Eyal Weizman, *Ungrounding: The Architecture of Genocide*. London: Penguin Random House, 2026. 416 pp., 53 illus. ISBN: 9781911717331



Screen grabs from 'Tunnel raid hits Israeli military outpost, with Jon Elmer', The Electronic Intifada, October 3, 2025, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rHLIOTK3GSs accessed September 25, 2026.

In late September 2025, under fire from Israeli drones, a fighter from the Al-Qassam Brigades returned to a tunnel opening following an attack on an Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) forward-operating base in the empty, desertified Magen Oz corridor in southern Gaza. A head-mounted video camera recorded as he slid down a steep bank of subsoil, joining two other fighters escaping into the crater formed by a bulldozer's attempt to destroy the tunnel, under a concrete archway, and out of sight into Gaza's earth.



This was not the terrorist's vanishing act beloved of Israeli propaganda whose imagery of a vast metro-like system beneath the Gaza strip has turned the enclave's entire subsoil into a supposedly legitimate target (p. 194). Rather, the fighters slid into what

Mahmoud Darwish called ‘the final passage’ where ‘earth is pressing against us’: ‘Here we will die. Here in the final passage’ (Darwish, 2013, p. 9).

Under Gaza, all are marked for death by bombs that can penetrate thirty meters below the surface and whose detonations in relatively anaerobic conditions produce carbon monoxide and other gases that will suffocate anyone underground (p. 194). They also collapse entire buildings into the earth. At least 11,000 Palestinians, killed since the beginning of Israel’s genocidal offensive in October 2023, ‘are under the rubble’ as the graffiti on destroyed buildings marking the presence of loved ones sometimes announces (pp. 5, 180). And even in death Gazans cannot rest. Whether interred in the rubble or in established cemeteries, their remains are routinely desecrated and reshuffled by Caterpillar D9 bulldozers employed to reconstruct Gaza’s landscape for the logistical purposes of the IDF (pp. 217, 220). Under Gaza, to borrow again from Darwish, ‘the living and the dead move in the dry clay’ (Darwish, 2017, p. 52).

And yet the opposite is also true. Engulfed by this underworld, the fighters fell into freedom. Gaza’s tunnels are life-lines constructed using techniques that enabled Palestinian Bedouins to dig wells in the desert (p. 8). They have provided sand for construction in refugee camps above ground (p. 169), carried up to 80% of Gaza’s imports in the face of Israeli blockades (p. 163), and materialized deep bonds of trust between those whose properties serve as access points to them from above the ground (p. 152). They are an architecture of liberation. And they are the only part of Palestine that remains unoccupied (p. 121).

As the citations in these passages suggest, it is difficult to imagine a more erudite handbook for a journey into the dizzying contradictions of Gaza’s earth than Eyal Weizman’s *Ungrounding: The Architecture of Genocide*. The book is framed by two images that encapsulate both its narrative and method. The first is a snapshot from August 1950 of a Caterpillar DG tractor ploughing the line that would come to demarcate the Gaza strip. The last is a map of the partitioning of Gaza after the October 2025 ceasefire showing the Yellow Line that separates Palestinian-controlled Gaza on the sand dunes to its north-west from the area to its south-east, controlled by Israel. The life-time’s journey between these images tells a story of the inscription of Zionist colonialism on Gaza’s landscape through the characteristic settler’s strategy of conscripting and manipulating geography to genocidal ends. Like Indigenous people confined to their ‘reservations’, Gazans corralled onto the coastal dunes are being subjected to slow genocide by the absence of sustaining ecology and infrastructure (p. 201).

The difference between these two images – one anecdotal, concrete and particular, the other empirical, abstracted and general – illuminates the breadth of Weizman’s conception of architecture as a practice. Forensic Architecture (FA), which is both a method developed by Weizman and his colleagues and the name of the research

agency he leads, treats the built environment (including, of course, environments designed and built by destruction) as an instrument to measure 'environmental, historical, and political processes' (Weizman, 2017, p. 54). This process requires researchers to convene and synthesise huge and varied collections of evidence and testimony in order to expose both the 'long duration of a split second' (p. 16) in which a photographer recorded the act of cutting Gaza's soil and folding it over onto itself, and the sedimented effect of the 'pattern of conduct' (p. 245) by which Israel has created the conditions to impose the 'Yellow Line' (p. 199). Most crucially of all, forensic architecture enables the interpenetration of these varied forms of evidence so that their fragments form a cumulative depiction of Israel's 'consistent and clear spatial plan' (p. 252) to destroy Palestinians, and remove the evidence of their existence from the face of the earth.

Ungrounding organises this account archaeologically. Part 1 follows the cut of the plough in the book's opening image into Gaza's soil, recording the period from the British mandate in Palestine to a decade after the Nakba (catastrophe) as a process of converting Gaza into Israel's primary agricultural zone. Part 2 goes deeper into the subsoil, following the tunnellers who resisted the march of Israeli settler colonialism above ground form the occupation of 1967 until October 2023. Part 3 traces the 'architecture of genocide' since then through its environmental operation, 'ungrounding' being the removal of a society along with any trace of its existence (p. 5). Weizman's account zooms in and out of this history throughout, in a manner familiar from investigation videos posted by FA. Larger spatio-temporal patterns are mapped, nodal points are identified, and these are expanded as the narrative dives into a case-study; features of that example then offer a further layer to the overarching account as the lens zooms out once more, and on we go, across a century.

Reading this extraordinarily comprehensive account, I have to confess that the pessimism of Weizman's intellect sometimes threatened to overcome the optimism of my will. In the face of Zionism's overwhelming genocidal force, the familiar slogans and foundational commitments of decolonization can sound a hollow note. What, for example, does 'LAND BACK' *mean* in a place where returning Palestinians often find no sign of the former location of their home, and where even the geological character of the ground on which it stood has been transformed into a place where, as one Israeli officer observed, 'no human being can exist' (p. 25)? Subjected not only to devastating artillery barrages, but to systematic ecocide and relandscaping, Gaza's soil has now been all-but-entirely deprived of its capacity to provide the conditions for organic activity and thereby of its ability to support life (p. 232). Even if it is returned to its indigenous inhabitants, can it be returned to anything like its former condition as the breadbasket of Palestine?

Perhaps this failure of political will is primarily personal, but it also strikes me as one pitfall of FA's turning of colonial aesthetics against their originators. Weizman notes, at one point, the appropriation of FA's aesthetics and techniques by the IDF, but doesn't observe that this is more like epistemological *re*-appropriation than simple stealing. Like the colonizing gaze, FA's reconstructions abstract and quantify people, objects and events, rendering all that is knowable to an objective view. Unlike the colonial gaze, this objectivity is openly politically 'engaged', and rooted in (rather than sublimated from) situated testimony (pp. 15–16). Nonetheless, its effect can become somewhat totalizing. The reconstruction of the paths of the 355 bullets that were fired from a tank-mounted machine gun at the five-year-old Hind Rajab and her four cousins, aunt and uncle, sheltering in a Kia Picanto 13m away (and visible to the tank crew), makes a claim to knowledge not wholly different, in its effect, to Israel's supposedly precision targeting, which justifies the genocidal modality that FA researcher Júlia Nueno calls 'individuated mass killing' (p. 193).

In making this observation, I do not wish to undermine FA's crucial and extraordinary evidentiary resistance to genocide. I merely want to emphasize that although Weizman's unflinching account of Gaza's ungrounding establishes the challenge of decolonization at a level of detail few have achieved, a wholly different kind of knowledge will be required for the work of replenishment by which decolonization will stand or fall. Weizman's account is by no means unaware of this. Replenishing possibilities are often visible between its lines: in the easy familiarity of Palestinian farmers with Gaza's soil whose constitution proved elusive to surveys undertaken by Yosef Weitz's Israel Soil Development Council, for example, or in the auditory navigation of tunnellers (p. 148) constructing spider's webs under Gaza by 'random changes in … direction' taken to evade detection (p. 170). In these moments, Weizman indicates an aesthetic and epistemological terrain quite different from the forensic reconstructions that have made FA justly revered. A wholly different aesthetics from that produced by FA's amassed, computer-modelled evidence is required, however, for the anticolonial imagination.

And so we return to the fighters with whom I began, and to the tunnellers who constructed their escape route. Weizman has emphasized in numerous interviews his ethical decision not to bring new material about the tunnels and their creators and users into the public domain. That decision is wholly justified. Nonetheless, the hope of a decolonized Palestine remains primarily in their hands, and can only be understood by those of us who are removed if we are prepared to take the epistemic leap with them into Gaza's ungrounded earth. 'Here,' one tunneller told Palestinian scholars Sameer Abumdallal and Ghassan Abu Hatab, 'is God, the tunnel, the darkness, the slow breathing and your little heart' (p. 161). Here, we half-hear the replenishing beat of Palestine's future.

References

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