CONTEMPORARY STATES OF EMERGENCY

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The Politics of Military and Humanitarian Interventions

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The Politics of Catastrophization: Emergency and Exception

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The main thrust of my argument is to provide a conceptual framework for understanding "emergency" in terms free from the discourse of sovereignty and its legal implications and in a way that still holds open a certain, limited place for the sovereign decision on the exception. While I am joining here scholars such as Ann Stoler, who insists on "degrees of sovereignty,"[1] and Thomas Aleinikoff, who speaks about sovereignty's "semblances,"[2] the theoretical context of my argument is different from theirs: It is an attempt to construe a political theory of man-made disasters and use man-made disasters as a viewpoint from which it becomes possible—in fact, necessary—to revise some of political theory's basic concepts. The immediate political context of this project and its initial motivation has been an attempt to provide a comparative-theoretical perspective on the recent catastrophization of the Occupied Palestinian Territories and on the Gaza Strip, in particular.

A TWO-TIER CONCEPT OF CATASTROPHIZATION

The neologism "catastrophization" is a common, technical term in cognitive psychology and psychiatry. It designates an "anxiety disorder" in which one interprets "a specific, mildly negative event as having global and negative implications for one's view of the self and/or one's future." [3] For the psychologist or psychiatrist, catastrophe lies in the eyes of the beholder. Catastrophization is a "cognitive bias" in which some event that "in reality is merely inconvenient or uncomfortable" is magnified into something "terrible, awful, and unbearable."[4] Individuals who are "high in social anxiety" tend "to interpret positive social events in a negative way and to catastrophize in response to unambiguous, mildly negative social events."[5] Those who tend to catastrophize are inclined to overgeneralize risk-related factors and to exaggerate the chances of the worst possible thing happening.

Cognitive psychologists seem quite confident in their ability to distinguish their patients' distorted sense of reality from their own sober evaluation of what is really dangerous. They may believe that catastrophe is in the eyes of the beholder, but sometimes catastrophes do happen, and a sober understanding of reality must overcome an opposite cognitive bias—the tendency to deny this possibility. Taking the possibility of real catastrophes into account, one may say that "catastrophization" is a disorder, indeed, but of the world, not of the mind, in which "specific, mildly negative events" generate—gradually or abruptly—other events with "global and negative implications for one's self, one's world, and one's future."[6]

I would like to call these events or states of affairs by the name "evils." Evils—always in the plural—involve suffering and losses, humiliation and scarcity, deprivation and neglect. For the cognitive psychologist, catastrophization designates a "subjective" attitude: One is panicked, helplessly, by the misconceived prospect of a coming avalanche of evils that one is going to suffer. For the historian or political theorist, the humanitarian expert or the journalist, catastrophization can also mean the processes that bring about that very avalanche of evils that injure entire populations. "Objective" catastrophization is the sudden or gradual rise in evils'

quantity, quality, frequency, span of distribution, and durability—in short, a rise in "the volume of evils" and the accompanying decline in the availability and effectiveness of means of protection, healing, and restoration. Catastrophization is a process in which natural and man-made forces and factors work together to create devastating effects on a large population.

A brief note about the distinction between man-made and natural factors is in place here. In extreme, rare cases, actual, objective catastrophization may be generated by unknown natural forces and go completely unnoticed until a full-fledged disaster takes place. Such a state of affairs is almost as abstracted from the contemporary human world as the state of nature. Some human agency is usually involved in the process of catastrophization, to a certain degree, at least, either by contributing to the production and distribution of an avalanche of evils or by contributing to its mitigation. In late modernity, it has become quite obvious that both the rise in the volume of evils and the decline in the efficiency of evils' mitigation are socially and politically mediated.[7] Women and men have become capable of tracing processes of catastrophization, forecasting disasters, anticipating and mitigating much of their negative effects, providing extensive assistance to the victims so as to prevent further deterioration of their situation, and helping them restore their ruptured lifeworld. At the same time, women and men have become capable of catastrophizing entire regions, in fact the whole globe. In late modernity, there are no more natural disasters, because catastrophization is always socially and politically mediated.[8]

Processes of catastrophization may advance more or less rapidly, more or less abruptly, with changing frequencies; they may expand or contract, have accumulated effects that lead to a crash or take the form of a sudden blast with dissipating effects. But there is a difference between catastrophization and catastrophe. The later is not simply a process that takes place in and expands over time and space, but rather an event that transforms both time and space. A catastrophe is an event in the strong sense of this term. Catastrophes are large-scale or megadisasters that affect multitudes or entire populations and leave their marks on many people's space and time.[9] Space is marked by the deterritorialization of a whole region and then by a reterritorialization of a special zone within it, a zone of disaster. This is the area where former orders crumble, normal expectations become meaningless, the self-evident dimension of everyday life is lost, and where, amid ruins of all kinds, the survivors experience a dramatic reduction in their ability to move and to communicate.

Time is marked by a clear and painful differentiation of a terrible present from a relatively peaceful past, before it all happened, and from a future one longs for, when it will all be over. In the catastrophic present, people still remember a past in which sheer survival was not the issue and often recall the moment or event in which their lives were shattered, and they cannot think about a different condition without imagining a certain leap into the future. However, it is not only the content of the lived experience that was or would be radically different before or after the event. The nature of time itself changes. Durations, sequences, repetitions, the empty moments of waiting, the intervals between one happening and another—all these are transformed during the time of catastrophe and will recovered only gradually, if at all, when a new normalcy will be established.

The rupture in lived time and experienced space is not merely subjective. It has an objective dimension, because it is the condition within which the many survivors experience their space and time, and this condition has clear objective manifestations. In space, the disaster zone may be isolated, disconnected, access to it may be limited or forbidden, the ways out may be blocked; in time, the pace of events may be greatly accelerated, or just the opposite—for hours or days, nothing happens, and waiting itself is so tormenting that it becomes part of the catastrophe.

Catastrophization is different. It is a process, not a cataclysmic event that ruptures space and time. The pace of the process may be slow, and only some of its manifestations may be perceived. In fact, the process may be imperceptible and not be experienced at all. What matters in catastrophization is the steady and significant rise in the presence, quantity, and effect of evils—the volume of evils—and the decline in the means for protection and relief. Without an intervention that would counter it, the simultaneous intensification of the destructive forces, together with the increase in people's vulnerability and exposure to these forces, might cause a total collapse or disintegration of the lived environment. Catastrophization is a process in which catastrophe is imminent. However, what is imminent has not happened yet. This suspended moment of catastrophe, which catastrophization implies, this interval that makes possible both moral urgency and political manipulation, will be the focus of my analysis.

The "volume" of evils, of exposure and vulnerability, makes sense only in relation to a certain more or less defined population. Disasters happen in and to cities, communities, whole regions; catastrophization occurs within and across populations and regions. The city can be considered as the true subject and hero of a disaster, as was the case in late medieval and early modern plagues, but in order to follow the plague and understand its catastrophizing effect, one must have a notion of the city's population, its normal pattern of death and burial, the distribution of disease and deaths across neighborhoods, and so on.[10] Populations and regions need not exist prior to the catastrophizing process; they may instead be defined by this process. (Think, for example, about potential carriers of HIV, actual carriers of HIV, and those who have already developed symptoms of AIDS.) The population defined by catastrophization is the medium of the catastrophizing process. The quantification of evils that catastrophization implies must have a defined realm of reference in which more and less dramatic changes in the pattern of evils' production and distribution may be observed, quantified, and measured. Some way to observe and measure events in a multitude must be assumed, and this is precisely what the notion of population has made possible. While catastrophes may happen to communities, cities, or, more abstractly, to multitudes, catastrophization, in the way I propose to employ the concept, is a process that can be conceived and articulated only in relation to populations. It presupposes the notion of population and is one way to account for the condition of a given population. And since "population" belongs to and presupposes a certain discourse of governmentality,[11] catastrophization, too, must be thought of as part to such a discourse.

Governmentality introduces two different connotations here—more precisely, two different planes of reality. The first is catastrophization as an object of concern or interest for anyone whose task is to govern people, things, and territories, especially by means of those processes that take place by and through means and acts of government, or due to the withdrawal of or failure to provide such means. The second is catastrophization as a process that is made to appear, take shape, and assume its specific spatiotemporal dimensions by and through a discourse of governmentality that articulates an order of evils as imminently catastrophic.[12] Hence, catastrophization is always "governmental," and as such, it subsists in two distinct planes that are neither reducible to nor separable from each other and whose specific interrelations vary across periods, types of regime, and geopolitical circumstances.

The first plane is the plane of actual or "objective," environmental, political, economic, and bodily processes in which nature has been entirely socialized and in which organized human activity can appear as devastating as the forces of nature.[13] This is the plane in which human beings and (socialized) nature, in concert or separately, cause multiple deaths, endemic violence, massive dislocation, severe shortage and deprivation, the deterioration of health services and hygienic conditions, the desolation of entire regions, and the destruction of the fabric of

life of numerous people.

The second plane is "discursive." The classification of evils into processes, events, and state of affairs—the distinctions, for example, between accidents, a structured failure of systems, and the intentional and systematic production of evils, or between scarcity, malnutrition, famine and starvation, the assessment of deterioration in living conditions, the definition of events as "humanitarian emergencies," "catastrophes," or "natural disasters"—all these are effects of a discourse of governmentality, but they are also discursive means of castastrophization. They designate objects to be observed, described, measured and analyzed, predicted, and interfered with by and through a certain discourse, and they all result from applying certain rules of "object formation" in that discourse. These are the discursive means through which the catastrophizing process assumes its objective status.[14] It is only through this mise en discours of the catastrophizing process that "emergency claims" or "emergency statements" can be pronounced in response to that process.[15]

By replacing the subjective bias of the overly anxious person with the discursively constructed concern of rational persons whose task or vocation is to warn others of a coming catastrophe or to manipulate its unfolding, we have replaced a sterile opposition (between objective and subjective catastrophization) with a fruitful, that is, dialectical opposition between actual and discursive catastrophization, conceived as two aspects of an intersubjective, socially constructed experience. Psychological catastrophization presupposes, as we have seen, a clear distinction between an adequate, objective sense of reality and a subjective, distorted one. The dual nature of "governmental catastrophization" implies a somewhat similar distinction between actual processes and their discursive articulation. However, the discursive is neither subjective nor necessarily a distorted representation of the real; it is rather the condition for the possibility of its observable appearance and conceptual configuration. At the same time, discursive catastrophization may become part of the actual processes that determine the way a catastrophe is unfolding and takes shape or is anticipated, mitigated, and sometimes even prevented.

Governmental catastrophization may take place simultaneously on these two planes, the actual and the discursive, but even on the rare occasions when this happens, there is always a gap between the two. Often, discourse records what nature, governments, and other powerful human agents have caused or have failed to do and traces their policies and actions in the debris they have left behind. Less often—and yet this is something we have learned to expect from a functioning system of government—some discursive catastrophization precedes the actual processes and enables (or pretends to enable) preparedness and mitigation. This, for example, is the case with earthquake preparedness in places where earthquakes strike often enough.[16]

The gap between the two planes is not simply temporal. Planned policies and sporadic acts carried out by state apparatuses, economic firms, and other bodies governing people, things, and territories may bring about, more or less gradually, more or less systematically, a series of devastating effects that affect large populations. But the same effects may also be the result of failing—purposefully or inadvertently—to take specific actions that might have prevented the catastrophe or have mitigated its impact. In both cases, the objective processes might go unnoticed and be misunderstood and misrepresented. Then the accumulative effect of the widespread production of evils is not accounted for, disasters are not inscribed into public memory, their victims simply disappear without a trace, and some recognized devastating effects are explained away as soon as they are recorded. Discursive catastrophization is the more or less systematic response to—or preemption of—unacknowledged or disavowed actual catastrophization. It is the effort to articulate "humanitarian conditions" that can be inspected, followed,

and explained, become objects of a continuous gaze, and be spaced out in charts and tables. The deterioration of these conditions can be measured and compared, and "the verge of humanitarian catastrophe" can be delineated and declared.

Catastrophization in this sense is a way to describe a state of affairs so as to make what has been a "tolerable" or "normal" situation seem too dangerous or intolerable, to arouse moral and political reactions, and to mobilize assistance. The described process, which has been naturalized or normalized before now, appears as either exceptional or as bearing potentially exceptional consequences. An imaginary threshold that separates a state of disaster or the happening of catastrophe from protracted disastrous conditions is invoked. It might have already been crossed, with or without notice, it may be declared as imminent and too close, but in any case, by the very fact that it has been stated, invoking the crossing of this imaginary threshold is an appeal for an exceptional response.

The situation is still more complicated, however. Being embedded in various governmental mechanisms, discursive catastrophization structures certain governmental discourses and practices and often imposes its point of view. Catastrophization focuses attention on the protracted deterioration in the living conditions of given populations, in given areas, which otherwise may never be observed or experienced as a catastrophe. Catastrophization also focuses attention on protracted environmental, geological, or climatic changes, on epidemic patterns, or on unemployment rates and signs of economic recession. Catastrophization causes the advance, pace, accumulation, and fluctuations of various factors to be monitored in relation to an imaginary, more or less explicit threshold that should not be crossed.

The situation is far more complicated, however. Because it is embedded in various governmental mechanisms, discursive catastrophization often structures the discourse of governmentality and imposes its focal point of attention. This attention may first be classified, in a rather simplified way and regardless of the different sources of objective catastrophization, into three distinct temporal axes and modes of presence of disaster.

Disaster lies in the future. Discursive catastrophization seeks to anticipate it and to contribute to preparedness for the coming disaster. This may include natural disasters such as earthquakes and floods, but also includes the anticipation and portrayal—realistic, exaggerated, or imaginary—of the imminent danger posed by an enemy whose intention and actions are not simply negative, but threaten the very existence of the group, the state, or the ruling power.

Disaster is unfolding. Discursive catastrophization seeks to trace its patterns of expansion and to help contain it and mitigate its effects.

Disaster is protracted and is not perceived or experienced as such. Discursive catastrophization seeks to draw attention to the protracted deterioration in the living conditions of a given population, in a given area, to articulate this deterioration as a potentially catastrophic process, and to cope with its results.

This typology of discursive catastrophization is indifferent to either the viciousness or the sources of destruction. It is instead attentive to its advance, pace, accumulation, and fluctuation and more concretely to the moment when the threshold of catastrophe is crossed. Discursive catastrophization offers a perspective on human evils from which atrocities, wars, massive dislocations, plagues, or earthquakes seem equally relevant and the justifications for the actions or failure to act that have brought them about almost equally irrelevant, for what is crucial is to understand the way these different sources affect and exacerbate each other and how they may be subdued.

In a similar vein, objective catastrophization has to be analyzed independently. Disaster's mode of presence is not telling in this context. More important are the different sources, mechanisms, and processes involved in the production of the catastrophic conditions. A possible classification might distinguish between

natural, ecological, economic, and technological sources and might insist on the fact that each of these sources is always already political, as well, and that each embodies discursive catastrophization. However, it would be a mistake to assume that discursive catastrophization always works to counter actual processes of catastrophization. Discursive catastrophization may play at least three different roles in actual catastrophizing processes.

Discursive catastrophization may legitimize the political generation of a catastrophe and mobilize people to take part in it. Discursive catastrophization also is often perceived as part of a concerted effort to mitigate the effect of an unfolding catastrophe and to reallocate some of the risks that it involves. Finally, discursive catastrophization may contribute to the suspension of an impending catastrophe by promoting the monitoring of the sources of risks and the indices of deteriorating well-being. The two first of these roles are quite trivial and straightforward, and I will discuss them only briefly. The third role, the suspension of an impending catastrophe, is more ambiguous and calls for more careful consideration.

LEGITIMIZATION By portraying the enemy—be it a state, a nation, a class, or any other group of people, their land, or their property—as agents of potential catastrophe, catastrophizing discourse contributes to the political acceptance and even naturalization of catastrophic measures employed in order to crush the disastrous agents, be them the enemy state, its country, or its population. Thus, for example, race discourse may catastrophize the presence of the racialized other and legitimizes a political decision to unleash massive forces of destruction or to naturalize genocidal policies, mobilizing the threatened population to kill everyone in its midst who has come to symbolize and incarnate the imminent danger. As we know well, a similar role may be played today by the discourse of security: The security of one group might appear as a sufficient reason for the elimination of another. Once a group is associated with an imminent catastrophe that threatens another group, the very presence of members of that group, let alone anything they may do or have done, is perceived as part of a catastrophizing process that must be stopped by all means, even at a cost of creating disastrous conditions for the carriers of risk.

THE MITIGATION AND REALLOCATION OF RISKS When disaster is threatening, unfolding as a cataclysmic event, or lingering as a chronic deterioration, the threshold of catastrophe is "a call to arms" for anyone who can help; it designates a new set of priorities and reshuffle resources accordingly. Discursive catastrophization is mobilized to "decatastrophize" a state of affairs by alerts, preparedness, containment, and mitigation. And yet, demarcating the threshold often means a more or less systematic, more or less purposeful neglect and abandonment of those still living at a distance from the imaginary line and who are now "out of focus," outside the area threatened or hit by disaster.

SUSPENSION When catastrophization becomes a set of governmental policies, a measured and restrained means of governance, the presence of an imaginary, ghostlike threshold of catastrophe often becomes a warning sign for the forces that use catastrophization as a means of governance. These forces should not cross the imaginary line, lest they lose the legitimization of those who support them or lest they have to take the burden of responsibility for the population they have abandoned. They catastrophize, but they wish to keep the catastrophe itself in suspension, not removing its threat or its causes and at the same time not letting something that may be grasped as a catastrophe happen, either. Hence, this case—which I call "catastrophic suspension"—is of particular interest, because it creates the condition for collaboration between the actual catastrophizing forces and the agents of catatrophizing discourse that seemingly oppose them. Both parties share an interest in drawing the line between the "normal" and the catastrophic and keeping the existence of the impending catastrophe at a distance. In addition,

production of disastrous conditions in a given area, for a given population, is often motivated by and goes hand in hand with a special care for others who are not part of the targeted population or the stricken zone and whose well-being and security (are said to) necessitate the governmental implementation of catastrophic policies. The concern for those whose well-being is (said to be) at stake shifts attention away from the area that discourse seeks to catastrophize and prevents one from grasping and conceiving the causes of the real conditions there.

While actual catastrophization is a process with one clear direction—from relatively normal conditions to catastrophic ones—discursive catastrophization may go in two opposite directions and may do so simultaneously: creating a catastrophe and mitigating its effects. But it may also go in no direction at all, helping to keep catastrophe in suspension, collaborating, purposefully or not, with the forces that have operationalized catastrophization and using it as measured, calculated, and controlled means of governance. A paradigmatic example of this latter state of affairs is Israel's rule in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, where controlled catastrophization has been consistently employed by the Israeli authorities since October 2000.[17] This strategy has not met much objection or dissent from the Israeli public, due in part to a legitimizing discourse that catastrophizes the Hamas government by associating it with suicide terror, on the one hand, and with the deadly threats of Hezbollah and Iran, on the other, by presenting Iran as a satanic enemy determined to destroy Israel. The rockets fired by the various Palestinian militias are thus interpreted not as a form of guerilla warfare and acts of resistance to the Israeli occupation, but as the spearhead of those forces determined to bring about the complete destruction of the state of Israel, a second Jewish Holocaust. These assertions—true or false, it does not matter—play a significant role in producing the catastrophization of Gaza.

THE THRESHOLD AND THE EXCEPTION

Discursive catastrophization should be further examined. First, it should be clearly distinguished from the act of giving an account of a catastrophe whose existence has already been established. When one counts bodies in the immediate aftermath of a hurricane, the unfolding of which everyone could have watched (for example, Hurricane Katrina), tells stories from the death camps, or collects the testimonies of the genocide's survivors (for example, in Rwanda), one does not catastrophize, but rather describes a given catastrophe. In such cases, the catastrophe has already been established as a fact and as a more or less defined object of discourse, something to be observed and accounted for, explained and commemorated. One does not have to establish that a catastrophe is really taking place, or has taken place, or is soon to take place, but, assuming that this has been the case, one describes and analyzes what has happened or is happening, questions its causes, or tries to comprehend the experiences it has produced.[18] Establishing the fact that a catastrophe is actually taking place or that it did or is about to take place is precisely what is at stake in discursive catastrophization. In other words, discursive catastrophization is a formation of discourse in which the occurrence of a catastrophe is always problematized. Part of this problematization is concerned with the occurrence itself: Must there be an event, clearly distinguished in time and space, in order for a catastrophe to take place?

Usually, such a problematization is involved even in the most dramatic event of devastation, an event that multitudes of people experience as a rupture of their shared and personal time, as a shattering of their shared lifeworld and private selves, and as a brutal deterritorialization and reterritorialization of their shared space. However, at the extremes, catastrophization and catastrophe might be rigorously separated. At the extremes, there are no catastrophes, only silent, objective processes of catastrophization, on the one hand, and loquacious discursive cata-

strophization of objective processes, on the other hand. At one extremity, catastrophe is reduced to nothing because it is a matter of the experience of victims whose disappearance has left no trace of and survivors who have been silenced. At the other extremity, catastrophization is a purely discursive matter with no corresponding subjective experiences. A catastrophe that is not constituted as an object of any discourse is what one may call the perfect disaster, which, like the perfect crime, would take place without leaving a trace. It may well be that the Nazi elite dreamed of such a perfect disaster when they contemplated "the final solution" to "the Jewish problem."[19] In the inverse situation, discourse and the experienced event are no less kept apart, discursive catastrophization produces no corresponding experience, and the disastrous effects may be no less "perfect."

Discursive catastrophization takes place today in several partly related, partly overlapping discursive fields. It comes in reports and testimonies composed by individuals or commissioned by local and international humanitarian organizations, human rights groups, governmental and nongovernmental commissions of inquiry, journalists, and other men and women of conscience and goodwill.[20] The history of this genre goes back at least to the Crimean War,[21] it includes European imperialism since then, and it has also accompanied almost any significant "natural" disaster in the twentieth century. But after World War II, and especially since the 1980s, with the dramatic growth in the presence of nongovernmental organizations that followed the end of the Cold War, "the retreat of the political," and the mediatization of politics, a clear change in the quantity, quality, and variety of the catastrophizing literature can be observed. The reports have become more elaborated; more factors have been documented, measured, and analyzed; statistics has become the lingua franca of these reports; more risk factors have been identified and analyzed; and experts and expertise of all kinds have contributed to the professionalization and depoliticization of discursive catastrophization, while new groups have been defined as "populations in danger."[22]

The reports vary in precision and scope, depth of analysis, the use of technical tools drawn from the social sciences, and the language of presentation. There are more and less politicized experts who take more and less reflexive and critical positions, looking at catastrophic processes from a wider or narrower perspectives. But common to most of them is a certain sense of moral urgency, which is often lacking from reports of the same kind concerning the socioeconomic conditions of deprived populations in "normal" situations. Sometimes only the rhetoric of urgency remains, while the detailed analysis is assumed, but left inexplicit. Often acute cases of massacres, famine, dislocation, and epidemic are placed alongside "milder" cases, which show similar symptoms, but spread at lower pace and on a smaller scale. Catastrophization here serves two different purposes: the portrayal of a series of related events or states of affairs as a large-scale disaster that demands an urgent response and the portrayal of relatively unrelated events as expression of a single, identified cause or problem whose cumulative effect demands a no less urgent response.

A quick comparison between two publications of the humanitarian organization Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) may illustrate this double sense of urgency and, by implication, of discursive catastrophization. In the introduction to the first report of *Populations in Danger*, published by the French branch of MSF in 1992, Rony Brauman wrote that the authors had "chosen critical situations" in reference to a "scale of severity of crises." They thus limited their analysis to the "ten cases that appeared to be the most tragic in the past year."[23]

By contrast, five years later, the American branch of MSF started publishing an annual list, *Top 10 Underreported Humanitarian Stories*, with short reports on each "humanitarian story." In it, it is not "critical situations" located at the acute end of a "scale of severity" that are the focus. Instead, it is the sheer accumulation of numbers that come from across the entire globe that assumes the figure of catas-

trophe, and it does so only through and within the realm of the humanitarian discourse. The report for 2006 records violent clashes that forced one hundred thousand people to flee from their homes in the previous year in the Central Republic of Africa, alongside violent clashes in central India that forced fifty thousand people to leave their homes during the last twenty-five years, an average of two thousand per year, 2 percent of the dislocation in Central Africa.[24] Even more significant is the attempt to portray tuberculosis as a major humanitarian crisis that every year claims the life of two million people all over the globe. The problem, the report claims, is the lack of adequate drugs to cure the disease, the lack of attention to this disease in the pharmaceutical industry, and "not seeing the necessary urgency to tackle the disease." The sense of urgency is a pure effect of the accumulation of cases in the charts of the humanitarian organizations. Although some regions and some kinds of populations are more conspicuously hit by tuberculosis, the report does cite any event, dramatic or otherwise, and does not mention even the quiet spread of an epidemic.

Even if no one would ever actually experience a situation as a catastrophe, discursive catastrophization thus may articulate the accumulation of evils as a disaster and produce the emergency statements that call people to respond. This discursive effect may be the most important feature of catastrophization: to determine that intangible moment, the crossing of a line that should change one's attitude from ignorance and indifference to careful, interested attention, from interested attention to action, or from acting at a distance to actual intervention. This is the moment when one hears that "something (or something else) must be done." When the threshold is crossed, a true exception has been created.

It is therefore not by accident that the term "humanitarian emergency" has replaced "catastrophe" as a more appropriate description for such a situation. "Humanitarian emergency" may designate what happens when the threshold of catastrophization is crossed. But it may also designate a state of alert that must be declared when deteriorating conditions bring a region or a population too close to the threshold. When a sovereign declares an emergency, it means, among other things, declaring a state of alert and calling for special preparedness in order to face an existential threat. Many humanitarian organizations have adopted the same language and tend to declare an emergency as a state of alert in order to avert the coming of the catastrophe itself. Sometimes they declare a "humanitarian emergency alert," that is, an alert regarding an emergent emergency.[25] Thresholds multiply; for an alert to be declared, a certain threshold has to be crossed, just as for an actual emergency. The difference between the two is not well defined, and it changes from one organization to another and from one situation to another.

A legally, politically, or governmentally declared state of exception, like the humanitarian alert, is meant to avert or preempt a true state of exception. But the threshold—of the emergency or the catastrophe—is never given; it is never a fait accompli, and the ambiguity problematizes any attempt to take it as such. Whether it is announced as a line that has been crossed or as an approaching turning point, it also appears or is pronounced as an imperative: "Something must be done," either in order not to cross it or in order to cross back, to "decatastrophize" a catastrophic situation. An "indistinction" between fact and norm, similar to the indistinction between "a situation of fact" and "a situation of right" that Agamben ascribes to the state of exception declared by a sovereign,[26] here finds a clear expression outside the logic of sovereignty, and this is true even if the appeal to "do something" is addressed to a sovereign. The very existence of nongovernmental agents of discursive catastrophization make it clear that no sovereign can claim today a monopoly over the exception.[27] Seen from the humanitarian perspective, an emergency does not refer to any authority, but to the human condition as such, that is, to the condition of living or surviving as humans. In a humanitarian emergency, it is the human condition itself that becomes exceptional. In fact, it is then

that the unbearable human condition emerges.

For all these reasons, it has appeared absolutely necessary to operationalize emergencies. A systematic attempt to "regulate" the discourse of catastrophization, establish objective guidelines for discursive catastrophization, and determine the threshold of catastrophe in a way that would be appropriate for a variety of crises all over the world was part of an ambitious endeavor of a group of scholars working at or with the UN University in Helsinki. Raimo Väyrynen, a key figure in the group, proposed a way to "operationalize" what the group termed "Complex Humanitarian Emergencies" (CHEs). A humanitarian emergency is a "multidimensional…social crisis in which large numbers of people unequally die and suffer from war, displacement, hunger, and disease owing to human-made and natural disasters." It becomes complex when more than one of these types of evils coexist and exacerbate each other. A CHE is indifferent to the sources of evils and includes all their types, from war to genocide, from epidemics to famine. However, each one of the four types of evil is operationalized independently,[28] and thus CHEs can also be measured and compared. The four types of evils of which CHE consists (warfare or violence, dislocation, famine, and disease) are easy to measure: warfare by the number of deaths that can be ascribed to it; dislocation by the number of refugees; hunger by children underweight; and disease by child mortality.[29] But the classification of CHEs into types and the assessment of their severity are based on the coexistence of several types of evils.[30] A CHE is declared to be acute when the numbers are high enough in all four categories. When only three categories are involved, a CHE is "serious," and it becomes merely "violent" when it consists of two categories only, one of which is usually war.[31]

Throughout the attempt to operationalize emergencies, one question keeps recurring: "Whether the rate of [the emergency's] destruction must accelerate and pass a certain threshold before it qualifies as a crisis, or should drawn-out disasters, whose costs accumulate only over a period of time, also be included in the definition?"[32] The solution proposed is typically ambiguous: On the one hand, a distinction should be made between protracted and accelerated emergencies, while on the other hand, one should keep in mind that acceleration itself is subject to change. Thus, "emergencies can move from one category of intensity to another," and hence a protracted disaster may suddenly accelerate, cross the line, and become a fully complex humanitarian emergency.[33]

The threshold is ambiguous on at least three accounts: first, because it is not clear where exactly the line should be drawn—even the choice of a unit of measurement (a state or a region) for determining some possible standards is questionable.[34] Second, the threshold is ambiguous because the line may be crossed at any given moment due to accumulation or acceleration.[35] Third, it is ambiguous because it is never certain whether identifying, determining, or declaring the threshold is a matter of recognizing a fact or of fulfilling a duty. This ambiguity is structural, and it inheres the efforts of operationalization.

The attempt to operationalize emergencies does not (and is not meant to) determine a threshold of catastrophes; rather, it only determines conventional ways to problematize such a demarcation. To operationalize means to determine what one should monitor, count, and take into account in order to frame the question of the threshold and make possible an informed decision on the threshold, which is nothing but the governmental form of the sovereign decision on the exception. But this governmental decision also deconstructs the very structure of sovereignty, its coherence and monopolistic claims, because it is a decision given to or made by a variety of governmental and nongovernmental agents such as humanitarian experts and activists, agents that are still involved in governmentality.

It is important to operationalize emergencies—this is the basic assumption of Väyrynen and his colleagues—and the reason is obvious. The humanitarian emergencies are not those declared by a sovereign, but those imposed upon him and

those created because sovereign power has shrunk or collapsed altogether, and when they happen, they unfold as ungovernable situations, populations, and territories. To operationalize emergencies is a first step and a condition for the reintegration of the territory and the population in the emergency zone into a governable realm. Whether the governing authorities are old or new, state authorities, international, intergovernmental authorities, or international nongovernmental entities matters less than making the zone of emergency governable again.[36] Hence, CIA analysts and independent humanitarian experts may find themselves linked together in the tables and charts drawn by emergency experts,[37] exchanging information and insights through his conceptual scheme and form of discourse. They share an interest in making emergency zones governable in order to save lives (the humanitarians) or maintain a certain world order (the state agents). They all assume the uncertain, indeterminable threshold of catastrophe as the moment in which a true exception to the rules (of a political order or of a lifeworld) has been created in or can be ascribed to a given region in relation to a given population. They all assume that when such an exception is established, an urgent need for justification and exceptional action would emerge. A license is given and an appeal is made to individuals and authorities to go out of their way. When a political sovereign declares a state of emergency, he merely interprets this situation within a legal-political framework and extends his authority accordingly. However, this interpretation is neither primary nor necessary.

From this perspective, war may appear as a means of actual catastrophization—one among others. Identifying or declaring the enemy appear as an effect of catastrophization, and the very concept of the enemy presupposes catastrophization as a special power on the use of which the sovereign might claim a monopoly that he does not really have. Instead, a dangerous virus, environmental pollution, or illegal immigrants may be declared to be the enemy by experts and concerned citizens, and the threshold of catastrophe may be drawn and redrawn by many social actors. This threshold is a scene of contest, struggle, and dissent, and the claims of a sovereign power, however they are pronounced, are neither primary nor constitutive of this scene. In other words, in a world like ours, the sovereign is not the sole author of the exception, and his word on it is not the last one, although the claim to be such a sole author and to have the last word may be a good way to characterize sovereignty as a special kind of political claim.

Moreover, it is important to emphasize that it is not only the case that the sovereign has no monopoly over the interpretation of the exception, but also that his interpretation presupposes the catastrophization of the exception. The sovereign decision on the exception, in the sense given to it by Carl Schmitt, assumes and implies the real possibility of a catastrophe.[38] When a sovereign declares an emergency, he presumably responds to the fact that a true exception has taken place or might soon take place—or at least this is how the state of exception is presented to the public.[39] The imminent danger of a catastrophe is an implicit part of the deliberation and the ruling on the exception, as well as of its legitimization. In this sense, a sovereign decision on the exception is simply an authorized form of catastrophization and one of its earliest expressions. Although this authorized form claims to be independent of any governmental or ideological discourse, it is at this moment that it stretches its legitimacy and exposes itself to severe disobedience, as well as to the competition of governmental or ideological discourses that claim authority over catastrophization. Thus, the notion of "complex humanitarian emergency" is a recent attempt to stabilize a field of action that has become rather hectic lately by introducing professional standards for dealing with catastrophes and operationalizing the exception.

The legal category of the exception is by no means the best perspective from which to understand catastrophization. It is the other way around: Declaring a state of emergency has always presupposed some sense of catastrophization—

false, imaginary, virtual, sincere, or realistic—and should be understood in its context. In today's globalized political order—and this may be one of its novelties—only a power that has given up any kind of legitimacy and therefore has become indistinguishable from the use of sheer force may give up any pretext of catastrophization when declaring a state of emergency. Whenever power is not indifferent to its legitimization, some kind of catastrophization is presupposed by the sovereign decision on the exception. Hence, the changing discursive conditions of catastrophization, including the inevitable conflict of interpretations regarding the threshold of catastrophe, both precede the sovereign decision and immediately follow it, undermining its claim for spontaneity, determination, and conclusiveness. That emergency has become such a prevalent concept in contemporary political and critical theory is not a sign for the return or persistence of sovereignty. It is instead an expression of the fact that sovereigns have lost their alleged monopoly over catastrophization and that the emergency can no longer be restricted to the realm of law. The partial and limited or full and straightforward suspension of the law is just one form that a response to catastrophization may take. Similarly, the state is not the only agent threatened with catastrophe or to whom a catastrophic power is ascribed. These are populations that are at risk, but that at the same time pose the risk.

It has always been the task of an enlightened, politically aware public to call the bluff of false catastrophization and to oppose power when it rules by manipulating fears and anxieties. Today, when catastrophization has its experts, when these experts inhabit a whole cultural field (in Bourdieu's sense of this term)[40] where heterodoxy regularly contests orthodoxy, and when power inheres in that field, and does not only confront it from the outside, the task of knowledgeable citizens and responsible officials and bureaucrats has become less risky, perhaps, but much more complicated. They have to distinguish among the various psychological, humanitarian, and legal-political meanings of catastrophization and make sure that neither their government nor their experts (pretend to) suffer from the severe "cognitive bias" and "anxiety disorder" that psychiatrists ascribe to catastrophization.

In contemporary strong states,[41] when governments catastrophize, their discourse is often followed by decisions on exceptional measures, while the sovereign decision on the exception is usually followed by a series of governmental catastrophizing acts. Facing catastrophization, sovereign and biopolitical apparatuses in strong states must work in concert and be completely integrated at this moment.[42] The whole population should be realigned according to the coming danger. Populations at risk and populations considered as risky should be defined, targeted, monitored, segregated, and more closely controlled. The sovereign decision on the exception, if it has ever been anything more than a hypothetical or imaginary moment in the theory of sovereignty, is now translated into and replaced by numerous local bureaucratic decisions on the exception, and the threshold of catastrophe is redrawn from all directions in various contexts of governance and domination, aid, relief, and subjugation by governmental and nongovernmental agencies alike. These different actors compete and struggle over the definition of the exception, the threshold of catastrophe, the nature of objective catastrophization, and the validity of discursive catastrophization. The existence of "degrees of sovereignty" that has always characterized empires, according to Ann Stoler,[43] thus characterizes the everyday life of any contemporary strong state and is only most conspicuous in states with imperial tendencies.

Catastrophization has become a more or less distinct branch of biopolitics that differ from more common and less dramatic political struggles and biopolitical practices due to its special concern with the moment of the exception. The "true exception" implied by the ghostly presence of the threshold of catastrophe both authorizes and calls upon both governments and citizens alike to act in unusual

ways. These may vary from evacuation to war, from deportation to the establishment of refugee camps, from targeted killings to heroic sacrifices. They may include dramatic changes in public and private allocations of resources, breaking contracts and alliances and making new ones, crossing borders, or ignoring them altogether. A formal suspension of the law may precede or accompany such actions, but certainly, this is not always the case. Exceptionality is much wider than the suspension of the law. What is common to all these forms is their temporary nature, or more precisely, the fact that they are proposed and declared as temporary, ad hoc responses to an emergency.[44] They are meant (or presented) as temporary interjections and interventions in cases where the social order has collapsed or is about to collapse, and they are supposed to take place as part of an interim regime that should facilitate the restoration of an old order or the constitution of a new one. Decentered, fragmented, and always contested as these moments of exceptionality are, they may still end up forming a clear pattern, leaving the impression of a clear policy, expressing a recognizable principle of governance. Moreover, in zones of emergency, such principles may be more clearly recognizable or more decisively at work than in the zones of normalcy.[45]

If one insists on a Schmittian reading of this situation, one would have to say that the sovereign is he who freezes a turbulent field of catastrophization, draws clearly the catastrophic threshold, imposes an unambiguous meaning on conflicting and confusing signs, and determines a direction and a mode of response to the emergency. No such sovereign exists, however, and catastrophization has become one domain among many where this becomes plainly visible. The Bush administration's response to the attack on the World Trade Center has been nothing but a series of catastrophizing acts. But there has been not a single moment since 9/11 when any of these acts went uncontested. Not one of them has been implemented without being transformed or at least affected by a lively field of catastrophization in which many, from the pope to Osama bin Laden, from the highest generals to petty bureaucrats, from experts on terrorism to experts on hunger and malnutrition, and from loyal citizens to lawless immigrants, have had a say. The relatively successful attempt of the U.S. president to extract from this situation a recognition of his claim to be the ultimate catastrophizing authority and to use it in order to extend and enhance the effectiveness of some of the administration's biopolitical technologies should not mislead us to underestimate the power of all other agents in the field, where numerous local, partial, little quasi-sovereigns constantly decide on exceptions. And yet this plurality may yield a result that, without being the outcome of any single decision, could seem like an expression of a certain more or less coherent policy or of the shared interests of certain players in the field.[46]

I started by noting that the broader context of this discussion is an attempt to construct a political theory of disaster. It is worth noting that in the history of political theory, disaster, whether man-made or natural, was often conceived as part of the circumstances in which power operates or one of the consequences of its operation, but in both cases, it was conceived as external to power. Hanna Arendt may have been the first to offer an analysis of catastrophization as a constitutive element of power. The two forms of power she studied in the *Origin of Totalitarianism*, imperialism and totalitarianism, may be construed as two phases in the "interiorization" of disaster within the realm of power. What has been presented here can be conceived as a new phase in the same process that characterizes a posttotalitarian, postcolonial world. This, I think, is the epistemological condition of the contemporary notion of emergency. It is within this framework that one should understand the humanitarian, security-related, and legal aspects of emergency and grasp the way in which these different aspects are differentiated without ever being truly dissociated. This is also the context for understanding the double meaning of emergency, that is, as a response to discursive catastrophiza-

tion, on the one hand, and as a way to create or accelerate the condition of actual catastrophization, on the other.

The collaboration between the forces that mitigate disasters and those capable of or actually producing them is not a result of a neoliberal ideology of professionals or of the tendency of humanitarian organizations to depoliticize violent crises and man-made disasters, ignore their "root causes," or channel the energy of their professionals and volunteers from politics to medicine and other caring professions. More generally, the professionalization of the aid industry or the fact that it has become an industry and as such is now exposed to economic forces like any other market enterprise are not enough to explain this collaboration. The fault—if it is a fault at all—lies with catastrophization as a special domain of governmentality, or rather with the two tiers and double-edged structure of this special domain.

ON THE VERGE OF HUMANITARIAN CATASTROPHE

I have distinguished above three ways in which discursive catastrophization may be involved in the actual production of catastrophes: legitimization, mitigation, and suspension. The third way, I have said, is characteristic of some contemporary zones of emergency, of which the Israeli rule in the Occupied Palestinian Territories since the second intifada may serve as a clear example. Let me look briefly at this case and draw from it some general conclusions.

The Israeli government responded to the Palestinian uprising with excessive violence, the generous and indiscriminate use of live ammunition, and the extensive destruction of houses, land, and property.[47] It was not physical violence, however, but spatial disintegration and fragmentation that emerged as the main technology of domination and control that Israel used in order to contain and suppress the Palestinian resistance and to stop a stream of suicide attacks in Israeli cities west of the Green Line, the de facto post-1948 border of Israel. The effect of the new regime of movement on the Palestinian population was enormous. The situation further deteriorated when Israel responded aggressively to a terrorist attack (in Hotel Park in Netanya on Passover eve 2002), reconquered several Palestinian towns, crushed the security apparatuses of the Palestinian Authority, and dismantled many other institutions of the Palestinian government in Operation Defensive Shield. The Israeli Defense Forces resumed the massive demolition of Palestinian houses in order to create "clean" areas and to punish families of suspects in terrorist activity, and thousands of Palestinians became homeless. Soon there appeared the first reports that catastrophized the conditions in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. They tried to ring the alarm bells, using rhetoric of urgency that had not been used before. First came the Bertini Report, which insisted on the fact that "the growing humanitarian crisis" is "man-made" and listed several "indicators" for the crisis: an increase in malnutrition, deteriorating health, and the exhaustion of coping mechanisms.[48] The report cited a survey made by scholars from Johns Hopkins University that found a "substantial increase in the number of malnourished children over the past two years, with 22.5 percent of children under five suffering from acute (9.3 percent) or chronic (13.2 percent) malnutrition," with much higher rates in Gaza than in the West Bank.[49]

These numbers were then cited and recycled by a few other reports that added information about unemployment, poverty, and health conditions and that started to analyze their causes. Jean Ziegler, the special rapporteur on the right to food to the UN secretary general, wrote in October 2003 that "the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) are on the verge of humanitarian catastrophe" and specified the Gaza Strip again as facing "a distinct humanitarian emergency in regard to…malnutrition," the level of which had decreased so much that it became "equivalent to levels found in poor sub-Saharan countries."[50] Ziegler's report was viciously criticized by the Israeli government, which, with some help from the American

administration, forced the secretary general to refrain from adopting the report as an official UN document. The Israeli officials did not contest the figures, only the ascription of responsibility. In regard to their pressure, Ziegler said: "My mandate is precise: the respect of the right to both solid and liquid food. That is my only concern. I saw a horrifying humanitarian disaster which worsens because of the occupation. I have carried my mandate to the letter; I have reported drastic deterioration of the dietary situation of the Palestinian population and the reasons for its being."[51] Similar expressions of catastrophization may be found in later reports. For example, John Dugard, special rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights, stated clearly: "There is a humanitarian crisis in the West Bank and Gaza. It is not the result of a natural disaster. Instead, it is a crisis imposed by a powerful State on its neighbor."[52]

My point is not to claim that the situation in the Gaza strip did not deteriorate significantly after April 2002, but that discursive catastrophization followed the objective catastrophization, made some aspects of it visible, observable, and accountable, articulated them, and endowed them with its specific figure. The figure was neither that of a natural disaster nor that of a "complex humanitarian emergency"—the accumulated numbers of dislocated people, victims of violence, and the rate of malnutrition were too low for that—but rather that of a threshold. Ziegler was the most explicit: "The Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) are on the verge of humanitarian catastrophe." He also suggested that this "fact"—or rather, this way to perceive the situation—was not entirely foreign to the Israeli authorities: "The Israeli authorities recognized that there was a humanitarian crisis in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. They did not dispute the statistics of increasing malnutrition and poverty of the Palestinians."[53] Despite recurring obstacles on the provision of aid by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and other international organizations, Israel remained committed to preventing the Occupied Territories from crossing the dangerous, imaginary threshold. "There will be no famine in Palestine," Israeli representatives kept reiterating as Israeli authorities kept frequent local shortages from turning into a famine. The authorities also took pride in the fact that UNRWA had added iron to the flour it distributes in the Occupied Palestinian Territories in order to fight malnutrition, thus maintaining the Palestinians at the threshold without letting them cross it.[54]

Israeli authorities were quick to adopt a humanitarian discourse and share it with the humanitarian organizations. "In the protocol of every operation, the first thing mentioned after security matters is the humanitarian issue.… When an operation starts, we gather the representatives of the humanitarian organizations active in the area and, as long as the operation continues, we coordinate their mode of action in the area.[55] Clearly, the army officers recognize the phenomena of catastrophization, and they are even ready to observe it through the conceptual lens of the humanitarian discourse and admit that the new regime of movement and other measures taken by the ruling apparatus are the causes of catastrophization. They hardly dispute the statistics, as Ziegler reported, and see the humanitarian crisis as "regrettable, but inevitable, consequence of security measures that were necessary to prevent attacks on Israelis."[56] And yet, at the same time, denying reports that find, for example, "a growing evidence that declining income amongst Palestinians are a primary cause of acute and chronic malnutrition in young children…Israeli officials have argued that '[n]o one is starving in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.'"[57] "There will be no famine in Palestine, no famine in Palestine," told a chorus of IDF "humanitarian officers" to Ariella Azoulay, in her documentary short film *The Food Chain* (2003).

This is a consistent Israeli policy. It has not changed with the "disengagement," when Israel has pretended to end the occupation of the Gaza Strip and dismissed its responsibility and obligations as the occupying power, and it only has become

more blatant and explicit since the Hamas won the election in Gaza and took effective control of the Palestinian government there in June 2006. The strip is encircled and enclosed as a camp, almost all its supplies come through the Gaza Strip's gates, which are fully controlled by Israel, and the opening of these gates for men and commodities is recognized by everyone as a humanitarian issue of utter importance that is constantly on the agenda at every new round of talks or violence. Though Israel often interrupts the provision of basic food by UNRWA and other NGOs, it never does so for more than a few days. Similar "punitive measures," such as electricity shutdowns and blockage of gasoline deliveries, are also used in a limited and restrained fashion without ever cutting off the supply of these resources completely. Israel could produce famine in Gaza by imposing complete isolation, and it could add to the chaotic situation by cutting off electricity for good, but such measures are plainly not part of the Israeli repertoire. Catastrophization seems to have clear limits in Gaza.

Note, however, that what is considered as an unacceptable humanitarian condition has changed dramatically over the years, together with the means to intervene and stop the accumulation of evils. In the late 1980s, during the first intifada, any local curfew that lasted more than a week was a matter of much concern among Israelis and foreign humanitarians alike. In 2007, many weeks of cordons and closures that disrupt the lives of hundreds of thousands have become the rule, while emergencies are quite rare. Before the Oslo Accords, there were hardly any NGOs to share the burden with Israel, and UNRWA mostly served the population of the refugee camps, with only 10 percent of its budget going to direct distribution of food and almost none of it to families outside the refugee camps. In 2008, no fewer than ten organizations distributed food in the Occupied Territories, UNRWA served more than half of the population, including thousands of families outside the camps, and most of its budget went to food assistance and emergency cash assistance.[58] And yet at the same time, a threshold of a "real," full-fledged catastrophe was still hovering, and everyone was—or pretended to be—concerned about it, committed to not letting it be crossed.

Israel has knowingly contributed to the catastrophization of the Occupied Palestinian Territories, especially through the new regime of movement established since 2000, and it has consistently refused to change its policies in order ameliorate the Palestinian living conditions. The systematic destruction of the Palestinian social fabric and the reduction of the Palestinian economy to sub-Saharan standards are seen as a fair price that Palestinians have to pay for the security of Israelis. The occasional "humanitarian gestures" the government is willing to offer remain symbolic and would never compromise the draconian administrative-military rule of Palestinian space and movement. In other words, the Israeli government is completely aware of its contribution to the catastrophizing process and would do nothing to cope with its root causes. And yet, the same government pretends that it would go out of its way, if necessary, to avoid crossing the threshold of catastrophe.

Thus, for example, when Hamas took over full control of the Gaza Strip in June 2006, the Israeli government had another opportunity to prove its commitment to the survival of Gazans. The major humanitarian organizations working in the region published emergency reports soon after the event, expecting full closure of the strip and calculating for how long existing supplies of basic food and medication would last.[59] Yet the Israeli government was quick to respond to the crisis, allowing the trucks of UNWRA, The World Food Programme, and the frozen vaccines sent by the United Nations Childrens Fund (UNICEF) to enter Gaza, despite the fact that these organizations had to coordinate their activity with the boycotted Hamas government without the mediation of the "legitimate" forces of President Mahmud Abbas. While starvation was prevented, blockade of the gates to the transport of other goods continued and became the rule, rather than the

exception, causing severe damage to the faltering Gazan economy.[60] This economy has been made ever more dependent on international donations, on the one hand, and on the willingness of the Israeli government to open the gates every once in a while so as to put the catastrophe on hold, on the other.

Opening the gates is all Israel has to do on its own in order to prevent famine in the Gaza Strip. A number of humanitarian organizations, UN agencies, special delegates of the European Union, and other diplomats readily place themselves as a buffer between the catastrophizing machinery of the occupation and the catastrophe itself. They help Israel suspend "the real" catastrophe while catastophizing the Occupied Palestinian Territories. The suspension itself has become part of the machinery of catastrophization, and the suspended catastrophe has become an essential element in the machinery of the Israeli rule.[61]

Placing the catastrophization of the Occupied Palestinian Territories in a wider context, one may note that the "catastrophic suspension" is neither a result of the military operation or economic policies of a strong state such as Israel nor the effect of a weak, disintegrating state apparatuses such as those of the Palestinian Authority, which give in to the violence of rebels and paramilitary forces. Catastrophic suspension is the result of the withdrawal of some legal and biopolitical apparatuses of the strong state from a given territory and population, which is accompanied by the excessive presence and activity of military and police forces of the Israeli state in ways that prevent other governing agents from governing effectively the evacuated zone. Myriad regional and international forces are drawn into the zone of emergency that the dominating power has brought to the verge of catastrophe, but their presence only enhances the sovereignty of the strong state. The three moments of power that characterize catastrophic suspension—withdrawal of legal and biopolitical apparatuses; coercive, violent prevention of the emergence of alternative modes of governance; and the acceptance of occasional humanitarian interventions in exceptional cases—are all expressions of decisions and policies of a strong state.

A different, more prevalent pattern may be identified in other zones of emergency, especially in territories controlled by weak states, that is, where a strong state has collapsed or has never been established. In these areas, state apparatuses do not withdraw; rather, they have disintegrated or have never been strong enough to exercise full sovereignty over their territory and population. Catastrophization in areas where states are weak is "nongovernmental" in the full sense of the word. Nonstate forces, tribal warlords, and paramilitary groups that spread destruction may rely on the mechanism of the state, but only partly, to the extent that they can seize it from the outside and use it for the purpose of destruction. Political power in this model has to be accounted for in regional more than national or centralized terms and is characterized by a rhizomatic, rather than a hierarchical structure. The decentering of power goes hand in hand with the interiorization of catastrophe within the rhizomatic realm of power, which may be described as a deconstructed and inverted imperialism—deconstructed, because it lives off the ruins and debris of the long-withdrawn empire and the collapse of the fragile state structure that the empire left behind, inverted, because it is driven by the expansion of scarcity and usually not directly by the expansion of capital.

The gains of the devastating forces in many contemporary zones of emergency are not to be measured in terms of relative positions in a global capitalist market and not even in terms of the opportunities opened for players in that market, but in terms of the capacity of the different authorities to continue the subjugation and destruction of their own populations.[62] This means that the rhythm of catastrophization, its naturalization, and its frequent tendency to turn protracted disasters into cataclysmic catastrophes do not necessarily respond to foreign investments and interventions in the economic system and that they will not come to a halt without a radical change in the way power is structured.

CONCLUSION

We may speak, then, of at least two distinct models of political catastrophization in contemporary zones of emergency. The first, catastrophic suspension, is associated with strong states and characterized by a partial withdrawal of state apparatuses and the intensification of security-related apparatuses, the intensive problematization of the threshold of catastrophe, and systemic, unavoidable collaboration between the ruling power and the humanitarians and other professionals of catastrophization. The other model, nongovernmental catastrophization, is associated with weak states and characterized by the collapse of state apparatuses, the naturalization of political catastrophization, and an ad hoc, contingent collaboration between local authorities of all kinds and the humanitarians.[63] In the first model, "a real state of emergency" is an always present ghost; in the second, ghostlike forces create and maintain it.[64]

NOTES

This paper is the result of lively discussions I have conducted over the last few years with Ariella Azoulay, Michal Givoni, and Tal Arbel on the notions catastrophe, emergency, and sovereignty. I am indebted to them all, but unfortunately cannot share with them responsibility for any of the faults that still prevail in my text.

1 Ann L. Stoler, "On Degrees of Imperial Sovereignty," *Public Culture* 18, no. 1 (Winter 2006): pp. 125–46.

2 Thomas Alexander Aleinkoff, *Semblances of Sovereignty: The Constitution, the State, and American Citizenship* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 2002).

3 Lusia Stopa and David M. Clark, "Social Phobia and Interpretation of Social Events," *Behaviour Research and Therapy* 38, no. 3 (2000): pp. 273–83. Similar definitions abound in the professional literature.

4 Mark Dombeck, "Cognitive Restructuring," available on-line at http://www.mentalhelp.net/poc/view_doc.php?type=doc&id=9350 (last accessed January 11, 2009).

5 Stephanos Ph. Vassilopoulos, "Interpretation and Judgmental Biases in Socially Anxious and Nonanxious Individuals," *Behavioral and Cognitive Psychotherapy* 34, no. 2 (April 2006): pp. 243–54.

6 Stopa and Clark, "Social Phobia and Interpretation of Social Events."

7 This was already clear to Rousseau in the middle of the eighteenth century. In a famous letter to Voltaire responding to his poem on the earthquake in Lisbon, Rousseau says that even earthquakes are thus mediated: "Nature did not construct twenty thousand houses of six to seven stories there, and…if the inhabitants of this great city had been more equally spread out and more lightly lodged, the damage would have been much less, and perhaps of no account. All of them would have fled at the first disturbance, and the next day they would have been seen twenty leagues from there, as gay as if nothing had happened." "Rousseau's Letter to Voltaire on Optimism," in Roger D. Masters and Christopher Kelly (eds.), *The Collected Writings of Rousseau*, vol. 3 (Hanover, NH: Published for Dartmouth College by the University Press of New England, 1992), p. 110.

8 It is not only the proliferation of "complex emergencies" since the late 1980s that accounts for the obliteration of the distinction between the natural and the man-made, as some observers suggested, but more generally the thorough socialization (and hence politicization) of the natural environment of humans. For the emphasis on "complex emergencies" see, for example, *Definitions of Emergencies*, Document Presented to the Executive Board of the World Food Programme, available on-line at http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/lib.nsf/db900SID/HMYT-6QDQ5K/$FILE/wfp-definition-feb2005.pdf?OpenElement (last accessed January 11, 2009).

9 Personal disasters, that is, events that affect one or a few individuals, will not be considered here.

10 A perfect example may be found in the opening pages of Daniel Defoe's *The Journal of the Plague Year* (1722).

11 Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977–1978*, ed. Michel Senellart, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), esp. lec-

tures 3 and 4.

12 It's important to distinguish here between a discourse of governmentality in the Foucauldian sense and governmental and nongovernmental bodies and agencies. Both types of bodies practice a discourse of governmentality.

13 This is a recurring theme in Hannah Arendt's *The Origin of Totalitarianism* (1951; Harcourt Brace and Company, 1973), for example, pp. 186–97.

14 I assume here Foucault's discussion of the formation of objects as part of an order of discourse. See Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (New York: Pantheon Books 1972), pt. 2, ch. 3.

15 For "emergency statements" and its distinction from "horror statements," see Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography* (New York: Zone Books, 2008), ch. 4. My text owes this book and its author much more than a passing footnote can express.

16 See, for example, the fascinating reports and suggestions made by the California Seismic Safety Commission, for example in its *Progress Report for the California Earthquake Loss Reduction Plan* (Sacramento: State of California, December 2003). Because estimation of the next major earthquake is based on statistics of past events, and not on the existence of warning signs, the gap between discursive and objective catastrophization is the clearest in this case. More complicated is the case of the discourse on global warming, for example, where relatively few cases of loss can be reported at the moment, and they are really marginal in relation to the cataclysm everyone expects, and yet warning signs abound. See, for example, *Climate Change and Human Security*, published by Radix, April 15, 2007, available on-line at http://www.radixonline.org/cchs.html (last accessed January 13, 2009). A different case is that of catastrophization based on the demonization of an enemy, which may meet all the criteria of the psychological disorder, except that it is publicly amplified and politically orchestrated.

17 Thinking about this case has inspired my whole analysis of catastrophization. See Azoulay Ariella and Adi Ophir, "On the Verge of Catastrophe," a paper presented in the conference The Politics of Humanitarianism in the Occupied Territories, The Van Leer Jerusalem Institute, April 2004; Ariella Azoulay and Adi Ophir, "The Monster's Tail," in Michael Sorkin (ed.), *Against the Wall* (New York: The New Press, 2005); Ariella Azoulay and Adi Ophir, *This Regime which Is Not One* (Tel Aviv: Resling 2008) [in Hebrew], pp. 297–311.

18 This, for example, is Arendt's position in *The Origin of Totalitarianism*. The point is not to establish that "administrative massacres" of hundred of thousands in colonial Africa or the concentration camps and the death industry in Europe were catastrophic, but to understand why the production of catastrophes was necessary for the totalitarian regimes and a possible means of governance for imperialism. See Adi Ophir, "Arendt's Theory Of Man-Made Disaster," *Insights*, forthcoming.

19 Long before Claude Lanzmann's *Shoa* and independently of Theodor Adorno's famous last chapter of *Negative Dialectics*, Hannah Arendt understood this aspect of totalitarian power and its catastrophes. See *The Origin of Totalitarianism*, pp. 433–37. She came to this understanding almost in passing, while discussing the secret police and the element of secrecy in totalitarian regimes. (*Ibid*., esp. pp. 419–37). Following Arendt's insights and observations, we may say that what brought totalitarian disasters to near perfection was not the sheer number of victims or the vast magnitude of the destruction they left behind, but their tendency to destroy the event of disaster itself and rule out the possibility of testimony. Extermination was meant to bring to an end not only the lives of so many, but also the irretrievable loss that their death had created. After the catastrophe, there were to have been left no people who could mourn and commemorate and then use their memories as a basis from which to begin something new. Destruction becomes perfect when even the ruins and remnants are destroyed, so that no recordable event could be reconstructed and no life, no action, can spring out of the ashes. Totalitarian regimes did not produce a truly perfect political disaster, after all, precisely because they failed to wipe out the traces of the disasters for which they were responsible.

20 If there is one thing that clearly distinguishes contemporary catastrophes—the so called "natural disasters," as well as political catastrophes, conflicts, military occupations, colonial wars, civil wars, and everything included under the term "humanitarian emergencies"—from their predecessors, it is the abundance of this kind of literature.

21 See, for example, Alexander Tulloch, *The Crimean Commission and the Chelsea Board* (London: Harrison 1857); Hugh Small, *Florence Nightingale: Avenging Angel* (New York: St. Martin Press 1998), ch. 4.

22 This the name of an annual report published since 1992 by Médecins Sans Frontières, *Populations en danger* (Paris: Hachette, 1992). It may be described as an established venue and forum of catastrophization

23 Médecins Sans Frontières, *Population en danger*, p. 8 (my translation).

24 The report is available on-line at http://www.msf.org/msfinternational/invoke.cfm?objectid=06616F5A-5056-AA77-6CE49B621A0C195D&component=toolkit.report&method=full_html (last accessed January 13, 2009).

25 For example, one can find in this statement issued by *The Charity Navigator: Your Guide to Intelligent Giving* in February 2006: "Humanitarian Emergency Alert: Kenyan Food Crisis." The statement opens with a typical description of a given situation: "The people of Kenya, where over 50percent of the population already lives in poverty and where life expectancy is only 47 years, are now facing a potential famine due to drought. The government of Kenya estimates that upwards of 3.5 million are at risk from the worsening food crisis. 50percent poverty is not a reason for alert, in Kenya, but the prospect of a new food crisis is a reason to turn the bells on." Available on-line at http://www.charitynavigator.org/index.cfm?bay=content.view&cpid=386 (last accessed January 13, 2008).

26 Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press 1998), pp. 18–29.

27 I have developed this argument in "The Sovereign, The Humanitarian, and the Terrorist," in Michel Feher (ed.), *Nongovernmental Politics* (New York: Zone Books, 2007).

28 Raimo Väyrynen, "Complex Humanitarian Emergencies: Concepts and Issues," in E. Wayne Nafziger, Raimo Väyrynen, and Frances Stewart (eds.), *War, Hunger, and Displacement: The Origins of Humanitarian Emergencies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 60–72.

29 *Ibid*., p. 49.

30 In addition to the basic measurements, some other indicators of an emergency are also considered. Thus, for example, the number of human rights violations can be "used to operationalize an emergency by setting country-specific minimum standards." *Ibid*., p. 59.

31 *Ibid*., pp. 72–80; Jeni Klugman, *Social and Economic Policies to Prevent Complex Humanitarian Emergencies—Lessons from Experience*, United Nations University, World Institute for Development Economics Research (Helsinki: Wider, 1999).

32 Väyrynen, "Complex Humanitarian Emergencies," p. 55.

33 *Ibid*.

34 *Ibid*., p. 72.

35 For a discussion of the flexible and explicitly unstable notion of emergency, which obviously implies the unstable threshold of catastrophe, see Michal Givoni, "The Advent of the Emergency: Political Theory and Humanitarian Expertise," paper presented at the workshop Zones of Emergency, The Van Leer Jerusalem Institute, June 2007.

36 Sometimes governability is not only a matter of the target population, but of accountability at home. It is necessary, states a 2005 report of the World Food Programme, to "strike a balance between allowing flexibility to respond quickly to varying crisis situations and providing accountability to donors for the allocation of emergency food aid." *Definitions of Emergencies*; see n. 7 above. The definition of emergency should therefore be flexible enough so as to determine the threshold of catastrophe—and the moment of intervention—in a way that would allow the introduction of domestic considerations into the evaluation of the disaster-stricken area.

37 For example, in Nafziger Väyrynen and Stewartm, *War, Hunger, and Displacement*.

38 Carl Schmitt: "The exception, which is not codified in the existing legal order, can at best be characterized as a case of extreme peril, a danger to the existence of the state or the like." *Political Theology* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1985), p. 6.

39 A good example came recently from Pakistan, whose then president, Pervez Musharraf, defended his decision to impose emergency rule by insisting that he was only "acting to curb extremism," which put in danger "Pakistan's sovereignty," and to suppress "a judiciary that had paralyzed its government." BBC World Service, November 3, 2007. It does not matter how sincere such statements are.

40 See, for example, Pascal Dauvin, Johanna Siméant, and the Collectif d'Analyse de l'Humanitaire International (CAHIER), *Le travail humanitaire: Les acteurs des ONG, du siège du terrain* (Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 2002), esp. chs. 3–5; Philippe Ryfman, *La question humanitaire: Histoire, problematique, acteurs et enjeux de l'aide humanitaire internationale* (Paris: Ellipses, 1999), pp. 142–49.

41 A quick note on the distinction between weak and strong states should be introduced here: A strong state is not necessarily a state that intervenes in all areas of life, but a system of power that has the capacity of such interventions and their further expansion. The withdrawal of state apparatuses from the economy, for example, should be conceived as a form of contraction in the Kabbalistic sense of this word. The state has contracted, but it is fully capable of expanding back into the space it has evacuated. Weak states are incapable of doing that. They do not intervene because they don't have means or capacity for intervention.

Thus, the difference between a strong and a weak state is a difference in capabilities and potentiality. The weak state cannot operate, efficiently or at all, the state apparatuses that

the strong state decides to withdraw or to put on hold. The privatization of the welfare state and the dismantling of some of its apparatuses that provide safety net to weakened sectors of the population do not reflect the weakening of the state as long as the course can be reversed and the state can take control of the spheres it has abandoned.

42 I assume here the Foucauldian distinction between these two apparatuses. See, for example, Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975–76*, ed. Mauro Bertani, trans. David Macey (New York: Picador 2003), ch. 2.

43 Stoer, "On Degrees of Imperial Sovereignty."

44 Technological and industrial regulations and new patterns of consumption called for in the face of global warming are exceptions to this rule, because the catastrophe will remain imminent for a long time, even if all the necessary measures are taken.

45 Israel may supply a good example: Separation along national lines is the organizing principle of the Israeli regime. The zone of emergency in the Occupied Territories is where this principle becomes most visible and where experimentation with new forms for the expression and implementation of this principle takes place.

46 This is not the case in Iraq, I think, but has certainly been the case in the Occupied Territories. Something similar may be said about situations and contexts as different as the Ukrainian government's dealing with the aftermath of Chernobyl, the American administration's response to Katrina, and the Colombian government's response to the paramilitary challenge.

47 The facts were reported by almost every human rights organization working in the Occupied Territories. See, for example, B'Tselem, *On Human Rights in the Occupied Territories: Al-Aqsa Intifada*, June 2001, available on-line at http://www.btselem.org/Download/200106_Issue7_Eng.pdf (last accessed January 15, 2009).

48 Ms. Catherine Bertini, Personal Humanitarian Envoy of the Secretary-General, *Mission Report 11–19 August, 2002*, available on-line at http://www.reliefweb.int/library/documents/2002/un-opt-19aug.pdf (last accessed July 17, 2009).

49 *Ibid*., para. 54. According to this survey 13.2 percent of children in Gaza suffered from "acute malnutrition, more than three times the rate in the West Bank (4.3 percent) and the rate of chronic malnourishment in Gaza (17.5 percent) was five times higher than in the West Bank (3.5 percent)."

50 *Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: The Right to Food*, [unofficial] Report by the Special Rapporteur, Jean Ziegler, The United Nation, Advanced Edited Copy, October 2003, available on-line at http://www.unhchr.ch/pdf/chr60/10add2AV.pdf (last accessed January 15, 2009).

51 Quoted in Silvia Cattori, "Wonderful Jean Ziegler," September 25, 2003, available on-line at http://www.silviacattori.net/article246.html (last accessed January 15, 2009).

52 John Dugard, *Question of the Violation of Human Rights in the Occupied Arab Territories, including Palestine*, Report of the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights," submitted on September 8, 2003, available on-line via a search at http://www.unhchr.ch/huridocda/huridoca.nsf (last accessed January 15, 2009). Similar expressions may be found in, for example, the *Amnesty International: Report 2003* (London: Amnesty International Publications, 2003), or a special report, "Development Assistance and the Palestinian Occupied Territory" published by the International Development Committee of the British House of Commons on February 5, 2004, excerpts of which are available in the *Journal of Palestine Studies* 33, no. 3 (2004): pp. 157–63.

53 *Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: The Right to Food*, ch. 3, para. 38, p. 14.

54 Israeli Defense Forces humanitarian officers and UNRWA officer Richard Cook, interviewed by Ariella Azoulay in her documentary Food Chain (2003).

55 Lieutenant Colonel Orly Malka, speaking with Ariella Azoulay, *The Food Chain* (2003).

56 *Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: The Right to Food*, ch. 3, para. 38, p. 14.

57 *Amnesty International: Report 2003*, pp. 53–54.

58 UNRWA Emergency Appeal, 2007, available on-line at http://www.un.org/unrwa/emergency/appeals/2008-appeal.pdf (last accessed January 19, 2009).

59 See, for example, The United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator for the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *Gaza Humanitarian Situation Report, 20 June 2007*, available on-line at http://www.ochaopt.org/documents/Gaza_sit_rep_20_June_2007.pdf (last accessed January 19, 2009).

60 The average daily income in Gaza is $2.10, and almost two-thirds of the population are now dependent on food distribution. The report *Border Closures: "Effect on Private Sector in Gaza*," prepared by Palestine Trade Center and the Palestinian Federation of Industries, July 12, 2007, and available on-line at http://www.paltrade.org/cms/images/enpublications/PSCC%20presentation%202007.07.pdf (last accessed January 19, 2009) estimates that more than thirteen hundred containers of imported goods were stuck at the Israeli freight terminals and warehouses during the first month after Hamas took power, while the total losses of sales of undeliverable goods was $16 million.

61 Suspension is a basic structure of the Israeli regime of occupation. The forty-year-long suspension of a final decision on the status of the Occupied Territories and their Palestinian inhabitants has played a crucial role in the Jewish colonization of the territories and has helped develop the system of separations that characterizes the occupation today and that is being implemented legally, economically, and spatially. On suspension as a mechanism of governance and domination in the Occupied Palestinian Territories see Azoulay and Ophir, "On the Verge of Catastrophe"; Azoulay and Ophir, "The Monster's Tail"; and Azoulay and Ophir, *This Regime which Is Not One*.

62 Väyrynen expresses the same idea from a different perspective: "The spread of digital capitalism has created an economy where the prosperity of society depends on intellectual and social capital rather on material resources. These forms of capital cannot be conquered by military means, but only destroyed by them." *War, Hunger, and Displacement: The Origins of Humanitarian Emergencies*, p. 45.

63 This distinction does not pretend to be exhaustive or inclusive. It is meant as a preliminary attempt to map and classify contemporary zones of emergency. My assumption is that other models would found to be relatively marginal. I also assume that in some areas, one may find an interesting fusion of the two models. This may be the case when a weak state that still governs a certain area effectively and exercises catastrophic suspension there while other areas are exposed to the devastating impact of nongovernmental forces.

64 "Ghostlike" is a metaphor frequently used by victims who describe the paramilitary groups and extralegal death squads that have ruined their lives. It is not only their nightly visits that make them appear as phantoms, however, but also the fact that there is no clear governmental body that they embody and no clear body politic that they represent.