

Displacement, Temporary Survival, and the Transformation of Social Bonds: How War Reshapes Community Networks and Collective Behavior in Gaza

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Introduction

Gaza has undergone radical social transformations since the October 2023 war, as mass displacement and survival struggles have torn apart the social fabric and reshaped societal behavior in unprecedented ways. Estimates suggest that nearly nine out of ten Gazans became internally displaced during the war.

This massive displacement, accompanied by unprecedented levels of destruction, has led to the breakdown of traditional family ties and the erosion of community support networks. New patterns of behavior have emerged, dominated by individual survival, tension, and symbolic violence, in the absence of security and scarcity of basic resources. Historical values of social solidarity have shrunk, replaced by a daily struggle for survival. Despite moments of solidarity among the population during the height of suffering, these did not amount to genuine and lasting community rebuilding. At the same time, the discourse of "community resilience and flexibility" has become prevalent in the media and political arena. However, the reality on the ground reveals deep contradictions in this discourse, which is sometimes used to cover up the extent of disintegration and suffering.

This paper aims to analyze these disruptive transformations in depth and impartially for the benefit of policy experts, decision-makers, humanitarian actors, and civil society as a whole. The paper reviews the background of Gazan society before the war, then details the manifestations of social fragmentation (family, class, spatial) and their impact on women, children, and the most vulnerable groups in particular. It also addresses the conditions in shelters as hotbeds of tension, violence, and inequality. Finally, the paper offers realistic policy recommendations for dealing with this disruptive reality in the long term, focusing on rebuilding the social contract and supporting psychological and community recovery, rather than merely offering vague rhetoric about community resilience.

Structural background on Gaza society before the October 7 war

Before the 2023 war, Gaza society was already under enormous pressure as a result of a 16-year blockade and repeated conflicts. The population of the Strip was approximately 2.1 million (more than two-thirds of whom were refugees registered with UNRWA) living in a densely populated area of ~365 km², making Gaza one of the most densely populated areas in the world. Despite relatively high levels of education, Gaza experienced crippling unemployment and poverty even before the war; The unemployment rate was estimated at over 45% (especially among young people), and the percentage of families below the poverty line was close to 50-60%. Most of the population relied primarily on humanitarian aid, with more than one million people [receiving](#) food assistance from UNRWA and others. At the same time, extended families and family ties formed the cornerstone of the social fabric, with members of large families typically living in close proximity and sharing resources and

responsibilities. The average family size in Gaza fell to around 5.6 members in 2021, compared to 6.5 in 2007, with families maintaining traditions of mutual support and solidarity.

Politically and socially, Gaza's social fabric suffered internal fractures even before the war. Since the Palestinian split in 2007 and the existence of two separate authorities (Hamas in Gaza and the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank), citizens' trust in institutions has declined and social divisions have deepened. Despite collective suffering under the blockade, challenges such as weak social cohesion, political division, and erosion of trust between citizens and their leaders have emerged over the years. Nevertheless, Gazan society has developed traditional mechanisms of adaptation and resilience, such as civil solidarity networks (clan reform committees, neighborly solidarity, local charitable associations) that have served as a safety valve in previous crises. Palestinians in Gaza have long extolled the idea of "resilience" as a collective value for facing challenges and siege, but the October 2023 war represented an unprecedented turning point, breaking many of those constants and exacerbating the weaknesses inherent in the social structure.

Ongoing social disintegration: familial, class-based, and spatial

Historically, the family has been the nucleus of social cohesion in Gaza, but the war has left an unprecedented humanitarian disaster at the family level. Widespread bombing and clashes have killed and injured tens of thousands, many of them entire families. [Statistics](#) indicate that Israeli attacks have wiped out 1,410 entire Palestinian families from the civil registry, meaning that no member of those families remains alive. In addition, there are at least 3,463 families that have lost all but one member. These horrific figures mean that entire family lines and genealogies have disappeared overnight. Some families have lost four generations at once, and thousands of children no longer have parents or siblings. It is [estimated](#) that more than 17,000 children lost one or both parents during the first year of the war, creating an entire generation of orphans or children suffering from deep psychological trauma.

In addition, waves of forced displacement have torn apart many extended families and scattered them geographically. Families who used to live in the same neighborhood or town suddenly found themselves scattered among shelters, relatives' homes, or even on the streets in different parts of the Strip. Amid the chaos of mass displacement, contact between parents, children, and siblings was lost. Children were separated from their families during the flight, and many were unable to be reunited for months due to the collapse of communications, the separation of the north and south of the Strip, and the scarcity of assistance dedicated to this issue. The International Committee of the Red Cross [reported](#) that it received thousands of reports of missing persons during the first weeks of the war, many of them for lost children or people searching for relatives. In addition to the human toll, the conditions of siege and displacement had a profound impact on the cohesion of remaining family relationships. With scarce resources and families unable to meet the basic needs of their members, psychological pressure and tension within families increased, forcing many parents to make difficult decisions such

as sending some of their children to live with relatives in less dangerous areas or allowing their daughters to marry at an early age to ensure their protection. Marital relationships have experienced unprecedented tension as a result of enormous economic and psychological pressures, with an [increase](#) in cases of domestic violence and quarrels within families due to poverty and deprivation.

Class Shifts and the Erosion of the Social Contract

The war has led to a fragmentary reshaping of Gaza's class structure, as the foundations of the limited middle class have collapsed and the gap has widened between the few who own resources and the overwhelming majority who have lost everything. Before the war, Gaza had a middle stratum of professionals, small business owners, and government employees, alongside a limited economic elite that enjoyed relative privileges (such as large merchants and some beneficiaries of the former tunnel system). However, the devastating strikes during the war razed the economic and living infrastructure to the ground: United Nations data from January 2025 [indicated](#) that nearly all of Gaza's homes, 80% of commercial establishments, 88% of schools, and about two-thirds of roads and agricultural land had been destroyed or damaged.

This widespread destruction erased the property and savings of thousands of families that had formed the backbone of the middle class and pushed small and medium-sized entrepreneurs to the brink of bankruptcy. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Gaza's gross domestic product fell by nearly 27% in the first six months of the war, with an estimated loss of \$7.1 billion compared to the usual scenario. An additional 1.74 million people were pushed into poverty during that short period, bringing the overall poverty rate in Palestine to 58% by mid-2024, most of them from Gaza, of course. It is expected that as the war continues, the poverty rate will double to exceed 60% of the population, effectively erasing the middle class [altogether](#).

The result of this dismantling process is that Gazan society has come to resemble an inverted class pyramid: a broad base of poor people who are entirely dependent on aid, and a narrow top that may include those benefiting directly or indirectly from the war economy. With the collapse of the formal economy, a shadow economy has emerged, driven by the smuggling of scarce goods and stolen aid and their sale at exorbitant prices in the markets. This has given rise to a new class of influential figures who have accumulated profits from trading in basic necessities, exploiting the collapse. Conversely, the purchasing power of most families has declined to the point of starvation: prices of some basic commodities have multiplied several times, and many have been unable to obtain even the most basic items, such as hygiene products and baby formula. A humanitarian worker in Deir al-Balah [described](#) the scene, saying: *"Some families don't even have a piece of cloth or tarpaulin to make a tent. People use seawater to wash themselves, and most of them eat canned food because it's the cheapest. No one can worry about the quality or safety of food anymore; everyone is just thinking about how to find something to eat to satisfy their hunger."*

Under these circumstances, the concept of the “social contract” no longer exists in its traditional sense. The state/authority is completely unable to provide security or basic services, and traditional solidarity networks have collapsed under pressure, leaving individuals to struggle alone. The United Nations described the situation in early 2024 as having reached “levels of deprivation that make Gaza uninhabitable,” and UNCTAD [noted](#) that cash poverty has become universal among the population of Gaza and that living conditions are the worst since the start of the 1967 war.

In this [scenario](#), social inequality has worsened dramatically. On the one hand, a small minority have managed to survive with their assets or external support (such as remittances from relatives abroad or a safe haven outside Gaza), and some may have been able to leave the Strip via Egypt (around 110,000 people left through the Rafah crossing during the war).

In practice, the middle class has vanished, and the ranks of the poor have expanded to include almost the entire population. Even those who were relatively well-off before the war have not been spared; many employees and people with fixed incomes suddenly found themselves without work or income as state institutions and private companies came to a halt. [Estimates](#) indicate that the unemployment rate in the Palestinian territory rose from 26% before the war to more than 46% afterward, reaching over 80% in Gaza.

This socio-economic shock means that the traditional pillars of stability, such as the existence of a productive educated segment and a middle class, have completely eroded. Without them, civil peace and the community’s ability to recover are at serious risk. Gazan society has effectively been transformed into a relief-dependent society, with individuals surviving on international aid, raising urgent questions about the future of the social contract and the relationship between citizens and the government (or any governing authority) in the post-war phase. It is difficult to imagine the restoration of trust and legitimacy amid the near-total inability of local governance to provide security and basic needs. This, in turn, deepens the cycle of disintegration: the absence of a social contract fosters an individualistic survival instinct, and individualism, in turn, undermines any possibility of reviving the social contract.

Spatial fragmentation and the collapse of local communities

The war has forcibly reshaped the social and spatial map of Gaza. Before October 2023, each area of the Strip, whether the densely populated neighborhoods of Gaza City, the northern border towns, the camps of the center and south, or the agricultural villages, enjoyed a certain degree of its own community life. Neighbors knew each other, schools, mosques, and public squares formed spaces for daily interaction, and the bonds of neighborhood and camp life constituted a kind of local identity (such as the identity of the camps versus the city).

These socio-spatial structures were hit by a massive earthquake as a result of the war. From the first week of October 2023, Israeli forces [issued](#) dozens of evacuation orders for the northern areas, instructing residents to move south. By November of the same

year, about 80% of the Gaza Strip's land area was under active evacuation orders issued by the Israeli army.

The result was unprecedented forced displacement: more than 1.8 million people were forced to leave their homes in just the first seven weeks, most of them concentrating in the southern part of the Strip. United Nations reports note that roughly two-thirds of Gaza's population had been displaced to the south of Wadi Gaza by late 2023, leading to massive population density increases in areas such as Khan Younis, Rafah, and Deir al-Balah, far exceeding their capacity. For example, the city of Khan Younis (with a pre-war population of about 430,000) received hundreds of thousands of displaced people from Gaza and the north, turning the camps of Khan Younis and Rafah into sprawling tent cities set up in streets and vacant lots.

This forced demographic change had profound social repercussions. The evacuated areas in the north of the Strip and Gaza City were turned into ghost towns: entire neighborhoods were left empty or destroyed, meaning that the local social fabric was completely severed. Some of the residents who survived fled south, while only a few remained in the north. In contrast, the host areas in the south faced a sudden population explosion that led to the collapse of local life systems. Residents of Khan Yunis say that the city's streets and homes were flooded with new arrivals; Families camped on sidewalks and in public parks, popular markets turned into small camps, and residential buildings housed dozens of families on each floor. This suffocating overcrowding led to the disintegration of traditional social structures in the host community as well. Neighborhoods lost their original character with this new mix of people, and friction and tensions arose between the "locals" and the displaced. Field reports indicate that residents of some host areas expressed their dissatisfaction with the enormous pressure on services and the scarcity of resources, as the capacity of water, electricity, and sanitation networks fell short of meeting needs. and health and education services have collapsed by nearly 60% from their previous levels. In contrast, the displaced feel marginalized and sometimes unwelcome, as their suffering is portrayed as a burden on the "people of the south," which has created a sense of rejection and psychological detachment among them.

This spatial disintegration severed the networks of relationships that existed in their original communities. Neighbors no longer knew their new neighbors in their places of displacement, and people lost the support of their extended families and neighbors who had been close to them. For example, those who used to live in the Jabalia camp in the north now find themselves in the Khan Yunis camp in the south, surrounded by complete strangers, and vice versa. Many of the weak ties that had formed over the years—such as the relationship between the grocer and his neighbors, the teacher and his students, and the imam and the people of the neighborhood—have disappeared due to the dispersion of the people. In their new places of displacement, people have not had the time or circumstances to build new bonds of trust; the situation is temporary and chaotic, and everyone is preoccupied with their immediate concerns. Furthermore, old geographical divisions (city versus camp, north versus south) have become more

pronounced in the social imagination. There is now talk of "the people of the south" versus "the people of the north" who have arrived burdened with tragedy. This has manifested itself in various forms of stereotyping, such as stigmatizing some displaced persons as bringing destruction or being "negligent" or a "burden" on host communities. A dangerous dichotomy has emerged in popular discourse: "displaced from the north" versus "resident in the south." These classifications are an expression of the tearing apart of both the spatial and social fabric, Gaza is no longer a single, geographically cohesive society, but a fragmented mosaic brought together by geography and torn apart by the circumstances of war.

It can be said that the war has fragmented the Gaza space into isolated and tense population bubbles. The crowded camps and shelters lack any sense of organized community or shared local identity; they are merely human gatherings in a confined space competing for resources. The abandoned and destroyed areas in the north are a painful reminder of the severing of the lifelines that connected them to the rest of society. As a result, the ability of any area to help another or even to empathize with it has been severely diminished, as everyone is immersed in their own spatial suffering. The policy of forced displacement has succeeded, according to some researchers, in "sowing islands of fear and suspicion among members of the same community," where each individual and each family has become isolated in their immediate survival, and society has lost its shared spaces that create solidarity and mutual benefits in the long term.

Symbolic Violence and the Fracturing of Collective Identity

Alongside the physical fragmentation of family and spatial ties, Gaza has witnessed a rise in forms of symbolic and cultural fragmentation, manifested in collective discourse and behavior. Here, *symbolic violence* encompasses all non-material practices that cause social harm, from hate speech and incitement, to stigmatization and accusations of treason, to identity-based divisions within society. Historically, Gazan society has enjoyed a strong national identity built on resistance and steadfastness, but the current war has exposed and exploited deep cracks that had lain hidden beneath this seemingly cohesive surface.

Several phenomena have emerged in this context:

1. Increase in internal hate speech and accusations of treason:

As suffering intensified, accusatory narratives within society rose to the surface. For example, some resorted to blaming specific social groups for what happened, such as supporters of a certain political faction or residents of a particular area, for dragging the country into war or for failing to hold out. Studies have [documented](#) a marked increase in treasonous and exclusionary rhetoric on social media and in public discourse, targeting both supporters of the Palestinian Authority in Ramallah and supporters of Hamas in Gaza, accusing them of cowardice or profiteering from people's blood. The discourse also split geographically between those displaced and those hosting them; some displaced people expressed quiet anger at having to leave their homes in the north under Israeli bombardment, perhaps implicitly blaming the resistance for its strategy.

Conversely, whispers spread among some southerners criticizing that “the steadfastness of the north was weaker than it should have been” or that “had they not left their homes, we wouldn’t have lost the north entirely.” Such dangerous narratives deepen psychological divisions within the community and reproduce fragmentation along new lines, exploiting the tragedy of war.

2. Fueling political and factional divisions:

The war has also exacerbated internal political polarization. While the official rhetoric of the factions appeared united in confronting Israel, underlying disagreements about crisis management surfaced. Supporters of each political side adopted their own faction’s narrative and implicitly blamed the other; for instance, some criticized the leadership in Gaza during the war, seeing it as an ill-considered gamble, while others argued that the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank did not do enough to support Gaza and left it to face its fate alone.

3. Collapse of collective moral and ethical systems:

Amid chaos and fear, some shared social values and ethics have also eroded. For example, there has been a rise in theft and looting from abandoned homes or relief warehouses, something rarely seen to this extent in previous conflicts. These incidents can be explained by desperation and hunger, but they are also indicators of the erosion of collective moral standards that once prevented community members from violating each other’s property, even in the hardest of times. There have also been [recorded](#) incidents of violence and fights in aid queues and at the few water stations, where the implicit motto at times became “survival of the strongest.”

4. Collective psychological trauma and loss of meaning:

At a deeper level, the war has produced a collective trauma that has shaken shared symbols and collective memory. Many now feel that everything they believed in is collapsing: the idea of glorious resistance has been fractured by the scale of the humanitarian catastrophe, and the notion of heroic steadfastness has, for some, been reduced to an empty slogan compared to their daily suffering. This moral void is a form of symbolic fragmentation, as society loses some of the symbolic pillars that give it identity and meaning. Among its manifestations are widespread feelings of defeatism and despair, and the explicit expression by some of a desire to emigrate and seek individual salvation at any cost.

Shelters Under Pressure: Tensions, Violence, and Inequality

Under these circumstances, it is hardly surprising that shelters have become hotspots for community tensions and violence. The daily coexistence of hundreds of psychologically strained families in cramped spaces for extended periods has led to frequent clashes over matters that might seem minor, but are in fact existential for those involved: a turn in the food line, priority for using the bathroom, a place to sleep in a packed hall, or even a small space to sit away from the crowd. With scarce resources, some felt that others were competing for their very means of survival. Reports from

child protection and women's protection agencies have recorded a rise in quarrels and violent incidents inside some shelters as pressures mount. Even UNRWA itself acknowledged in one of its early reports (October 2023) that tensions among the displaced were on the rise, with reports of violent disputes in some of its facilities.

This prompted UNRWA to try [measures](#) such as separating unrelated families to maintain safety and, where possible, allocating separate areas for women and children. However, the ability of such measures to contain the situation was limited given the scale of the crisis.

One form of violence prevalent in shelters was gender- and age-based. The most vulnerable, such as unaccompanied children and women, were exposed to heightened risks. A recent [report](#) by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) documented a sharp rise in cases of domestic violence and sexual exploitation among the displaced. With no privacy, entire families (including girls and women) were forced to sleep outdoors or in overcrowded rooms with strangers, which in some cases exposed women to harassment and abuse. There were also recorded instances of some families marrying off their teenage daughters early, believing this would protect them amid the lack of security. Children, too, were vulnerable to exploitation; some boys were lured into performing work in exchange for food or small amounts of money, constituting a form of forced child labor or trafficking, driven by extreme poverty.

These manifestations of violence and exploitation within shelters point to the collapse of the social protection systems that families and communities provided under normal circumstances.

Impact of the War on Women, Children, and Vulnerable Groups

Women, children, the elderly, and people with disabilities have been among the most affected by the unraveling of Gaza's social fabric during the war, as they are typically the most dependent on community support and care networks, which have collapsed under pressure. The war has pushed thousands of women to the forefront of suffering and exposed them to multiple forms of risk and marginalization:

- **Increase in gender-based violence:**

With escalating economic and psychological pressures within families and shelters, Gaza has seen a rise in domestic violence rates against women. Women's organizations have reported a noticeable increase in the number of survivors seeking help due to physical or psychological abuse by husbands or relatives. A worker at a women's safe center in Deir al-Balah noted: *"There is a sharp increase in survivors seeking help. We are working in difficult conditions... and there are not enough safe spaces."* The loss of the man's traditional role as breadwinner and his sense of helplessness toward his family sometimes translated into assaults on his wife or daughters in moments of breakdown, amid the near-total absence of customary protection mechanisms.

- **Sexual exploitation and abuse:**

The collapse of law and order created a dangerous environment for women and girls. Cases of harassment and sexual assault were reported in makeshift settlements and overcrowded shelters lacking adequate lighting, security, and segregation. International reports have revealed the systematic use of sexual violence by Israeli forces during ground operations, with testimonies emerging of abuses against women in border areas during incursions. Women and girls were also forced to travel long distances daily to fetch water or food due to the absence of transport and fuel, exposing them to violence or harassment on the roads. With local communities dismantled, women lost the neighborly and familial networks that once provided a first layer of protection, leaving them to face such dangers alone.

- **Collapse of women's health and education services:**

Maternal and child healthcare has been catastrophically affected by the destruction of hospitals and shortage of staff. Prenatal and postnatal care for pregnant women and new mothers has dropped to the bare minimum; many have found themselves giving birth in completely unsafe conditions without medical assistance. Programs on reproductive health and awareness once offered by women's centers have also been cut off. As for education, girls have been entirely out of school, and as displacement has dragged on, some parents have begun questioning the point of sending their daughters back to school at all given the uncertain future, opting instead for early marriage. Such decisions represent a serious setback for women's education and public participation, with long-lasting consequences for years to come.

Children's story in this war and societal breakdown is perhaps the most tragic and innocent. UN [statistics](#) indicate that children (under 18) make up about 50% of internally displaced persons—around one million children uprooted from their homes and safe environments. Children have been affected on multiple levels, including loss of psychological security and trauma, interruption of education and upbringing, child labor and early responsibility, and the loss of parents or caregivers.

Fleeting Moments of Solidarity vs. Rebuilding the Social Fabric

Despite the bleak picture of social fragmentation in Gaza, the war also revealed fleeting yet profound moments of human solidarity and unity within the community, even if they were short-lived. In the first days and weeks of the catastrophe, Palestinians in Gaza responded spontaneously to aid one another: families opened their already cramped homes to host displaced families with no direct kinship ties; neighbors shared what little food and water they had with newly arrived neighbors in shelters; and young volunteers formed teams to clear rubble and rescue those trapped beneath it using the simplest of tools. These scenes, broadcast by the media amid the bombardment, reflected the depth of solidarity deeply ingrained in the community despite everything.

Moments of solidarity also appeared in individual acts of heroism that became widely discussed: a father who rushed through flames to save his neighbor's children; a woman who cared for a group of lost children until she found their families; doctors who continued performing surgeries despite shells falling near the hospital. These examples reinforced the sense that the Palestinian collective spirit remains alive, even in the darkest of times.

Shared pain united people in an immediate human moment where they overcame fear and narrow allegiances. However, the challenge lies in the fact that these flashes of solidarity did not last long nor evolve into a sustainable social structure. As the war dragged on and suffering persisted, the social capital built in the early days began to erode. Families that initially hosted others eventually saw their resources depleted, and some ran out of patience under the daily pressures, leading to a certain coolness and discomfort between hosts and guests.

This illustrates how momentary collective goodwill collided with the reality of scarcity and exhaustion. There were also brief moments of unity on the broader political and societal level, such as all parties in Gaza agreeing to organize solidarity gatherings, collective prayers, or local relief convoys from the south to the north during ceasefires. Yet even these initiatives soon ran into harsh realities: convoys could not reach northern areas due to intense fighting, and collective gatherings sometimes turned into arenas for disputes over who was to blame for the catastrophe.

This phenomenon can be understood through the lens of disaster sociology: in the early stages of crises, people tend to come together, driven by the instinct for collective survival and a sense of compassion. However, as the crisis drags on with no clear resolution in sight, what is known as *compassion fatigue* sets in—when suffering becomes so widespread and prolonged that it overwhelms people's emotional capacity and ability to keep giving. This is exactly what happened in Gaza; although people initially demonstrated solidarity, continuous psychological and material depletion led to a kind of enforced indifference among some, as they could no longer extend help when they themselves were in need.

Fundamental contradictions in the discourse of "community resilience" Gaza and its inhabitants are often described with terms such as "resilience" and "legendary steadfastness" in the face of adversity. During and after the war, official and media discourse glorified the "social immunity" of Palestinians and their ability to rise again and again despite disasters. However, the deconstructive reality we have reviewed reveals deep contradictions in this discourse and even points to the dangers of adopting it without scrutiny.

The first contradiction is that the discourse of "resilience" is sometimes used as an excuse to normalize prolonged suffering. When officials repeat that "society is capable of absorbing shocks and adapting," it may be implicitly understood that there is no urgent need for radical intervention or accountability for the causes of suffering, as long as people are "coping." This ignores the harsh reality that resilience has its limits, and that what is called resilience in media discourse may in fact be nothing more than

painful forced adaptation. For example, a displaced family's ability to live in a tent for months may be hailed as a "story of resilience." while this description overlooks the fact that the family suffers daily and that the continuation of this situation is not humanly acceptable. True resilience does not mean passive acceptance of suffering, but rather presupposes the availability of internal and external factors that enable society to overcome adversity, and these factors are almost non-existent in Gaza today under the siege and destruction.

The second contradiction lies in the exaggerated generalization of this discourse, which obscures the differences within society. For example, it is common in the media to highlight group photos, such as a picture of a group of children laughing and playing on top of rubble, to suggest that "life goes on" and that children are "quick to adapt." However, this overlooks the fact that individual experiences vary; behind every child smiling for the camera, there may be dozens of others in a state of shock or deep sadness who do not appear. Similarly, women who have returned to cooking on primitive stoves in front of tents may have their images used as a symbol of resilience, when in fact they are doing so out of necessity and have no alternative. Selecting scenes of resilience and ignoring scenes of despair presents an incomplete and misleading narrative of the state of society. Yes, there is still hope and life, but there is also fragility and collapse that should not be denied.

The third contradiction is that the discourse of resilience focuses on outcomes and ignores causes and structures. It praises society's ability to adapt after a blow, but rarely discusses why society received that blow in the first place and how its causes can be removed. In the case of Gaza, talk of the resilience of the people may obscure the necessary discussion about Israel's responsibility and the blockade in bringing society to this state. As UN reports have warned, it is not possible to return to the situation prior to October 2023 as if nothing had happened. What is needed is radical change that ends the environment that produces disasters (i.e., ongoing aggression and blockade). Otherwise, "resilience" will not be of much use, because society will be exposed to more and more until it collapses completely. Resilience is not a substitute for justice and ending the root causes of the conflict. There is also a psychological/cultural dimension to this discourse that deserves consideration. Urging people to be resilient and flexible may place an additional psychological burden on them. Individuals may sometimes feel guilty or ashamed if they experience moments of weakness or despair, because the general narrative expects them to be "resilient heroes." This is unrealistic and harmful, as acknowledging weakness and suffering is an essential step toward healing.

Policy Recommendations

In light of the above analysis, it is clear that addressing Gaza's "fragmented" reality requires a long-term, comprehensive approach that goes beyond temporary relief solutions or reassuring rhetoric. Below is a set of realistic policy recommendations that can contribute to mending social bonds and promoting long-term social and psychological recovery:

Socially Sensitive Reconstruction of Infrastructure:

When future reconstruction efforts begin, the focus should not be solely on buildings and concrete, but on rebuilding communities. This entails involving local residents in planning reconstruction processes—for example, designing new residential neighborhoods in a way that preserves family ties and previous neighborly relations (resettling displaced families near one another wherever possible). It also includes rebuilding community facilities (such as schools, health centers, and youth spaces) given their vital role as hubs for social interaction. Housing policies that could cause permanent demographic disruption (e.g., concentrating most northern residents in the south) should be avoided. Instead, those wishing to return to their original areas should be enabled to do so once they are secured, as this would help restore part of the previous social fabric.

Large-Scale Psychosocial Support Programs:

The scale of collective trauma calls for a comprehensive community-based mental health intervention plan. UN agencies recommend strengthening mental health services by supporting both mobile and fixed psychosocial support centers and deploying teams of specialists across all population concentrations.

Caring for Children and Youth and Building a New Generation:

Gaza needs a comprehensive educational revival program to compensate for children's lost learning. This should include condensed curricula, accelerated construction or rehabilitation of schools, and support for non-formal education (such as remote learning where possible) to prevent further loss of school years. Orphans and street children should receive sustainable support through strengthened social sponsorship systems and dedicated monthly stipends for them and their host families. For youth, who are the backbone of any change, temporary employment and volunteer opportunities should be created in reconstruction and relief projects. This would serve two purposes: providing income to a large unemployed segment and making young people part of the solution in rebuilding their community, thereby enhancing their sense of belonging instead of leaving them prey to frustration or migration.

Combating Hate Speech and Promoting a Unifying Narrative:

Local media and educational bodies should launch awareness campaigns and curricula that foster tolerance and cohesion rather than division. The roots of hate speech, which have intensified during the war, must be addressed through workshops and seminars bringing together different community components (displaced persons and host communities, supporters of different factions, etc.) to dismantle mutual stereotypes. Opinion leaders and religious figures can also be mobilized to disseminate messages of unity and forgiveness, using religious platforms to call for rejecting incitement and prohibiting targeting one another. In the long term, integrating civic education and reconciliation concepts into school curricula will be essential to building a generation more resistant to internal division.

Promoting a Fair Local Economy to Prevent Dangerous Inequalities:

Reconstruction projects should be coupled with socioeconomic considerations, for example, giving employment priority in reconstruction projects to members of affected families and the unemployed, while ensuring fair wages. Small businesses should be supported alongside large projects, so that benefits do not accrue solely to big companies or contractors from outside the local community. Reviving the middle class requires stimulating productive sectors (such as agriculture, fishing, and crafts) by providing them with facilities and soft loans, thus ensuring the return of the producer and professional segment that has slid into poverty.

Policy Alternatives for the Role of Civil Society in Re-Stitching the Social Fabric: Volunteering, Partnerships, Conflict Resolution, and Civil Peace

Gaza's civil society in all its diversity, including local associations, neighborhood committees, youth and women's groups, unions, and volunteer initiatives, constitutes today the most important lever for halting social fragmentation and re-stitching the torn fabric. In a context marked by shrinking institutional capacity and disrupted services, civil society becomes a form of "social infrastructure" for organizing resources, mediating conflicts, protecting the most vulnerable, and rebuilding horizontal trust between displaced persons and host communities. This role rests on five interlinked functions:

Institutionalizing a Culture of Organized Volunteering (Beyond Ad-Hoc Initiatives):

Moving from short-term relief initiatives to sustainable volunteer systems through practical tools such as service-hour exchanges, unified volunteer registries at the camp/neighborhood level, and short training courses to certify volunteers in psychological first aid, shelter management, protection from exploitation, and case referral.

Building Fair Local Partnerships Linking Communities to Donors and Authorities:

Establishing monthly "community coordination tables" that bring together neighborhood committees and local CSOs with municipal representatives and UN agencies to set intervention priorities based on public criteria, and publishing "transparency scorecards" for food, water, and shelter. This reduces favoritism, redirects resources according to real needs, and increases public trust in distribution mechanisms.

Creating Mechanisms for Mediation and Resolution of Individual and Collective Disputes:

Forming "local mediation networks" consisting of community leaders, women and youth representatives, and social workers, trained briefly in community mediation, anger management, and minimum protection standards. These networks would operate under a simple protocol: receiving complaints, assessing risks, mediation

sessions, a short written agreement, and follow-up. Priority should be given to shelter disputes (queues for water/food, privacy) and disputes between displaced persons and hosts.

Promoting Civil Peace and Combating Hate Speech:

Launching “community codes of conduct” in every shelter, developed with resident participation (no violence, no incitement, priority to vulnerable groups, non-violent accountability/correction mechanisms) and posting them publicly alongside confidential reporting channels. In parallel, short and repeated messaging campaigns (via mosque pulpits, local radio, WhatsApp groups of committees) should promote mutual respect and challenge exclusionary narratives between north/south, displaced/host, faction/faction.