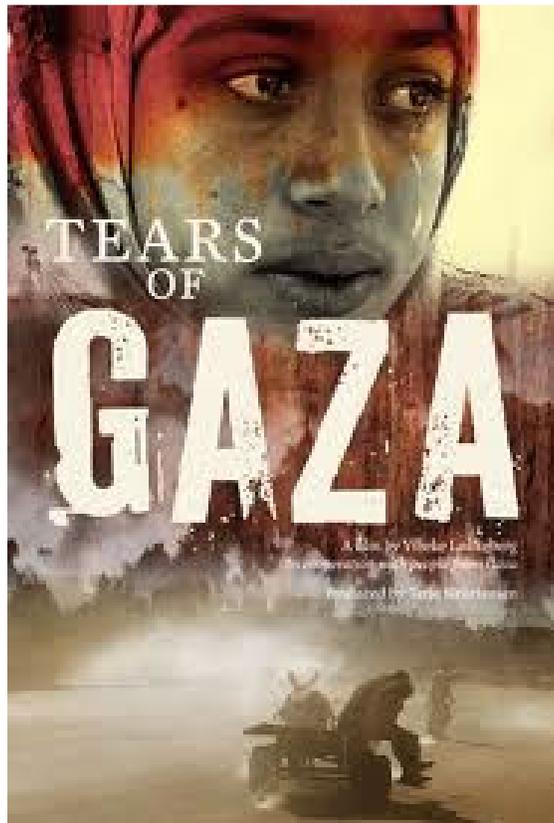




## TEARS OF GAZA



**A Film by Vibeke Løkkeberg**  
**Produced by Terje Kristiansen**

### STUDY GUIDE

To order this and other programs call:  
(888) 570-5400; (310) 839-1500

[www.epfmedia.com](http://www.epfmedia.com)

# TEARS OF GAZA STUDY GUIDE

## SUMMARY OVERVIEW

Most films concerning Palestine focus on the occupied West Bank and, less often, conditions facing Palestinian citizens of Israel. Few films depict the situation in Gaza, much less focus exclusively on that part of the occupied Palestinian territory. Noteworthy among the latter are: *Gaza Strip*, directed in 2002 by British documentarian James Longley; *Death in Gaza*, a 2004 documentary directed by James Miller, himself killed during its very shooting; *Fatenah*, a 2009 animation directed by Ahmed Hadash; the 2012 documentary *Where Should the Birds Fly?*, directed by Gazan journalist Fida Qishta; and the 2012 global feature, *A Bottle in the Gaza Sea*, a French-Israeli co-production directed by Thierry Binisti. None of these, however, conveys the horrific nature of the atrocities committed by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) during their monumental 2008-09 military attack on Gaza, known as “Operation Cast Lead,” with the unremitting graphic quality of Vibeke Løkkeberg’s 2010 documentary *Tears of Gaza*. Replete with candid, direct footage of the siege, interspersed with interviews with Palestinian children who have just survived the exceedingly brutal experience, *Tears of Gaza* depicts the genocidal violence meted out by Israel against this tiny strip of occupied land with a visceral relentlessness that surpasses even Alain Resnais’ classic meditation on Auschwitz, *Night and Fog*, fostering an unprecedented degree of empathic identification with scenes of unmitigated death and destruction.

## EXTENDED DESCRIPTION

*Tears of Gaza* was directed by Norwegian actress and filmmaker Vibeke Løkkeberg in 2010, and released in 2012. Because she was denied entry into Gaza by the Israeli authorities, Løkkeberg drew for her film from footage of the 2008-09 IDF siege shot by Palestinian photographers Yosuf Abu Shrea, Mwafaq Al-Khateeb, and Saed Al-Sabaa, who were present in Gaza at the time. The raw footage was smuggled out of Gaza and edited subsequently into a collage-like structure by Torken Gjørsv, Anwar Saab, and Sven Olav Sandem, adding music written by Marcello De Francisci and Lisa Gerrard and interviews shot in the aftermath with a trio of children—a boy, Yahya, and two girls, Rasmia and Amira—who lived through the siege. *Tears of Gaza* was produced by Norwegian writer and filmmaker Terje Kristiansen (*The Chieftan*; *Vilde, the Wild One*; *Måker*) and received funding from The Freedom of Expression Foundation and the Norwegian Film Institute. The film premiered at the 2010 Toronto International Film Festival and won the Human Rights Award at the 2011 Al-Jazeera International Documentary Festival, Best Documentary at the 2012 Al-Ard Palestinian Film Festival, and Best Film at the 2010 Gaza Film Festival.

*Tears of Gaza* is the first feature-length film about the 2008-09 invasion of Gaza. It is distinguished from video reportage of the Gaza siege—which Løkkeberg says inspired her to make the film—as well as from prior films about Gaza for its sheer, decontextualized focus on the excessive violence wrought by the IDF on Gaza. *Tears of Gaza* is especially powerful for its attention to the IDF targeting of civilians with air-delivered incendiary weapons (white phosphorous bombs being the most vivid example) that “transform [marketplaces, plazas,

homes, and densely populated residential streets] into something like a lunar regolith of debris, disintegrated bodies, and massive chunks of concrete bristling with rebar” (Chris Packam, *The Village Voice*). In this respect, *Tears of Gaza* affirms findings of the 2009 *Report of the United Nations Fact Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict* (aka *The Goldstone Report*) that the IDF was operating in contravention of the Fourth Geneva Convention, rendering Israel guilty of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

The central focus of *Tears of Gaza* is death and destruction, particularly of children and civilian infrastructure. Gut-wrenching scenes abound of relatives and rescue workers extracting from the rubble and displaying the limp, mutilated, dust-covered bodies of dead children blown apart and crushed by merciless areal bombings of their homes and schools—all illegal acts under international law. Scenes of injured and dying children in hospital emergency wards, and of dead children’s bodies, riddled with bullet holes clearly effected at close range, stored in a morgue, are similarly emotionally devastating.

*Tears of Gaza* is in fact a cinematic occasioning of the *haptic*—an affective phenomenon by which events depicted onscreen are experienced as immediately “felt” by the spectator. This aesthetic structuring offers little or no explanatory attention to the historical, political, and ideological contexts of the Israeli occupation and siege. Instead, the shocking imagery takes precedence, its disturbing, almost hyperreal quality serving itself to illustrate the acute as well as systemic power imbalance between the state of Israel, with its well-funded military machine, and the Palestinians, mostly unarmed and living in de-developed conditions, in turn serving to indict Israel for the disproportionate, indisputably illegal collective punishment it has authorized the IDF to enact against Gazans for their largely non-violent, sometimes militant, always weakened and impoverished attempts to achieve national liberation and self-determination vis-à-vis the Israeli behemoth.



## **BACKGROUND – GAZA AND THE ISRAELI OCCUPATION**

The Israeli occupation of Gaza began formally during the 1967 Six-Day War initiated by Israel as a “preemptive” attack against neighboring Egypt and Syria, allegedly in response to military threats but in actuality in order to regain access to the Straits of Tiran controlled by Egypt and closed to Israeli shipping since 1956. Closely scrutinizing Israeli military and political archives, historians of the period have shown that any perceived threat to Israel was in fact a reaction to incessant Israeli military provocations, often clandestine, along the Egyptian and Syrian borders, against displaced Palestinians attempting to cross back into Israel in order to return to the homes and lands stolen from them by Israel during the *Nakba* (catastrophe) of 1947-48, and against neighboring, Arab countries which had supplied shelter to Palestinian refugees and, in the case of Syria, were attempting to divert much-needed water from the Jordan River to Palestinian enclaves in Syria and the Jordanian West Bank.

In 1904, Palestine was still under the control of the Ottoman Empire, a Muslim caliphate which had ruled the region under Turkish auspices since 1516. During the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, imperial Turkey began succumbing to pressure from Europe as well as its own imperial *vilâyet*s (administrative provinces) throughout much of the Middle East, which were being promised emancipation by an industrializing Europe eager to increase its economic coffers. In reaction, the Ottomans began a process of modernization that would culminate in the empire’s demise and the 1923 establishment of the Republic of Turkey, a nominally secular nation-state led by charismatic military nationalist Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1891-1938).

During the period leading up to World War I, European countries made competing promises to both Arab nationalist and Zionists. The Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916 enabled France and Great Britain to divide their spheres of influence over much of the Middle East into colonies and mandated protectorates following the postwar fall of the Ottoman Empire. All of these colonies and protectorates remained under European control until after World War II, when ongoing anti-colonial struggles eventually won independence for nearly all of them, excluding Palestine. (See: *Historical Dictionary of Middle Eastern Cinema*, pg. 276.)

In 1917, England drafted the controversial Balfour Declaration, which effectively favored the formation of a Jewish state in historic Palestine while stating concern that any such state not impinge on the rights and freedoms of the indigenous Palestinian population. In 1920, the British Mandate over Palestine was initiated, and in 1923 it was implemented. Following World War II, however, and two decades of Palestinian resistance to British and Zionist colonization, including the 1936-39 Arab Revolt, the United Nations at the behest of Great Britain proposed to divide the region into two countries, one Zionist (Israel) and one Arab (Palestine). The terms of General Assembly Resolution 181, named the “Partition Plan,” were unsatisfactory to the Zionists, whose aim was to control all of Palestine, and to the Palestinians, who were not only to be allotted less than half of their former homeland, despite their comprising its majority population, but whose slated allotment would allocate the vast majority of fertile farm and grazing land to Israel and its Jewish-only settlements.

Hence on May 15, 1948, one day following the termination of the British Mandate and the subsequent Zionist declaration of the Jewish State of Israel, a war erupted between Israeli forces and the armies of Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syrian and Iraq, which had entered Palestine to support Palestinian irregular forces and the Arab Liberation Army (sponsored by the Arab League). The war ended in 1949, with a Zionist victory that expanded Israel's borders beyond those designated by Resolution 181, with the loss of more than 500 Palestinian villages and the displacement of more than 750,000 Palestinians. The West Bank of the Jordan River was assigned to Jordanian rule and the Gaza Strip to Egyptian rule; both were relinquished to Israel after the Six-Day War, when Israel's incorporation of 400,000 additional Palestinians under Israeli administration became perceived as a threat to the Jewish demographic majority thought necessary to justify the state's Zionist character. (See: *Historical Dictionary of Middle Eastern Cinema*, pp. 317-318.)

Gaza (*aka* the Gaza Strip) is a very small territory running 25 miles in length and 7.5 miles in width, with a total area of 141 square miles. Its population is approximately 1.7 million, comprised mostly of post-1948 refugees and their descendants. Because of its small size, Gaza is one of the most densely populated regions on earth. It is surrounded on its landed sides by a border fence/wall heavily monitored by the IDF and containing only four official crossings.

In October 1956, with the tacit approval of France and England, Israel attacked Egypt in an attempt to gain control of the Suez Canal, which Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser had nationalized earlier that year. Israel occupied Gaza until in 1957 it was forced by the U.N. to withdraw under pressure from U.S. President Eisenhower. Since the Israeli occupation of 1967, Jewish settlements were built and increased in number until 2005, when the "Disengagement Plan" resulted in their dismantlement and the transfer of their inhabitants back to Israel or, ironically, the occupied West Bank.

The subsequent Palestinian elections of January 2006 saw the victory of Hamas, an Islamist political party loosely affiliated with the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, in Palestinian Legislative Council elections. The victory gave Hamas official prominence in Gaza and numerous municipalities throughout the West Bank. Whereas the minor yet longstanding rivalry between Palestinian Islamist groups, and between such groups and the largely secular Fatah, had previously been exploited by Israel in the interests of divide-and-conquer, the empowerment of Hamas prompted Israel, with the help of allied Egypt, to tighten its grip on the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt), in what the U.N. would later cite as illegal acts of collective punishment. This involved demonizing Hamas, stoking tensions between Hamas, Islamic Jihad (loosely affiliated with the Lebanese Hezbollah) and Fatah, and increasing military incursions into the territories. In Gaza in 2007, shortly after Hamas and Fatah formed a national unity government, Israel imposed an economic blockade which prevented the export of Palestinian labor to Israel, the exchange of foodstuffs and other civilian goods between Gaza, Israel, and the West Bank, and the import of fuel as well as educational and medical supplies. Extended curfews and school closures were also imposed.

Tunnels were built between Gaza and the Egyptian Sinai for smuggling necessary supplies into Gaza, whereas little official help came from Egypt, subservient to Israeli interests since 1977, when Egyptian President Anwar El-Sadat, along with Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin, signed the U.S.-brokered Camp David Accords. This compromise with Israel, famously facilitated by U.S. President Jimmy Carter, opened Egypt to large sums of U.S. financial and military aid while provoking the assassination of Sadat by a militant Islamist, leading to further crackdowns on Muslims throughout the Middle East and beyond.

In retaliation for the blockade, and for numerous IDF attacks and targeted assassinations of Palestinian political leaders and activists, Hamas and other political groups in Gaza, which for several years had abided by a truce negotiated with a non-compliant Israel, began firing makeshift rockets into nearby Israeli towns, inadvertently giving Israel a rationale for engaging in the major military assault on Gaza known as Operation Cast Lead. This assault was deemed an atrocity by the U.N. notwithstanding the retraction by U.N. Justice Richard Goldstone of certain of his report's indisputable claims concerning human rights violations and crimes against humanity committed during the attacks by the IDF. Similar conditions prompted a later IDF assault in 2012, named euphemistically Operation Pillar of Cloud. Both attacks have led to the further radicalization of Islamist parties in Gaza amidst increasing violence and oppression of Palestinians and their sympathizers by Israel.

## **SOURCES**

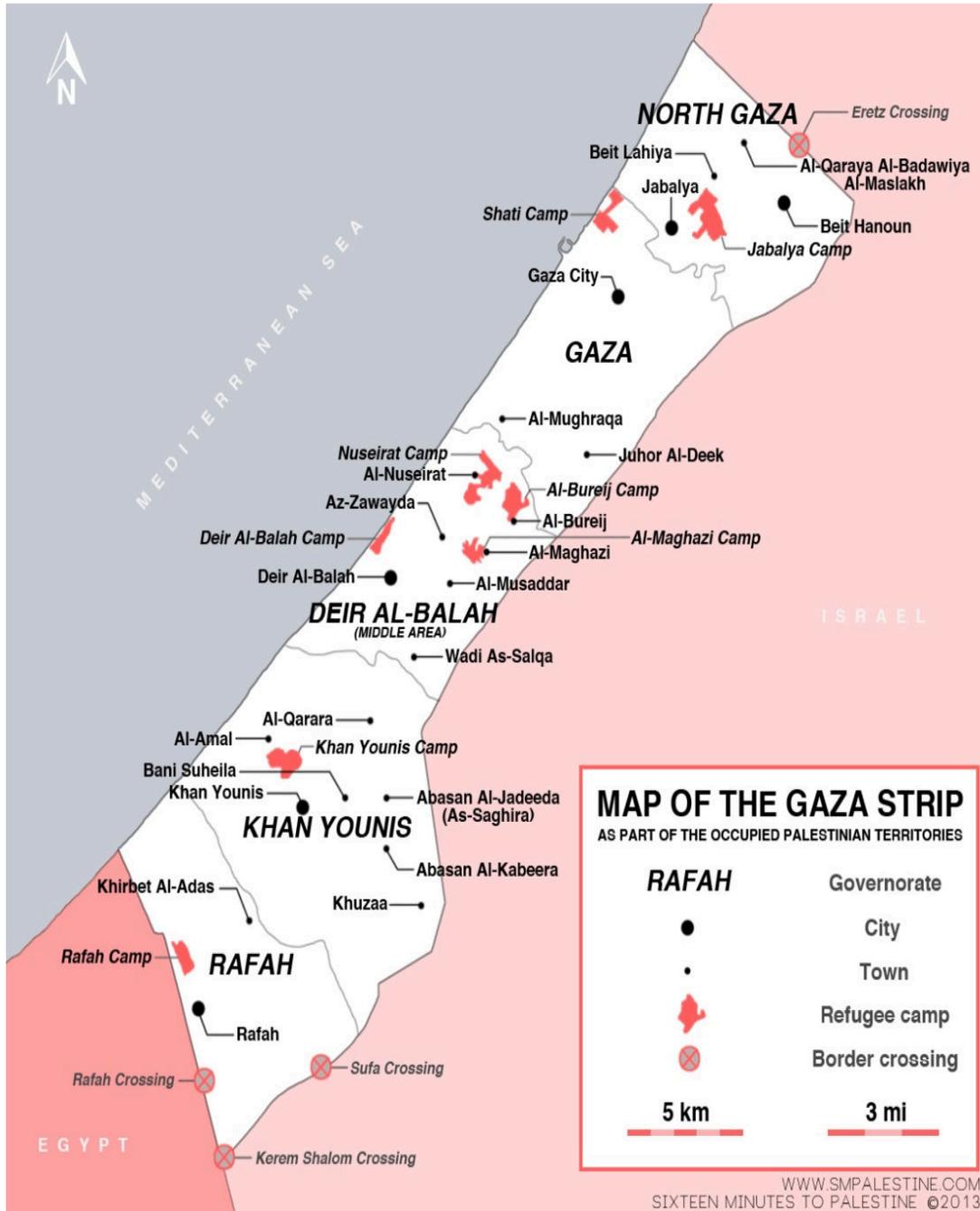
Gaza Siege, <http://gzasiege.org>.

Ginsberg, Terri, and Chris Lippard, *Historical Dictionary of Middle Eastern Cinema* (Scarecrow Press/Rowman & Littlefield, 2010).

Packam, Chris, "Tears of Gaza," *The Village Voice* 19 September 2012, <http://www.villagevoice.com/2012-09-19/film/tears-of-gaza-film-review/>.

The Numbers Guy, "Accurate Death Toll a Casualty in Gaza," *Wall Street Journal* 24 Nov. 2012, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424127887324851704578133221887645666.html>.

# MAP OF OCCUPIED GAZA



## RECOMMENDED READINGS

- Bennis, Phyllis. *Understanding the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict: A Primer*. Northampton, MA: Olive Branch Press, 2012.
- Chomsky, Noam, and Ilan Pappé. *Gaza in Crisis: Reflections on Israel's War against the Palestinians*. Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2010.
- Finkelstein, Norman. *"This Time We Went Too Far": Truth and Consequences of the Gaza Invasion*. Rev. ed. New York: OR Books, 2011.
- Hass, Amira. *Drinking the Sear at Gaza: Days and Nights in a Land under Siege*. Trans. Elana Wesley and Maxine Kaufman-Lacusta. New York: Owl Books, 1999.
- Khalidi, Rashid. *Brokers of Deceit: How the U.S. Has Undermined Peace in the Middle East*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2013.
- Roy, Sara. *Failing Peace: Gaza and the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict*. London: Pluto Press, 2006.
- ---. *The Gaza Strip: The Political Economy of De-Development*. Washington, DC: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1995.
- Masalha, Nur. *Expulsion of the Palestinians: The Concept of "Transfer" in Zionist Political Thought, 1882-1948*. Washington, DC: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1992.
- Pappé, Ilan. *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*. Oxford: Oneworld, 2006.
- Sacco, Joe. *Palestine*. Seattle: Fantagraphics Books, 2001.
- Shlaim, Avi. *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2000.

## EXTERNAL LINKS

- Al-Haq - <http://www.alhaq.org/>
- Alternative Information Center - <http://www.alternativenews.org/english/>
- Applied Research Institute / Jerusalem Society - <http://www.arij.org/>
- B'Tselem: The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights Violations in the Occupied Territories – <http://www.btselem.org>
- Electronic Intifada – <http://electronicintifada.org>
- The Goldstone Report - <http://goldstonereport.org/>
- Institute for Middle East Understanding – <http://www.imeu.org>
- International Committee Against House Demolitions - <http://icahd.org/>
- International Middle East Media Center - <http://www.imemc.org/>
- Israeli Occupation Archive - <http://www.israeli-occupation.org/>
- Middle East Research and Information Project - <http://www.merip.org/>
- Palestine Chronicle - <http://palestinechronicle.com/>
- Palestinian Center for Human Rights - <http://www.pchrgaza.org/portal/en/>
- Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics - <http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/default.aspx>

## EXCERPT FROM THE JERUSALEM FILM FESTIVAL PROGRAM GUIDE

It is difficult, apparently impossible, to make an objective film about the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians, a conflict that arouses visceral reactions not only among the rival sides. Vibeke Lokkeberg's documentary does not pretend to objectivity. Rather, it tries to sketch a picture from inside Gaza during and after Israel's Operation Cast Lead. We do not see combatants, only children and parents who lament their horrible situation; children and parents on whom the bombings left not only physical but psychological scars; human beings who lost not only their property but also those closest to them. Tears of Gaza moves from situations captured by Palestinian photographers during the War itself, to the aftermath and the repercussions of the fighting on the souls of the children of the Strip — a lot of desperation and rage, and not much hope.

It could be that our hearts become calloused to these kinds of images when seen over and over on the television screen. In the cinema hall the effect is different, and the emotional reactions sparked among the viewers will not necessary fall easily on either side of the political divide. It will not be simple, but those of us who come to the screening free of prejudice will discover an unsettling, gut-wrenching, and simultaneously thought-provoking film.

### **Contact**

For inquiries, please contact:

EPF Media

(888) 570-5400; (310) 839-1500

[info@epfmedia.com](mailto:info@epfmedia.com)

**Copyright.** The Study Guide is owned by EPF Media. You may use the Study Guide solely for personal or educational, non-commercial use, and you may download or print any portion of the Study Guide solely for personal or educational, non-commercial use, provided you do not remove the copyright or other notice from such Content. No other use is permitted without prior written permission of EPF Media.