

Reviews

Until Palestine is free, nothing is normal

Adam Hanieh, Robert Knox and Rafeef Ziadah, *Resisting Erasure: Capital, Imperialism and Race in Palestine* (London: Verso, 2025). 128pp., £9.99 pb., 978 1 83674 075 9

I have now read Adam Hanieh, Robert Knox and Rafeef Ziadah's *Resisting Erasure: Capital, Imperialism and Race in Palestine* three times. My first full read-through was last September (2025), as the genocide continued to scorch and remake earth in Gaza. This was five weeks before the ceasefire was announced and within weeks of the book's release. It also coincided with the leaking of the new 'Gaza Reconstitution, Economic Acceleration and Transformation' (or 'GREAT') plan. I read them both together. *Resisting Erasure's* cogent, clear analysis offered an integral framework for understanding this 38 page vision of apocalyptic violence.

Co-drafted by an American-Israeli businessman (Michael Eisenberg), an Israeli former intelligence commander turned tech entrepreneur (Lyron Tancman), and a financial-modelling think tank (the Boston Consulting Group), Trump's 'GREAT' plan for Gaza felt like an accumulation of decades of development planning initiatives. Hanieh, Ziadah and Knox start with the structures that make possible the logics that underwrite the plan's spatial and financial projections and treat Gaza as inherent paradox: threatening, dangerous, a black hole of nightmares, yet also always empty, unproductive, unliveable, until someone fills it with possibility.

Through their bringing together of racial capitalism, settler colonialism and empire, we understand how Gaza's potential and possibility relies on this vision of empty, cleared, unencumbered space. The projections start from 'zero', with Gaza's worth twinned to new circulations of capital investment, labour surpluses, industrial materials and extractive ecologies. There's even a page devoted to spatial pacification, with instructions for how to redesign – and contain – the social fabric of Gaza's 'unruly' population, not unlike the first decade of Israel's occupation of Gaza, when Ariel Sharon in 1971, ordered bulldozers into the refugee camps for the same purpose.

This first reading was also shaped by my own ongoing

research into the newly branded 'Abrahamic corridors' that underwrite the plan; an architectural operationalisation of the 2020 Abraham Accords, signed between Israel and the UAE, Bahrain, Morocco and Sudan. A project oriented towards what Hanieh, Ziadah and Knox point to as the USA's 'new Middle East', in which US, Gulf and Israeli capital are stitched together in seamless, infrastructural, energy and financial flows. In other words: the ultimate project of normalisation on display.

I have spent close to a decade following the slow infrastructural reconfiguration of Middle East trade, transport and logistical throughways – the corridor geographies being retrofitted for the knitting and knotting together of Israel-US-Gulf capital. Throughout, I have been focused on the less spectacular assemblages of this material world: the realignment of mismatched rail gauges, the streamlining of port technologies, the modularity of shipping traffic, the bureaucratic and legal articulations of customs gateways and the risk management brokers that bridge the ever-persistent holes, chokepoints and stopgaps that separate them. These are the less visible backbone of the more public dominion of blockades, diplomatic agreements, and military interventions. Flashpoints that have increasingly found their way into our mainstream consciousness via newly garnered attention on those resisting this new 'Middle East' since the genocide began; places like Hormuz, the Red Sea and the Suez Canal.

My work shares so much common ground with *Resisting Erasure*, as I seek to unravel the relationship between Israeli mobility and Palestinian containment, underwritten by the material work of infrastructural connection and disconnection. Infrastructure has always been core to a Palestine that is historically rooted in regional flows, a normal part of Middle East political and economic relations. The Israeli state's emergence in 1948 on the back of its expulsion of at least 750,000 Palestinians, turned

it into a sealed fortress. Dependent on the sea as its only exit-point, it operated as it was meant to: an enclave for Western frontier-makers against a wave of pan-Arab resistance and socialist nationalisms. Palestine became the linchpin of Global South radical movements, part of a fabric of social and political consciousness, making it all the more threatening to Western/capitalist orders.



Israel, as the authors contend, has always been – and always needed to be – a hostile presence in the region, a military station, first for European then US interests (funded and propped up by them). This project has borne endless fruit. Over the last three decades, Israel has shifted from bounded to seemingly limitless. It now permeates the Middle East's infrastructural, logistics, energy and financial grids, while Palestine is increasingly re-scaled for containment. In what feels like a distorted reality, Palestine, now deemed disruptive to regional profit and prosperity (at least by the region's leaders), is increasingly landlocked and isolated in the new regional vision. This is acutely on display in Gaza, the last access point to the Mediterranean after the Nakba. For the last 20 years, it has been sealed in and surrounded on all sides by Israel's military siege, its sea, air and land completely

determined by Israeli whims of violence and blockade.

For this to happen, for Israel to become normal – and Palestine abject, threatening, abnormal – requires global partners and collaborators. As *Resisting Erasure* points out so well, it is imperative to frame Israeli normalisation and the impunity with which genocide is treated as a global project, one that requires excessive commitment, conviction and direct political, economic and ideological investments from states and corporations alike.

One of the book's key contributions is its tracing of this normalisation project through its genealogical origins. It locates the present in the longer story of fossil capitalism in the region, widening and deepening our understanding of the genocide and what makes it possible. It reminds us that we cannot understand how Israel becomes such essential real estate – a military, colonial actor – unless we rethink the Middle East's central role in 20th and 21st-century supply chains, not just in terms of the discovery of oil, but the way things move through its waterways, the fulcrum of global circulation. Violence is always integral to keeping this under control: it is insurance against disruptive threats, not just to American supply chains, but to authoritarian power in the region. Palestinian liberation equates hope and horizons for other liberation projects.

Even more insightful is the way the authors route this history through the Oslo Accords, making clear the relationship between genocidal violence and liberal diplomacy. Seeing Gaza in 2025 as an outcome of 1990s Oslo – and the siphoning of Palestinian resistance into endless rounds of negotiation, governance reform and neoliberal institutions – tells us that it is in the moments of quiet that infrastructures of genocide are planted, with a keen warning to pay attention to what comes after the ceasefire. So many critics of Oslo point to the expanded settlement project, the bantustanisation of the West Bank (into Areas A, B and C), the checkpoints, the military raids and the building of the Separation Wall. The authors take us on a different journey, focusing on entanglement rather than fragmentation. In their framing, it is not the concrete walls that contained Palestinian liberation, it is Oslo's normalisation terrain. Specifically pointing to the Paris Agreement, they remind us that Oslo twinned Palestinian economic, financial and trade circuits to Israel's customs and tax revenue services, taming the newly created administrative body – the Palestinian authority

– and future-proofing Israeli capitalism against the kind of economic boycott that proliferated the First Intifada’s achievements. The further integration and intertwining of the PA into joint security arrangements, energy grids, even internet networks, sealed them in and then paved the way for Arab countries to join in the process.

My second reading of *Resisting Erasure* was in January, 2025, days before beginning to teach a new third-year undergraduate module entitled *Reading Global Politics through Palestine* at Queen Mary University of London, where I work. Together with Shahrazad Odeh and James Eastwood, I curated the module around Palestinian voices, centring their intellectual and political interventions as a way to engage Palestine on its own terms, as well as an agent of global politics. The very first lines of *Resisting Erasure* tell us (citing Mohammed al-Kurd) that ‘Palestine is a microcosm of the world’. The authors call for a precise interrogation of how it becomes a fault line for global systems of oppression, and thus a litmus test for resistance to those systems. Their framing of our current moment, as structured by empire, colonialism and racial capitalism, helped us to anchor the political economic history of Zionism, to see its uneven incorporations of Palestinian labour and space as integral to the global reworking of regional ecosystems, and to understand settler colonialism as expansive, always operating according to racial lines that follow those made elsewhere as much as through Zionist supremacy. And to see what is happening in Palestine, historically and in the present, as reliant on capitalist imperial powers for support.

The authors also caution that there is a need to see both Palestine’s rage and its wretchedness, its ordinariness and its ruptures. By following their framing, Palestine is never a magical place. Palestinians are not magical people. Taking away the magic, Palestinians become rooted in history, making it possible to see their present and imagine their future. But we didn’t read Hanieh, Knox and Ziadah on their own – they were constantly in dialogue, with Edward Said, Ghassan Kanafani, Rabea Eghbariah, Rana Barakat, Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian and so many others. We learned how to listen to all of them and how to share them with our students. This was essential for finding a language for dispossession as an ongoing structure, and for liberation as always tied to an ongoing politics of return.

My last reading was recent. It lingered and took me longer than the other two. I read as Israel and the US re-oriented the world’s attention to an illegal war with Iran, killing thousands and triggering an amazing resistance-blockade in one of the world’s most essential trade/transport arteries. I read as Israel returned its sights to Lebanon and inaugurated round after round of bombardment, mass-death and destruction, and the displacement and re-occupation of southern Lebanon. I read while the news from the West Bank revealed daily deaths at the hands of settlers and soldiers. I read while the alleged ceasefire (which is broken daily) reasserted a dangerous new normal in Gaza, where new ‘facts’ on the ground mark out the terrain for military operational and architectural containers. A new yellow line also reaches into Lebanon, while the Abrahamic corridor continues to gain momentum. I read while the Gaza Plan made the rounds at Davos in 2026, the UAE left OPEC and inched further towards the US and Israel, and public calls for other ways of transporting and securing energy flows rumbled everywhere.

Amidst this ever-widening cycle of devastation, the global ideological and structural commitments to Israel that *Resisting Erasure* points at have become even more blatant. This is particularly the case in the UK, where I live, as a new virulent strain of anti-Palestinian racism, veiled as ‘protection against anti-Semitism’ has emerged. In a move that gaslights Palestinian movements and racialised communities alike, they have been targeted for the alleged creation of the ‘greatest epidemic’ this country has ever seen. All while new far-right parties are carving out their place in the streets and in mainstream politics, adding their own discourse to the mix.

The authors once again give us the tools to recognise the connections, to see anti-Palestinian racism in the scapegoating of migrants as ‘illegal’. They tell us to dig through the language that intersplices security risk with racialised publics, that locates anti-Semitism in pro-Palestine slogans and protests, that unleashes counter-terrorism and ‘Prevent’ policies to discipline workers, teachers and activists who see Palestine as essential to their own struggles against state violence. They make clear how this aligns with how Israel has shaped its own discourse around its right to self-defence – a post 9-11 branding of good-guys vs bad-guys, in which brown Arab and Muslim people are always threatening, always ter-

rorists. They put it so well when they claim that ‘anti-Palestinian racism is big business for Israel’. I know they actually mean this literally, as Israel’s security industry – tested on Palestinian lives and deaths – is also booming. But they also point to how this becomes part of an infrastructure of support-systems and grids that further sustain the normal workings of the militant settler state in the Middle East.

My three readings were underscored by the different (always intersecting) hats I try to wear: the researcher, the teacher, the ally. I imagine that this is what the authors were hoping for: that the text would be a platform for political education across multiple terrains. That they would help me to find new ways to articulate Palestine as present and integral to all the places where I am active: the classroom, the research, my union, the associations to which I belong, the everyday worlds in which I walk,

parent, eat, live. And that I would do this with a deeper understanding of the structures that shape unfreedom in Palestine and beyond. They spell out how to see and encounter the essential struggles of this moment – against empire, against racism, against capitalism – as entwined and requiring a systemic approach to solidarity, in ways that ‘strengthen all of us’. But as we embark on the next phase, what is already being called ‘an aftermath’, with new orders filtering in to settle the dust, erase the bodies, churn the rubble and blood into something we do not recognise or reckon with, they tell us to keep working, keep organising, keep shining the light on those lost. Because ceasefires are some of the most dangerous moments, as attention wanes and ‘normal’ sets in. As they remind us across *Resisting Erasure’s* beautiful, heartbreaking and always precise genealogy of our current moment: until Palestine is free, nothing is normal.

Sharri Plonski

The Mickey Mouse Industrial Complex

Vicky Osterweil, *The Extended Universe: How Disney Killed the Movies and Took Over the World* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2026). 320pp., £26.95 hb., 979 8 88890 366 7

Who owns Mickey Mouse? The world? From the beginning – 1928 – this spawn of trivial, commercial culture was subjected to philosophy, which asked the above question of him and posed many more. Walter Benjamin wrote about him in the 1930s. For Benjamin, Mickey Mouse is a cipher of cruel, alienating modern life. Yet he is also its consolation: nature morally mobilised against itself – and us. He is, above all, a figure of mirth, a laughter so visceral that it loosens up the masses, acting as sadistic cackle or safety valve. Mickey Mouse becomes a dialectical image of the possibility of life in which everything is solved, everything concludes in tremendous relief. Benjamin describes him as ‘globe encircling’, implying that he does belong to the world, and even belongs, more than anyone, to the oppressed.

Of course that cosmic tenure is also untrue. Mickey Mouse is, above all, private property. He is a trademark, a brand item, a logo. His world conquering has been identified as a vector of cultural imperialism. We live inside an enormous Disney comic which threatens to destroy

political nous – so note Ariel Dorfman and Armand Matelart in their 1971 study *How to Read Donald Duck*, an assessment of the ideological impact of Disney comics in Latin America. Infused with the revolutionary spirit of the Allende government, they confidently foresee a time after Disney that would be shaped by the social practices of people in revolt. But Pinochet came and, anyway, thereafter the Disney company went on to become one of the largest corporations in the world.

Vicky Osterweil’s *The Extended Universe* asks what universe Mickey Mouse and the whole Disney company have conjured into being. The subtitle leans into a contemporary vogue for explanatory-dramatic subtitles that have an air of Ted Talk historicism about them. Perhaps this is deliberate, ironic even. The claim may nonetheless be true. How did Disney kill the movies and achieve world take-over? The answers are various but largely come down to revised and anti-union labour practices and the tight management of intellectual property. The extended universe refers to the expansion of Disney and