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The American University in Cairo
School of Global Affairs and Public Policy

The Tunnel Operations under the Gaza-Egypt Border in Rafah

A Thesis Submitted to
The Center for Migration and Refugee Studies
Under the supervision of Dr. Ray Jureidini

in partial fulfillment of the requirement for
the degree of Master of Arts

by Brandy Castanon
BA, University of California, Santa Barbara 2006

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AMA	Agreement on Movement and Access
APRC	Agreed Principles for Rafah Crossing
COGAT	Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories
DCO	(Gaza) District Coordination Office
EUBAM	European Union Border Assistance Mission
OCHAoPT	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs occupied Palestinian Territory
RCP	Rafah Crossing Point
UNCCP	United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

TRANSLATIONS

<i>Tajr</i>	Merchant
<i>Wizarat al Harigeya</i>	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
<i>Tansik</i>	Coordination
<i>Ain</i>	Eye (Lookout)
<i>Ameya</i>	Local dialect/slang
<i>Hdeera</i>	Floor mat
<i>Salata</i>	Salad
<i>Zinco</i>	Aluminum

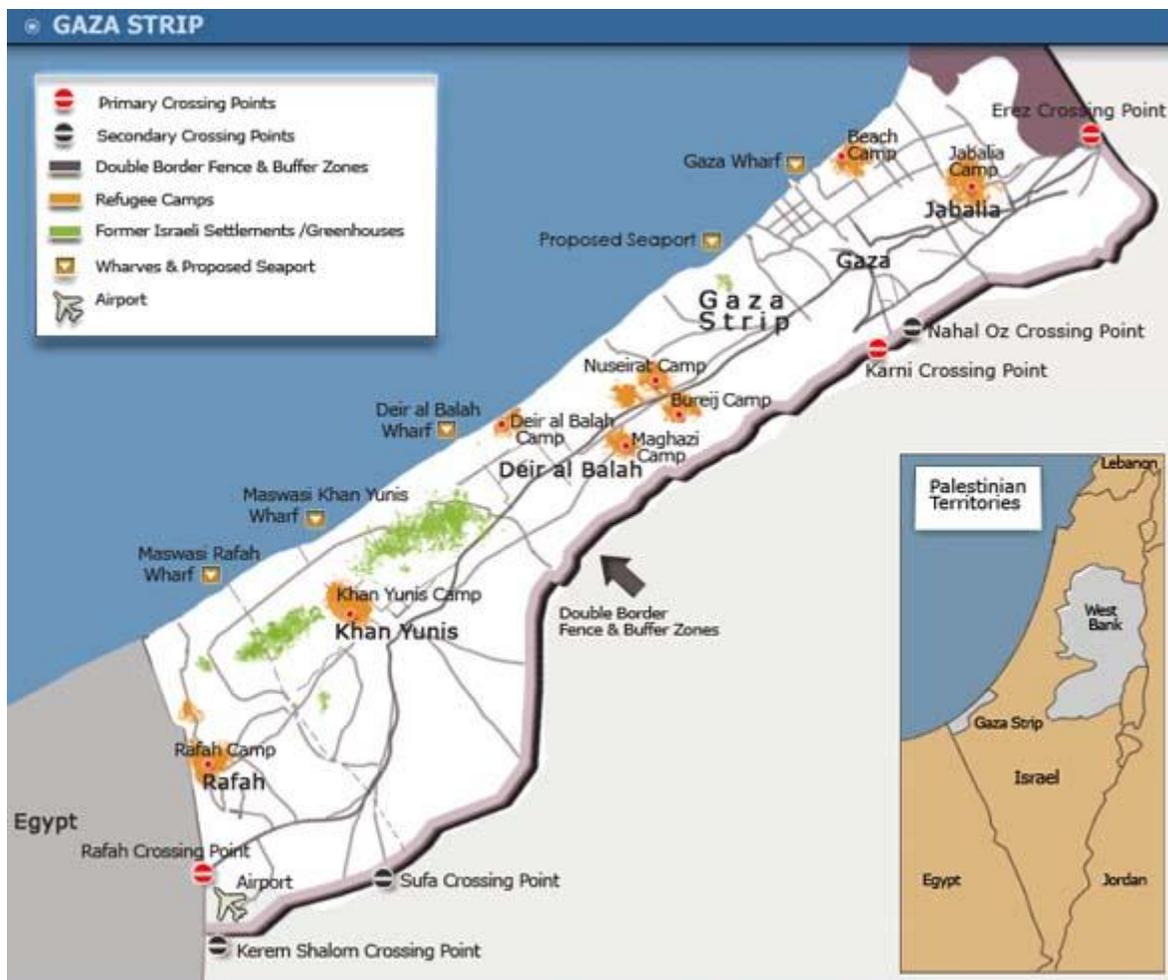
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MAP 1. THE GAZA STRIP BORDER CROSSING POINTS



Gaza E.R. 2007

ABSTRACT

The negative ramifications of the creation of nation-states resulting in the assignment of arbitrary borders, walls and international border crossings are most vivid, obvious and ridiculous in the city of Rafah. It is an ancient city with a rich history that was divided by the 1979 Israel-Egypt peace treaty separating Egypt and Palestine. This thesis is concerned with how Rafah operates as a divided border town and the illicit tunnels that are used between Gaza and Egypt. It focuses on Egyptian policies towards the tunnels, how they are implemented by Egyptian border officials and how people experience and are affected by these border policies. The discussion is of a border town-space which highlights the resilience of Palestinians and Egyptian Bedouin in the Northern Sinai-Gaza region, despite policies of internal colonialism, in terms of marginalization, siege, closure, social, political, economic inequality as well as the lack of accountability and transparency of Egyptian public policy in border relations. I assessed the informality of the international border in Rafah with a particular focus on the tunnel phenomenon. This thesis relies heavily upon a combination of oral history on personal opinions and experiences, news reports, documentaries and interviews. It is not known when the first tunnel was created, or its purpose; nor are there any firm estimates of how many tunnels have been started, completed, exist or function. On this, there are only educated guesses. This thesis attempts to unpack the tunnel industry and evaluate the lives of those Egyptians who support the Palestinians in Gaza via tunnel activity.

Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION: RAFAH, THE UNDERGROUND BORDER TOWN

A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. (Anzaldua, 1987, p. 3)

The Gaza Strip was geographically defined after the 1948 war, and its borders were outlined in the armistice agreement between Israel and Egypt in 1949 (Gisha, 2009). The line separating the city predated the actual separation. Between 1949 and 1982 the Gaza strip and the Sinai Peninsula were either under Egyptian rule or Israeli occupation and Rafah remained a united city. With the Israel-Egypt peace treaty of 1979 (IEPT), Rafah was finally divided as per the 1949 agreement. In 1982 Rafah was officially separated into Rafah, Egypt and Rafah, Palestine. The political, economic and social landscape of the Northern Sinai-Gaza Strip region has historically been tumultuous at best and remains constantly in flux. Tunnels have existed under the border since the late 80s early 90s. It is not known when the first tunnel was created, or its purpose nor are there any firm estimates of how many tunnels have been started, completed, exist or function. On this there are only educated guesses. The closure of overland crossings which led to alternative underground crossings in the liminal space, in-between Egypt and Palestine, is the basis of this study.

This was a study of the consequences of the three-year Israeli-Egyptian siege and closure of the Gaza Strip from June 2007 through August 2010. The evolution of the tunnel phenomenon is a consequence of continuous siege. This study uses the terms “tunnel boom” and “tunnel phenomenon” interchangeably to describe the rapid growth and transformation of tunnels as an alternative to prohibited overland trade, entry and exit (with the Gaza Strip) between 2007 and 2010 along the Egypt-Palestine border. The Israeli-Egyptian siege and closure of the Gaza Strip has been detrimental for the populations of Gaza. According to Amnesty International,

Israel's military blockade of Gaza has left more than 1.4 million Palestinian men, women and children trapped in the Gaza Strip, an area of land just 40 kilometers long and 9.5 kilometers wide.¹

The situation in Gaza has been made worse by the Egyptian government's general closure of the Rafah crossing.
(Amnesty International, 2010)

Some scholars, including Sara Roy (1995), one of the foremost researchers on Gaza, argue that the closure of the Gaza Strip did not happen as an isolated response to the events of June 2007 (Hamas taking power in Gaza) but rather the closure began incrementally in the mid-late 1990s. The consequences of siege and closure suffered by Palestinians in Gaza is a contextually relevant yet secondary focus of this thesis. Primarily, this study evaluated the lives of those Egyptians who support the Palestinians in Gaza via tunnel activity, with focus on those whose livelihoods were dependent upon the tunnels between Egypt and Gaza. .

¹ Amnesty continues, “Mass unemployment, extreme poverty and food price rises caused by shortages have left four in five Gazans dependent on humanitarian aid. As a form of collective punishment, Israel's continuing blockade of Gaza is a flagrant violation of international law. However, it is Israel, as the occupying power, that bears the foremost responsibility for ensuring the welfare of the inhabitants of Gaza.”

The tunnel boom and Egyptian Authorities responses to it have been an interesting byproduct of the formal Egyptian-Israeli siege and closure policy since 2007. This thesis examines the formal Egyptian position on tunnel-related activity alongside border closure and the informal individual behavior and actions of Egyptian officials in Rafah and surrounding areas. Egypt is under great international pressure to police the border with Palestine; it is argued here, however, that current policies and behaviors of border police have not in fact deterred underground activity. The ways and means of implementing border policy has, significantly, though not entirely, passively accepted tunnel activity via bribery and corruption. The illicit activities using the tunnels are understood primarily through the lens of those whose lives were most affected by the policing tactics, namely those whose livelihoods were dependent upon the tunnel businesses before August, 2010, the end date of my fieldwork.

The Egyptian Bedouin populations of the Northern Sinai, whose livelihoods were dependent upon the tunnels between 2007 and 2010, were the target population of this study. Their role in the informalization of the international border between Egypt and Palestine has been critical. Informalization is the phenomenon of the normalization of illicit trade and movement at the Egypt-Gaza border—expanded use of tunnels (that is, beyond gold, money or weapons smuggling)—that was treated with inconsistent ways and means of implementation, by border officials of the Egyptian government.

The argument presented here is that the Egyptian government has marginalized—excluded and ignored—the Egyptian Bedouin in basic provision of services and in the implementation of border closure and tunnel prohibition policies. Marginalization of Bedouin populations includes,

but is not limited to, lack of development opportunities and initiatives in the Northern Sinai, poor healthcare, poor education and no gainful legitimate employment opportunities in the region.

It will be argued that their marginalization resulting from policies that may be seen as “internal colonialism” is counterproductive. Internal colonialism is “the dominance of the metropolis over isolated communities inhabiting deformation of the indigenous economy, the relations of production based on exploitation and the plunder of land, and the prevalence of a subsistence economy accentuating poverty and technological backwardness” (Haque, 1999, p. 94).

Rafah is the epicenter of a very fascinating phenomenon in which average persons living near the Egyptian-Palestinian border became entrepreneurs. This study focuses on those border residents who took state sovereignty, trade regulation and international border crossing into their own hands.² The opportunism of these border populations was a product of various factors. For example these marginalized populations normalized underground border crossings to fill the demand for the movement of people and goods, for trade and to create jobs. The creation of numerous alternate crossings was a direct response to the formal siege-closure policy of the Gaza Strip since 2007 and the conflicting policies applied on opposite sides of the border.³ It can be expected that the local border residents (Egyptian Bedouin and Palestinian) will continue to use these methods of subverting the otherwise closed border so long as the movement of goods and persons is restricted. The opposite is true also; once international movement is allowed, border subversion will be unnecessary. For example, in August 2010 the tunnel business significantly declined because Israel slightly reinstated overland trade with Gaza; loosening the Israeli-

² The author acknowledges that this is not the only international border where persons living in the border town take such things as “state sovereignty, trade regulation and border crossing” into their own hands, for example there are drug-smuggling tunnels as well as informal groups such as the Minutemen regulating the international border between the U.S. and Mexico.

³ Egyptian prohibition vs. Palestinian regulation.

Egyptian siege of Gaza. This act was a direct response to a surge in international activism which strongly encouraged an end to the Siege of Gaza. The unfortunate incident on May 31, 2010, in which Israeli commandos boarded an international humanitarian aid ship, ended in numerous deaths and casualties of predominantly Turkish civilians.⁴ Clearly, the repercussions of siege have stretched beyond the shores of Israel, Palestine and Egypt.

Opposing border policies are a main component to tunnel growth. After 2007, tunnel related activity was decriminalized and regulated by the acting Hamas government on the Palestinian side of the border. On the Egyptian side, tunnel related activity had always been entirely taboo and punishable by law. The conflicting policies are the prime reason why the majority of the wealth of media coverage on the topic of tunnels in Rafah was reported from within Palestine. Most reports have been published about Palestinian tunnel workers and the issues related to what it means to work in the tunnels within Palestine. Needless to say, the issues related to tunnel work from the Palestinian side differ from the Egyptian side of the border.

The descriptions of tunnel-related activities cannot be universally applied to both sides of the border. For example, the business of tunnels in Rafah has been described as a “cross between a war-zone and a massive and unique industrial park” (Sherwood 2009). This is not true for Egyptian Rafah. The visibility of a “massive and unique industrial park” does not exist in Egypt. Tunnel entrances in Egypt are hidden, whereas most Palestinian entrances can be easily

⁴ The media frenzy surrounding the event manipulated public opinion. The initial estimate of casualties was 19, the final amount was 9. A Turkish news agency reported, “The incident on 31st of May verifies the warnings previously made by Israel. Consequently the flotilla was forcefully stopped, Israeli commandos stepped on board to the Turkish ship, a brawl broke out between the commandos and the crew and an unknown number of people died or got wounded. Israel’s such reckless use of force was unexpected. The numbers of deaths and casualties cannot be exactly known because of restrictions on the media” (Oguzlu, 2010)

identified by the white, tent-like buildings alongside piles of dirt. Conversely, the “war-zone” aspect of Rafah is evident on both sides of the border. The excessive number of police checkpoints in Egyptian Rafah has made the Egyptian town feel like an occupied war zone, comparable to Al-Khalil (Hebron) one of the more tumultuous Palestinian town-Israeli settlement in the West Bank.

The numerous police checkpoints in Egyptian Rafah attempt to prohibit tunnel-related activity. One of the many consequences of Egyptian prohibition of tunnel related activity is the difficulty for journalists and researchers to report on tunnel related information from within Egypt. The closed border has made it challenging for journalists and researchers to have access to the Gaza side of Rafah. Regardless, the siege of Gaza and the tunnel-smuggling have been hot topics in international media. The international community is fully aware of the Egyptian and Israeli closure and siege of the Gaza Strip...the world has known the tunnels exist.⁵ International media has acknowledged the resilience and growth of the tunnel phenomenon—despite Egyptian, Israeli and American efforts to quell and control it.

For example, on June 4, 2010 Aljazeera aired a news report in which, journalist Nicole Johnston crawled through the tunnel to show the exact point where Palestinian tunnel smugglers have managed to cut through the thick metal underground wall that Egypt had pounded into the sand to try and break the smuggling trade. According to Johnston, the wall “was an ongoing construction project, but it [appeared] to have failed” (Johnston 2010). Johnston’s footage showed the tunnels were still operating where smugglers had cut through the steel barrier in

⁵ One need only google “Palestinian Tunnels” to find a wealth of articles, youtube videos, documentaries and pictures of tunnel workers, elaborate pulley systems and various goods being traded—including cows, sheep and cars.

about 400 tunnels; in the particular tunnel shown, the man used a gas and oxygen torch and it took five people three days to cut through the barrier (Johnston 2010). Johnston's news report testified to the inadequacy of Egyptian closure policy and the resilience of the imprisoned Gazans. In other words, the continuity of the siege is counterproductive in that it creates the need for illegal and dangerous activities to meet the daily needs of Gazans.

International media have continually evaluated whether the siege was getting stronger or weaker; particularly following the Israeli attack of the Turkish civilian vessel in international waters on May 31, 2010. The hostile Israeli attack raised international awareness of the siege of Gaza. In addition to Israel reinstating some degree of trade with Gaza, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak responded to international criticism of the siege by issuing a presidential decree that ordered the indefinite opening of the Rafah border crossing. It is important to note the importance of this act, as Egypt neglected to open the border during Israeli operation "Cast Lead" in December 2008 to January 2009. According to Amnesty International, "Operation Cast Lead was a devastating military offensive carried out to stop Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups from firing indiscriminate rockets into Israel...more than 1,380 Palestinians were killed including more than 300 children and civilians, thousands were injured" (Amnesty, 2010). Nonetheless, this opening of the border is seen as a much needed relief for Gaza, like the opening of a pressure valve.

On June 1, 2010, the day Mubarak ordered the opening of the border (following the attack of the Turkish vessel) I was at the Rafah gate and stayed for 3 days. The border, however, was not open for general public traffic in both directions. A few media agencies and several ill-informed

border guards had basically misled the public. Weeks later it was made clear that Egypt had indefinitely opened its crossing with Gaza at Rafah (Zacharia 2010) but only for humanitarian cases and the entry of aid and relief supplies (KUNA 2010). Since the indeterminate border opening, there remains no formal policy of how the open border should be administered outside of humanitarian cases, aid and relief supplies.

The last formal policy of border administration in Rafah is the formal agreement between the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority, namely, the Agreement on Movement and Access of 2005 (AMA). This agreement followed the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza in 2005 to provide Israeli-friendly guidelines for Palestinian border administration. 2005 was the first year Palestine, not yet a state, would have had control over any of its international borders since 1967 (Gisha 2009).

The AMA outlined border administration at each international crossing to the Gaza Strip, including import-export and entry-exit protocol. Gaza is not a landlocked territory; it is only controlled as such.⁶ Gaza has access to the sea, and in the past there was also an airport as part of its infrastructure that has been destroyed by Israel over the years. Israel controls the Gaza Strip tightly from the outside, while preventing the residents of the Gaza Strip from traveling through Gaza's territorial waters and air space and almost completely barring the use of the land crossings with Israel (Gisha 2009). Incrementally since 2007, Israel has closed the other

⁶ This thesis does not engage in the debate over the legality of the siege and Israel's responsibilities as the occupying entity under the International law of Occupation. For more information regarding the illegality of the siege and closure policy being implemented upon the Gaza strip and Israel's responsibilities under the International law of Occupation visit www.gisha.org. Gisha is an Israeli not-for-profit organization, founded in 2005, whose goal is to protect the freedom of movement of Palestinians, especially Gaza residents. Gisha promotes rights guaranteed by international and Israeli law (Gisha 2010).

crossings from the Gaza Strip and turned the Rafah Crossing into the practically exclusive channel of traffic in and out of the Gaza Strip (Gisha 2009). In so doing Israel has placed great responsibility on the façade of Egyptian administration of the Rafah Border Crossing. Yet Egypt is not a party to the AMA or any other agreement outlining border administration and accountability; this fact has been extremely detrimental for all travelers at the Rafah Border Crossing. The lack of accountability has allowed for a policy of informality to become the norm in the Rafah border-crossing terminal. The uncertainty of passage for Palestinians, spouses of Palestinians, Humanitarian workers, all persons attempting to enter or exit Gaza is an infringement to Article 13 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights⁷ at the only international border crossing to an otherwise landlocked population.

The primary objective of this study was to investigate Egyptian authorities' implementation of policy responses to the evolution of the tunnel phenomenon since 2007⁸. The study at hand discusses border administration policies as a part of the context of siege and closure. Tunnel prohibition policy from the Egyptian side with mention of the policy environment on the Palestinian side of the Rafah border as experienced by those whose livelihoods were dependent upon the tunnel businesses was the focus of this study. My evaluation of this objective is through the lens of those whose livelihoods were dependent upon the tunnels in Rafah, from personal observation at the border, conversations with border guards, local residents and interviews with travelers in and around the Rafah terminal—those whose movement was somehow dependent upon Egyptian border administration policy.

⁷ 1) Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state.

2) Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country. (UDHR 1948).

⁸ I acknowledge that the tunnels have existed and been prohibited since the 1979 Israeli-Egyptian peace agreement. Regardless, the focus of this study is formal and informal policy since 2007.

The topic of this thesis is important because of the uniqueness of the closure of the Gaza Strip and the restrictions of freedom of movement being imposed by the occupying power, Israel, which are fully supported by the government of Egypt. This research, unlike other studies of the Israeli-Egyptian siege, highlights the means and motivations of an area under siege and the neighboring similarly marginalized community, how they have circumvented the restrictions of siege and the consequences of their actions. This thesis does not differentiate between Palestinian refugees and non-refugees, yet it is important to note 1.1 million people, or three-quarters of the entire population of the Gaza Strip, are Palestine refugees registered with United Nations Relief and Works Agency [UNRWA] (UNRWA 2010).

Chapter 2: THE TUNNELS THROUGH TIME, LITERATURE REVIEW

“Before 1967 this was all one land. Before 1981 Rafah was one city. It was Israel which separated Rafah to cut the ties between the two peoples. We need an open border. We are one people and one nation...So why divide Rafah again?”

-Abu Mujahid (Usher 2005).

This chapter is a review and analysis of the main factors that shaped the tunnel phenomenon. The exponential growth of the tunnel phenomenon did not happen in a vacuum. It is not the result of one isolated event. The most significant factors shaping the tunnels through time have been the Israel-Egypt Peace Treaty of 1979, The Agreement on Movement and Access of 2005, The Palestinian Elections, the Internal Divide, the External Siege and closure as well as the underlying socio-economic context for both the Bedouin populations of the Northern Sinai and the Palestinians in Gaza. This chapter is wrapped up with a review of the Tunnels as depicted in the media and finally supplemented with literature on the theory of “internal colonialism.”

2.1 The 1979 Israel-Egypt Peace divided Rafah

The existence of the tunnels dates back to the division of the city of Rafah under the terms of the 1979 Israel-Egypt Peace Treaty (Sharp 2008). The mass movement of household items, luxury goods and construction materials through the tunnels is a relatively new phenomenon, less than five years old—the tunnels are not. The literature suggests that “Palestinian families, divided by the partition of Rafah in 1982, appear to have been the first to construct underground tunnels linking Gaza and Egypt to foster communication amongst extended family members” (Sharp, 2008, p.6). The tunnel phenomenon was conceived to sustain normalcy amongst family members. Over the years the uses of the tunnels have evolved. Clearly the tunnels would not have been necessary had the people on both sides of the international barrier been able to foster communication via legal means.

The Israel-Egypt peace treaty of 1979 divided the city of Rafah leaving the majority of the population on the Israeli-Palestinian side of the border. In 1982, as Israel was in the midst of its phased withdrawal from the Sinai under the terms of the peace treaty with Egypt, former Israeli Prime Minister and then Defense Minister Ariel Sharon reportedly requested that Egypt make alterations to its international border to keep Rafah whole and under Israel’s control (Sharp 2008). Sharon alleged that, if divided between Egypt and Palestine, “Rafah could become a focal point for terrorist infiltration and arms smuggling, Egypt refused” (Sharp, 2008, p. 5), and Rafah was divided.

In addition to dividing the city in two, the Israel-Egypt Peace treaty also significantly characterized the political relations between the Egyptian National Military forces, the Egyptian State Police forces and the Sinai Bedouin populations. The Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty separated the Sinai into four regions and distinctly mandated the amount of artillery, manpower and military presence that [could] exist in the four areas. According to the Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty Zones A and B [could] have a meager degree of military presence; whereas only United Nations forces and Egyptian civil police [could] be stationed in Zone C; The Egyptian civil police armed with light weapons [would] perform normal police functions within this Zone (Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty [EIPT], 1979).⁹ According to Moussad Abu Fagr, the Egyptian government strategically employs contradicting policies¹⁰ in the Northern Sinai to supplement its justification for a heightened allowance of artillery and manpower in Zone C otherwise prohibited by the IEPT.

Rafah overlaps Zones C and D, the areas with the highest levels of military restriction. Ironically enough, the same Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty was rhetorically cited as a factor contributing to the illegality of the underground steel wall. In a brief statement to the court, Ibrahim Youssri—a former ambassador and lawyer calling for Egypt to stop its illegal construction of the steel wall along the Egypt-Gaza border—asked “How is the wall an act of sovereignty when Egypt is prohibited, because of the Egypt-Israeli Peace Treaty, from any military activity in Area C (in Sinai), deploying an Egyptian officer, or one military tank? How is it that Egypt is constructing an entire wall in this same area in violation of the same agreement?” (Howeidy, 2010). At the time of writing, the ruling on the legality of the steel wall was not yet public. Regardless,

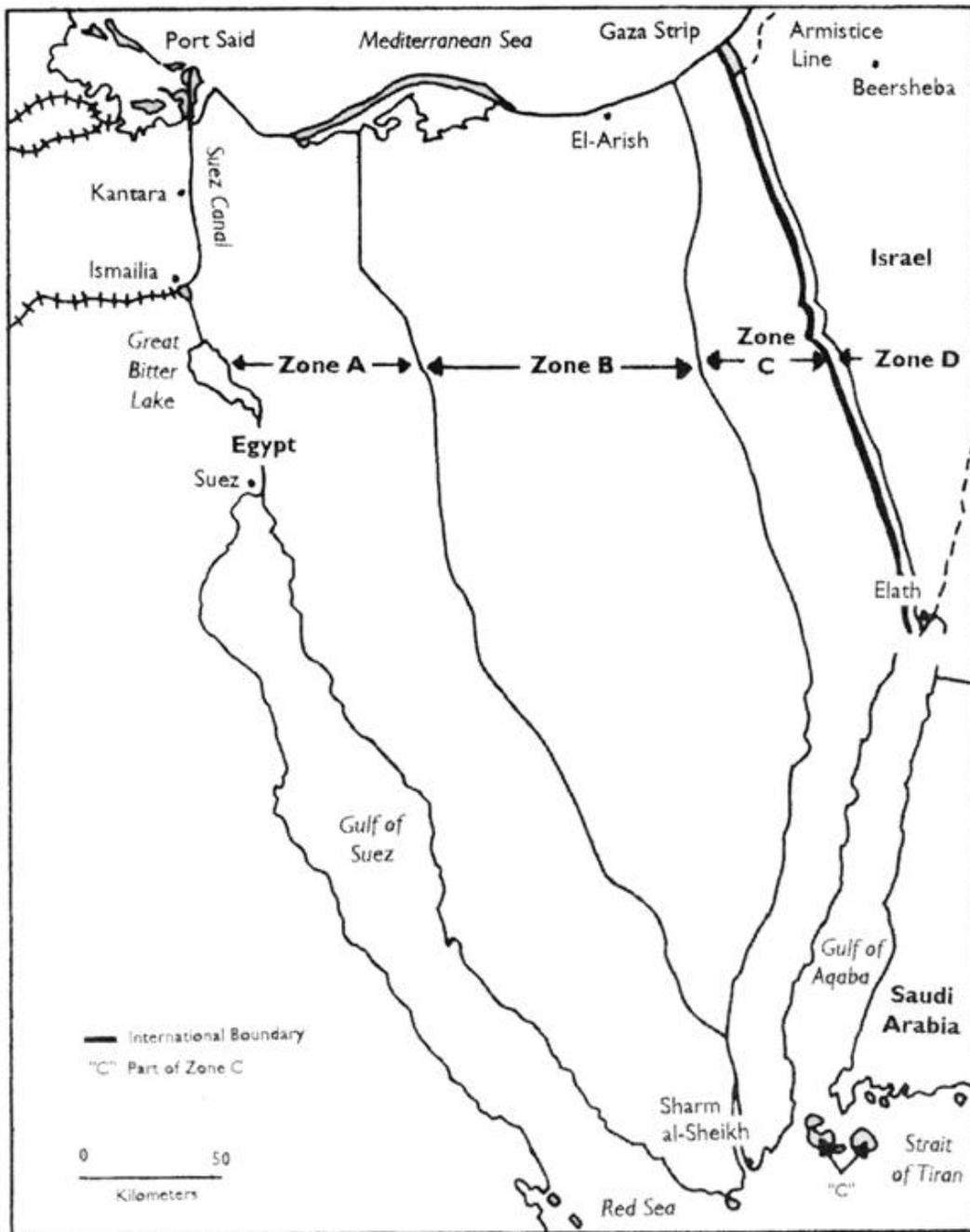
⁹ See Map 2 for further details.

¹⁰ One policy allows tunnel activity—passive acceptance, the other policy actively prohibits tunnel activity ie, imprisonment, sentencing persons in absentia, etc.

Yousri's statement accurately depicts the complex paradox of sovereignty in Rafah, Egypt Palestine. Yousri's position highlighted Egypt's large concessions to appease Israel, regarding militaristic freedom/sovereignty within Egyptian borders.

The stipulations of the EIPT, particularly those mandating the presence of the Egyptian civil police, near the Rafah border have shaped and defined the relations between the Egyptian government and the Bedouin tribes of the Sinai. A comprehensive understanding of the tunnel phenomenon and border administration policy necessitates understanding the Bedouin-Egyptian relations in the Northern Sinai. In recent years between 2007 and 2010, Bedouin tribes in Zone C, particularly to the North, have become more independent and relatively sovereign—due to an influx of wealth and weapons since 2007. The Bedouins of the Sinai have been and continue to be the guardians of Egypt's north eastern international borders with Palestine and Israel.

MAP 2 - LIMITED-FORCE ZONES PROVIDED BY ISRAELI-EGYPTIAN PEACE TREATY



Department of Army Historical Summary, 1984. Oland 1995.

2.2 The AMA of 2005 encouraged accountability and movement

The AMA of 2005 is the last standing agreement on the topic of border administration in Rafah. Before the AMA, the Rafah crossing was administered by Egypt and Israel. Border Administration in Rafah is a reflection of who is in control of the Gaza Strip at any given time. As previously mentioned Rafah was divided in 1982. Politically and legally, the territory has been under Israeli military occupation since 1967 and was under Egyptian occupation between 1949 and 1967. Sara Roy's work, *The Gaza Strip; The Political Economy of De-development*, while quite dated—written in 1995—is extremely relevant for historical reference. At the time Roy wrote *The Gaza Strip*, “all forms of political activity were prohibited, the law was defined by more than 1,000 military orders; no one in the Strip carried a passport; everyone was stateless; and no one could leave the territory without permission from the Israeli military authorities” (Roy, 1995, p.13). The Israeli army declared Gaza a closed military area; all entry and exit was regulated on a case by case basis pending approval of the district commander. This policy has both evolved and at times regressed in response to the various *Intifadas* and the generally tumultuous political atmosphere including the most recent state of internal division within Palestinian politics.

Before the 1979 Israel-Egypt Peace, Rafah was a united municipality under Egyptian occupation and later under Israeli occupation; there was no need for an international border crossing. The Rafah crossing was opened on April 25, 1982 not long after the signing of the IEPT, and was operated by the Israel Airports Authority (IAA) (Gisha, 2009). It was opened 24 hours a day, seven days a week, except for Yom Kippur (The Jewish Day of Atonement) and *Eid al-Adha*

(the Muslim Festival of Sacrifice) until the outbreak of the second *Intifada* in late September 2000 (Gisha, 2009).¹¹ Between 1967 and 1991 Gazans traveling abroad had to acquire exit permits, a protracted and tedious bureaucratic procedure (Gisha, 2009). In September 1991 Gaza Strip residents requested exit permits at the border crossings on their way abroad; this requirement remained in effect until September 2005 (Gisha, 2009). There is no evident systemic mode of differentiating who was allowed in and out of Gaza or what was restricted; both were determined by the disposition of the Government of Israel.¹²

The Israeli withdrawal from Gaza was followed by one of the more interesting moments in the history of the Rafah border. Israel withdrew settlements from Gaza in September 2005 without establishing a regional border administration agreement. Newspaper articles reported the free-for-all opening of the Rafah border was a display of Egyptian frustration following Israel's decision on September 7, 2005 to close Rafah crossing without agreement on border administration and entry/exit protocol (Usher, 2005). According to Al-Ahram journalist Graham Usher, for a full week Palestinians in Gaza enjoyed freedom of movement, (without Israel); Thousands of Palestinians and Egyptians traveled to and fro across the broken border which separated Egypt from Gaza (Usher, 2005). Eventually Egyptian and Palestinian officials united and clamped down on the freedom of movement taking place in Rafah; each side sealed their door to the border and restricted movement.

¹¹ Gisha continues, during those years, between 1,200 and 1,500 Palestinians crossed through Rafah every day in both directions, and twice as many in the summer, when relatives from Arab countries came to visit the Gaza Strip (Gisha 2009).

¹² It is relevant to note that travelers at the Rafah crossing (on both sides) preferred Israeli administration of the Rafah Border Crossing, as well as the time of EUBAM accountability to the uncertainty of passage that is the consequence of siege, internal divide and closure.

Negotiations ensued throughout the month of October. On November 15, 2005, Israel and the PA signed the Agreement on Movement and Access. Mediated by the US and EU, and approved by Egypt it included, among other things, the agreed principles for the administration of the Rafah Crossing (Gisha, 2009). According to Condoleezza Rice, a key player in negotiations, “the agreement was meant to give the Palestinian people freedom to move, trade and live normal lives...for the first time since 1967, Palestinians will gain control over the entry and exit from their territory” (Gisha, 2009, p.22). The agreement forbade the entry of merchandise into the Gaza Strip through Egypt beyond personal belongings...import/export between Egypt and Gaza should be routed through Kerem Shalom (Gisha, 2009), a crossing point under Israeli control closest to Egypt.

Before the AMA, entrance and exit into Gaza was based upon the disposition of Israel. The AMA outlines the most specific documented procedural requirements for entry and exit of Gaza:

Use of the Rafah crossing will be restricted to Palestinian ID card holders and others by exception in agreed categories with prior notification to the GoI and approval of senior PA leadership.

The PA will notify the GoI 48 hours in advance of the crossing of a person in the excepted categories-diplomats, foreign investors, foreign representatives of recognized international organizations and humanitarian cases.

The GoI will respond within 24 hours with any objections and will include the reasons for the objections;

The PA will notify the GoI of their decision within 24 hours and will include the reasons for their decision;

The 3rd party will ensure the proper procedures are followed and will advise both sides of any information in its possession pertaining to the people applying to cross under these exceptions. (GoI, 2010)

Clearly entrance and exit into Gaza post-AMA still relied heavily upon the whim of the GoI. One of the chief requirements of the AMA is the stipulation mandating third party supervision of the Palestinian administration of the border. The European Union was assigned the third party role. The European Union Border Assistance Mission Rafah (EUBAM) was made up of 98 monitors and 17 countries with the mandate to actively monitor, verify and evaluate PA performance with regard to the implementation of the Agreed Principles for Rafah Crossing and to act with authority to ensure that the PA complied with the terms of the Agreed Principles for Rafah Crossing (APRC) (EUBAM, 2007).

Again, Egypt is not a party to the agreement; the AMA was signed between Israel and the PA and established an agreement for Palestinian administration of the border (Gisha, 2009). An agreement between the Palestinian Authority and the Egyptian government regarding the administration of the Rafah crossing is necessary. As is a similar requirement mandating third party supervision of the Egyptian administration of the border; an absence which could explain the lack of accountability and the dearth of formal policy administering the Egyptian side of the Rafah Crossing Point.

On paper, the purpose of the EUBAM was to be a neutral third party; in practice the EUBAM was easily manipulated by Israel to control the opening of the Rafah crossing. According to a United Nations assessment of the Rafah Crossing, the Israeli authorities [prevented] the crossing opening by preventing EUBAM access to Rafah through Kerem Shalom (OCHAOPT, 2006). A UN assessment of the AMA described the first six months of 2006 at the Rafah crossing as successful: it was open nine and a half hours a day with an average of 650 people crossing daily each way; almost double the average during the six months prior to the AMA (360 people a day) (OCHAOPT, 2006). The report also associated the capture of an Israeli soldier on June 2 with closure of the crossing (OCHAOPT, 2006). The capture of Israeli soldier, Gilad Shalit, in 2006 was a primary catalyst toward heightened closure and the eventual siege of Gaza.¹³ OCHAOPT reports, since [the capture of Gilad Shalit] the opening of the crossing has been intermittent and erratic (open only 14% of days) (OCHAOPT, 2006). According to the EUBAM facts and figures, after the capture of Gilad Shalit until June 9, 2007, the opening became irregular: the terminal was open 83 days and closed 268 days; EUBAM Rafah suspended its operations at RCP on 13 June 2007 (EUBAM, 2010).

The tale of the tunnels and the siege are one and the same. As overland goods were restricted, underground trade was normalized in Palestine. As Gaza was formally closed by Egypt and Israel, Egyptian Bedouin assisted Palestinians in their pursuit of alternate means of entry and exit to the Gaza Strip. To the detriment of the region the AMA was nullified shortly after it was instituted. The AMA should have been continued to regulate the Rafah border. The EUBAM, which is theoretically a neutral third party, should have pushed for the border to remain open

¹³ At the time of writing, Gilad Shalit remained captive in Gaza despite ongoing negotiations for his release.

despite political relations. The EUBAM should resume operations immediately and relocate either to Gaza or Egypt.

The internal politics of Gaza following the Israeli withdrawal in 2005 and compounded by the capture of Gilad Shalit have evolved to the detriment of the perceived competence of the Palestinian Political ability to monitor its own borders, particularly considering the internal division between Hamas and Fatah. Since Israel withdrew from the Gaza Strip in 2005, responsibility for the closure of the Rafah Crossing could not be attributed to one entity (Gisha, 2009). Responsibility for the border closure and responsibility for its management are two different issues. The Gisha research center found Israel, Egypt, the Hamas regime in the Gaza Strip and the Palestinian Authority (PA) involved in and responsible for the closure of Gaza: (2009). EUBAM should also carry some degree of responsibility for abandoning its post at the Rafah crossing and quietly complying with the siege and closure of the Gaza Strip. The consequence is that 1.5 million residents of the Gaza Strip are isolated from the outside world (Gisha, 2009) and collectively imprisoned. The events leading to closure and followed by tunnel growth and expansion are intricate and complicated.

2.3 Elections divided Palestine; Israel restricted trade with Gaza

On January 25, 2006 the Palestinian Legislative Council successfully held elections; those elections, the first ever in 10 years and the second ever in Palestinian history, were conducted in a free, fair and peaceful manner (UN General Assembly, 2006). The outcome of the elections detrimentally changed the internal Palestinian political landscape. Hamas won the general election. The international community immediately required that the new Hamas government renounce violence, recognize Israel's right to exist, and accept the terms of all previous agreements (Rose, 2008). Hamas did not immediately accept the terms offered and has yet to accept the above terms fully. Following the Hamas victory, and their refusal to the above terms, many donors reevaluated their assistance policy to the Palestinian Authority; the Government of Israel in particular decided to withhold the payment of taxes and duties collected on behalf of the Palestinian Authority (UN Economic and Social Council, 2006).

John Wolfensohn, the representative of the Quartet, international convoy for reconciliation between Israel and Palestine, and former president of the World Bank, resigned from his post around the same time Hamas was elected and funding was cut. His resignation preceded and was not entirely related to the election of Hamas. He left his post warning that the West should not consider trying to starve the Hamas-led Palestinians into submission (Eldar, 2006). He posed the question, "Are we going to give all [our previous work toward a two-state solution] up now, or will we find a way that will allow us to work in the framework of the law and the policy, while

continuing to support building a democratic and responsible administration, that can actually realize the dream of peace and security for two peoples” (Eldar, 2006). When Wolfensohn resigned, his sentiment of working with Hamas toward peace left with him. Unfortunately, his replacement, Tony Blaire, has not been as active in building a democratic and responsible administration, and working toward peace and stability for two peoples at the price of working with and talking to Hamas. In short, the new Hamas led administration never had a chance. Not long after the election results the siege was initiated, and Israel began to withhold basic household items from import into Gaza.

The divide between Fatah and Hamas, the West Bank and Gaza was not a direct and immediate response to the election results of 2006. According to the investigative journalism of David Rose, Fatah and Hamas both committed atrocities and the war between them gathered momentum throughout the autumn [of 2006] (Rose, 2008). By the end of 2006, dozens of Palestinians were dying each month; by June 16, 2007, Hamas had captured every Fatah building, as well as Abbas’s official Gaza residence (Rose, 2008). Rose reported that the internal divide was due to a US backed Fatah coup d’état gone horribly wrong. Regardless, the political and physical divide between Hamas and Fatah which began in 2007 remained unresolved at the time of this writing in 2010. Hamas controlled the Gaza Strip. Fatah controlled the West Bank. Each side has imprisoned hundreds from the opposing side, countless attempts at reconciliation have failed and the Palestinian political impasse remains. Palestinian politicians are just as responsible for the continued closure of the Gaza Strip as Israel and Egypt.

The “ Hamas coup ” was used in part as the justification for the continued Israeli-Egyptian siege of Gaza; just as previously mentioned, the “ rift ” between Fatah and Hamas was used as a justification to keep Gaza closed during Operation “ Cast Lead ”. According to Gisha, since Hamas took over the government of the Gaza Strip in June 2007, Israel has closed the crossings into and out of the Gaza Strip, forbidden export from the Gaza Strip and allowed the entrance only of humanitarian goods, such as food, medicine and fuel, and in limited quantities that do not exceed what is needed for the basic subsistence of the population (Gisha, 2009). However, the UN estimated that the amount of goods that entered Gaza was less than what was needed to meet the basic needs of the population (Gisha, 2009). What constitutes humanitarian and subsistence goods by Israeli standards is not transparent.

From mid 2007 through May 2010, there was no formal Israeli siege closure policy. There was no accountability for whom or what was allowed to enter and exit the Gaza Strip. An Israeli COGAT official (Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories) confessed, the policy of which goods were permissible and impermissible into the Gaza Strip was continually subject to change (Feldman and Blau, 2009). It was simple. Every week, about 10 officers from the Israeli Defense Force’s COGAT unit convened...and decided which food products appeared on the tables of the 1.5 million Gazans (Feldman and Blau, 2009). The decision makers communicated with humanitarian organizations regarding the needs of the population. In the same article another senior COGAT officer stated that in 2007 there was a “ vague and unclear policy, influenced by the interests of certain groups...without any policy that derived from the needs of the population...simply, the Israeli interest took precedence over the needs of the

populace” (Feldman and Blau, 2009). In short, what was excess in Israel was exported to Gaza regardless of the needs of the population.

Since May 2010, (following the Israeli attack of the Turkish civilian vessel in international waters), Israeli authorities stated that they would allow more civilian goods to enter, including all food items, toys, stationary, kitchen utensils, mattresses and towels (BBC, 2010). According to UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East) the list of household items that had been refused entry at various times included light bulbs, candles, matches, books, musical instruments, crayons, clothing, shoes, mattresses, sheets, blankets, pasta, tea, coffee, chocolate, nuts, shampoo and conditioner (BBC, 2010). All prohibited items were commonly transported through the tunnels. The tunnels filled the void created by the restrictions of external siege and closure.

2.4 Marginalized Palestinians in Gaza

In order to truly understand the complex domino-effect which led to the closure of the Gaza Strip it is important to understand the pre-existing marginalization of Palestinians in Gaza. The context of unemployment, poverty and de-development in Gaza pre-dates the election of Hamas and the latter closure of the Gaza Strip.

The situation in Gaza has drastically changed since Sara Roy's writings in 1995, yet some trends she discussed remain unchanged. Roy's analysis remains relevant. For example, in the past the Palestinian population in Gaza increased at a rapid rate, between 1947 and 1987, the population of the Gaza Strip increased from roughly 71,000 to 633,600 people, a rise of nearly 800 percent in just 40 years (Roy, 1995 p.210). This trend of rapid procreation has continued. According to the World Health Organization, February 2009 report, the Gaza Strip has a population of 1.5 million with the sixth highest population density in the world, and a very young demographic with 18% of people aged under 5 years old (WHO Health Cluster, 2009). The population of the Gaza Strip was, and still is, extremely young. In 1995, nearly 50 percent of all residents were fourteen years old or younger; nearly 60 percent were younger than age twenty (Roy, 1995, p. 211). Finally, the rate of employment and poverty in the Gaza Strip has drastically changed from bad to worse. At the time of her writing, Roy stated, if domestic employment continued to fall behind population and labor force growth, the rate of unemployment would grow; suggesting that unemployment was structural in nature, related to the inability of the local economy to

provide new jobs, and not a temporary or transitory phenomenon (Roy, 1995, p. 213). In 1995 the Palestinian and Israeli economies were inextricably linked through migrant Palestinian labor.

The situation of stability and economic development in Gaza has never been a positive one. One of Sara Roy's many conclusions was, that

Weakened by the expropriation of its own economic resources, Gaza's economy became increasingly and structurally dependent on external (largely Israeli) resources for domestic growth. This dependence was imposed and achieved through economic integration with Israel and Gaza's externalization toward Israel's economic needs. (Roy, 1995, p. 252)

Since Roy's writing, labor migration has been removed from the equation. Circular migration between Gaza and Israel ended following the 2000 *Al-Aqsa Intifada*. To say the second *intifada* detrimentally affected the economic situation in the Gaza Strip is an understatement.

Again, Roy's assessment is extremely relevant because it followed the March 1993 closure, one of the first of a series of closures leading to the current Israeli-Egyptian siege of Gaza today. The overpopulated, unemployed, youthful Gaza of 1995 is not so socio-economically different than the Gaza Strip of 2010. Roy asserted:

The 1993 closure created an unprecedented number of permanently unemployed people, and a growing dependence on credit and indebtedness. In 1995, Israeli policy in the Gaza Strip continued to be defined by what it had not allowed in Gaza rather than by what it had. Israel had not allowed real Palestinian control over key economic resources (independence)...What it did allow is a form

of economic growth linked to and mediated by Israel
(dependence). (Roy, 1995, p.330)

In 2007, Israel continued to define its policies in Gaza by what was not allowed. In response to the Egyptian-Israeli marginalization and closure of Gaza, substantial portions of the wall between Egypt and Gaza were removed. According to The UN Humanitarian Monitor of the occupied Palestinian Territory, crowds of Gazans flooded into Egypt, many of them buying goods that had been blockaded by Israel, such as cement and fertilizer...Some analysts estimate that Gazans spent \$150 million in Egypt, buying food, livestock and other goods that were in short supply (The Humanitarian Monitor oPT, 2008). The rush for the border in 2008 largely resembled the unsolicited border opening of 2005. Hundreds of thousands of Gazans entered [Egypt]...Palestinians had purchased food, medicine and other supplies (UN Security Council 2008). By January 25, 2008 Egypt was working to close the border.

Egypt has since allowed the Rafah Crossing to open periodically to avoid another border breach. The openings are brief, irregular, and in direct coordination with Hamas (Gisha, 2009). According to Egyptian sources, the border openings are also in coordination with the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority (Gisha, 2009). The openings are not overseen by EUBAM. The opening of the Rafah Crossing in the absence of EUBAM third party oversight is a direct violation of the AMA of 2005.

2008 ended with war. From December 27, 2008 to January 18, 2009 Gaza was subjected to a devastating Israeli military offensive, Operation "Cast Lead". The Government of Israel alleged the attack was carried out to stop armed groups from firing indiscriminate rockets into Israel

(Amnesty, 2010). According to Amnesty, more than 1,380 Palestinians were killed, including more than 300 children and other civilians, and thousands were injured (Amnesty, 2010). During the war, the Rafah border was not opened to regular traffic. Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak declared at the outbreak of the crisis that Egypt would not open Rafah Crossing to avoid violating the AMA—in the absence of the PA and EUBAM—and deepening the rift between Fatah and Hamas (Gisha, 2009). This justification is easily disregarded, as Egypt has and continues to open the Rafah crossing in the absence of the PA and EUBAM. For example in response to the Israeli attack of the Turkish aid ship, the Mavi Marmara, in international waters on Monday May, 31, President Hosni Mubarak ordered the crossing opened to give access to necessary humanitarian and medical assistance, (Fleishman 2010) indefinitely, regardless of the continued ‘Fatah-Hamas rift’, and the absence of the PA and EUBAM. Such is the current state of Egyptian ‘ad-hoc’ Rafah border administration policy today. Egypt continues to straddle the internal divide and lead negotiations toward reconciliation, while ultimately maintaining allegiance to Israel.

2.4.1. Egypt, Israel and Hamas

Egypt’s allegiance to Israel in Palestinian relations is a byproduct of having the United States as a common ally and Hamas as a common enemy. According to the Council on Foreign Relations—an independent, American, nonpartisan membership organization, think tank and publisher—Hamas grew out of the Muslim Brotherhood, a religious and political organization founded in Egypt with branches throughout the Arab world (CFR 2009). According to Amnesty international, the Muslim Brotherhood is a banned organization in Egypt. Members of the

Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt¹⁴ are often arrested, detained, charged with membership of a banned organization, possession of leaflets, and participation in demonstrations (Amnesty 2010). In short, the Muslim Brotherhood is not in good graces with the current Egyptian Regime. The current Egyptian Regime, while “neutral” in matters related to the internal Palestinian divide between Fatah and Hamas, has obvious qualms about a successful Hamas rule in Gaza ideologically overflowing and empowering the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. The current Egyptian government and the government of Israel found camaraderie in their mutual loathing of Hamas.

US monetary assistance is the financial tie that binds Egypt and Israel together. Egypt and Israel have not always had amicable relations. According to a report summarizing the Egypt-Gaza border and its affect on Egyptian-Israeli relations written for the US Congress in 2008, Israel accused Egypt of not adequately sealing its side of the border, citing the breakthrough of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians who rushed into Egypt on January 23, 2008 as evidence (Sharp, 2008). Egypt accused Israel of exaggerating the threat posed by smuggling, and deliberately acting to “sabotage” U.S.-Egyptian relations (Sharp, 2008).

The US responded with Section 690 of P.L. 110-161, the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2008, [which withheld] the obligation of \$100 million in Foreign Military Financing for Egypt until the Secretary of State [certify]...Egypt has taken concrete steps to ‘detect and destroy the smuggling network and tunnels that lead from Egypt to Gaza’ (Sharp, 2008, p.2). The

¹⁴ The Amnesty report states, Amnesty International frequently documents the use of Emergency powers to arrest and detain political activists...In practice, the peaceful exercise of freedom of expression in Egypt remains subject to sever sanction: blogger and activist, Musaad Suliman Hassan Hussein, known as Musaad Abu Fagr, has been held in administrative detention since February 2008 on account of his peaceful expression of his views (Amnesty 2010).

underground wall was one of the steps taken to fulfill Section 690 of P.L. 110-161 of the Consolidated Appropriations Act. As previously mentioned the underground wall has been easily circumvented. Policy election has yet to take into account the fact that the tunnel phenomenon since 2007 is a direct consequence of siege; the best way to prohibit tunnel activity is for Egypt and Israel to resume normal trade, and border relations with the Gaza Strip.

2.5 Marginalized Bedouin in the Northern Sinai

“Before the tunnels there was no money, no work, nothing.
Now, life is good. Bedouins were poor before the tunnels.
Now, there is money, but no freedom.”
-Abu Ahmed

Too often conversations about the tunnels in Rafah neglect to mention the Northern Sinai Bedouin, the significant other half of the story. One cannot discuss the tunnels in Rafah without mentioning the Bedouin of the Northern Sinai. The small border town of Rafah and its surrounding areas are largely made up of Bedouin tribes. While this thesis does not purport to recount the ancient history of Rafah, nor that of the Northern Sinai Bedouin, it is vitally important to remember that Rafah was divided not more than thirty years ago, at a time when loyalties were not arbitrarily associated with imaginary lines in the sand. In comparison to the wealth of information on the topic of Palestinians in Gaza, there is a dearth of information regarding the social, economic and political reality of the Bedouin in the Northern Sinai—especially in English. Discussion of the marginalization of the Northern Sinai Bedouin is not as widespread as discussion of Palestinian marginalization. That being said, my analysis relied heavily upon conversations with the Bedouin and their assessment of the social, political, and economic factors surrounding their circumstances, which is discussed in the findings chapter. A recurring theme in the majority of conversations was complaint of the Egyptian state. Most of the

Bedouin felt a sincere disconnect from the Egyptian government. According to a Bedouin quoted by *Time*, “The government doesn’t consider us Egyptians,” [a smuggler] “Sinai has never been Egyptian. Sinai has always belonged to the tribes” (Hauslohoner, 2010). Another author on the Sinai and Bedouin issues concurs,

“over the last century, control of the Sinai Peninsula has flip-flopped...the Bedouin have been marginalized by the trading of control of the peninsula by Israel and Egypt...Does it really matter to the Sinai Bedouin whether they are “Israeli” or “Egyptian”? (Klayton, 2010).

Klayton’s analysis continued to assert, “The Bedouin probably identify as Bedouin more so than they do as Egyptian now or Israeli in the past or as Egyptian even further back in the past...” (2010). Unfortunately, my conversations with the Bedouin did not directly inquire as to the experience of Israeli occupation of the Sinai, nor the changes which followed the Israeli-Egyptian Peace Treaty (although both topics were brought up in a couple of conversations).

As a result of the 1979 IEPT, Egyptian State Security-Police were responsible for administering all normal police functions in the Northern Sinai—Area C region. Therefore Bedouin complaints against Egypt are generally rooted in the relations between the Bedouin and the Egypt State Police. Some of the complaints of marginalization include discrimination, arbitrary arrests and frequent harassment at checkpoints (AFP, 2007). On the other hand, police often accuse Bedouin of weapons and drug smuggling to Gaza as well as involvement in the drug trade with Israel and human trafficking. In addition, one of the most sincere Bedouin complaints against the Egyptian

state was the fact that there was no real development in the Northern Sinai. Many respondents agreed: there is no quality healthcare, no quality education, and no gainful employment in the region; consequently, there is smuggling, and there has always been smuggling.

Hamas's acceptance of the tunnels as a viable mode of transporting goods, in response to the siege in 2007, was a huge turning point for the Northern Sinai Bedouin. In 2007 tunnels were decriminalized in Gaza, initiating the tunnel boom. The Egyptian side of the tunnel activity is managed by the Bedouin. The flow of goods into Gaza has meant a significant and steady flow of money into the Northern Sinai. The effects of this newfound wealth will be discussed in chapter four. Section 2.4 and 2.5 were juxtaposed to enlighten the reader to the similar sense of destitution on both sides of the border, the setting which cultivated the tunnel boom. The unequal attention to the two tales of marginalization is an unfortunate consequence of the dearth of academic attention paid to the Northern Sinai Bedouin socially, politically and economically. The most significant mutual marginalization is obviously economic. Unemployment is rampant in both Gaza and the Northern Sinai as each region is economically ignored by their respective administering entities—Israel and Egypt.

2.6 The Tunnel Phenomenon (2007-2010) in media

The wealth of literature on the tunnel phenomenon in Rafah is incalculable. International and new media have lent an enormous amount of attention to this topic. The tunnels, while not a new story, remains repeatedly reported on for a number of reasons. The first and foremost reason is the unchanging degree of mortal danger surrounding this industry of booming employment. The tunnel boom has created numerous jobs on both sides of the border—an obvious appeal in regions with high unemployment. The danger on each side of the border is as different as each side’s differing policies surrounding tunnel related activity. Palestinians—because Palestinians are generally the ones who work underground—face mortal danger whereas Egyptians typically face legal perils and imprisonment.

When Hamas came to power, tunnel related activity was decriminalized in response to the heightened siege policy of Egypt and Israel. The tunnels were thereafter taxed and regulated by the Hamas government. According to one news source, Hamas nurtured the tunnel industry and continued to view it as an important source of revenue—a significant income supplement for the Hamas administration struggling to make ends meet considering the withholding of taxes by the GoI and the withholding of aid by the international community. One tunnel owner-worker-manager claimed “The party issued licenses for the tunnels, charging Gazans up to \$6,000 for the privilege of beginning construction...It then taxed each tunnel \$200 per month” (May, 2010). In

return for these fees, the municipality of Rafah [oversaw] the tunnel trade—[helped] resolve disputes between tunnel owners, [imposed] labor laws, and [provided] emergency rescue support in the event of a collapse (May, 2010). One resident of Gaza explained that Hamas plans to work to close the tunnels once the Israeli siege ends and checkpoints open; until then the tunnels remain decriminalized by Hamas because the situation in Gaza cannot continue without the tunnels.¹⁵

Tunnel employment in Gaza is legal yet deadly. Unlike Egypt, the dangers did not come from the acting government but instead from Israeli air raids, inherent dangers associated with working underground—for example the possibility of collapse, suffocation, electric shock, etc.—and in some cases, Egyptian closure tactics. According to one Palestinian tunnel worker interviewed in the documentary film, *Gaza Tunnels*, “Sometimes sand falls in the tunnels, there are risks of electric shock, sometimes the Egyptians shoot gas into the tunnels that might kill us, sometimes the Israeli’s might bomb the house while you are in the tunnel...” (*Gaza Tunnels*). In all documentaries on this topic Palestinian tunnel workers express awareness of mortal danger, yet lack of other employment options.

A number of the mortal dangers are related to Egyptian closure tactics. There is no public-official Egyptian policy or procedure for closing a tunnel. Implementation of closure informally depends on the officers who unearth the tunnel. According to conversations conducted along the border with persons whose livelihoods are dependent upon the tunnels, as well as media reports, Egyptian closure tactics have been known to include filling tunnel openings with cement, water or gas.

¹⁵ Conversation between Author and Palestinian waiting in Egypt to return to Gaza. July 22, 2010.

Ultimately, not all dangers of tunnel work are related to Egyptian or Israeli tunnel raids or the nature of being underground; there is also the possibility of electric shock from faulty wiring and there have also been cases in which tunnel workers have died because of faulty merchandise. For example, once while I was in the field 6 Palestinian tunnel workers died because of a faulty gas tank, “imbuba”—for household gas needs. The “imbuba” had a gas leak which filled the tunnel where oxygen was scarce and 6 Palestinian tunnel workers perished. There is also the widely told tale of the lion being transported for the Gaza Zoo. As the story goes, the drugged but un-caged lion woke up part way across the tunnel. One story claims, smugglers built two halves of a makeshift cage, which were then separately lowered into the tunnel from the Gaza and Egyptian ends, and very, very carefully pushed together (Brynen, 2010). In other versions of the story tunnel workers were killed in the tunnel by the un-caged lion. There are many additional, unforeseen dangers to working in the tunnels. According to one tunnel worker interviewed in a recent documentary “Ticket from Azrael” filmed February-March 2009, “before entering the tunnel, we need to show the ticket from Azrael¹⁶...that means we go down not knowing whether we’ll get out or not, this is in the hands of god” (Ticket from Azrael).

Persons whose livelihoods depend upon the tunnels on the Egyptian side of the border also take large risks because of their career-lifestyle choice of contributing to this informal and illegal economy. As mentioned earlier, Egyptians are not often working underground; instead the majority of the work is done illegally above ground. Egyptians greatest risk is imprisonment in

¹⁶ Azrael is the Arabic name for the Archangel of Death in Islam.

Egyptian prisons¹⁷ or being sentenced in absentia¹⁸. Two of the persons I interviewed had spent time in Egyptian prisons for smuggling; at least one other admitted to having been sentenced in absentia. The topic of legal risks associated with smuggling was recurrent in all conversations with respondents. Most of the persons interviewed stated that 5,000 Northern and Southern Sinai Bedouin are in prison for smuggling.¹⁹

With all of the dangers surrounding the tunnel business in Egypt and Palestine the obvious question is why take the risk? When this question is posed to those whose livelihoods are dependent upon the tunnels—on either side of the border—the answer is very similar. The tunnel phenomenon has provided a steady flow of money and employment to many Palestinians and Bedouins, such as the tunnel diggers featured in the films, while making tunnel owners millionaires. The Palestinian answer, as documented in the literature, is “there is no other work” (Ticket from Azrael), and “this business is like a drug, once you start making money you just can’t stop” (Gaza Tunnels). As a result of the tunnels, there is a class of “nouve-riche” on both sides of the border. According to Moussad Abu Fagr, a Bedouin activist recently released from Egyptian Prison, the nouve riche in Egyptian Rafah does not exceed 1% of the population, yet they have high visibility.²⁰ The same can be said about Palestinian Rafah, the tunnel owners, those with the greatest wealth from tunnel businesses, are the more visible minority rather than the majority. On both sides of the border the monetary gain is the most obvious impetus for

¹⁷ Imprisonment in Egypt is a huge risk; according to Amnesty International Human rights abuses are common in Egyptian prisons.

¹⁸ Sentencing in absentia is a common tactic of Egyptian Authorities in which Bedouin are accused of tunnel related activity, found guilty in their absence and sentenced to a prison term to be fulfilled once found by Egyptian authorities.

¹⁹ This estimate includes smuggling drugs, weapons, goods, persons, etc. throughout the entire Sinai and to Israel and Palestine. This estimate is not limited to the Egypt-Gaza border.

²⁰ Interview with the Author, August 10, 2010.

tunnel related work. Additional motivations include, but are not limited to, mutual struggle, fighting the siege, and for the Bedouin, supporting their Palestinian brethren.

The employment opportunity is considerable as Gaza's protracted blockade has resulted in a near total collapse of the private sector; at least 95% of Gaza's industrial establishments (3,750 enterprises) were either forced to close or were destroyed over the past four years, resulting in a loss of between 100,000 and 120,000 jobs (Roy, 2010). Currently, almost 80% of the population is dependent on some sort of humanitarian assistance (Berger, 2009). Thereafter, the economy is now largely dependent on public-sector employment, relief-aid and smuggling, illustrating the growing informalization of the economy (Roy, 2010). According to Roy, two new economic classes have emerged in Gaza because of the economic circumstance...one has grown wealthy from the black-market tunnel economy; the other consists of certain public-sector employees who are paid not to work (for the Hamas government) by the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank (Roy, 2010). This is the context for the tunnel boom of 2007 and the subsequent reactionary Egyptian border policies.

2.7. Analysis and Internal Colonialism

This chapter has reviewed the main factors leading to and greatly shaping the tunnel phenomenon with focus on the Israel-Egypt peace treaty of 1979, the Agreement on Movement and Access of 2005, the internal divide, siege, and the similar marginalization of each respective population. This subsection introduces the theory of “internal colonialism”; a theory which explains Egypt’s “double-bind” in the Northern Sinai region. Egypt has elected to align itself with Israel and isolate the indigenous populations which have aligned themselves with the occupied Palestinians in Gaza. A post-independent country’s alignment with external global powers without considering the damage toward indigenous populations is a common occurrence the world over.

I first read about “internal colonialism” in “Local Histories/Global Designs; Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking.” The author, Walter D. Mignolo discussed the concept of border thinking within the discussion of coloniality and subaltern knowledge. Mignolo’s discussion of subaltern knowledge reflects a global understanding of the consequences of colonialism which he calls “the colonial difference”, and the creation of nation-states upon the production of knowledge as well as policy-making. Mignolo’s focus is “on forms of knowledge produced by modern colonialism at the intersection with colonial modernities, border gnosis/gnoseology and border thinking [thereafter he uses each] interchangeably to characterize powerful and emergent gnoseology, absorbing and displacing hegemonic forms of

knowledge into the perspective of the subaltern” (Mignolo, 2000, p. 12). Gnoseology refers to the philosophy of knowledge, or the capacity of human being to learn. Border thinking is related to understanding policies of marginalization associated with “internal colonialism.”

Mignolo explained that the coloniality of power adapted a new form of colonialism: “internal colonialism in peripheral post-independence countries during the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries” (2000, p. 282). His analysis and references are focused on post-colonial America, with some mention of Asia. Using Mignolo, the Gazan population may be categorized as a “silenced society”, that is, a society in which talking and writing take place but which are not heard in the planetary production of knowledge managed from the local histories and local languages of the “silencing” (e.g. developed) societies (Mignolo, 2000, p. 71). As an outsider I am not a part of the “silenced” Gazan or Bedouin societies. As discussed in the subsections regarding their respective marginalization the Egyptian Northern Sinai Bedouin and the Gazan population are similarly disenfranchised (by their respective “silencing societies”). The “shared spirit” of marginalization has bound the two societies together and fostered their continued cooperation of relative mutual struggle against border closure. Israel marginalizes Palestinians in Gaza via policies of Zionist colonization. I argue that the state of Egypt uses policies of “internal colonialism” to marginalize the indigenous Bedouin.

“Internal colonialism” was an idea proposed by two Mexican sociologists, Pablo Gonzalez Casanova (1965) and Rodolfo Stavenhagen (1965), to describe the relationship between the state and the Amerindian population after Mexico’s independence from Spain (Mignolo, 2000).

“Internal colonialism” as used by the above authors as well as Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui (1984;

1993) describes the “double bind of the national state after independence: on the one hand, to enforce the colonial politics toward indigenous communities and, on the other, to establish alliances with metropolitan colonial powers” (Mignolo 2000, p. 104), in this case the United States and Israel. Mignolo’s analysis relies heavily on North and South American examples, yet maintains a global relevance. In his book, *Local Histories/Global Designs* he does not mention the circumstance of colonization and nation building in the Middle East/Occident; yet he does incorporate theories of Orientalism and Occidentalism in his assessment. “By ‘colonial difference’ [he means] ... the classification of the planet in the modern/colonial imaginary, by enacting coloniality of power, an energy and a machinery to transform differences into values” (Mignolo, 2000, p. 13). His discussion, and the many academics, authors and researchers he references either write from within or about “silenced societies” and the effects of the colonial difference.

Mignolo’s analysis of Orientalism, Occidentalism, Internal Colonialism and Border-Thinking are all extremely relevant to any discussion of the creation of nation states in the North African, Middle Eastern, and Arab Regions. I find Mignolo’s discussion particularly relevant to the Arab-Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the ongoing Zionist-colonization of Palestine. Egypt’s assistance in the Israeli Zionist-colonization of the Gaza Strip, via policies of “internal colonialism” toward indigenous Egyptian Bedouin populations in the Northern Sinai Region, assisted closure and restricted movement for Palestinians—native Gazan’s and refugees—in the Gaza Strip.

Chapter 3: METHODOLOGY: CONVERSATIONS AND OBSERVATIONS IN AND AROUND RAFAH

The constructivist approach is the most relevant to my data collection and evaluation techniques. According to Mills, et al. (2006) “during the process of narrative interaction, the research and participant give and take from each other, the complexity of the area of interest being explored becomes apparent, and in turn gains density as the conversation about meaning ensues” (Mills, 2006, p.2). As previously mentioned there is a dearth of information on the livelihoods of the Bedouin populations in the Northern Sinai and their socio-economic reality. Clearly I entered the field with a substantial understanding of tunnel-related issues in Palestine, but it was not until I began to interact and converse with the respondents that this thesis truly began to take shape. The conversations truly became ‘sites for construction of knowledge’ (Mills, 2006, p.2). In the majority of the interviews and conversations I attempted to create a neutral space, avoiding any sort of interviewer-interviewee hierarchy and in a few cases the respondents guided the conversation and questioned me.

In adopting the constructivist approach, I analyzed the data by coding. I have done my best to permit the theoretical framework to arise from the data, not for the data to fit any pre-existing theoretical framework. I have relied heavily upon reflective note taking when reading back through the various interviews and conversations in search of themes and codes. The guided

interviews and conversations did not consistently nor directly inquire as to formal and informal policies being implemented in the Rafah border region.

Throughout my four trips to interview persons whose livelihoods were dependent upon the tunnels and to observe tunnel related activity in the Bedouin community between Sheikh Zuwaid and the Egypt-Palestine border, I informally interviewed 18 males between the ages of 16 and 50. Of the eighteen, five respondents were between the ages of 16 and 20, none between 21 and 30, one man was 31, seven men were between the ages of 35 and 40, four men were between the ages of 41 and 44 and only one man was 50. They all ranged in knowledge and exposure to the tunnels; because their experience was so varied the conversations were loosely guided and I made my best effort to allow them to define which issues, topics, facts and figures they understood best. In the event that they were unsure of a date or figure, they would state they did not know or estimate respective to the exposure. Three of the respondents were not dependent upon the tunnels, these two contributed their observations of the way the tunnels have affected their community. None of the respondents owned tunnels.

The following questions loosely guided every conversation,

- 1) When did you first start working with the tunnels?
- 2) What do you know of the history of the tunnels, for example when was the first tunnel?
- 3) How have the tunnels changed over time?
- 4) What is your job specifically?

5) In your opinion, how many people (in the Al-Arish, Shiekh Zuwaid, Rafah area) are employed by the tunnels?²¹

I purposefully did not inquire specifically as to Egyptian Authorities political treatment of the border area, but instead allowed for this knowledge to surface where possible. I found that respondents who had an opinion on Egyptian Authorities in the Northern Sinai would volunteer such information willingly. The above questions are more concerned with the connection between respondents' livelihoods and the tunnel phenomenon. In nearly every circumstance the interviews were conducted in a group setting but generally one person would respond to all the questions then the next and so on. If respondents had strong opinions in agreement or disagreement with their peers, they would not hesitate to express themselves—creating a group-like interview. None of the group exchanges were controlled enough to be labeled focus groups. Some of the conversations took place in Abu Ahmed's home, in the desert, in homes of respondents and some while driving through the desert along the Israel-Egypt border. When in the region to conduct interviews with the target population, I stayed fairly removed from the police presence, in the safer more remote "no-man's land", where the Bedouin live in relative peace and autonomy.²²

I inquired generally as to the greater history of the region in relation to the tunnels and the Rafah border crossing particularly as each individual has experienced such. I took care to make general

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²² I did not get too close to the Palestine border-tunnel area when I was with the Bedouin. I did not directly see any entrances to tunnels in Egypt. I did not enter any tunnels. The only time I saw a tunnel entrance was in May 2009 in Gaza.

inquiries so that the respondents could guide the conversation with the specific experiences they chose to share.

The method of data-collection employed for this thesis was as multifaceted and flexible as the field allowed. I conducted a series of guided and informal interviews as well as participant and non-participant observation in Rafah, Sheikh Zuwaid and at the Rafah Border Crossing. In addition, I interviewed Egyptian government officials I had been in contact with when requesting permission to enter Gaza. According to Leon Festinger (1950) in his “Methodology of field study,” “there is a necessity in employing such a multitude and apparent confusion of diverse techniques, inherent in the extreme complexity of the subject matter of the field of study—the entire community.” (Festinger, 1950, p. 179). To a large extent I was concerned with understanding the community of Egyptian Bedouin who had become the gatekeepers for the informal tunnel border crossings; understanding this community required a range of approaches; however, I relied heavily on interview and observation. I had the opportunity of witnessing the community that administered the tunnel phenomenon from the Egyptian side, before and after the Israeli attack of the Turkish ship the Marvi Marmara which ultimately led to a loosening of the siege of Gaza.

3.1. Data Collection

Between May 25, 2009 and August 2, 2010 I took ten separate trips to the Egyptian side of the Rafah Border Crossing in an attempt to cross into Gaza.²³ During each trip I recorded my observations and conversations with other travelers attempting to cross or persons waiting to receive travelers from Gaza as well as locals who would frequent the border crossing. Conversations ranged from border administration, the general political atmosphere, travel plans, etc.²⁴ In addition I took four trips to Egyptian Rafah and surrounding areas solely to conduct interviews with persons whose livelihoods were dependent upon the tunnels without attempting to cross the Rafah Border Crossing. I was coincidentally in the field when the freedom flotilla was en route to Gaza and Israel opened fire on the Turkish humanitarian aid ship. During this trip I was in the region conducting my fieldwork with persons of concern when Hosni Mubarak issued the presidential decree to open the Rafah Border Crossing. As a result of the sudden policy change I attempted to cross the Rafah border crossing and spent the following four days at

²³ Of my ten attempts to enter Gaza, two were successful. The first success was May 26, 2009, with a student led delegation, after which I independently stayed in Gaza an additional two and a half months working for PalThink, a neutral Palestinian think tank, and teaching English at the Cambridge Career Institute. My second entry on November 3, 2009, followed weeks of navigating Egyptian bureaucracy, frequent trips to the American Embassy and lobbying the American University in Cairo for support to enter Gaza. After one rejection letter from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs my second request for travel was approved. My entry was successful from the Egyptian side, yet within twenty-four hours I was deported by the Hamas administration due to bureaucratic misunderstandings. Twice I exited Gaza, thrice I attempted. The first attempt to leave Gaza was in August 2009 the first day of a three day border opening, the attempt was unsuccessful as I did not have the adequate permission from the Hamas administration to exit.²³ The second day I was approved for exit and issued a seat on a bus thanks to a dear friend's distant familial ties to a Hamas official overseeing the border administration.²³ The second successful exit was my deportation. It is difficult to describe the emotional experience of exiting Gaza. The uncertainty of entering Egypt coupled with the uncertainty of ever re-entering Gaza is something all persons at the Rafah border crossing have in common.

²⁴ Seventy-five percent of the time I traveled with other interested individuals seeking to enter Gaza.

the Rafah border.²⁵ While at the border I discussed the Egyptian governments' administration and likelihood of passage; in some more involved conversations I inquired as to general knowledge, understanding and opinions on the tunnel phenomenon.

This thesis intended to investigate the ways and means of Egyptian border officials' political treatment of above ground closure and underground movement. I specifically explored Egyptian authorities' responses to the evolution of the informal tunnel phenomenon as experienced by persons whose livelihoods were dependent upon the tunnels between mid 2007 and August 2010. The border town of Rafah—particularly from the Egyptian side—has been academically under researched despite the uniqueness of siege and resilience of the border populations.

Throughout data collection I utilized a constructivist approach in that I loosely set to investigate Egyptian authorities' treatment of the tunnel phenomenon, while leaving room for respondents to guide the conversation. I am confident that my method fits the constructivist approach as I aimed for a reciprocal exchange of information and creation of meaning. In all conversations I sought out the respondents' personal connection with the topic and together we exchanged ideas and information. It was extremely important that I create a neutral space and explicate power imbalances. From their stories I have distinguished that the theory of "internal colonialism" is the most fitting explanation for Egypt's political treatment of the Egypt-Gaza border region.

²⁵ June 1 through June 4, 2010.

3.2 Access to the community: Gatekeeping and Translation

A local Egyptian journalist first introduced me to the Bedouin community where I conducted most of my interviews. The journalist introduced me to five tunnel merchants (singular: *Tajr*) with whom I conducted my first interviews within the community. After the first day I was welcomed back into the community by the first tunnel merchant, Abu Ahmed. Thereafter, he became my gatekeeper to the community. The community I was primarily interested in learning more about was the community of persons whose livelihoods depended upon the tunnels in Egypt. It was immediately evident that the tunnel economy had deeply permeated the whole of the Bedouin community between Shiekh Zuwaid and Rafah. Despite the large reach of the tunnel phenomenon, it is important to note that not all Bedouin in the Northern Sinai region near the Rafah border take part in the tunnel business. I had the opportunity of interviewing three persons whose livelihoods were not dependent upon the tunnels, but who had observed the effects of the tunnel business on their communities through time.

I acknowledge that my research is flawed by the “snowball” method, and use of a gatekeeper. The “snowball” method is flawed because it reduces the likelihood that the sample will represent a cross section of the population, but due to the limitations of the field and the sensitivity of the topic this was the safest and most fruitful way to conduct this type of research in this particular region at this critical time. The siege of Gaza and high restrictions on travel for foreigners to Gaza via Rafah made this a “critical time.” Travel to the border had been tightly regulated since

my first trip in May 2009, following operation “Cast Lead.” Restrictions had been heightened for foreigners following the attempted Gaza Freedom March in December 2009. From December to February travel was highly regulated.²⁶ I was not in Egypt during the Gaza Freedom March, in which persons from many different countries gathered in Cairo with the intention of marching across Gaza from Rafah to Erez, entering via Rafah, and bringing international attention to the siege of Gaza. After months of meeting with Egyptian officials, the organizers and marchers were denied entry into Gaza. Out of the thousands of marchers, 100 were finally admitted entry for a very short period of time. I do not know details, as I was not in the region and I do not entirely agree with the tactics of Code Pink and the administration of the Gaza Freedom March. However, I do know that the Gaza Freedom March briefly made traveling to the Northern Sinai region more challenging for foreigners.

During my first trip to the Egypt-Gaza border to conduct interviews with persons whose livelihoods were dependent upon the tunnels, I met Abu Ahmed. Abu Ahmed was vital to this research, not only as my gatekeeper but also as co-translator. When I would visit the region I would stay with Abu Ahmed and his family, and meet with persons he introduced me to, family members, neighbors, friends, business contacts, etc. We visited friends’ homes and spent a great deal of time driving through the desert discussing a range of topics. It was during these drives throughout the community that I observed a large amount of tunnel activity, taking place blatantly in the community without any attempt to be hidden from view. During these tours of the community and border area, Abu Ahmed would point out which trucks were en route to the

²⁶ I did not attempt to visit the region from December 2009 to April 2010; partially because I was conducting background research and interviewing people in Cairo, partly because I had been informed that the failed Gaza Freedom March made it difficult for foreigners to travel to the Northern Sinai.

tunnels, which roads were safe for smuggling as well as the nearest Egyptian police checkpoints—which were never very far from view.

An additional challenge to conducting fieldwork was the language barrier. Translation was an important element in the field. My first trip to the field was done without an interpreter.

Regarding the topic of translation, at times there were other persons with dual-language capabilities to translate, but for the most part the majority of my conversations and interviews were conducted in such a way that Abu Ahmed and I worked together to communicate the questions and answers between myself and the respondents. On my first trip to the field I attempted to use a voice recorder and none of the respondents were comfortable having their voices recorded; thereafter I would ask if I could take notes of our conversations, a method which was always accepted.

During all conversations and guided interviews, Abu Ahmed introduced me and I explained the purpose of my research. After introductions I would inquire as to whether I could ask a few questions about the persons' exposure to the tunnel phenomenon and opinions thereof. If such inquiry was accepted, in all cases it was, I would continue with the above questions. In many cases, I had the opportunity to meet with persons multiple times and the trajectory of the conversation was more casual and less guided. The primary example of this is my constant conversation with Abu Ahmed. As previously mentioned I took notes of all of my conversations and was constantly taking notes while driving through the desert with Abu Ahmed.

During my trips to the Rafah border crossing, in my attempts to enter Gaza, I would similarly introduce myself and ask for permission to interview the person and take notes. In other cases I would simply engage in casual conversation and make notes after the fact. During these conversations and informal interviews I would ask about experiences at the Rafah border terminal, and the persons' opinion of the administration thereof. In some conversations I would express my research interest in the tunnel topic and ask the person if they had any opinions or basic knowledge on that topic. In all cases, the circumstance at the border was less controlled than my trips to the field. At the Rafah border crossing and in the Rafah border terminal there was no gatekeeper and I would make my best attempt to talk to as many people as possible.

3.3. Challenges and Precautions

Considering the legal repercussions for the persons I was interviewing I took great care traveling from Cairo to the Northern Sinai border areas.²⁷ It is important to note the benefits and limitations between conducting research related to the tunnels in Palestine vs. Egypt. As previously mentioned, the majority of tunnel media, for example, pictures, video and print journalism highlight the experience of Palestinian Rafah—where the tunnel business is normalized, goods are taxed and the tunnels are regulated by the Hamas government. The situation in Egypt is the opposite. In Egypt the topic is taboo, the governmental policy is tunnel closure and imprisonment of any persons found working for, with or in relation to the tunnels. Simply put there are fewer articles and sources with information regarding the Egyptian Bedouin role in the tunnel trade and the politics being played out on the ground in Egyptian Rafah, Sheikh Zuwaid and Al-Arish.

The Egyptian government has taken a hardliner approach to prohibiting tunnel related activity. For instance, in February one Lebanese news agency reported, Egyptian security forces have been unusually active in uncovering and destroying smuggling tunnels citing the new metal wall as increasing said effectiveness (Brom 2010). This report contradicts the Al-Jazeera report cited

²⁷ Traveling to Al-Arish was not difficult, getting from Al-Arish to Rafah where the persons of concern live was a little more challenging due to the numerous checkpoints along the way. Along the main roads there are 3-5 checkpoints between Al-Arish and Sheikh Zuwaid, and another 2-4 between Sheikh Zuwaid and the Rafah Border Crossing; according to a local resident, in Rafah alone there are around 40 checkpoints. When I was in the region without the intention of visiting the Border Crossing, arrangements would be made for a private car to pick me up at the bus station in Al-Arish and take me to Rafah via back roads, away from the Police checkpoints. When I was in the region strictly in attempt to enter Gaza I would stay in Al-Arish and take a taxi to the Rafah Border Crossing.

earlier which claimed the opposite; the wall was not working. It is difficult to gauge the success of the wall considering the noted ease of circumventing it. It is true, and the Bedouin confirmed, at times the Egyptian police conducted raids and uncovered many tunnels at a time. As previously mentioned, Egyptian security forces had also been accused of controversially gassing the tunnels as a method of deterring further tunnel business—a policy which was officially denied by the Egyptian government, and was not discussed greatly in my conversations with Egyptian tunnel workers.

Because of the sensitivity of the topic and the legal repercussions for respondents, I have taken great care to protect the identities of the persons I have conversed with and interviewed for this thesis. All of the following are pseudonyms, except for Mussad Abu Fagr because he is a high profile human rights activist within the Bedouin community. In addition I have also neglected any topics that might have included any identifying factors, such as tribal affiliations or family names. When possible I tried not to use direct first names, but instead I referred to the persons of concern as Abu (name of their first son).²⁸ All of the following names have been changed, including the sons' names to protect the identities of the persons whose livelihoods depended upon the tunnels (between 2007 and 2010). It is important to remember that the Grounded Theory does not mean “to provide full individual accounts as evidence, rather it seeks to move a theoretically sensitive analysis of participants' stories onto a higher plane while still retaining a clear connection to the data from which it derived” (Mills, 2006, p. 5). The following chapter introduces and analyzes the data that has been collected.

²⁸ Abu means father of. Most of the men I interviewed went by Abu--- the name of their first born son. In which case I never learned their real names, and for the purposes of this research I changed the sons' names as well.

Chapter 4: RAFAH: RESEARCH FINDINGS

This section addresses the codes, themes which recurred in conversations and observations in and around Rafah. Although I did not always directly inquire as to policy exposure, policy affects every aspect of the historical trajectory of the tunnel phenomenon. Naturally, tunnel prohibition policy is one of the recurring codes to surface during the coding process. Other codes that surfaced, and will be addressed in the following chapter included evolution of the tunnel phenomenon, Egyptian-Bedouin relations, Bedouin-Palestinian relations, transported goods, tunnel employment, the use of new wealth, and the reality of uncertainty at the Rafah Border Crossing.

4.1. Tunnel prohibition policy

Tunnel prohibition policy and Egyptian-Bedouin relations are inherently linked. The conversations I had with the Bedouin traders and tunnel workers solely depict their observations and opinions of policy as they experienced it via implementation. The respondents openly conversed about the Egyptian authorities' behaviors and actions, what I refer to as "informal" policy. The Bedouin perspectives are equally important to any discussion with government officials themselves, because their stories depict policy in implementation. It warrants noting that Egypt is a police state. While policy trickles down from governmental entities in Cairo, there is a huge void in accountability and many individual police officers implement policy informally.

Unfortunately, I did not have equal exposure to Egyptian government officials as I had to Egyptian Bedouin border populations, therefore I acknowledge that this story is relatively one sided. I conducted one interview in Cairo with an employee at the desk of Palestinian Affairs at the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs "*Wizarat al Haregeya.*" During this visit in August 2010, I inquired as to the informalization of the international border between Egypt and Gaza, the official policy regarding how the Rafah border crossing is being administered and about the policies surrounding tunnel activity. I was advised to change my research topic. I was told there is no public information on this topic and it would be impossible to critically write an entire master's thesis on a topic as undocumented as this. The government employee I spoke with

adamantly asked to be kept off the record, and insisted that he could not speak outside of his mandate.²⁹

I had many conversations with border guards at the Rafah border crossing, predominantly on the topic of passage to Gaza. The border guards were not too keen on discussing tunnel policy although they all acknowledged tunnels as an alternate border crossing. One border guard suggested my friends and I enter Gaza through the tunnels after he saw how many times we were turned away from the Rafah border crossing. As a result, this study merely mentions the position of the Egyptian government, while the focus is on what was actually happening on the ground. The creation of policy is a multifaceted process and in many cases a policy in implementation takes a life of its own and creates a second policy not always in line with the elected policy. The second policy is the “informal” policy, or the ways and means of implementation. A significant portion of Bedouin stories indicate that passive acceptance of tunnel activity is a frequent reality near and around the Egypt-Gaza border. This study relies upon the experiences of persons living along the Egypt-Gaza border land to explore and describe the way Egyptian border relations affect respondents’ lives and livelihoods.

²⁹ I did not have the opportunity to interview Egyptian officials in Al-Arish, Sheikh Zuwaid or the Rafah area regarding their tunnel prohibition policy; because every time I was in Rafah and neighboring areas with Bedouin people I avoided the Police because I did not want to endanger the company that I kept.

4.1.1. Consequences for tunnel-related activity

We are smuggling because they don't open the border, for them it is a military offense and I am a military criminal. But for us, it is something we are proud to do. (Abu Ahmed)

The Bedouin experience of formal Egyptian tunnel prohibition policy was primarily discussed in terms of imprisonment. The topic of imprisonment for tunnel related activity, and the length of prison terms assigned to the varying degree of smuggled items were discussed in one third of the conversations. Two of the persons interviewed had spent time in prison for previous smuggling activity; both, plus one other respondent was convicted of smuggling and sentenced in absentia.

One respondent, 50 year old Abu Hamada stated that he was imprisoned for three and a half years from 2004 to the middle of 2007, for smuggling weapons. He was a lively and memorable character proudly toting a Kalashnikov rifle, who claimed that "if anyone in Gaza wanted weapons [before 2004], they called him." He clarified that after 2007, "no more guns were needed, there were already too many guns in Gaza, so [he moved] clothes, chocolate, chipсы, bounty bars, mars bars, candy...etc." Abu Hamada did not go into detail about being sentenced in absentia, yet he stated that if he were caught by the police, he would be taken straight to prison. He does not travel anywhere there is a police presence because he is deemed guilty of smuggling. He was very vocal about the restrictions on his movement, which will be discussed

further under the topic of Egyptian-Bedouin relations. He was also outspoken of his fear that the Egyptian police might seize his son if his son were to leave the Bedouin area. Hamada was a young man between the ages of 16 and 18. Abu Hamada was afraid the Egyptian police would imprison Hamada on trumped up charges³⁰ related to the charges against the father.

The other respondent who had been imprisoned for smuggling activity was 35 year old Mohaned. Mohaned was imprisoned for five years between 1998 and 2003 for his smuggling activity. He has since been sentenced in absentia. Two days before our interview he was found guilty in the Ismailia court for smuggling cars. According to Mohaned the sentence for smuggling cars is 10 years. Mohaned explained that when one person is caught (outside of their “no-man’s land” area) that person is sentenced to 7 years and three or four persons inside the “no-man’s land” generally get sentenced in absentia to 10 years [for cars]. Mohaned smuggled zinco and construction materials, he never mentioned smuggling cars. According to Abu Ahmed the sentence for smuggling cars is 10 years (equal to weapons). The sentence for smuggling anything from chipсы to television sets was generally up to 5 years. Abu Ahmed had also been sentenced in absentia. He was sentenced to 3 years for smuggling chips.

Six respondents estimated around 1,000 Bedouins have been imprisoned for tunnel-related smuggling. During one of the informal group interviews four respondents compiled a list of names of persons who were imprisoned for smuggling chips, chocolate, television sets, etc (non-weapon items). 5,000 Bedouin in total are said to have been imprisoned throughout the entire Sinai, for smuggling goods, weapons or drugs as well as human trafficking with Gaza and Israel.

³⁰ Abu Hamada used the example of the police possibly planting drugs on Hamada, then arresting him for drug related charges.

I do not have information on recidivism rates among Bedouin who have been incarcerated for smuggling related activity and released upon completion of their prison sentence, but neither Mohaned nor Abu Hamada had been deterred from tunnel-related activity after being released from prison. Abu Ahmed's quote introducing this chapter adequately summarizes the sentiment of most respondents.

4.1.2. Passive acceptance of tunnel related activity

Sometimes the government in Rafah is very dangerous.

Sometimes they have both eyes closed—completely blind.

Sometimes they have one eye open and one eye closed.

Sometimes you pay a policeman and he doesn't see anything at all,
(some, not all). (Abu Ahmed)

Passive acceptance of tunnel-related activity is the exact opposite of Section 690 of P.L. 110-161 the Consolidations Appropriations Act of 2008. Mousad Abu Fagr explained that the Egyptian government implemented two policies in conflict regarding tunnel prohibition and the closure of Gaza. One policy was because the Egyptian government did not want to starve the Gazans and have a repeat of the chaotic rush for the border that took place in 2008. The second policy was because the Egyptian government did not want to compromise US financial support which meant supporting Israeli interests. Abu Fagr is describing policies of “internal colonialism”.

According to Moussad Abu Fagr, the Egyptian Regime manipulates the Bedouin. Some departments of the Egyptian government allowed smuggling and some actively prohibited it. Of the respondents who discussed policy in our conversations, most provided a very similar assessment of the topic. Yes, there are tunnel raids and the wall has been expanded, but there is also a significant percentage of Egyptian border authorities who passively accept and benefit from tunnel-related activity.

One of the recurring themes in most conversations was the transitory police presence. According to Abu Ahmed and Mohaned, the Egyptian soldiers near the Rafah border-tunnel area are transitioned out on a regular basis to avoid building relationships with the Bedouin traders. The high turnover rate has made it fairly easy for the Bedouin traders to pay off some Egyptian soldiers. According to Abu Ahmed, the conversation of bribery always started with kind words. An abridged version of the typical exchange initiating bribery between Bedouin drivers and Egyptian soldiers is as follows:

Trader: Hello, *salama lakum*³¹ how are you?

How is your family?

Do you have money?

Soldier: No, the whole country is poor.

(Trader takes the soldier a delicious dinner)

Soldier: How many cars?

Trader: How much money?

(Soldiers would always change the rate, but the average bribe rate was \$500)³².

Abu Ahmed and other respondents clarified that not all soldiers accepted bribes. It was also clear that in many cases the corruption reached rungs of the government that I personally did not try to uncover.

³¹ Greeting of peace.

³² Estimated 2,840 Egyptian Pounds per August, 2010 conversion rates.

Another example of passive acceptance of tunnel-related activity was the existence of “smuggling safe” roads. It is difficult to grasp the peculiarity of “smuggling safe” routes without first acknowledging the large number of police checkpoints along main roads.

The main road which divided the Sheikh Zuwaid and Rafah areas between the seaside and the desert side in particular had a significant police presence, as does the border-town of Rafah. The majority of the time I spent with the Bedouin was on the desert side of this main road. The few times I crossed this road with Bedouin traders we used “smuggling-safe” routes. The routes that are safe for smuggling are not by any means hidden from Police sight. In fact these routes were in full view of the police checkpoints. Two particular instances of traveling along the “smuggling-safe” roads stand out in my mind. The first time I crossed the main road via a smuggling route, we were in a regular sized SUV following a large truck full of goods obviously en route to the tunnels in broad daylight. As we were driving a fellow passenger pointed out the police checkpoint, across the street in plain sight. The loaded truck crossed the road freely, as did we. Our driver drove us along back roads up the coast and very near the border. I was told we were 800 feet from the border and within 100 feet from tunnel entrances (hidden in orchards).

The second instance in which I witnessed the smuggling-safe road was just near the Rafah border crossing. During this trip I had gotten a ride from the Bedouin camp to the border crossing in attempt to enter Gaza following the presidential decree to open the Rafah border on June 1, 2010. The road we were on leaving the Bedouin area intersected with the main road to the border gate not 100 meters from an Egyptian artillery tank stationed near the border crossing. Again I was in a regular sized SUV, following full-size trucks loaded with cement that were obviously en route

to the tunnels.³³ I was not the only person at the border in awe of how obvious the tunnel traffic was, and its proximity to the border gate. In a conversation with a Palestinian traveler waiting for the border to open he exclaimed, “I saw the cement today, the cops don’t do anything!” These examples testify to the informal policy of strategically placing checkpoints away from the “smuggling-safe” roads and, or simply turning a blind-eye to tunnel traffic.

Another common occurrence—of passive acceptance—was brought to my attention during a handful of conversations with Bedouin respondents when I inquired about the tunnel used to transport diesel/fuel for cars. Throughout the majority of our drives around the community, the most obvious and highest quantity of goods being transported were diesel-fuel and cement. The trucks transporting these goods were easily identified. Because of the high visibility I inquired how the diesel-fuel tunnel could remain open. One answer was that the diesel-fuel tunnel brings in so much money for the Bedouin that there is a greater effort to keep it concealed and functioning. Another answer was that the Egyptian government is aware of where it is and has filled it with cement in the past, but that the Palestinians and the Bedouins have re-opened it. A handful of respondents on various occasions explained it is quite normal for a tunnel to be filled with cement by the Egyptian authorities, and for the Palestinians to dig through the cement and re-open the tunnel within days or weeks. These answers support the theory that the Egyptian government is well aware of where the tunnels are and what is being transported; especially if tunnels are re-opened and return to business post closure by the Egyptian authorities.

An example of Egyptian authorities benefiting from tunnel activity was first brought to my attention during a conversation with an Egyptian businessman at the Rafah border crossing in

³³ Cement is the most obvious of goods being transported as it is not repackaged.

December 2009. I was at the border with a small delegation attempting to take humanitarian aid from the Doctor's Syndicate in Egypt to hospitals in Gaza. Our 3-day attempt was unsuccessful; we spent a lot of time on the Egyptian side of the border conversing with various other travelers attempting to cross. On our first day at the border the one particular group of persons were coming and going at the border and sparked our interest.

A group of men had passed the first gate with relative ease and returned to the Egyptian side nonchalantly, which I found to be odd, so I introduced myself to one. His name was Dr. Karim, he was an Egyptian businessman from Al-Arish. He inquired as to why we were trying to enter Gaza and we asked him what he was doing at the border. He explained that when the Egyptian authorities uncover goods en route to the tunnels they secretly resell them at cheap prices at the Rafah border crossing. He was there to buy confiscated goods at cheap prices. That day he was purchasing wood and glass. The concept of Egyptian officials secretly re-selling confiscated goods at the border was reinforced months later, by 44 year old Abu Abdallah. When I was interviewing Abu Abdallah about his experience with the tunnels, Abu Abdallah mentioned, "Once the cars and goods are confiscated you never see them again, [Egyptian authorities] re-sell the goods at the border at cheap prices." This was a common occurrence.

The ways and means of Egyptian border authorities varied greatly and have been extremely difficult to document and quantify. The ways and means of implementation include every individual behavior or action of Egyptian authorities near the Rafah border related to the tunnel phenomenon, I have solely emphasized those recurring behaviors and activities. The recurring examples of passive acceptance to tunnel activity include corruption, bribery, turning a blind eye

to re-opened tunnels, tunnel traffic and “smuggling-safe” routes as well as profiting from confiscated merchandise. These activities contradict the official policies of the Egyptian government. The mentioned behavior exemplifies informal passive acceptance of tunnel related activity and the reality that one hand allows what the other prohibits. According to Mussad Abu Fagr, “the Egyptian government is not monolithic, some parts entice the Bedouin to engage in smuggling while other parts of the police harass the Bedouin and put them in jeopardy for smuggling...[this leaves] the Bedouin squeezed between the two conflicting practices of the Egyptian Government.” The contradicting policies of the Egyptian government have allowed enough acceptances (combined with the void of development initiatives and employment opportunities) of the illicit trade that tunnel-related activity was the most lucrative occupation in the Northern Sinai.

4.2. Tunnel employment

By far the most discussed topic in all conversations was the topic of tunnel-related employment. Fourteen respondents discussed tunnel employment in the Northern Sinai. Another brainstorming session/focus group including Abu Ahmed, Abu Abdallah and Abdallah, identified the following various jobs related to the tunnels:

1. Drivers³⁴
2. Look outs (*ain*)³⁵
3. Merchants (*tajr*)³⁶
4. Tunnel Owner³⁷
5. People who package³⁸
6. Storage³⁹
7. Tunnel opening workers⁴⁰

This is by no means a comprehensive list of all jobs related to the tunnels. As previously mentioned, tunnel work on the Egyptian side of the border is different from tunnel work in

³⁴ There are various driver-jobs depending on where the goods are being transported from. The drivers from Cairo to Al-Arish are generally not the same persons who drive the repackaged goods from the Bedouin area between Al-Arish and Rafah to the tunnel entrances.

³⁵ There are look-outs who assist the drivers as passengers and there are look-outs who also charge tolls and direct drivers toward police/checkpoint-free routes.

³⁶ The majority of the Bedouin I interviewed were Merchants. These people get the orders from Gaza, handle the payments for goods and contact merchants/companies/suppliers in Cairo, Ismailia, Al-Arish and in some cases internationally.

³⁷ There are two tunnel owners to each tunnel, one Palestinian and one Egyptian.

³⁸ These persons were the younger ones between the ages of 15 and 21.

³⁹ These are the persons who allow goods to be stored in their houses or on their land before being transited.

⁴⁰ These persons keep track of which goods go through which tunnels to assure the packages reach their appropriate destinations.

Palestine. The major difference is that Palestinians do most of the underground work. The various jobs have different degrees of risk. Outside of discussing imprisonment and the possibility of being sentenced in absentia our discussions did not explore the various degrees of risk, but instead the amount of persons employed by the tunnel industry in the Northern Sinai region—particularly Al-Arish, Shiekh Zuwaid and Rafah—estimations varied.

Abu Ahmed informed me there are two types of tunnel work, *mupasha* and *ghair mupasha* (direct and indirect). There are those who are directly invested, for example tunnel owners. There are those who work indirectly, they do not seek out the work but are sought when there is work to do, those persons are *ghair mupasha*—indirect. The first time I asked Abu Ahmed to estimate the amount of people employed by the tunnels he said, “I am direct (*mupasha*), there are around ten people who work with me. Perhaps there are 1,000 people who are direct like me.” He estimated 10,000 people work in various capacities related to the tunnels. Abu Ramadan also estimated 10,000 persons in the Rafah, Al-Arish, Shiekh Zuwaid area. He compared 2010 to 2003, when only 100 people were employed by the tunnel industry. He specified that his estimate was not counting the companies in Cairo in 2010.⁴¹ It is important to emphasize that estimations of the number of persons working in the Al-Arish, Shiekh Zuwaid, Rafah region varied. According to Abu Islam, only 2,000 people worked related to the tunnels. According to Mohamed, the only storage provider interviewed, there were around 200 or 300 other storage providers in the area. Abu Salaam also estimated 10,000 people. He stated 10,000 out of a population of around 50,000 so 20% of the population worked related to the tunnels. Hisham, who was not dependent upon the tunnels, estimated 5,000 people had tunnel related employment.

⁴¹ Most merchants worked with persons throughout Egypt, some claim to have worked very closely with big companies in Cairo to fulfill bulk orders.

Abu Omar estimated 10% of the population in the Al-Arish, Sheikh Zuwaid, Rafah region were dependent upon the tunnels; Ayman estimated 20 %. When I asked Abu Abdallah his estimate of the employed population he replied, “many people, you can say 70% of the population in Al-Arish, Sheikh Zuwaid and Rafah. In 2009 maybe 90%, business has dropped significantly in the last two months.” Abdallah, the translator for this conversation, added that the tunnel economy has raised the economic level of Rafah so that it is now comparable to the economic activity of Gaza City. The lowest estimate of jobs created by tunnel-related activity was 2,000 and the highest was 90 percent of the population in 2009. The average estimate of jobs created was 10,000 in the Rafah, Al-Arish, Shiekh Zuwaid region alone.

Abu Ramadan was the only respondent to compare 2010 to 2003, as he was one of the few respondents to have over five years experience with the tunnels. All of the respondents whose livelihoods were dependent upon the tunnels indicated that while tunnel work was their only income, work was not consistent. Consistency varied depending upon the job and the respondent. Abu Ramadan, a tajr, worked with four or five distributors in Gaza. Each distributor would place a bulk order with him, for example 100 television sets, every 15-20 days. Mohamed, who provides storage, specified he worked with around five cars every week. Abu Abdallah’s family worked with one car a week—he did not specify in what capacity. Rami, a lookout for a diesel truck, sometimes worked everyday sometimes every three days. Abu Salaam, a tunnel opening worker moved goods once or twice a week, four-five hours at a time in three or four different tunnels.⁴²

⁴² Abu Salaam continued that twice or three times the cops have come and he escaped through the tunnel to Gaza, where he then waited until morning before returning to Egypt through another tunnel.

These responses provide a mere shard of the economic circumstance of the Bedouin populations of the Northern Sinai and the ways in which they have benefitted, with consequence, from the siege of Gaza. During my second to last trip to the field there was a significant decline in tunnel work which was evident in various ways: there was less tunnel traffic, and fewer people in the streets, the Bedouin area felt deserted. Toward the end of the summer, each of my contacts had the same assessment that there was less work since mid-July. When I asked Abu Ahmed, “what will the people do without the tunnels?” He responded, “Farm.”

4.2.1 New wealth for development or conspicuous consumption?

Question: Where is everyone's money, if there are no banks?

Answer: In the Sand.

We bury it at night, in dollars.

The desert is rich. (Abu Islam)

A significant amount of money has been pumped into the Northern Sinai Bedouin community as a result of their work transporting goods to Gaza via the tunnels. At least ten percent of the population has financially benefited from the tunnel economy at some point between 2007 and 2010. The future of the community is uncertain. As previously mentioned one of the greatest complaints against the Egyptian government has been the void in development of the Sinai, despite its wealth of natural resources. Toward the end of my fieldwork I had the opportunity to discuss investment opportunities with a few of the Bedouin I had built relationships with, a handful of whom showed me their beautiful homes, multiple cars, laptops, etc; the majority of which were purchased or built post 2007. It was clear; the Bedouin respondents did not trust banks any more than they trusted the Egyptian government. It was a common practice to bury their money in the sand at night.

Those who did not bury their money used it for conspicuous consumption. Their purchases were material; there were few if any multiplier effects from their investments. Most (*tajr*) respondents had built beautiful villas and drove top of the line off road vehicles. During my first tour of the region I noticed the numerous beautiful villas in the Bedouin-Shiekh Zuwaid region, juxtaposed

to the average Bedouin homes. When driving through the region I would inquire as to the owners of the homes and Abu Ahmed, Ahmed or Mohaned would explain all of the newer villas were built in 2007 and in some cases they would say, “those two are merchants, that one sells cars, etc.”

On one such drive throughout the community we visited Mohaned’s land. Mohaned had purchased a farm with his new wealth. He owned 45 dunams at 10,000\$/dunam (\$450,000). His land was full of fruit trees, during harvest he employed around five to ten people to help him collect the fruit and prepare it to be sold. Mohaned was the youngest most successful merchant with whom I was in contact. I do not know of any other respondents who were able to provide non-tunnel related employment to anyone—outside of construction labor for homes built between 2007 and 2010.

It was clear that the money was not equally distributed. One need only drive a little away from the sea and the Gaza-Israel border to see traditional Bedouin dwellings with the stamp of the World Food Program, signifying the more destitute of the Bedouin community. In some conversations the topic of inequality would arise and I would ask respondents how distribution of wealth affected internal Bedouin relations. Hisham explained, “10% of the people have villas, 50% have better homes and 40% know their situation and accept it without trying to change.” Abdallah simply explained, “those who have money help those who do not.” I did not spend time in the outlying areas of the community. It was quite evident that the proximity to the border made a difference in the distribution of wealth—although there were increases in recent years, not all persons in close proximity to the border were dependent upon tunnel-related activity.

4.3. Evolution of the Tunnel Phenomenon

How the tunnels have evolved and changed over the years was discussed with nine of the eighteen respondents. All responses indicated that the tunnels had evolved greatly over the past 20 years. Experience and exposure to the tunnel evolution varied. Of the respondents, eight did not disclose when they began working or noticing more work in the tunnels, one began working in 1999, one in 2001, two in 2003, one in 2005, three in 2007, one in 2008 and one in 2009. Thus of the ten respondents who can recall the year they started working in the tunnels, five began working after 2007. Throughout the conversations only three respondents estimated the creation date of the first tunnel; each guessed a different year. Their responses were: 1982, 1984 and 1992. Those who discussed the growth of the tunnel phenomenon did so in line with major events and political changes in the region.

Most conversations that featured the topic of how the tunnels have changed over time were summaries of regional events that advanced tunnel growth. For example, when I asked Abu Ahmed about the history of the tunnels he responded with a historical review of regional politics. He associated the heightened Israeli-Egyptian Siege of Gaza with the various goods transported at different points in time. He stated that

“from 1984 to 2000 there were very few tunnels, maybe one or two only, in the beginning they were used to move money. From 2000-2005 there was not much activity. From 2000 to 2007 the tunnels were used to move weapons only, all other goods were

available in Gaza. On September 15, 2005 Israel pulled out of Gaza. In June 2007 the siege began...”

Abu Ahmed claimed that after 2007 gun policy in Gaza changed and only members of Hamas could carry weapons, which explained why weapons were no longer being transported through the tunnels. After 2007 the goods being transported through the tunnels changed from weapons to just about anything. The business was simple, “A Palestinian in Gaza would call his friends in Egypt; to say we need televisions, gas, cigarettes, benzene petrol, chips, refrigerators...etc.” (Abu Ahmed). All respondents who discussed the movement of weapons agreed, after 2007 the movement of weapons was not comparable to all other goods.

Hisham was another respondent whose response aligned the growth of the tunnels with political and economic developments in the region. Hisham stated that in 2005 people wanted work and there was work in the tunnels, “After the Israeli’s pulled out, there wasn’t a problem making a tunnel. Maybe there were around five hundred tunnels. In 2007, maybe there were around 1000 tunnels.” Hisham, claimed that the withdrawal from Gaza was a contributing factor to tunnel growth, but the real increase in tunnel activity came after 2007. All respondents, who discussed this topic, agreed that tunnel business surged in 2007.

According to Abu Ramadan, between 2004 and 2005 the livelihood of around 500 people were dependent upon tunnel-related activity. He recalled 2005 as a significant year because Israel pulled out of Gaza; he explained: “after that they made the siege.” In 2006 there were maybe 250-300 tunnels, but he specifically stated that it was not until Hamas came to power in 2007 that everything changed. Abu Ramadan explained, “With Hamas there were 900-1000 tunnels,

twice as many.” He specified that despite rapid growth in 2007, business was better between 2003 and 2005 because there were fewer people, and less competition. Another estimate which testifies to the drastic increase of tunnel-related activity in 2007 is that in 1999 there were only two to five tunnels and now there are between three hundred and upwards of a thousand tunnels.⁴³ The consensus is that in 2007 everything changed. With the siege the number of tunnels doubled and the type of goods being transported changed from weapons and money to household and luxury items. Most respondents also stated in the past three years there have been a number of technological advancements within the tunnels to increase productivity and accommodate the rise in goods being transported. Most documentaries or videos that include footage of the tunnels between Egypt and Gaza showcase the tunnel “trains”. The tunnel trains are electronic pulley systems which mobilize train-like compartments. These contraptions more efficiently transport sand and goods from one country to the next. Abu Hamada, Abu Ramadan and Abu Ahmed all agreed that one of the major changes since 2005 has been technological advancements. Abu Ramadan claimed that by 2010 everything was moved with machines.

Another major advancement discussed by a handful of respondents was the size of the tunnels. Before 1992-2003, the tunnels were smaller, more primitive. By 2010 there were tunnels big enough to transport cars. The transportation of cars was new in 2010. At the time of my first set of interviews the tunnels had been transporting cars for four months—dating back to February 2010 (around the same time that the American corps of engineers made headline news for building the underground wall along the Egypt-Gaza border).

⁴³ The number of tunnels is impossible to quantify or verify. The majority of respondents who estimated the number of tunnels all specified that while perhaps there are more than 300 tunnels in existence (estimations vary) there are not more than one to two hundred tunnels working at a time. I reiterate there is a constant tunnel turnover rate; tunnels are constantly being dug, filled, expanded, closed, collapsing, etc.

Another noteworthy change was discussed by Abu Ramadan with agreement from Abu Hamada and Abu Ahmed. According to Abu Ramadan in 2003 maybe 50 to 100 people worked related to the tunnels...today in 2010 the companies in Cairo indirectly work with the tunnels. Each *tajr* described transporting goods in bulk. They explained they would make arrangements with friends in Ismailia and Cairo for semi-truck loads full of merchandise. It was their understanding that the persons they worked through were employed by big businesses and major corporations. They explained that there was no attempt to hide that these goods were going to Gaza, and it was their understanding that suppliers knowingly supported tunnel-related activity.

Since 2007, the size of tunnels grew and more goods could be transported to Gaza via the tunnels and supply grew regardless of the demand. In order for the cost of transporting goods to remain competitive prices dropped. According to Abu Abdallah, in the beginning (2003-2007) tunnel rent for one package was five hundred dollars and the prison terms for smuggling were twenty years; now rent varies from fifteen to twenty dollars and as previously mentioned prison sentences varied from three to ten years depending on the goods being transported. These adjustments reflect the normalization, or informalization that took place under the Egypt-Palestine border between 2007 and 2010.

The tunnel phenomenon between Egypt and Gaza is in constant flux. Between May and June 2010, the greatest changes were in the size and capacity of the tunnels as well as the amount of persons employed by the business. Between July and August the greatest change in business was in the reduction of business, a consequence of the loosening of the siege by Israel and Egypt. In

the beginning of June, Hisham explained, “this month [smuggling] has gone down, more goods are coming from Israel.” Business continued to decrease through July and August 2010. My final visit to the Northern Sinai in August 2010 was drastically different from my first visit in May 2010. The community was less active, and there were fewer trucks transporting goods. There was obviously less work. I was told there was still work moving cement and construction materials, most other goods were being transported through Israel.

Each of the respondents who discussed tunnel growth in terms of regional politics agreed, the main reason 2007 was a bigger year for the tunnels than 2005 (following the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza) was Hamas policy. It cannot be disputed that when Hamas came to power the siege began and Israel closed the gates for goods going to Gaza. As Israel closed the legal routes for trade, entry and exit to Gaza, Hamas legalized the tunnels, creating a prime environment for the tunnel boom. The restrictions imposed by Israel and Egypt were such that Bedouin traders made a substantial profit ordering goods in bulk from companies in Cairo.

4.4. Transported goods

Respondents were eager to discuss the variety of goods they transported, as well as the amount and price of those items. Eight respondents discussed this topic. It was also a topic of conversation with the random selection of respondents I met at the Rafah Border Crossing. One of the more significant findings in this section is the amount of goods that were transported between May and June 2010. Goods were transported in bulk. The amount of transported goods reflects the severity of siege. The following conversations took place before May 31, 2010 and the subsequent loosening of the siege which drastically lowered the amount and variety of goods being transported through the tunnels.

According to a group discussion with Abu Ahmed, Mohaned and Tamer, the top five most frequently transported goods included:

1. Petrol/Diesel
2. Cement⁴⁴
3. Coke/Pepsi
4. Cigarettes
5. Electronics

These goods made the tajrs the most money because they were in constant demand. Both Abu Ahmed and Mohaned agreed there are also a lot of clothes, watches, perfume, mattresses,

⁴⁴ One respondent, Abu Mohamed stated everyday 500 tons of cement were transported through the tunnels.

livestock, blankets, floor-rugs (*hdeera*). Some of the more unconventional and rare items to be transported were the zoo animals. Abu Ahmed estimated there are between one and seven lions in Gaza.⁴⁵ Abu Ahmed was personally responsible for the transport of two monkeys, as well as goats, donkeys, horses, chickens. When I visited a zoo in Gaza I saw deer/stag, monkeys, baboons, a lion/lioness, a tiger, peacocks, snakes, etc.—the majority of which were surely transported via the tunnels. According to Abu Ramadan, “We move everything.” In each conversation about the evolution of the tunnels, the transportation of cars was revered as the most significant spatial and financial development in recent years. Tajrs who transported cars made the largest commission.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ I have personally heard four different stories of Lions being transported via the tunnels, with different details regarding how the lion was recaptured, awakened, killed by tunnel workers or killed tunnel workers at some point in transit. Stories varied.

⁴⁶ See table 1.

Table 1. TRANSPORTED GOODS AND ESTIMATED BEDOUIN COMMISSIONS

(Focus group-like conversation amongst, Abu Islam, Abu Hamada, Abu Ramadan and Abu Ahmed.)

Item	In Egypt	Tunnel Rent (split 50/50 between tunnel owners)	(Commission)	In Gaza
*Computer	+/- 1250\$	175\$	175\$	1,600\$
Televisions (bulk quantity unclear)	1,300\$	225\$	225\$	1,750\$
Small Sheep (from near the Libyan border)	700LE	80LE	100LE	880LE
Turkish Cement (preferred over Egyptian cement) (quantity unclear)	100\$	200\$		\$300
Clothes	(prices vary)	20\$/bag, no more than 40kilos		
Cars	(prices vary)	6,000\$		
Aluminum (<i>zinco</i>)	\$1,5000/ton	250\$	250\$	2,000\$

*some disagreement about the cost in Egypt

The above table is included to indicate the estimated price of goods at the various points of transit rather than the variety of goods being transported. Other goods not previously mentioned

include reams of paper (all sizes), luggage⁴⁷, generators, computers, televisions, receivers, ceramics, freezers, chocolate, bounty bars, mars bars, candy, cokes, cigarettes, musical instruments, motor-bikes, etc. Respondents who had experience transporting goods before 2007 acknowledged weapons smuggling as a past-time. All of those persons asserted weapons were no longer in demand in Gaza since 2007. Abu Hamada, also adamantly stated “food”—rice, sugar, flour—was not transported via the tunnels. According to him, “[Palestinians] have better food than we do; we do not take them food UNRWA is there...sometimes we take peaches, oranges, and watermelon” (local crops).

There was a standing offer from the Bedouin traders I was in contact with that if I ever needed anything sent to Gaza or if I knew of any aid organization which needed to send supplies into Gaza they would be more than happy to move it. The range of goods moved through the tunnels was best described by Bianca Zammit. She is Maltese and was in Gaza for eighteen months working with the International Solidarity Movement⁴⁸, she explained:

“the tunnels really are just allowing hobbies and dreams to continue, besides the very basics, food—cement, etc...[all the other things] are really just hobbies, different materials for [peoples] passions, musical instruments, things that are not entering [overland] through Egypt or Israel are entering through the tunnels...”

⁴⁷ A Palestinian family I met at the Rafah Border Crossing was trans-nationally moving to Gaza with two small children and it was most advantageous for them to send their luggage ahead through the tunnels than to take it to the border. They did not indicate how much they paid to have their luggage transported but they said they had 8-10 full size suitcases sent through the tunnels. In retrospect this was a beneficial decision because they went to the Rafah border crossing every day for two weeks before they were allowed to enter Gaza.

⁴⁸ Who are they—what do they do?

I acknowledge that there is no way in knowing, limiting or estimating the wealth of goods that has been or continues to be transported through the tunnels. It is important to mention that the goods being transported reflect the items being prohibited for overland import/export.

4.5. Egyptian-Bedouin Relations

At the time of writing the Bedouin in the Northern Sinai between Sheikh Zuwaid and the Rafah border were fairly autonomous.⁴⁹ I was not aware of the exact boundary where the Egyptian government was feared and respected versus where there was no police presence and Bedouin moved freely without threat of capture and governed themselves, but such a border existed.⁵⁰ The empowerment of the Bedouin in the Northern Sinai has been a relatively new occurrence, which matured alongside and was not totally unrelated to the tunnel boom-phenomenon beginning in 2007. Clearly the tunnel boom infused the Bedouin community with newfound wealth, weaponry and technological advancements: tools which aided the Bedouin in securing a sense of autonomy.

Nine of the eighteen, or half of the respondents were very outspoken about the topic of Bedouin self-government. These conversations indicated a clear “us”-“them” mentality. The majority of respondents expressed varying degrees of disconnect with the Egyptian state and in some cases very negative sentiments toward “Egyptians.” Not all of the respondents expressed negative remarks. Abu Hamada expressed his disgust with Egyptians by giving the example of the way the Egyptians treat African migrants and refugees migrating to Israel. According to Abu Hamada

⁴⁹ I am referring to the Bedouin having a region where they would govern and police themselves. This is an area where the Egyptian authorities were largely unwelcome and shoot-outs between Bedouin and Egyptian authorities happened on a regular basis particularly when the Egyptian police challenged the regional boundaries and attempted to make arrests in certain areas.

⁵⁰ Such a border seemed to be aligned with “smuggling safe” roads. On one occasion a friend and I were leaving the Rafah Border Crossing waiting to be picked up and taken back to the Bedouin area by our Bedouin friend. As previously mentioned, the “smuggling safe” roads intersect the main road to the border gate, so we began to walk up the side street. As we were walking a group of Bedouin children warned us to stay off the road and away from the trees as we could be shot by those protecting the tunnel route, indicating that we were near the relative armistice line between tunnel-dependents and border authorities.

there was one particular occasion in which an African migrant and child were attempting to migrate, the child was caught by the Egyptian police but not the parent. Abu Hamada claimed that Egypt did not return the child to the parent until required by Israel. Abu Hamada was not the only respondent to cite Egyptian treatment of African migrants as a testament to their lack of humanity. According to Abu Hamada “one to three African migrants died daily along the Egyptian-Israeli border.”

In most conversations where one person would claim “*all* Egyptians [are] liars and thieves” another respondent would specify, “not *all* Egyptians.” Some Bedouin would identify themselves as separate from the Egyptian state and some would call themselves Egyptian Bedouin. Clearly, there existed diverse sentiment toward the Egyptian state and Bedouin self-identification (as inspired by exchanges with Egyptian police). On the topic of Bedouin self-government and autonomy in the region, which I have previously referred to as a “no-man’s” land or Bedouin “reservation”, however, there is no diversity of opinion; relative Bedouin autonomy exists. The living-space and relative autonomy is loosely comparable to Native American reservations in the United States. In a few conversations some of the Bedouin respondents inquired as to the circumstance of Native Americans in the United States and said, “We are like them.”

The following two quotations highlight the concept of autonomy. These two respondents were not dependent upon the tunnels. One respondent a 40 year old farmer, Hisham explained that “The people in Rafah, and all neighborhoods within 20 kilometers of the [border] wall, have so much money [they have started] to challenge the government. Before, we had guns, but they were hidden, now any car has guns...” Another respondent, 18 year old Abdallah—who also was

not dependent upon the tunnels for his livelihood, but whose father and brother were—explained “the tunnels are good for the Bedouin; the government leaves us alone here in our village. Rafah is different. There are 5,000 Bedouin in jail.”⁵¹ Abdallah continued, “Some people don’t sleep at home, they stay far from their houses to keep away from the cops eyes; these people live in the mountains or the desert and they have guns to protect them from the government.”⁵² Both of these comments associate increased Bedouin ownership of firearms with attaining their autonomy; as well as a sense of separateness between the Bedouin “sovereign” region and Egyptian Rafah re: governmental control. In the conversation with Abdallah, Abu Abdallah and Abu Ahmed I inquired when the most recent shoot-out with the Egyptian police had occurred in the region, the response was “last week, when you were here maybe ten days ago there were shoot-outs.” According to Abu Ahmed, the government was looking for people to arrest and the Bedouin shot back, no Bedouin were wounded; only Egyptian police suffered injuries.⁵³

Some assessments of the empowerment of the Bedouin in the Northern Sinai did not solely attribute relative Bedouin sovereignty to the newfound wealth related to the tunnel phenomenon. According to acclaimed author and activist Moussad Abu Fagr, this empowerment was a natural development as the traditional Bedouin community faced modernity, particularly considering the Bedouin access to firearms.

Abu Ahmed’s theory of Bedouin empowerment was less hypothetical and more circumstantial. He believed that the empowerment of the Bedouin in the Northern Sinai was related to a

⁵¹ Abu Ahmed and a few other respondents also estimated 5,000 Northern and Southern Sinai Bedouin were imprisoned from the Sinai, because of drugs, weapons and tunnels.

⁵² One *tajr* had bodyguards with him at all times and changed the location he slept in every night.

⁵³ I did not find any media reports testifying to these exchanges between the Bedouin and the Egyptian police.

complicated turn of events, offset by the brutal killing of two Bedouin men at the hands of Egyptian police officers in the middle of the Sinai. In his memory this event united northern and southern Bedouin. It inspired protests along the Israeli border. The protests inspired negotiations between the Egyptian government and Bedouin leaders. Negotiations were cut short after Bedouin leader, Salem Lafi, was seized and imprisoned during an attempt to communicate with the government on behalf of the Bedouin. This was a significant event contributing to the Bedouin mistrust of the Egyptian Regime.

According to Abu Ahmed, Salem Lafi was then characterized as one of the most dangerous men in Egypt and his prison location was changed on a regular basis. In 2010 somewhere between Port Said and Al-Arish, a group of Bedouins surrounded the convoy transporting Lafi. Lafi, as well as the prisoner he was handcuffed to, were released and a couple of Egyptian officers were killed. The Egyptian Regime responded to his escape by sending ten tanks to Lafi's house. The Bedouin were strong enough to hold off the tanks and the Egyptian government has not returned since. To the Bedouin Salem Lafi is a hero. This story was told differently in the media. Media has depicted Lafi as a dangerous criminal and the standoff in the desert (with ten Egyptian tanks) went unmentioned. The heroic tale of Salem Lafi and the inability of the Egyptian government to recapture him symbolized the strength and autonomy of the Bedouin in the Northern Sinai. Abu Fagr acknowledged that "both smuggling and self-armament had empowered the Bedouin to challenge the Egyptian government; through their empowerment, the Bedouin discovered that the Egyptian state is not as strong as it appeared."

Bedouin autonomy proved sustainable with traditional Bedouin justice. In situations of internal communal conflict the Bedouin rely upon their own traditional means of seeking justice and fairness. Via participant observation of the community during my first visit to the region I was exposed to a situation in which two Bedouin families were in conflict and the *Sheikhs* or leaders of the two families were called upon to resolve the situation in their traditional way. Between May 22, and May 23, 2010 one Bedouin family confiscated six cars of another Bedouin family being transported to the tunnels. The former family wanted to be compensated by the latter, because transporting cars is a symbol of great wealth. The family transporting the cars did not have many people with them at the time and surrendered the cars. The following day the family whose cars were confiscated paid a visit to the family who confiscated the cars, requesting the return of the confiscated merchandise as well as compensation for their trouble. There were no Egyptian police involved.

Thereafter the system of Bedouin justice came into play. The Bedouin concepts of justice are simple. The most respected *Sheikhs* of each family meet to discuss the situation and a third *Sheikh* from a neutral family mediates. I was in the home of Abu Ahmed when various members of the communities came to discuss the situation of the cars which had happened the previous the night. Abu Ahmed explained, “There is no police. One *Sheikh* from one family will talk to the *Sheikhs* of these two families and together they will resolve it.”⁵⁴ The last time I asked Abu Ahmed about the situation he explained that the families were still in negotiations but that the cars had been returned and the family that confiscated them would most likely have to compensate the other family for their trouble.

⁵⁴ I was invited to go with Abu Ahmed and his family members to witness the process; I responded that if there would be weapons I did not want to go. We did not go.

The Bedouin preferred to be left to their own devices, yet the most recurring complaint about the Egyptian government and their treatment under the regime was related to development. The Bedouin felt that the Egyptian regime had not adequately developed the Sinai, considering its wealth of resources. Today, Sinai⁵⁵ accounts for nearly one-third of the country's total tourism revenue (Mohyeldin, Makary 2010). The Egyptian Government has yet to develop the Northern Sinai to its full potential. Abu Ahmed explained “in the Sinai we have fish, petrol, sand, cement, tourism, etc...but the Bedouin are very poor—why?” According to him this is because the Egyptian Regime sees the Bedouin in the Sinai as bad. According to Mussad Abu Fagr the absence of development is intended to keep the Bedouin dependent and poor. Moussad Abu Fagr is a border thinker. “Border thinking” in all its complexity—geohistorical, sexual, racial, national, diasporic and exile, etc.—is a way of thinking that emerged as a response to the conditions of everyday life created by economic globalization and the new faces of the colonial difference (Mignolo, 2000). Northern Sinai Bedouin are marginalized and ignored with regard to provision of services, development initiatives and employment opportunities. This marginalization is a main push factor toward tunnel-related employment.

⁵⁵ Southern.

4.6. Bedouin-Palestinian Relations

“In half an hour we could be in Gaza.”

-Abu Hamada

The lack of development and relative marginalization of the indigenous populations of the Sinai is something the Bedouin find in common with Palestinians (as suffered by Israeli policy).

Nearly half of the Bedouin respondents brought up the topic of Bedouin-Palestinian relations. In these conversations, Bedouin respondents spoke more amicably about Palestinians than they had spoken about Egyptians. These conversations discussed the various ways the Bedouin community is similar to Palestinians in Gaza. One of the most interesting themes from these conversations was the frequency of Bedouin and other individuals traveling between the Bedouin community and the Gaza Strip. For example, 8 of the 18 respondents mentioned how they or people they knew—Egyptian and or foreign nationals—used the tunnels to enter and exit Gaza.⁵⁶ On most occasions Bedouin used the tunnels to visit Gaza for special occasions like weddings, to visit family or friends or because for some Bedouin it was safer and easier to travel to Gaza City in case of an emergency rather than the nearest hospitals in Egypt—due to threat of capture.⁵⁷ The context of foreign nationals entering Gaza via the tunnels varied.

⁵⁶ All were cases in which travel was or would have been prohibited by the Egyptian government.

⁵⁷ Bedouin respondents who felt safer visiting hospitals in Gaza were ones who either knew or expected they had been sentenced in Absentia and preferred not to leave the region in which they felt they could move freely rather than risk being caught and imprisoned by Egyptian Authorities. This region of free movement included tunnel travel to Gaza.

Abu Hassan, a respondent whose livelihood was not dependent upon the tunnels spoke to me at length about the “shared spirit” between the Bedouin and the “people—refugees—of Gaza.” He believed there was a shared spirit resulting from a history of suffering which motivated the continuance of the tunnel economy. All respondents who spoke of the Egyptian government concurred: the suffering endured by the Bedouin is rooted in Egyptian policies of marginalization. When they discussed their marginalization by the Egyptian Regime, Bedouin respondents continually referred to the void of development in the Sinai as a main indicator of inequality with other parts of Egypt. Most complaints, as previously cited, returned to topics like inadequate education, healthcare and infrastructure—for example access to water. One respondent, Tarek, compared the Egyptian administration of the Sinai to the preceding Israeli administration of the Sinai, favoring the latter. According to Tarek water infrastructure during the Israeli occupation was more efficient, advanced and reliable compared to current Egyptian administration of the Sinai.

In all conversations in which I inquired about the future of the tunnels, respondents stated that the border must open for the Palestinians. They acknowledged that while the tunnels had made them a significant amount of money and provided jobs within their community, the status quo could not continue for the Palestinians. The temporariness of the situation was anticipated. All in all, Egyptian Bedouin in the Northern Sinai were supportive of an end to the siege despite the rewards their community has reaped by monopolizing alternate exit/entrance tunnels to an otherwise isolated and closed Gaza strip.

It warrants noting that each of the Bedouin respondents who openly discussed the limitations to their movement had traveled to Gaza with great ease. Thus the tunnels served an additionally significant purpose for the marginalized Bedouin populations. According to Abu Hamada, Palestinians go to weddings in Gaza; and if [he] needed to [he would] go to a hospital in Gaza [rather than al-Arish]. He stated, in the presence of Abu Ahmed and Abu Ramadan—who agreed—that if he were injured and in need of a hospital he would go to the hospital in Gaza City before anywhere in Egypt. He declared he had not left the Northern Sinai Bedouin region in three years. He did not specify exactly how many times he had visited Gaza.

The Bedouin respondents who admitted to traveling from Egypt to Gaza via the tunnels were Abu Ahmed, Ahmed, Mohaned, Tarek, Abu Hamada, Abu Salaam. Abu Ramadan and Abu Ahmed aided others in traveling to Gaza via the tunnels. Other respondents I am aware of have also used the tunnels to cross the otherwise closed border include three foreign nationals⁵⁸, two non-Bedouin Egyptian nationals and two Palestinian respondents. The first Palestinian used the tunnels to flee Gaza indefinitely after being turned away at the Rafah Border Crossing in Gaza.⁵⁹ The second Palestinian used the tunnels to enter and exit Gaza, to visit family and friends. The second Palestinian traveled to Gaza via the tunnels with two foreigners and an Egyptian national—all of whom would not have been able to enter Gaza via the Erez crossing or the Rafah Border Crossing. The tunnel traveler was able to enter Gaza via the tunnels without being charged a toll/fee at either entrance. The first Palestinian was charged a significant price at each tunnel opening. I am unaware if the second Palestinian and company paid for travel.

⁵⁸ Of the foreign nationals I had the liberty of interviewing one at length, who I refer to as “tunnel traveler”. I do not have any information as to the motivations of the other two.

⁵⁹ There were similar stories of Palestinians using the tunnels to exit Gaza in other conversations with Palestinians. One such recurring theme recalls pastimes when Hamas used the tunnels to flee Fatah and vice-versa.

Again, circumstances of using the tunnels as alternate entry/exit into Gaza varied. Abu Ramadan was proud of the circumstance in which he enabled an Egyptian woman to enter Gaza to meet her Palestinian fiancé, a man she met and fell in love with online. Abu Ahmed knew of similar “love stories” in which Russian women have traveled to Gaza to meet their husbands. On other occasions, doctors or Palestinians had used the tunnels to travel to Gaza.⁶⁰

Of the Bedouin respondents, the youngest respondent to have visited Gaza was 16 year old, Ahmed. He listened to Palestinian music and spoke in a dialect that was a combination of Palestinian and Bedouin *ameya* (slang), significantly different from Egyptian *ameya* (common in Cairo). His vocabulary included slang words for the drones that hovered above Gaza and he had a similar understanding of the occupation to the musicians he shared with me. He exemplified a greater “shared spirit” with Palestinians in Gaza than his father or uncles. In the three month time that I knew Ahmed, he had traveled to Gaza twice. Two other respondents mentioned they frequently traveled to Gaza once every two or three months.

The respondents who went into the greatest detail about the tunnels in which they traveled said they traveled through “chipsy” tunnels. A chipsy tunnel varies from three to five feet in height two to three feet in width. The tunnel traveler provided the most detail. He traveled through a tunnel escorted by the tunnel owner. He wore a Bedouin scarf to hide his foreignness. He stated

⁶⁰ A photojournalist was simultaneously working on a story about the tunnels as I was conducting my fieldwork. We were able to help each other and occasionally met in the field with the Bedouin. She was able to travel to Gaza when I was turned away at the border—her request was processed through the Egyptian press syndicate where mine was processed via the *Wizarat al Haregeya*. Her photo story followed the lives of one family separated by the international border. In our discussions she coined the term, “love smuggling” to describe the movement of persons similar to the “love story” described by Abu Ramadan.

that there were people working in the tunnel while he was crossing; the six to eight men were moving boxes of goods along the tunnel-trains and he could not identify the contents of the packages, nor did he inquire. Before crossing he had arranged to have the permission of a leading Hamas official.⁶¹ He was not met by a Hamas official upon entrance into Gaza. He stayed in Gaza for two weeks with friends and acquaintances and when it was time for him to leave he received a call from his fixer and exited Gaza that day. He exited through the same tunnel, but he said he did not recognize it as workers had lengthened it and dug a second exit.

This section testifies to the normalization-informalization of the tunnels as a viable alternative for any interested people who wish to enter Gaza where passage is otherwise prohibited.

The Gaza Freedom March and the various humanitarian aid ships are full of interested foreigners who would at least consider and at most pay extravagant prices to travel to Gaza via the tunnels—if it were presented to them as a viable alternative entry/exit into Gaza.

⁶¹ This was required as a safety precaution by the Bedouin who arranged the travel.

4.7. Tunnels as alternate to uncertainty at the Rafah Border Terminal

“The Rafah Border Crossing is like the Bermuda Triangle, who knows what will happen.” -Shahinaz

“Its *salata*, a little this, a little that, but no real rule of law, no real reason for anything. One day you talk to one person, another day you talk to another person, but they never say the same thing and at each different gate/point of entry into the next point there is a different reason not to get through...” -Hamid

Border Guard: “What are you doing here?”

Me: “Mubarak said the border is open, is that right?”

Border Guard: “THANK GOD! Yes, it is open every day now!

Where is your passport?”

(about ten minutes after taking our passports....)

Border Guard: “Ah, you do not have Palestinian *tansik*.⁶² You see the problem is not with the Egyptian government anymore, on our side the border is open but from their side you need *tansik*.”

From my observations at the Rafah Border Crossing and experiences with Palestinian friends and travelers, the greatest problem of policy at the Rafah Border Crossing since the siege has been the arbitrariness of passage. One of the policies that encouraged arbitrariness was the stipulation

⁶² Coordination.

from the AMA of 2005 that “use of the Rafah crossing be restricted to Palestinian ID card holders and others by exception in agreed categories with prior notification to the Government of Israel and approval of senior PA leadership.” The reality on the ground—that there is no other viable crossing into or out of Gaza as well as the disconnect between Hamas and Fatah—makes this registry and notification to the Government of Israel politically charged and thereafter null and void as the most important characteristic for passage.

The wealth of travelers who have been stranded on either side of this border seems unnecessary. The two main reasons people do or do not cross are: 1. Possession or lack of proper Palestinian identification or *tansik* (coordination) with the Egyptian government⁶³; or 2. Contact with or the inability to contact one of the two people on the Palestinian side who the Egyptian government maintained communication with since the rise of the Hamas administration of Gaza and the internal divide.⁶⁴

To emphasize this point I will mention two cases of passage into Gaza. The first is the case of a transnational family permanently migrating to Gaza. The family consisted of a Palestinian man (from Gaza), Hamid, his Arab, non-Palestinian passport holding wife, Shahinaz, and their two children (under the age of 4), Mena and Ibrahim. The family attempted to enter Gaza nearly everyday for two weeks and everyday they were told a different story. All four of them held American passports, only Hamid held both an American and a Palestinian passport. The first

⁶³ I acknowledge the importance of travel documents at international borders, exit and entry into Egypt should be administered equally at all entry and exit points to Egypt—particularly in cases of exiting Egypt via Rafah.

⁶⁴ This is a requirement that I met upon my last trip the Rafah Border Crossing after the presidential decree that the Rafah Border Crossing be opened indeterminately for humanitarian and medical aid. This requirement was mandated by an Egyptian Colonel who claimed this has been the policy for the past 20 years—regardless of the fact that policy was completely different when the Border Crossing was under Israeli administration.

time they went to the border they were told only Hamid could enter. The second time they were told Hamid and Ibrahim, his son could enter. The third time Hamid, and both his children Ibrahim and Mena could enter. In the first two weeks Shahinaz was never allowed past the first gate. The family tried everything. It was not until one border guard randomly allowed another foreigner and I past the first gate that we discovered the name of one of the two people in Palestine the Egyptian border officials worked with.⁶⁵ Within the following week the transnational family was finally allowed into Gaza.⁶⁶ According to Hamid, [the Rafah Border Crossing was] *salata* (salad), (Shahinaz called it the Bermuda Triangle). Hamid explained, “no you do not raise your voice there, because the guy who worked today might work again tomorrow and there is no semblance of justice, accountability, systemic chain of command that one can count on—it’s the Rafah Border and anything goes.”

The second case is Salam. I met Salam on June 4, 2010. He was a 39 year old Palestinian man who had permanently migrated to Denmark because of the lack of stability in Gaza. He had not been back to Gaza, nor attempted to return, in 10 years. He was there on June 4, 2010 solely because he heard the presidential decree that the border had opened. Salam no longer carried a Palestinian passport; he only carried Danish travel documents. He was rejected by the Egyptian border guards at the first gate. When I asked him what he would do he responded, “I will go back to Denmark; that is my country now. I do not belong here anymore...I know these people, this will never change...[the presidential decree] is just propaganda.” He called his family in Gaza

⁶⁵ I met Hamid and Shahinaz between June 1 and June 4 following the presidential decree to open the Rafah Border Crossing. The day they were allowed passed the first gate was because we—myself, and another foreigner trying to reach Gaza—had passed the gate without any logical explanation and lobbied for them to be allowed into the terminal. Once inside the terminal we were all informed that we could not enter Gaza until our names came from Idris Barhoum. The next day the same border guard did not allow us past the first gate.

⁶⁶ I do not know the exact details of their entrance, but I believe it was because they or their families in Gaza were able to contact Idris Barhoum.

and informed them he was not allowed to cross; he told them he did not have the patience to play this game with the Egyptian border officials. They asked him to be patient and they would send someone to get him. Within the hour the border guard called Salam; his family had contacted Idris Barhoum.

During those four days I saw many people come and go. On the one day we were allowed into the terminal I was able to speak with detained Palestinians exiting Gaza who were waiting to travel to third country destinations. There were around 70 Palestinians of all ages waiting for a bus to take them from the border terminal to the airport—regardless of whether they had airline reservations or their time of departure. One of the Palestinian women I spoke with explained, “the border is not open—you must be sick or have a visa to pass. Egypt said the border was open so Hamas let anyone on a bus for 80 shekels, there were five busses full of people and three were turned back.” She explained “at every point in transit there were cameras, photographers and journalists asking ‘What do you think of the new border policy? What do you think of Mubarak??’ so all of the people smiled and responded, ‘he’s great, it is wonderful’...because if you told the truth Egypt would not let you out.” She told me she wanted to speak the truth but her husband would not let her, because they would not have been able to leave. According to her, the border was not open, nothing had changed.

Chapter 5: ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION

The negative ramifications of the creation of nation-states resulting in the assignment of arbitrary borders, walls and international border crossings are most vivid, obvious and ridiculous in the city of Rafah. The siege and closure between 2007 and 2010 has been extremely limiting for Palestinians in Gaza. The most unique consequence of the three year siege and closure has been the tunnel phenomenon⁶⁷ or the normalized informalization of the international border. The Israeli-Egyptian siege and closure of the Gaza Strip is the reason the amount of tunnels and informal trade expanded so greatly between 2007 and 2010. The thriving tunnels have continued (despite the Egyptian government and the Government of Israel's attempts to stop tunnel activity by all means necessary) as a result of border populations' resilience, compounded by some border authorities' passive acceptance of tunnel-related activity. What the Egyptian government and the Government of Israel have failed to recognize or factor into their unilateral solutions is the fact that tunnel growth is entirely related to the Israeli blockade and Egyptian closure which has unsystematically limited Palestinian movement and access to goods.

This thesis aimed to unpack the tunnel phenomenon and dig deeper into the consequences of closure in the Northern Sinai region along the Egypt-Gaza border. The objective of this study was to investigate Egyptian Authorities' policy responses to the evolution of the tunnel phenomenon since 2007. Chapter 2 provided a review and analysis of the main factors leading to the tunnel phenomenon, the official administration of the Rafah Border Crossing and summarized Egyptian policy responses. Chapter 3 explained the use of the constructivist,

⁶⁷ The estimated 300 to 3,000 tunnels under the international border between Egypt and Palestine between 2007 and 2010.

grounded theory approach in data collection and analysis. Chapter 4 summarized the data. The data was coded into the following categories: tunnel prohibition policies, consequences for tunnel-related activity, passive acceptance of tunnel-related activity, tunnel employment, new wealth for development or conspicuous consumption, evolution of the tunnel phenomenon, transported goods, Egyptian-Bedouin relations, Bedouin-Palestinian relations and tunnels as an alternate to uncertainty at the Rafah Border Crossing.

This study, in review of the literature and by conducting qualitative fieldwork, examined the situation which unfolded as a result of Egypt's alignment with Zionist-colonialism, via shortsighted policies in support of the siege of Gaza.⁶⁸ Section 690 of P.L. 110-161⁶⁹ is evidence of the international pressure imposed upon Egypt to police the border and continue closure. This reality supplements the assessment that Egypt is deep in the “‘double bind’ of the nation-state after independence: on the one hand to enforce colonial politics toward indigenous communities and, on the other to establish alliances with metropolitan-colonial powers” (Mignolo, 2000, p. 104). It is important to note that passive-acceptance of tunnel related activity is a direct violation of the above consolidation appropriations act.

I aimed to critically assess the policy-makers' treatment of the “problem” of the tunnels. It is clear that Egypt treated its border with Gaza and the problem of the tunnels as defined by its “alliances with metropolitan-colonial powers” (Mignolo, 2000) fitting the definition of “internal

⁶⁸ This thesis has made repeated reference to the underground barrier expansion which has been particularly futile and useless in its aim. Other policies which do not necessarily deter tunnel activities are sentencing persons in absentia and imprisonment.

⁶⁹ The consolidated Appropriations Act, [2008] which withheld the obligation of \$100 million in foreign military financing for Egypt...contingent upon 'Egypt taking concrete steps to detect and destroy the smuggling network of tunnels leading from Egypt to Gaza (Sharp, 2008, p. 2).

colonialism". Time news agency reported, "Locked out of development projects and tourism investment along Sinai's southern coast, the long-marginalized Bedouin have often been forced to work outside the law to make a living" (Hauslohner, 2010). This statement is supplemented by the above section which discussed tunnel employment; where 14 of 18 respondents spoke at length about their employment and the estimated ten to twenty percent of the Northern Sinai population which were dependent upon the tunnels between 2007 and 2010.

The existence of tunnels between Egypt and Gaza predate the siege of 2007 and their use has evolved over the years. In the past they have predominantly been used for people to flee or to import gold, money or weapons, just as other restrictive-protective international borders such as the US-Mexican border.

As unfortunate as it was, the Freedom Flotilla, specifically the controversy surrounding the Turkish humanitarian aid ship, weakened the siege. The Israeli commandos boarded the Marvi Marmara, a Turkish Civilian vessel, in International waters on May 31, 2010. The International community was enraged. In response, Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak ordered the Rafah border crossing open indeterminately. Additionally, the government of Israel allowed more goods to pass overland from Israel into Gaza. This event has been significant within the story of the tunnels in Rafah and the siege of Gaza. As more goods are allowed to cross overland, fewer goods are passed underground. So long as Israel maintains the status quo of closure and economic control, the tunnels will remain and the siege will continue.

In addition to Israel, the internal divide has been particularly detrimental to the future of the Palestinian state and the Palestinian Authority's control over its borders. The rise of Hamas in Gaza strengthened Egyptian support for the Israeli Zionist colonial enterprise isolating Gaza. The tunnel boom is a direct result of Egyptian compliance in the closure of Gaza combined with the cunning and resilience of Palestinians in Gaza and Egyptian border populations. The Egyptian government has supported Israeli interests to the detriment of Palestinian interests. The Northern Sinai Bedouin have similarly supported Gazan Palestinian populations through their tunnel support. There is a "shared spirit" between Northern Sinai Bedouin and Palestinians in Gaza. The Gazan people and the Northern Sinai Bedouin have circumvented Egyptian and Israeli border restrictions, often by endangering their own lives, or risking imprisonment. Egyptian policies have not deterred tunnel activity. Only an end to the siege and a regular, open border will change the reality on the ground.

Since the end of fieldwork, the situation has not improved. According to journalist Kingsley Kobo, more than 150 kilograms of TNT, machine guns, grenades, mines, body armour and other equipment was discovered [in the border area, en route to Gaza] on October 18, 2010 (Kobo 2010). The re-awakening of weapons smuggling in Rafah is counterproductive to a regular-open border. In other news, the Egyptian government, aware of the Bedouin dissatisfaction with the government for lack of sufficient employment, education, and development opportunities, is planning to forcefully relocate the Bedouin populations of the Northern Sinai. The governor of the Northern Sinai explained, "The villages projects are designed to settle the Bedouin into developed areas, to give them steady livelihoods and help them live within integrated communities..." (Bradley 2010). According to journalist Matt Bradley, "the new developments,

which include plans for industrial projects to provide employment for the area's future residents, are part of a targeted effort to wean the 12 largely nomadic Bedouin tribes in the region from the lucrative cross-border smuggling industry with the Gaza Strip, a Palestinian enclave that has been under Israeli blockade since 2007" (Bradley 2010). The unilateral relocation of the Bedouin against their will would incite revolt. It is another example of a unilateral and short-sighted policy.

I fully agree that development needs to be incorporated into a multifaceted incremental approach toward "weaning" the Bedouin off of the lucrative smuggling trade, however forcing them on reservations and removing them from their land is counterproductive. Abu Mohammed, a Northern Sinai Bedouin respondent, commented, "I heard that a few villages are being established with the intention of evacuating people who live near the border with Rafah and moving them to new villages. If this is the case, no. It's impossible if I'm settled on the land of my fathers and grandfathers and then they come and evacuate me. No, this won't work" (Bradley 2010). A façade of "developmental initiatives" does not cloak the internal colonialism at play.

Internal colonialism as defined by Pablo Gonzales Casanova, Rodolfo Stavenhagen and Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui as described by Walter Mignolo appropriately illustrates the policy election and motivations of the Egyptian government in the Northern Sinai. Underdevelopment of the Northern Sinai Bedouin accompanied by forced migration needs to be avoided. The intention of the policy to provide development initiatives for the border populations is a tremendous step in a positive direction—such needs to be done in coordination with the border community, not externally applied to them.

I agree with Mousad Abu Fagr and his recommendation that development initiatives should be sponsored for the Sinai Bedouin under the administration of International non-Governmental organizations (INGOs); he insists that the development of the Sinai be consistent with indigenous traditions. Egyptian government should work with the Bedouin to close underground passageways by opening the border so that Egyptian Bedouin and border populations could travel to and fro overland. While this may seem farfetched, such a policy could have deterred the existence of the first tunnel following the Israel-Egypt Peace Treaty.

The Egyptian government is well aware that employment opportunities for the populations of the Northern Sinai could provide incentives to stop smuggling. It is unfortunate that the government does not realize that forced relocation would worsen relations between Northern Sinai Bedouin and the Egyptian government. The Egyptian government needs to extend an olive branch toward the indigenous Northern Sinai populations rather than initiating a land grab.

Current policies of marginalization and attacks on the traditional livelihoods push the Bedouin to utilize their knowledge and skills in any way they can. Clearly, Bedouin populations in the Northern Sinai have demonstrated significant mistrust of the Egyptian Government. The Egyptian government has acknowledged why the Bedouin are discontent and continue tunnel-related activity. Now is the perfect time for the Egyptian government to work with the Egyptian Bedouin in the Northern Sinai, not to disregard them or to discredit their natural, traditional role as the keepers of the Egyptian-Palestinian-Israeli borders. It is vital for the Egyptian government to incorporate some form of coordination or consultation with the Bedouin populations in the

Northern Sinai to end informal operations under the Egypt-Gaza border.

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