

Cementing Palestine: Ontology, Production & Resistance
Kate Siegfried

On October 16, 1935 in the port of Jaffa in Palestine, Arab dockers were unloading drums of cement from a Belgian cargo ship when one drum mistakenly broke open, spilling out guns and ammunition, resulting in what is now referred to as the “Cement Incident.” Upon investigation by the British Mandate, officials found a mass of smuggled weapons including 25 machine guns, 800 rifles, and 400,000 rounds of ammunition that were bound to arm the Haganah, a Jewish paramilitary organization that later came to comprise the core of the Israeli Defense Force (IDF). 78 years later in 2013, nearly to the exact day, the IDF revealed that they found a 1.5-mile cement tunnel running under the Gaza-Israel border, built by the radical militant Palestinian organization Hamas. The cement used to build the tunnel was obtained through smuggling tunnels between Gaza and Egypt that became active as a result of strict Israeli blockades on imported food and materials that intensified after Hamas took control of the strip in 2007. Specifically, between 2007-2013, Israel imposed a blockade on building materials such as cement, gravel, and steel out of concern that Palestinian militants would use the materials for fortifications and weapons instead of for (re)building homes and revitalizing the local economy. During this seven-year period, whether or not to allow cement into Gaza was a highly contested topic that resulted in heavy international pressure on Israel to ease the blockade, which Israel responded to by, in September of 2013, allowing a limited amount of gravel, cement, and steel into Gaza for private builders.

This paper begins and ends with cement, as a politically and economically laden material mobilized by the Israeli state apparatus as a technology for the ontological production of Palestinian subjects. While contextualized within a larger landscape of colonization through home dispossession in Occupied Palestine, I focus here specifically on the practice of home sealing carried out by the IDF, wherein Palestinian homes are filled with cement rendering the family homeless while the structure of the home remains intact. First, I situate this project within a lineage of materialist rhetoric, highlighting the ways that this particular framework enables questions to emerge at the apex of production, ontology and resistance. I argue that home sealing positions the Palestinian home as an immanent tool of the Israeli state apparatus that pushes bodies into liminal spaces, collapses notions of temporality, and positions Palestinian families as always potentially homeless. Last, I turn toward the enclosure of resistance through the sealing of the Palestinian home, locating the home as a compositional space for non- or anti- state actors. Contextualized within Occupied Palestine, I argue that we can understand the interiority of the home as a site of potential anti-state composition and struggle as it offers a physical location for organizing, building solidarity, and where bodies might experiment and recompose themselves as non- or anti- state actors. Therefore, home sealing short circuits the potential for resistance against the Israeli state apparatus. Ultimately, this demonstrates that the mere *potential for* struggle offers the justification for dispossession through home sealing as a form of collective punishment in the Occupied Territories.