the common local sentiment. Gaza’s comparison to a prison has been broadly endorsed by non-Gazans, too, including Britain’s Prime Minister David Cameron (*BBC* 2010) and Noam Chomsky (2012), who commented: “it hardly takes more than a

day in Gaza to appreciate what it must be like to try to survive in the world's largest open-air prison, where some 1.5 million people on a roughly 140-square-mile strip of land are subject to random terror and arbitrary punishment, with no purpose other than to humiliate and degrade." Staged to the sounds of Palestine's female hip-hop artist Shadia Mansour, a recent clip (*The Guardian* 2015) depicts life in Gaza through the eyes of Gazan youth who leap their way around the ruined city, inviting acclaimed British street artist Banksy and others to make Gaza their next tourist destination. "We have a lot of friends and neighbors around us, and they keep their eyes on us," states one of the rappers as the camera pauses on a Jewish site beyond the fences, while his friends somersault off of Banksy's kitten mural, Israeli bombs exploding in the background. "We have a lot of dreams. . . . [We] want to go out, we want to see the world," the rapper continues. One gets the impression that what is most overwhelming about Gazan life is the omnipresent and claustrophobic enclosure.

Israel's 2.5-month-long military incursion of summer 2014 produced an even more extreme state of captivity. In addition to their already severe movement restrictions in and out of the Gaza region, Gazan humans found themselves newly captive within their homes, unable to step out for fear of the airstrikes and tank missiles. In Shawa's words: "I sit in my home with my kids and wife for sixty days without going outside. We have no shelter; we have been bombed twice or three times. The bombs [are all] around us" (interview 2014a). At the start of the incursion, Omar Ghraieb (2014) blogged similarly: "I have been holed up inside the house for a week now. I miss the outside. Every morning when I hear the birds chirping and see the sun slowly filling the streets, I miss being out there. . . . I miss the streets and how I feel when I walk on them. I miss walking around. Life was never normal here, ever, by any means. But whatever 'normal' did mean before the current spate of Israeli attacks has changed now." A visiting Stanford physician and his colleagues have described Gaza as "something of a laboratory for observing an absence of dignity," a condition that has devastating effects on physical, mental, and social wellbeing. "The constant surveillance from the sky, collective punishment through blockade and isolation, the intrusion into homes and communications, and restrictions on those trying to travel, or marry, or work make it difficult to live a dignified life in Gaza," the physician and his colleagues wrote (Batniji 2009; quoted in Chomsky 2012).

Martin Heidegger defines the basic condition of the animal vis-à-vis the human as simultaneously "captivated" and "captivating," pointing to both the deprived or poor condition of the animal in comparison to man (as the animal is captive in space and time) and the privileged position of its captivation (as the animal is immersed in its environment, its *umwelt*). Giorgio Agamben (2004: 52) explains that, for Heidegger, "The mode of being proper to the animal, which defines its relation with its disinhibitor, is captivity. . . . Insofar as it is essentially captivated and wholly absorbed in its own disinhibitor, the animal cannot truly act (*hendeln*) or comport itself in relationship to it: it can only behave (*sich benehmen*)." For Heidegger and Agamben, the term "captive" thus goes to the heart of what it means to be human, what it means to be animal. Seen in this light, it is not incidental that many Gazans perceive their extreme state of collective captivity as dehumanizing.

Captivity is a core element of zoometric operations in Gaza. Such captivity—the helplessness of living in a place where bombs can drop from the sky at any moment—mirrors and is mirrored by the state of Gaza's zoo animals, who have become captive targets in their cages, first unable to escape and then starved to death because their captors are prevented from providing for them.

Used in both human and nonhuman contexts, captivity is thus a highly effective zoometric tactic: a way to dehumanize and animalize both the captive human and the captive nonhuman.

Gaza Zoos and Normality

Since 2007, Gaza's illegal underground tunnels have served as the central means for circumventing Israel's tightening blockade. The tunnels have seen unusual passengers, not least of which are tigers and baboons. These and many other exotic animals have been smuggled into Gaza to populate the region's five zoos. On certain days, Gazan zoos resemble other zoos around the world. At the zoo—any zoo—human differentiation from, and similitude with, zoo animals is performed as a matter of course, both delineating and diffusing human-animal boundaries (Berger 1980; Miller 2013). Just like at the Bronx or Copenhagen zoos, exotic animal exhibits in Gaza, too, serve both to display human superiority and exceptionalism and as a platform for pastoral care (Braverman 2012).

But in Gaza, zoo animals perform an additional function: they do the extra totemic work of displaying Gazans' longed-for "normality" in light of the persistent "abnormality" of this place. In our interviews, Shawa explained that his main goal in creating a zoo was to give the children of Gaza a place where they could get away from the occupation and feel like normal children (for a similar account about the Qalqilya Zoo, see Braverman 2013). Their care for zoo animals thus aims to affirm Gazans' humanness in the face of Israeli attempts to dehumanize them. In one of our later conversations, I asked Shawa if he would still smuggle animals into Gaza even after witnessing the morbid effects of the airstrikes on the animals' material and psychological condition. He replied: "Yes. Because we are looking for living and dignity and freedom like any other people in the world" (interview 2014b). Underlying this narrative is Shawa's belief that it is the (human) right of Palestinians to hold animals captive. Animal captivity in Gaza thus serves to exhibit the perceived normal condition: that of non-captive humans displaying captive animals. In other words, both the establishment of zoos and the pastoral care of zoo animals are zoometric tactics used by Gazans to reassert their categorization as humans in the face of their continued oppression.

Despite such intentions, the contrary has in fact occurred: Israel's frequent military incursions and blockades in Gaza have very quickly resulted in that Gaza's zoo animals, too, bear a "doubly captive" status. Indeed, during Israel's attacks in 2009 and, even more so, in summer 2014, zookeepers were no longer able to provide for the animals' basic needs, resulting in their suffering and death. Such conditions of war illuminate the otherwise latent violence inherent in the extreme dependency of zoo animals upon their human caregivers, as well as that of Gaza's humans upon their Israeli occupiers.

In the wake of Israel's bombings, the boundaries between nonhuman and human captivity have become irrelevant, as all life—both human and nonhuman—has been rendered precarious. In terms of suffering, then, the inside and the outside of the zoo have collapsed into one another, making for a collective human-nonhuman captivity. The zoo's "normal" capacity to demarcate the distinctions between animals and humans—through positioning the one's captivity against the other's freedom—has shattered; the comparison between Gaza's human and animal captivity displays the insecurity of both under Israeli control. At the same time, the zoo also represents Gazans' desire for normality and, as such, is both a symbol and an embodiment of their resistance to the demoralizing properties of the occupation.

Gaza Zoo

Stories from Gaza's zoos offer insights into how human-animal representations under conditions of captivity feed into the zoometric regimes performed in this space. Situated twelve kilometers south of the Bisan Zoo, the plight of Gaza Zoo's animals during the large-scale Israeli assaults on Gaza in 2008 and 2009, referred to by Israel as "Operation Cast Lead," were widely reported in the international media. This zoo, the first in Gaza, was built in Gaza City in 2003. Starting out as a small enclosure with a few birds and sick animals, by 2005 the zoo had grown to hold over one thousand animals (Shawa interview 2011).

But Gaza Zoo's golden days were short lived. In December 2008, the zoo was seized and turned into an Israeli military base. For twenty-two days, the animals were cut off from food and water. Most of them starved to death (Braverman 2013). In 2014, the zoo exhibited approximately one hundred animals. Shawa (2011) tells me: "It was my dream to establish a zoo for the children of Palestine, to make a place for our children to get off the streets and the violence of the Israeli occupation. Now my dream has been broken and destroyed." In addition to enabling the continuing performance of normality between the human (as the being that captivates) and the animal (as that being captivated), here Shawa highlights the use of the animal as a technology for captivating the human child. This use exposes the intermediary zoometric status of the Palestinian child, and of children more generally, as a semi-human, semi-animal entity.

Sabrina, a lioness, is the pride of the Gaza Zoo and a symbol of perseverance for Gaza's people. In 2005, the Gaza Zoo purchased Sabrina and another lion, Sakher, from a circus in Cairo. Then three-month-old cubs, Sabrina and Sakher were smuggled across the Egyptian-Gazan border in the underground tunnels to circumvent the official Israeli closure of Gaza. Shawa hand-reared the cubs. In 2008, Israeli bombings tore a hole through the main fence of the lions' enclosure. They managed to slip through it and ate a few other escaped animals before seeking shelter in the zoo's administration building. Shortly after they were rescued from the rubble and re-caged (see Figure 1), Sabrina gave birth. The zoo's director at the time was quoted saying: "The Israelis can come and they can shoot us and send their missiles to kill us and they make us bleed. But some of us will survive, and we will be ready for them with our claws" (Frenkel 2009). The use of the plural tense "us" when referring to the lion's blood and claws demonstrates the identification of Gazan humans with Gaza's nonhumans. Only this time, the zoometric move of animalizing humans is an act of valorization and even romanticization: the lions have become a source of pride as well as a totemic displacement of Palestinians (Freud 1989).

Figure 1. Sabrina and Sakher immediately after the war, February 9, 2009. Courtesy of Dr. Saud Shawa.

Sabrina's story is not only the story of Gaza's captive animals, but also the story of Gaza's captive human population and its turbulent becomings. "This is our life under Israeli occupation," Shawa told me. "Even the animals are being killed" (interview 2011). This quote highlights the perceived incivility of the Israelis, who do not even spare the lives of captive animals. To Gazans, Israel's treatment of animals is thus seen through a zoometric lens that valorizes certain animal lives (zoo animals) as a mechanism for devaluing certain humans (the Israeli occupiers).

The biographical lives of Gaza's zoo animals were not lost on Israel, either. In 2009, the Israeli military devised a rescue mission for these animals. The plan was for Israeli soldiers and scientists to rescue the animals from the devastating war conditions by transferring them into

Israel (Braverman 2013). “[We] had some ideas,” the Jerusalem Biblical Zoo’s veterinarian Dr. Avni-Magen told me (interview 2011). “We could go and anesthetize them—it was dangerous, [there were] lions, leopards—and [then] bring them to Israel The animals were so hungry and didn’t get food. . . . [O]ur soldier[s saw them in] such terrible condition . . . and [said] ‘We have to help them.’ But it was too dangerous to start.” “I don’t know what happened to the animals,” Avni-Magen concluded, “Nobody does” (ibid.). But while Israel planned for the rescue of Gaza’s zoo animals, no such rescue missions were planned for the human inhabitants of this place.

Khan Younis Zoo

Situated at the southern tip of the Gaza Strip, the Khan Younis Zoo made headlines in February 2015 when the international media declared it “the worst zoo in the world.” “Dozens of animals have wasted away from thirst or hunger at Khan Younis zoo,” one media report stated, quoting the zoo owner Mohammed Awaida’s claim that staff couldn’t get to the zoo “because of the Palestinian and Israeli conflict,” yet again highlighting the prominence of the occupation over the lives and the deaths of both humans and nonhumans in this place. “Monkeys, lions, tiger, porcupines and crocodiles were all left to rot away in their enclosures at the animal park,” the report noted (Resnick 2015).

This item likely would not have made it to the front-page news, but for the fact that Awaida decided to mount the animals who died, and has been displaying them side-by-side with the zoo’s living animals. “So when our animals die we insist on preserving them. Live and dead animals on display, side by side,” Awaida was recorded saying (ibid., video). “My taxidermy is amateur,” he continued, “but it will do. It’s all in the name of keeping Gaza alive.” Dead or alive, Awaida displays zoo animals to provide Gazan children respite from the occupation in the name of life—a normal child’s life, as imagined from his perspective. “When I am with the animals I forget the world out there and I become one with them,” he explained. “I get up at 5 a.m. and see the sunrise. I watch the birds waking up. I am in another world here, it’s so very beautiful” (ibid.).

But the beauty of Khan Younis Zoo’s living-dead displays was lost on many western readers. A dozen photos of stuffed monkeys, tigers, and baboons, exhibited alongside the live pelican, deer, and Australian tiger, invoked enraged responses by readers, and a petition was soon circulated that urged to help the animals. Facebook comments dubbed the zoo “monstrous” and “a zoo of horrors.” “It’s time to give up the zoo idea where you live, it’s not working out!” One commenter proclaimed. “[G]ive these animals a chance in nature’s [sic] habitat,” said another. A more detailed response stated: “the bastards stuff them and put them on display, stealing the last dignity these creatures have” (*Exposed* 2015). Another commenter went even further: “[M]ay god strike the people who left them to suffer and die this way. [H]ave no mercy in the least on their soul” (ibid.). Albeit in a more constrained manner, the western media, too, highlighted the animal welfare concerns pertaining to this zoo’s operations, stating: “With no government body in Gaza that oversees zoos, and no animal rights movement in the region, the Khan Younis facility is virtually unsupervised” (Resnick 2015). In April 2015, an international team of veterinarians was parachuted into Gaza to provide emergency veterinary care and food for the animals (Withnall 2015).

The discrepancy between the two narratives, the liberal animal rights/welfare narrative and that of Awaida and many other occupied Palestinians, is telling. While for Gazans, to operate a zoo signifies hope, steadfastness, and life, this signification is turned on its head in a liberal narrative

that sees only morbidity and death in this situation. According to this narrative, there is no justification for imposing unnecessary suffering on animals who deserve to be free in the wild, not captive in Gaza's war zone. Gaza's humans, it is implied, not only belong there but also deserve such treatment in light of their incivility toward animals. Although the zoo in Gaza is not the Bronx Zoo or the zoo in Copenhagen, the liberal narrative assumes a universal reach, imposing its standards on every zoo, no matter its cultural, political, temporal, and geographic context. From displays of animals, Gazan zoos have thus become displays of humans: exhibiting just how primitive, uncivilized, and inhumane Gaza's humans are through their treatment of animals. The western world's imperial gaze into Gazan zoos at the same time turns a blind eye to the panoptic gaze of Israel's occupation apparatus that oversees the entire Gazan territory.

Civilizing Dogs

Gaza's zoometrics are not limited to zoos, and neither are scenes of nonhuman captivity. In 2011, Shawa shared with me an anecdote about his brother's 4,000 citrus trees. "He tied his dog to one of the trees. Israeli bulldozer destroyed all 3,999 trees, but left this one tree with the dog tied to it untouched," Shawa recalled. "They are a very loving people, the Israelis," he continued wryly (interview 2011; Braverman 2013). This time, the zoometric move is the humanization of the animal: treating the dog as subject of worthy life. The explicit move of treating animal life as valuable, while at the same time implicitly devaluing human life through the destruction of their livelihood by uprooting thousands of fruit trees, serves to undermine the common assumption that humans are valued more than animals. This then prepares the ground for the dehumanization of such humans, while at the same time elevating the zoometric ranking of the human who has treated animals in such a civilized manner: the Israeli soldier is humanized.

Six weeks after Israel's summer 2014 attacks on Gaza ended, *Hadshot Arutz 2* (in English: Channel 2), one of Israel's top television channels, broadcasted a short clip entitled: "The Fighting in [Operation] Protective Edge through the Eyes of Israeli Dog Warriors" (Hamo 2014). In this item, the reporter traced the story of three dog members of IDF's "Sting Force," who were each trained by a human soldier to detect bombs and dead bodies. The clip opens with a statement-dedication: "To those who see the world only in black and white," which I will return to shortly. One of the three dogs, Solo, died during the attacks. The film's pivotal moment is when the reporter follows Amir, Solo's "trainer-friend," to IDF's "dog graveyard." Sitting by the grave, the camera fixed on Solo's muzzle as it rests on the tombstone, Amir quietly describes how Solo had died. In his words:

We understood that there might be terrorists in the basement, [so] we waited for the dog. We prepared him to go down, [and] I sent him down. When he passed the threshold, he activated a tripwire and then you could hear the bomb and a barrage. Behind the door were the terrorists who waited for us. . . . He died on the spot. I dragged him out with my hands. This really affected me; I miss him very much (ibid.; translated from Hebrew and transcribed by author).

The reporter then narrates: "Despite the difficulty and the sadness, Amir's words speak hope." Amir's voice follows: "I am happy Solo was there to save the soldiers; he did his duty. Now I have another dog, and we'll continue doing exactly what I was doing before." "I am still young and feel no remorse," Amir concludes (ibid.).

In a response entitled, "Forget about the Children of Gaza, Channel 2 Found the Real Victims of [Operation] Protective Edge," *Haaretz* journalist Ravit Hecht (2014) comments about the

patriotic and militaristic tone of Channel 2's clip. "In the face of . . . the true pain that was expressed at Solo's grave," Hecht writes,

I found it hard not to remember that in this Operation, in addition to Solo, 439 Palestinian children and one Israeli child died. It is hard for me not to wonder: maybe it would have been more faithful to the truth to consider how [Gazan] childrens' bodies were stored in food refrigerators. . . . Maybe we could have celebrated the 1.5 months since the end of the Operation from the perspective of the dead children? How does this Operation look like from the eyes of those children, who saw in color and not in black and white, but unlike the dogs, except Solo, did not get to live? (ibid.; translation from Hebrew by author).

"I don't want to be considered a speciesist," Hecht says. "There is no doubt that dogs deserve to live respectfully." "However," she concludes, "maybe this is proof that not just dogs see the world in black and white" (ibid.).

The perceived inability of both humans and nonhumans to see color—which, ironically, has been proven scientifically incorrect in the context of dogs (Olson 2013)—takes on particular significance in this context. Arguably, the misconceived inability of dogs to see the world in color is a way of further distinguishing dogs from humans, implicitly devaluing them and thereby legitimizing the project of sacrificing their lives (a sovereign "make die") for the lives of Israeli soldiers ("make live"). This sacrificial act offers yet another example of the inherent racism (Foucault 2003: 258) underlying this particular zoometric apparatus.

But while Israel sacrifices dogs, it also deeply grieves for them. As the television report shows, the soldiers treat their dogs as friends and as co-warriors, defending them in the battlefield and caring for them when they are injured. The double gesture of "killing and crying" (my pun on the Hebrew expression *yorim ve'bochim*, shooting and crying) thus serves in this context to demonstrate both the humanness and the humaneness of the IDF: their humanness because they can sacrifice animals and their humaneness because they can then mourn for them (but not for Palestinians). The move to both sacrifice and thereby humanize certain animals serves to establish the zoometric order of things, whereby Israelis are the most human, followed by dogs, and lastly Palestinians (compare this form of sacrifice to that of Tokyo Zoo's favorite animals toward the end of WWII, as depicted in Miller 2013; this particular zoometric also calls to mind Nazi Germany's progressive animal rights legislation that protected certain animals such as dogs and wolves more than certain humans such as Jews; finally and relatedly, one must mention in this context the story of the Warsaw Zoo, where Jews were saved from the Nazis during WWII by hiding them in the barren animal cages, see Ackerman 2007).

Another point to consider is Hecht's juxtaposition between (Israeli) dogs and (Gazan) children, which constructs the grievability of these two groups as mutually exclusive. You cannot have it both ways, she implies: either you mourn for humans, or you mourn for animals. This black or white narrative, which is in turn projected onto human and nonhuman others, raises the question: why not grieve for *both* animals *and* children? Instead, the zoometric project becomes that of hierarchy and differentiation between those whose lives are valued more and those whose lives are valued less. An online comment to Hecht's piece responds to her criticism along the same lines. "I'll explain this to you slowly, so you understand quickly," the commenter says to Hecht. "The dogs are us, the children are the enemies" (Hecht 2014). Here, again, the project of

humanizing the dog explicitly serves to dehumanize the human other, now configured as the enemy.

Significantly, the relationship between soldier and dog is construed in the various narratives—including that of Hecht, who declares herself as not being guilty of speciesism—as one of collaboration, not of coercion. These various narratives thus all assume that the dogs would only fight on the side of the righteous and technologically savvy Israeli soldiers. Neither Hecht nor the Channel 2 journalists stop to consider the ethics of training dogs to sacrifice their lives, especially when the dogs have no dog in this fight, so to speak. “What about the trained mice, why does no one report about them?” asks one online commenter cynically. “They also contributed to the war effort,” she says (*ibid.*). Although I could trace no evidence that the IDF uses mice for warfare, this last comment nonetheless attempts to highlight the perceived difference between lab mice and domestic dogs, and the assumption that the latter choose to live as companion (and warrior) species and are therefore not captive. Is this assumption also true with regard to “dog warriors,” or is their involvement in human wars yet another, perhaps more latent, form of captivity? Indeed, the final scene in Channel 2’s clip, which follows Amir as he picks up his new dog from his caged enclosure, invokes strong associations of incarceration.

What is the significance of biographing and mourning Solo, and how does this preclude biographing and mourning hundreds of dead Gazan children? In a column published in *Haaretz* in August 2014, Gideon Levy comments about the Israeli mourning of the one Jewish Israeli child who had just died (Daniel), contrasting it with Israel’s apathy toward the 478 dead Gazan children: “The radio yesterday already talked about ‘murder.’ The prime minister already called the killing ‘terror,’ while hundreds of Gaza’s children in their new graves are not victims of murder or terror. Israel had to kill them. And after all, who are Fadi and Ali and Islaam and Razek, Mahmoud, Ahmed and Hamoudi—in the face of our one and only Daniel?” “We must admit the truth,” Levy (2014) concludes. “Palestinian children are considered [by Israelis] like insects. This is a horrific statement, but there is no other way to describe the mood in Israel in the summer of 2014. When for six weeks hundreds of children are destroyed; their bodies buried in rubble, piling up in morgues, sometimes even in vegetable refrigeration rooms for lack of other space” (*ibid.*). Here, the leftist Israeli journalist identifies a double zoometric stance: first the humanization of the single Israeli child who has a name (an angel’s name at that) and a biography, and second the animalization, the insectization even, of the many anonymous Palestinian children (who Levy then chooses to name) “in the face of our one and only Daniel.”

Figure 2: Nazi propaganda poster reads: “Jews-Sucking Louse-Typhus” (in Polish) was posted on the streets in occupied Poland in 1942. Public domain.

Identifying Palestinian children with insects and piling their dead bodies in refrigerators designed for vegetables are powerful images that call up deep associations to Nazi propaganda, with its similar references to Jewish people as lower than vermin and as bacteria, lice, and typhoid (Perry and Schweitzer 2002: 2-3; Goldhagen 1996: 71; see also Figure 2). In “Vermin Beings,” Clapperton Chakanetsa Mavhunga (2011: 151, 153) depicts how pest control techniques were used against Zimbabwean freedom fighters, examining “not only metaphors of the colonized as pests but also the actual transformation of colonized people into pests. . . . [T]hat is, the [shift in] treatment of certain *people like animals* toward the treatment of *people as animals*.” According to Mavhunga, “When humans turn other humans into vermin beings, they prepare them for annihilation using weapons befitting ‘problem animals,’ reducing them into things” (*ibid.*, 154).

Mahvunga clarifies that he is not simply concerned with the indifference toward the pain and killing of others, but also “with inhumanity as also making and being transformed into instruments for dehumanizing others and deriving ecstasy from producing corpses, stench, and pain” (ibid.). Hugh Raffles (2007) similarly explores the Nazi’s zoometric process of making the Jewish people into lice, as he compares the Jewish Holocaust to the Rwandan genocide. I will quote him at length, as his insights are important to the points I make in this article:

“Ordinary” dehumanization of this type—“the Tutsi ‘cockroaches’ should know what will happen, they will disappear”—requires two associations: the identification of a targeted group with a particular type of nonhuman, and the association of the nonhuman in question with adequately negative traits, traits that are always specific to that time and place. The rhetorical boundary that separates humans and nonhumans is notoriously labile, though it is worth making the obvious point that humans—in the generic—always (almost always?) retain their position at the top of any species hierarchy. Equally obvious, generic humans are more theoretical than lived, and in everyday practice the humanist human tends to be simultaneously universal and not universal, differentiated by all those naturalized markers of race, gender, and class with which it is so impossible not to be familiar. In these terms, genocide is a state of exaggeration rather than a state of exception, a hyperbolization of the familiar story in which universalism is restricted through the naming and instrumentalizing of biologized difference (Raffles 2007: 525; see also Mamdani 2001: 13).

In March 2015, a right wing settler posted a video of a terrified Palestinian teenager as he was being hunted down by a trained dog, with the soldier-trainer encouraging the dog and mocking the teenager’s fear (*Haaretz* 2015; see Figure 3). Echoing human rights organization *B’Tselem*’s request that the Israeli military stop using dogs to control Palestinian demonstrations and conduct arrests (*B’Tselem* 2014), Israeli law professor Eyal Gross stated in an op-ed: “A society that does not act with compassion and dignity toward humans and is prepared to attack them with animals is a society that has lost its morals and its conscience. . . . Such behavior calls to mind dark regimes and other times” (Gross 2015; translated from Hebrew by author).

Figure 3: The soldiers, the teenager who was attacked, and the attack dogs in Beit Umar. Photo: Muhammad ‘Awwad, B’Tselem, December 23, 2014. Courtesy of B’Tselem.

The Sovereign and the Beast

A final anecdote serves to illustrate the interrelations between Gaza’s human and animal populations under extreme conditions of confinement. “Two or three years ago one of the keepers decided that since we have no zebras he will make one by painting a white donkey with stripes,” Shawa recounted (interview 2011; Braverman 2013). The episode was picked up by the international news, which reported that the zoo’s two zebras died of hunger during the war in Gaza. The popular animals were too expensive to replace, so the keepers decided to design a pair of donkeys with black and white patterns instead. A professional painter used French-manufactured hair coloring to make the donkeys look like zebras (*Associated Press* 2009).

In Israel, this event became a source of ridicule toward Gazans, who were portrayed as unable to tell a zebra from a donkey. Implied in this ridicule was Israel’s insistence that Gazans are so ignorant and primitive that they cannot live “normally” as humans, even if only in their relationship with zoo animals. Shawa told me in response: “Of course the people knew it was a

joke, and they loved it” (interview 2011). In this distortion of the traditional zoo exhibit, the Palestinians creatively protested their insular conditions, comically relaying their resistance to the Israeli occupation through making a domesticated donkey into an exotic zoo animal. “Because [the Israelis] are preventing us from importing a real zebra, we created our false zebra,” explained Shawa along these lines (see Figure 4).

Whereas colonial projects traditionally prescribe new means of manufacturing the experience of the real (Mitchell 1988: ix), here the colonized subjects have taken an active stance by creating their own version of the real. But making a zebra from a donkey also involves violence. In this attempt to “re-humanize” and civilize themselves, the Palestinians have thus recreated and reproduced their own colonial project.

Figure 4: A donkey-zebra, from Malkit Shoshan’s exhibit “ZOO or the Letter Z, just After Zionism.” Shoshan imagines “a white donkey . . . being transformed by a beautiful Palestinian boy into a zebra. This in order to fulfill the desire of the Gazans for normality, which in this case means possessing a zoo as a space for urban leisure” (Shoshan 2012). Courtesy of Malkit Shoshan.

In addition to captive human and zoo animals, Gaza’s captive geographies include another form of captivity: that of farm animals. Destined for a different kind of slaughter, these farm animals, central to the livelihood of Gazans, have not been spared in the most recent Israeli attacks on Gaza, either. Shawa owns a few private farms, on which he raises chicken and rabbits (Figure 5). Twenty days before our final interview, these farms were turned “upside down” in an “Israeli-made tsunami,” Shawa tells me (2014b; 2014c). He sees this destruction as a deliberate Israeli attack on “Palestinian infrastructure, agriculture, economy, home and houses.” “Hundreds of thousands of chicken, cattle [and] milking cows—[the source] of milk for our children—have all been killed by bombing and by airstrikes,” he laments (*ibid.*).

Figure 5. Dr. Shawa inspecting hens in his farm near Gaza City, March 15, 2014. Courtesy of Dr. Shawa.

Although they have suffered from the recent violence no less than the children and lions of Gaza, the hundreds of thousands of chickens, rabbits, and cows killed in Israel’s recent assaults on Gaza did not receive any headlines in the central news outlets. Such disregard of certain nonhuman life, while not unusual, demonstrates the biopolitical racism (Foucault 2003) that places differential values on manifestations of animal lives through their categorization as endangered, zoo, pest, lab, or farm animals (Braverman 2015). These zoometric hierarchies become particularly acute, and also particularly apparent, in times of war, when life is even more fraught and unstable than usual and when captivity can no longer be performed responsibly and caringly.

It is finally worthwhile to consider in this context statements that were sounded by certain Palestinians in the media during the 2014 attacks on Gaza: for example, that because of their brutality, the Israeli occupiers are themselves wild beasts (see, e.g., “Palestinians are not bloodthirsty beasts like their opponents,” comment in *Press TV* 2014). By contrast, from the Israeli perspective, Palestinians are killed (and should be killed) because they are animals (the term *hayot adam*, literally “animal-humans,” was used repeatedly in the Israeli press at the time) and their killing proves—this time from the perspective of the Palestinians—that the Israelis are beasts (worse than animals) and are therefore killable. These particular usages call to mind

Jacques Derrida's (2009: 17-18) discussion of the relationship between beast and sovereign. In his words: "sovereign and beast seem to have in common their being-outside-the law. . . . I believe that this troubling resemblance, this worrying superposition of these two beings-outside-the-law or 'without laws' or 'above the laws' that beast and sovereign both are, . . . explains and engenders a sort of hypnotic fascination . . . which makes us see, project, perceive, as in a X-ray, the face of the beast under the features of the sovereign." Derrida also writes about this coupling of beast and sovereign that "the beast becomes the sovereign who becomes the beast; there is the beast *and* the sovereign, but also the beast *is* the sovereign, the sovereign *is* the beast" (ibid.). The intimate relationship between beast and sovereign and its enhancement under conditions of captivity were recently highlighted by Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's announcement of a multi-year plan to surround Israel with fences in order to, in his words, "defend ourselves against wild beasts" (Ravid 2016). Netanyahu clarified that in that particular region, the Jewish people must protect themselves from infiltration by both Palestinians and citizens of surrounding Arab states (ibid.).

Epilogue

"Gaza's Zoo Animals Caught in Crossfire of Israel-Hamas Conflict," read *CNN*'s headlines on August 22, 2014, 46 days into "Operation Protective Edge" (Pleitgen 2014). By that point in the assault, more than 467 Gazan children had been killed. Some have suggested that they, like Gaza's zoo animals, were "caught in the crossfire;" others argued that the numbers are considerably lower because once they reach fifteen years of age, Palestinians are no longer children but adult terrorists (Connor 2014); and certain voices among Israel's right wing further referred to Palestinian children as "little snakes," implying that they may legitimately be killed at any age (Resnick 2014).

Israelis and Palestinians, children and terrorists, snakes and zoo animals—the above media accounts employ the central human and nonhuman players as well as the metrics explored in this article. While Gaza's zoo animals are portrayed by the Israeli right as biographical subjects and, as such, are rendered innocent and grievable, Gaza's children are seen as faceless, dangerous terrorists. They are snakes and, as such, are both despicable and killable. Indeed, Gaza's zoo animals, and other nonhuman animals who dwell and operate in this space, have often been cast as innocent bystanders caught in the humans' crossfire. In Gaza, certain animals cross the human-animal divide by having the additional capacity for grievable existence, while humans and most other animals are rendered killable. This inversion circles back to Cary Wolfe's quote in the epigraph, in which he asserts that animality is not a biological or a zoological construct but a political and discursive one.

The series of heterogeneous stories I have told here confirms Wolfe's assertion that in addition to their biological constructs, animality and humanity are also discursive and performative. There is more to learn from these stories, however. Human animals—Israelis and Palestinians, children and terrorists—as well as nonhuman animals—snakes, zoo animals, dogs, mice, lions, insects, zebras, donkeys, chicken, and beasts—perform detailed daily rituals of humanization, dehumanization, and animalization, making life and death *more* or *less* worthy through redefining the *degrees* of their relative humanity and animality. I have coined the term "zoometrics" to refer to such detailed calculations of biopolitical worthiness that occur within and along the animal-human divide.

The point that this article makes thus expands on Wolfe's position. Certainly, *Homo sapiens* are commonly "animalized" as an act of degradation, as Wolfe notes. What my study adds, however, is that under some conditions a reversal may occur: nonhumans can be "humanized" over and against *Homo sapiens*. Among the features of my story that show this are the conditions of captivity and the work of innocence in coordinating the various axes of zoometric operations. As terrorists, Palestinians are always under the shadow of collective guilt; they are latent "carriers" of terrorism, which trumps and "infests" the innocence of their children. In Gaza's state of war, what is and what is not human is therefore defined vis-à-vis the animal as part of the war efforts. More than anything, the siege over Gaza in summer 2014 exposed the precarious boundaries between human and animal and how these boundaries, and their questioning, fuel practices that reassign value to particular forms of life and death.

Furthermore, whereas Wolfe (2012) portrays the (bio)political positioning as one between animals and humans writ large, this article has exposed a more nuanced interplay between various humans (innocent and dangerous, children and adult, et cetera) as well as between a range of nonhumans (generally: companion animals, zoo animals, and then farm animals; specifically: dogs are more worthy than insects and trees, zebras are more worthy than donkeys, lions are more worthy than chickens, et cetera). A zoometric scale is thereby molded and invoked to compare the relative worth of living entities, its particular rankings in Gaza both temporally and spatially specific to this region and its situated relations of power.

According to this way of thinking, positioning Palestinians as relatively dehumanized vis-à-vis Israelis, and positioning Palestinian children as relatively dehumanized vis-à-vis Israeli children, are two different moves (children, both human and nonhuman, are typically considered more zoometrically worthy than adults and could even occupy their own intermediate category on the animal-human divide: closer to nature and thus more innocent, yet at the same time also more beastly and wild and thus dangerous). Simultaneously, the two moves are also distinct from the positioning of Palestinians as relatively inferior to animals, which in turn depends on the particular animal they are compared to. In the latter cases, the placement of certain humans relative to particular animals puts those humans in a much inferior position than when they are compared to other humans. That dogs are positioned *above* Palestinians is a more radical assertion of zoometric unworthiness than that Palestinians are positioned below Israelis. As a general rule, then, the further away these entities are from each other on the zoometric scale (in this context, children on top and insects at the bottom), the more devaluing their comparison. And it is precisely here that the most dangerous zoometric reversals occur, as history has taught us time and time again.

* * *

Figure 6: Dr. Shawa holding Sabrina's and Sakher's cubs, August 2014. Courtesy of Dr. Shawa.

A few days after Israel's 2014 military incursion into Gaza finally ended, I received an e-mail from Dr. Shawa (2014c). The title read: "Good News." That's odd, I thought to myself, recalling Shawa's depressed state when I spoke to him last several days earlier. The e-mail announced that Sabrina had given birth to two healthy cubs. An attached photo, showing the cubs with their proud human caregiver Dr. Shawa (Figure 6), illuminates how, in the midst of counting human deaths, animal births represent politics of hope and resistance in this place. Such new nonhuman life is celebrated as a return to the normality of captivity for Gaza's zoo animals and occupied

humans alike. Gaza zoos' lions met a different fate, however: one was transferred through Israel to a zoo in Jordan (Kais 2014); another, ironically named "Shalom" (peace) by Israeli officials, was carefully rescued to a zoo in the West Bank (*Y-net* 2016). Such journeys would have been close to impossible for Gaza's human animals.

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