



Palestine, Gaza and Ireland: A Shared History of Colonial Persecution

**Afri**



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INTRO

INTRODUCTION

The Israeli genocide in Gaza is a nightmare from which it seems impossible to wake. The sheer brutality and unremitting cruelty defy language, logic and understanding. Even to watch 'the first live streamed genocide' is overwhelming and unbearable but what it's like for those who live, are wounded and traumatised or die in its midst is simply unimaginable.

For 'Western' countries to stand idly by would be unconscionable, but worse is the fact that many actively support the genocide by supplying the weapons to the murderous Israeli state. Meanwhile, the war criminal Netanyahu who has been indicted by the International Criminal Court is feted as a hero in the US Congress.

Ireland is also implicated through continuing and increasing trading relations with Israel including military trade and by allowing Shannon Airport to be used by US military en route to Israel. How shameful it is to prioritize trade over human rights at any time but particularly so in the context of a genocide!

Any response to this horror seems meagre and inadequate but we must keep on doing what we can: standing up for Palestine, refusing to accept the normalization of genocide, boycotting Israeli goods and demanding an end to this barbarous war – and indeed all wars.

Palestine and Gaza was the focus of Afri's annual Famine Walk in 2024 and in this booklet we publish two powerful texts from walk leaders Faten Sourani and Donal O'Kelly. We also focused on the same theme in Féile na Beatha in Carlow in 2024 and we publish here an excellent talk given by Iain Atack, as part of that event.

As I write this on the 40th anniversary of the Dunne's Stores anti-Apartheid strike we draw inspiration from the heroism of those young workers. It is a reminder of the power we have as individuals and small groups to bring about change, regardless of how marginalized or impotent we may feel in the face of monumental injustice.

Joe Murray - July 19th 2024



THE HISTORY OF THE IRISH AND PALESTINIAN PEOPLE IS INTERTWINED

Talk by Faten Sourani at Afri Famine Walk, May 2024

Friends, supporters, and kind people who have come all the way here today to commemorate, learn, and act. I feel deeply honored to be among you.

As we gather to remember a time of great suffering in Ireland's history, we also gather in solidarity and love for our people in Gaza, Palestine who are today enduring genocide and great atrocities at the hands of a settler-colonial regime—the same kind of regime that caused unimaginable loss, intentional starvation, and displacement of the Irish people.

The plight and shared history of the Irish and Palestinian people cannot be more intertwined than it is today. Today, we witness, on live streams, the same brutality and inhumanity that the Irish people once faced. In Gaza, it is us—it is me and you. Our fellow humans, with the same eyes, dreams, and ambitions, are being intentionally starved, killed, and tortured.

What is it like to witness the genocide and starvation of your own people in today's world? It is a horrifying reality, a constant state of psychological torture. Since October 7th, 2023, my social media feed has turned into obituaries. Every morning, I wake up to the news of the deaths of friends, relatives, classmates, teachers, and kind neighbors. And how enraging it is that people in Gaza were already living in misery—poor, desperate, and under siege for 16 years. Despite this, they were trying with whatever they had to build a decent life. These kind and simple people had their lives taken away from them in the blink of an eye by the decision of this settler-colonial power.

Today, I remember 5-year-old Rahaf, my niece, killed on November 12th, 2023. My sister Hala lost her husband and little angel Rahaf to a sniper drone, an Artificial intelligence drone that scanned that little face and decided it's time for the 5-year-old to be killed. My heart was torn apart when my seven-year-old niece, Hala's surviving daughter, told me, "We left Dad sleeping on the pavement with blood, and Rahaf—we could see her brain." This trauma is something no child, not my six-year-old niece

nor the thousands of other Palestinian kids, should ever have to hear about, let alone witness with their own eyes.

On the 76th anniversary of Nakba, the Palestinian catastrophe of 1948, we see history repeating itself. The Nakba continues, and our struggle for freedom, justice, peace, and equality is far from over. From non-stop bombardment to intentional starvation and forced displacement, people in Gaza tell me that the misery we see from afar doesn't reflect a quarter of the reality on the ground. Imagine not feeling safe for over six months, constantly living in fear, with a good chance of dying at any minute.

In the end of last month, I lost my dear father to forced starvation and the blocking of medical care in the north of Gaza. He was a great man, a kind father and grandfather who loved life, his people, and his land. He planted and cared for olive trees way more than I could count. Despite everything, he refused to leave his home until the last minute. Escaping death many times, he died heartbroken after burying his granddaughter. Starved, denied medical care, and scared, he passed away after enduring six months of genocide.

And starved... 'starvation, not famine' 'famine is a lie.' I heard this and nodded in strong agreement whenever someone mentioned An Gorta Mor. Yes, starved, with food intentionally blocked from them, with all the evil a human can muster, not allowed to survive or to feed their children. Just like the people of Doolough, who tragically took their death journey from here to search for food, death journeys happen today in Gaza.

Today, I remember Mohammed Reefi, a friend and talented photographer. Mohammed was shot dead on March 14th, 2024, while seeking a bag of flour. My friend's life was taken for a bag of flour. How can this make any sense?

As genocide in Gaza continues, we must hold onto hope. Holding on to hope can be exhausting, but we have no other choice.

I plead with you all today to continue giving hope to the Palestinian people. Your unapologetic, mass solidarity is felt today in Gaza and throughout Palestine. Your honest actions, words, and feelings continue to give Palestinians hope in a world where we feel forgotten and forsaken. To be remembered and stood by in your darkest and most brutal moments is invaluable.

Now, it is the time to push for no dealings with Israel, to cut off all ties with the apartheid regime—no Israeli goods, no companies, no sports, no music or university ties. The

regime's total isolation, like that of South Africa's former apartheid, is our path.

We tell the Irish government that words of condemnation are important but not enough in times of genocide. It is time for Ireland to act now on its legal responsibility to prevent genocide. The time is now to act with economic sanctions. Ireland can proudly lead on this, until we reach a day of international isolation of the apartheid Israel, and eventually, one day, a dismantlement of the apartheid entity.

We remember the heroic role of the Dunnes Stores Strikers in ending South Africa's apartheid. And my dear Irish friends, you ended apartheid once, you can do it again.

Continue to talk about Palestine, and continue to disturb the aggressors, who want us to only die in silence.

Organizers at Afri, thank you, and thanks to everyone involved and here today. Thank you, Joe Murray, for a life of dedication to advancing human rights worldwide.

Thanks to the brilliant Donal O'Kelly and Roisín El Cherif.

May justice and peace prevail in our lifetime for the Palestinian people and all oppressed people around the world.



HEAR THE VOICES OF GAZA NOW!

Donal O' Kelly's talk at the 2024 Afri Famine Walk

Recently, I heard Palestinian writer Adania Shibli, banned from receiving her prize at Frankfurt Book Fair, talk about how her parents kept silent about what they endured in the Nakba of 1948. It took her thirty years to realise they couldn't talk about it. As humans we find it hard to talk about the memory of being rendered powerless.

In May 1849 in Doolough 100 people weakened by hunger and forced displacement in search of food died on the road from Delphi Lodge to Louisburgh.

At the same time young Scot James Redpath got a job in the New York Tribune. Redpath made a career for the next decade documenting the injustices of the slave plantation system in the Southern US states, at great personal risk.

After the US Civil War, he took administrative roles in the 12-year period from 1865 known as Reconstruction, when the Black population of America hoped equality could be attained. By 1878 the Jim Crow apartheid era ruled in the Southern USA and lynch law became a constant threat for Black Americans.

James Redpath arrived in Ireland in 1880, 30 years after An Gorta Mór. People were starting to realise how their parents had been rendered powerless by landlordism. One evening he was in County Mayo, in the village of The Neale, between Ballinrobe and Cong, where Lord Erne's agent, Captain Charles Boycott, served eviction notices on eleven families. The families sought and got the backing of the newly-formed Land League. Redpath was with Father John O'Malley, parish priest of The Neale.

Redpath was looking for a word to describe the shunning of landlords and their agents. Social ostracism wouldn't do. Then O'Malley said 'how would it do to call it to Boycott him'? The New York Tribune had the word 'boycott' from Mayo on its front page next day.

Boycott was a new word, but the strategy had been used before. The first of modern times was the sugar ban, an organised movement mainly by English women in the 18th century to stop the household consumption of sugar supplied by slavery in the Caribbean.

In 1887 Arthur Balfour embarked on his imperialist political career by introducing his

Irish Coercion Act with the aim of destroying the Irish Land League boycott movement. It introduced concepts such as:

- Hard labour without trial for three months, renewable thereafter, for anyone found on the word of a magistrate to be involved in boycott;
- imposition of martial law and collective punishment on any area where land agitation took place, described as 'outrages' by the government;
- Unlike other emergency legislation, it was made permanent so that it covered Black and Tans to engage in terror with legal impunity 1920-21.

In 1922, 200 Black-and-Tans were transferred to the British Mandate for Palestine. A version of Balfour's 1887 Irish Coercion Act was introduced to subdue Palestinian Arabs. This culminated in the brutal suppression of the Palestinian uprising of the 1930s.

In 1933 the Nazis came to power in Germany. The American Jewish US Veterans' Association organised a global boycott of German produce in protest against the anti-Semitic Nuremberg Laws introduced by Hitler: Dockers refused to unload German exports; massive rallies took place, countries cancelled shipments; the entire Bosch sales order for South America vanished. The German government was set to fall from power.

What saved the Nazis? Zionism did. The leaders of the German Zionist movement made an agreement with Hermann Goering to oppose the boycott in return for the right of German-Jewish emigrants to transfer property to Palestine and food trade from Zionist settlements in Palestine. This destroyed the global movement behind the boycott of Germany, resulting in more anti-Semitic legislation and the mass transportation to Nazi death camps of more than six million European Jews, as well as Roma, Sinti, LGBTQ and Communists. The settlements in Palestine became by violent repression and mapping manipulation the state of Israel in 1948, destroying 500 Palestinian villages and expelling three-quarters of a million Palestinians.

The Israeli leaders know from history that boycotts work. That is why they invest so much in opposing BDS in the US, the EU and the UK. They know that Israel's long-time ally for more than forty years, apartheid South Africa, was brought down in significant part by the power of boycott. Not least, by the refusal of the twelve Dunne's Stores strikers of Dublin to handle South African apartheid goods. All the Dunne's Stores strikers support the Palestinian call for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions on Israel.

37 US States have introduced laws against the Palestinian demand for BDS. Germany has outlawed BDS activism, and the UK are introducing legislation. The policy making elite know that mass boycott has a significant effect on the downfall of apartheid regimes and those built on slavery.

Itamar Ben-Gvir, Israeli Justice Minister uses as his catch-phrase 'We are the masters of this house'. The advocates of structural inequality are determined to maintain the Zionist state as the manifestation of supremacist ideology. They must be defeated as South African apartheid was.

I encourage everybody to sign up for BDS activism. It is one concrete action we can take to support the people of Palestine, and Gaza in particular at present, in their struggle for parity of esteem. It's the struggle of humanity. It's the duty of us all to join in that struggle. That's the minimum.

You don't have to stop at that. Disrupt, occupy, block, interfere, protest, let no business as usual continue – hear the voices of Gaza now! Let's not wait to interpret with difficulty future silence. Let's walk today in active memory of those rendered powerless in Doolough in 1849, as two-and-a-half million Palestinians of Gaza face the same genocidal threat as took through death and exile a quarter of the population of Ireland in An Gorta Mór. RESIST!



IRELAND AND PALESTINE: WAR, SUFFERING AND SOLIDARITY

Iain Atack - Feile na Beatha - Carlow March 2024

I am going to connect two seemingly quite disparate and distant (both geographically and chronologically) human-made humanitarian catastrophes, An Gorta Mór, the Great Hunger or Great Famine in Ireland, and Israel's current military assault on Gaza. The connecting link is not only the disastrous impact of both in terms of massive suffering and loss of human life, but also, I will argue, their underlying structural and political causes. I also want to conclude by demonstrating that resistance and solidarity can provide both hope and effective responses to such manifestations of human suffering and structural injustice.

1. The Great Famine (An Gorta Mór) and Israel's assault on Gaza

The Israeli military assault on Gaza has caused a humanitarian catastrophe on an almost unimaginable scale, with tens of thousands of Palestinians killed to date, the majority of them women and children. Entire families, including multiple generations of families, and hundreds of health workers, teachers, students, journalists, and UN and NGO staff have been killed. Ninety per cent of the population of Gaza has been displaced, forced to flee their homes without access to adequate shelter, food or medicine and under constant attack by the Israeli military even when seeking safety in schools, hospitals and refugee camps.

There is no access to clean water in the north of Gaza, and severely limited access to clean water and adequate sanitation elsewhere in Gaza.

Hospitals and health facilities, schools and universities, water treatment plants and drinking water installations, and more than half of housing units, have been destroyed or damaged.

This is compounded by Israel's ongoing blockade of food and medical supplies entering Gaza. Only severely limited and insufficient numbers of aid delivery trucks (providing essential food, fuel and medicine) are being allowed into Gaza, and access to northern Gaza is even more difficult. All of this is facilitated, if not directly supported, by Western governments, particularly the U.S., which continues to supply weapons and financial

aid to Israel while stopping its funding for UNWRA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency) (the major source of aid to Gaza and to Palestinian refugees) in January.

The result is that Palestinians in Gaza are facing catastrophic levels of food insecurity. Children are now dying from malnutrition and dehydration and Gaza is on the brink of famine. In other words, hunger, catastrophic food insecurity and famine are direct consequences of Israel's ongoing military assault of Gaza, in addition to the massive fatalities and casualties inflicted directly by ongoing bombardment and ground operations by the Israeli military.

Similarly, An Gorta Mór or the Great Famine from 1845 to 1848 had a catastrophic impact on Ireland and the Irish people through death, disease and forced displacement or emigration. According to Robbie McVeigh and Bill Rolston, in their book *Ireland, Colonialism and the Unfinished Revolution*, "An Gorta Mór was a catastrophe—an Irish Holocaust or Nakba." This was because "a population of some 9 million on the eve of An Gorta Mór was halved over a generation—and has never reached that level again" (McVeigh and Rolston, p. 115).

It is estimated that as many as 1.5 million people died of starvation in Ireland during the Famine and that "100,000 people died in County Mayo alone out of a population then estimated at perhaps 250,000" (Garavan, p. 4). Massive numbers of people were also evicted by landlords from their homes and their farms during the Famine, almost 200,000 families or one million people between 1846 and 1849 (McVeigh and Rolston, p. 122). As many as 2 million people were forced to emigrate, mostly to North America, on so-called "coffin ships" because so many died from disease either during the journey or upon arrival.

2. Colonialism as a shared cause

I would argue that colonialism and more particularly settler colonialism is the connecting link or the shared cause of both the ongoing humanitarian catastrophe resulting from Israel's military assault on Gaza, and An Gorta Mór or the Great Famine in Ireland. Colonialism, according to Jeff Halper, involves: "Control over a country by an external metropole for purposes of extracting the country's resources." Settler colonialism, in particular, occurs: "When a foreign settler population comes to take over a country. The natives are eliminated, displaced, marginalized, disappeared, assimilated" (Halper, p. 21).

An Gorta Mór occurred not only while Ireland was a British colony but after the Act of Union when Ireland was incorporated into the United Kingdom. According to McVeigh and Rolston: “The political economy of the Union created both this mass starvation and the refusal to provide adequate relief” (McVeigh and Rolston, p. 115).

“Rural Ireland in the 19th century was dominated by a class of rich landlords, many of whom were absentees, living well in England off the rents from their Irish land....The Irish peasantry was left almost entirely dependent on the potato as their staple diet” (McVeigh and Rolston, p. 117). When the potato crop failed due to blight in 1845 and subsequent years, there was little choice for Irish peasant farmers except to starve or emigrate.

Furthermore, because Ireland had been integrated into the British political and economic system, there was no independent mechanism for Irish intervention in support of Irish peasant farmers or to control food exports, primarily to Britain (McVeigh and Rolston, p. 117). The consequence of British control over Ireland during the Famine was that although more than enough food was being produced in Ireland to feed its population, this food was being exported while Irish people starved (McVeigh and Rolston, p. 115).

Palestinians, in Gaza and elsewhere, are also suffering from the disastrous consequences of colonialism, and particularly settler colonialism. Those who came to live in Israel and to establish the State of Israel, whether explicitly Zionist or not, “in claiming Palestine for themselves alone and rejecting the society they found there...chose to come as settlers” rather than as immigrants, according to Halper.

They “intended to displace the local population, not integrate into it as immigrants would” (Halper, p. 18).

Israel is not unique in this respect. Other countries such as Canada, the United States, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa have been established through similar processes of settler colonialism. For those engaged in settler colonialism: “The Natives....are irrelevant, a nuisance on the path of the settler’s seizure of their country, an expendable population, one that must be ‘eliminated’” or at least marginalised and suppressed (Halper, p. 19).

In other words, Israel’s current assault on Gaza is not an isolated or exceptional event. It is the product or outcome of an oppressive settler colonial project that includes the Nakba of 1948, when 750,000 Palestinians were expelled from their homes and

entire Palestinian villages were levelled or expropriated as part of the foundation of the Israeli State. It also includes the occupation of the West Bank and East Jerusalem since 1967 and the illegal Israeli settlements that have proliferated in the Occupied Palestinian Territories since the so-called Oslo Peace Accords of the 1990s. It includes the siege of Gaza since 2006 that had already produced much human suffering and deprivation even before the current Israeli onslaught.

3. Resistance and solidarity as a shared response

How can we respond effectively and with hope to oppressive structures such as colonialism and settler colonialism that produce such catastrophic events as An Gorta Mór and Israel's current onslaught in Gaza? I would suggest two interconnected responses in the form of resistance on the part of the oppressed and solidarity by others with that resistance.

Resistance can occur at multiple levels, from the individual to the collective to the international or global, all of which can have an impact on dismantling oppressive structures. Resistance connects with solidarity when the colonised or the oppressed become aware that they share this experience with others and when we act upon our shared human responsibility to work to dismantle the structures of oppression. I will suggest some examples of forms of resistance and solidarity that challenge the underlying structures that produce or result in humanitarian catastrophes such as An Gorta Mór and Israel's current onslaught in Gaza.

Organised collective resistance in Ireland in the late 19th Century in the form of the Land League was one effective and largely successful response to the power of landlords and the colonial structures of land ownership that produced An Gorta Mór. Mass evictions, emigration, starvation and the threat of famine persisted in Ireland after An Gorta Mór. Almost 100,000 families or half a million people were evicted from the land between 1849 and 1882, for example (McVeigh and Rolston, p. 122).

The response was organised resistance in the form of the Land League under the leadership of Michael Davitt and Charles Stewart Parnell, and the Ladies Land League led by Anna and Fanny Parnell. "Land ownership became the central political cause in the country, which required a head-on confrontation with the landlord class" (McVeigh and Rolston, p. 124).

The Land League's campaign to resist the power of landlords and to transform patterns of land ownership in Ireland involved a powerful and effective combination of parliamentary action (through Parnell) and what we now might refer to as nonviolent direct action or nonviolent civil resistance. The Land League initiated and developed the tactics and strategy of peaceful and nonviolent mass mobilisation as effective and successful forms of resistance not just against individual landlords and acts of eviction, but ultimately against a structure of colonial land ownership that had resulted in destitution and famine for Irish peasant farmers. "Such was the success of the combined parliamentary and popular campaign that the British government finally conceded land reform", by, for example, providing grants to allow small farmers to buy land they had previously rented (McVeigh and Rolston, p. 125).

McVeigh and Rolston suggest that the success of the Land League in achieving its objectives has provided a model for other campaigns of peaceful or nonviolent mass mobilisation and direct action elsewhere (McVeigh and Rolston, p. 374). The term boycott, for instance, was derived from the tactics of blockading and ostracising a landlord's agent, Captain Boycott, by peasant farmers in County Mayo. Boycotts have become central to campaigns of resistance and solidarity globally, in the campaign against apartheid in South Africa for instance and more recently in the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) campaign of Palestinian civil society.

We can identify everyday resistance at the level of the individual or family, collective resistance by Palestinian civil society campaigns or organisations, and solidarity by international civil society, as components of Palestinian resistance to Israeli settler-colonialism. Everyday resistance, or *sumud*, refers to persistence and basic survival under the impact and structures of Israeli military occupation and Israeli settler-colonialism. "*Sumud* is the most ubiquitous form of Palestinian resistance", according to Jeff Halper. "*Sumud* means steadfastness or 'everyday resistance,' doing whatever had to be done to remain in one's house, on one's land, in one's country and a determination to carry on 'normal' life under conditions of cultural, demographic and physical elimination" (Halper, p. 115).

According to Halper, international civil society and international solidarity can play a central role in efforts to challenge and dismantle the structures of Israeli settler colonialism, following the example of the anti-apartheid campaign led by the ANC

in South Africa (Halper, pp. 172-173). Solidarity from international campaigning and civil society groups is necessary to “offset Israel’s strength as a recognized state and its military and economic superiority” (Halper, p. 173) as well as to challenge and minimise or end the diplomatic, military, and financial support it receives from Western governments (particularly the U.S.).

This is where the Palestinian-led Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) campaign can play an important role in mobilising international pressure on Israel, for example, and also where support from solidarity groups such as those in Ireland and elsewhere is vital.

4. Conclusion

In discussing solidarity and resistance as effective responses to structures of oppression such as colonialism and settler colonialism, I have emphasised both the role of non-state actors or civil society organisations and the impact of peaceful forms of mass mobilisation or nonviolent direct action. The Land League in Ireland developed and implemented innovative methods and largely peaceful methods by which peasant farmers could resist not only individual instances of landlord oppression and brutality, but also achieve the transformation of colonial patterns or structures of land ownership. Similarly, international civil society in the form of solidarity groups and campaigns, in conjunction with *sumud* or “everyday resistance” and grassroots or community-based resistance by Palestinians, can provide a necessary and effective challenge to the current form or structure of the Israeli State as a settler-colonial enterprise.

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Biographies

Faten Sourani is a lawyer and advocate for human rights and social justice with a particular focus on the rights of Palestinian people. Coming from the Gaza Strip, Faten has pursued her studies and professional endeavours in Galway and Dublin. She has collaborated with dedicated individuals in the fields of international law, human rights research and advocacy to amplify the voices of those affected by conflict and oppression in the MENA region. She supports the work of the NGO Front Line Defenders by supporting human rights defenders in the occupied Palestinian territory.

Donal O'Kelly is a Dublin-born writer, performer and activist who has been involved in many Afri projects over the years since the Dunnes Stores anti-apartheid strike in 1984. He sees the genocidal attack on the Palestinian people as a culmination of the repressive forces operating since then, such as the arms industry of the rich white world, the beneficiary in money and political influence of the slaughter in Gaza. He is writing a book on twenty five years of Direct Provision in Ireland and the criminalisation of migration.

Dr Iain Atack is a former lecturer in International Peace Studies in Trinity College Dublin. He is a member of the board of Afri and coordinator of Swords to Ploughshares (StoP), a network of peace activists concerned about Ireland's increasing involvement in militarisation and the arms trade. He is the author of two books, *The Ethics of Peace and War* and *Nonviolence in Political Theory*. He has worked with peace and human rights groups in Canada, Sri Lanka and Ireland.



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