GAZA AND AN ANTHROPOLOGY OF GOVERNMENT

This exploration of government in Gaza has illuminated a diverse and sometimes contradictory array of governing practices. The ways in which these practices worked together—even as they did not always fit together—gave shape to a mode of government, and also to the place and people of Gaza. The relationship among government, population, and place was not one simply of cause and effect, but rather operated in multiple directions, sometimes at the same time. In addition to the national, regional, and international forces that influenced the style of rule in Gaza, the demands of this particular space, as a provincial market center or overcrowded refugee destination, shaped the details of this practice. At the same time, rule was shaped not only by the constraints of place, but also by the demands of its participants (the governors and the governed). These demands for freedom, for independence, for security, for order, for stability, for nation were formed in rule and were formative of it, shifting over time and circumstance. The efforts to manage the complexities of governing Gaza demanded a multiplicity of sometimes contradictory instruments and techniques.

The two major styles of rule I have explored here—the deployment of reiterative authority and the use of tactical government—seem, and in fact are, at odds in many ways. These practices worked together in part by not claiming to cohere into any totality. If one of the problematics of liberal governmentality is how to govern “spatially and constitutionally ‘at a distance’”1—a technique that was often developed in the colonies2—in Gaza this problematic was inflected as how to govern without quite identifying
what that distance was, without clarifying the relation between government and place, government and people. In the absence of a precise framework in which to place and through which to interpret these different practices, the significance of such contradictions often remained opaque. With governments that did not work through sovereignty or legitimacy, there was no whole against which the parts of government were judged. This is not to say that these governments were not judged, for they often were, but they were not judged on the basis of their incoherence. Contradictions were generally not a problem for government, and indeed they were often productive for it. If one ruling style was ineffective at a particular moment, another might help hold things together. We saw, for instance, how civil servants disassociated the work of government from its politics in order to continue to feel good about their own work. Given the difficult conditions in Palestine and Gaza and the fundamental incapacity of either the British Mandate or the Egyptian Administration to actually resolve those conditions, it is hard to imagine how rule could have worked otherwise.

Reiterative authority relies on regularity and on an expansive view of the bureaucratic domain. Files and civil servants accrued and deployed authority in part through a process that seemed to offer no alternative, no other place to go. It is in this respect that Gaza’s bureaucracy came closest to the picture offered by Weber of the “iron cage” that offers no way out. Bureaucratic practice can appear as a hall of mirrors, each instance of such practice being judged in relation to other such practices, and which in fact may simply be the same practice duplicated endlessly. We saw this in the absolute importance accorded to documentary similarity—with even the smallest deviations controlled for. We saw it as well in the often circular character of civil servants’ claims about their work. Public service was good work because it was work for the people, it was for the people because it was public service. While this circularity did not obviate the possibility of critique—of individual civil servants, particular practices—it did make it more difficult to conceive of an alternative structure of governance.

Bureaucracy and bureaucracy’s reiterative authority shaped, constrained, and helped define possibility for all its actors. The expansion of bureaucratic apparatuses bound people and government in new ways and made demands of both. People found themselves obliged to follow government regulations,
to use proper procedures, to petition in appropriate language. The government, at the same time, acquired new obligations to provide services, to respond to people’s complaints, to manage social relations. Responsibility, authority, and opportunity were distributed very unevenly across the bureaucratic terrain, but this multiplicity is nonetheless significant. When Gazans wrote to the Mandate high commissioner to complain about the city’s mayor, they had learned particular lessons about how best to get a hearing for their complaints. When civil servants petitioned the Administration for jobs or promotions owed them, they too displayed skills acquired through bureaucratic familiarity. That in many of these cases the complainants did not get the result they desired is a further reminder that these governments had an array of techniques at their disposal to deflect, redirect, or refuse these demands. These struggles were in part defined by the terms of bureaucracy itself and by the dynamic of reiterative authority that helped stabilize it. In these conditions there appeared to be no perspective outside service, and therefore the idea of such an outside was itself less imaginable.

Tactical government, on the other hand, depended on always keeping the possibility of spaces beyond service alive. Rather than regularity, it was exceptionality that most characterized tactical practice. Uncertain of their relationship with the place of rule, anxious about the future, constrained in their finances, and concerned about security, Gaza’s governments relied on practices that were both impermanent and restricted in their claims. Service, while at the center of the governing relation, was not necessarily meant to declare anything about the character of that relation. We have seen how crisis services were a priori defined as exceptional, even when their enactment was both broad and long. In contrast, everyday services, while in theory permanent, in practice almost never were. The shifts in and contestations over these ordinary services indicate the importance of necessarily located and partial perspectives in shaping a governmental experience. The most self-consciously expansive form of service, community services, was also the domain that produced the most tension in government, a reminder that tactics were by no means an instrument available only to government. In each of these sites and forms of service, the uncertainty of government, that is, its potentially short life and limited capacity, was highlighted.

The tactical approach to governing, while helping to mitigate these diffi-
culties, was not a technique of limitless possibility. It could not and did not work always or indefinitely. That governments did not have a monopoly on tactical practice—we have seen clear evidence of its use among the Gazan population, directed sometimes at government and sometimes at others like themselves—indicates one source of constraint. During both the Mandate and the Administration there were instances of clear challenge to the governing regimes, instances in which neither distraction nor deferral was quite sufficient. That the British eventually gave up on their efforts to govern Palestine serves as a further reminder of the limits of tactical government. It can help manage the moment but leaves the future very uncertain. If reiterative authority seemed to offer no outside perspective on rule, tactical government offered no horizon.

The coming together of contradictory practices—the nontotalizing governmental field—was practice rather than policy. That intentions do not always or even often match outcome is, by this point, a truism about government. By focusing on the practice of rule, my aim is not to highlight this disjuncture, but to understand better the effects of practice itself. The picture I have traced here, while not unrecognizable to the policy makers of the Mandate and the Administration, would also not necessarily have been identical to how they articulated their visions of government in this territory. This has been very much a description of government at work, not as imagined. Gaza is a good location from which to consider this practice of government. Provincial as it was, it was never the center of government decision making. Even during the Administration, when it was a distinct administrative area, Cairo remained the power center. It was, at the risk of overstating matters, a place where government was enacted, not planned. And yet, as this exploration has made clear, such enactment was a highly creative process. The work of government was never a simple application of policy, regulation, and procedure.

Looking at government in this way makes it possible to see something new about Gaza, to better understand how the place took shape (and what shape it took) over the course of the fifty years examined here. We have seen something of the “social life” of bureaucratic authority, how it worked to help sustain government and also to shape relations among people, to structure political arrangements, and to define spaces. At the same time, government is
always a process of interaction between ruling ambitions and existing conditions. It does not simply impose itself on a place, but rather places also help shape government. This general process is perhaps particularly clear in Gaza, with its crisis conditions and (especially in the Administration) overcrowded space, untenable economy, and unsustainable population.

By exploring the in many ways extraordinary operations of government in Gaza, it actually becomes possible to see Gaza as a more ordinary place. Many locales suffer from a burden of presumptions that can get in the way of actually comprehending them. Gaza’s regular appearance in the news as a site of violence has certainly tended to work against more complex understandings of the place. Investigation of the daily work of rule, in contrast, has divulged a multiplicity of facets, some of which in fact appear fairly ordinary. This book has depicted transformations in social relations as civil service employment accrued and lost both status and economic importance; as people’s financial conditions were upended by the dislocation of 1948; as new population categories followed from this event; and as schools sought to produce different sorts of subjects. It has emphasized the formation of place in the expansion and occasional contraction of government services as people got water from wells, pipes, or central pumps; as roads and railroads were built, destroyed, and rerouted; and as opportunities for landownership were reconfigured. It has also described changing mechanisms for civic expression: as formal structures of local and national government were reconfigured; as paths for petitioning were redrawn; and as political circumstances and movements shifted. As this array of practices has shown, for all of its truly remarkable history, Gaza is not wholly exceptional.

Indeed, because of its provincial location and uncertain state form, Gaza has afforded an opportunity to understand government in a somewhat new light. In the lack of any definite model that could be turned to in order to explain this government, it has required a focus on the details of its practice. The governing techniques I have explored here can, in fact, be identified and understood only through the lens of practice. They could not be distinctly seen simply in ideology, prescriptive discourse, or policy. An understanding of their operations has to be teased out of the daily work of governing. This investigation illuminates a much broader governing dynamic, one that is relevant far beyond Gaza.
Government beyond Gaza

Approaching government through its practice provides a different perspective on both the historicity and coherence of governing arrangements. It is widely recognized by now that considering new actors, questions, and concerns in historical research does not simply add to our understanding of historical periods, but can generate a rethinking of these periodizations themselves. In this case, looking at quotidian ruling practices underlines rhythms of transformation that do not always correspond to the periodizations of political history. Sometimes there were continuities across dramatic breakpoints, such as the retaining of personnel across regimes. Sometimes significant changes occurred in otherwise unremarkable moments, such as the transfer of government land to people in Gaza. It is in apparently mundane processes, expressed, for example, in a minor change in bureaucratic procedure, in a gradual accommodation to a new regulation, in a new style of social interaction, that both government and the formation of people and place are often most clearly grasped. While Gaza has had more distinct “periods” than many places, this shift in perspective can be helpful for exploring numerous circumstances. Further, it is precisely the focus on practice that makes it possible to understand that diverse and often contradictory techniques could work together in government, and how important having this array of instruments available was for enabling the persistence of always tenuous governments.

While in some ways Gaza represents an extreme case of governmental uncertainty, studies conducted in numerous settings have highlighted how uncertain even apparently stable governments and seemingly strong states can be. Colonial states, for example, have been shown to be frequently insecure in both their knowledge of the colonized and their capacity to manage relations between ruler and ruled; such insecurity shaped the practice of governance in important ways. Postcolonial states have proven to be dependent on “mystifying complex[es] of practices and beliefs,” on productions of “illegibility,” and on varieties of both amnesia and memory as means of distracting attention from often fundamental instabilities. Conditions of globalization have only underscored the uncertainty of even powerful state forms such as the nation-state.
Indeed, in a world that seems increasingly unstable, the potential importance of both reiterative authority and tactical government in a variety of settings seems evident. The number of governments across the globe that can be described as tenuous is enormous, and it is not just the classic sorts of “failed states” that fit this description. The case of the U.S. occupation of Iraq, for instance, underscores how perilous it can be for governing regimes to forget the importance of ordinary bureaucracy. In its initial zeal for de-Ba’thification, the purging of the new Iraqi government of anyone tainted by the old order, the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) outlawed the party, dissolved the army, and fired thousands of former Ba’thists from government offices. Combined with the military’s failure to intervene to stop the looting and destruction of government offices, this mass purging seems to directly contradict Weber’s reflections on bureaucracy: “A rationally ordered officialdom continues to function smoothly after the enemy has occupied the territory; he merely needs to change the top officials. It continues to operate because it is in the vital interest of everyone concerned, including above all the enemy.” The smooth functioning of Iraqi government would certainly have been in the interest of U.S. occupying forces and of the Iraqi population as well. In the event, it was not long before the problems with this approach were realized. In following years increasing numbers of former Ba’thists have been returned to government positions, but the stability of the bureaucracy had already been disrupted.

If, on the one hand, the U.S. approach to governing Iraq seemed to disregard the importance of bureaucratic continuity and reiterative authority, thereby underutilizing some crucial governing techniques, it seems to have overreached in other areas, refusing to be satisfied with the limited claims of tactical government. In the circumstances I have explored in Gaza, governments were acutely aware of the uncertainty of their relation to the place of governance and of the tenuousness of their authority. The United States displayed no such concern when it went into Iraq. Convinced that American troops would be greeted as liberators, that the United States would automatically be granted authority, officials appear to have paid little attention to how governing authority might be produced. Further, in claiming to be the savior of Iraq—promising liberation, freedom, democracy (despite a lack of planning for how to make that happen)—the United States put the legitimacy of
both its occupation and the regime it helped install front and center. As a consequence, abeyance, however useful it might have been, was not entirely available as a technique. While other aspects of tactical government, such as the focus on the near-at-hand, a lack of strategic planning, and extremely limited service resources, quickly became important, it appears to be tactical government without its advantages. As this brief excursus on Iraq suggests, the analytic developed in this book provides useful tools for investigating the work of government beyond Gaza.

**Israeli Occupation**

I have emphasized throughout this book that the rhythms of government and bureaucracy are not identical to the rhythms of political history. We have seen how sometimes the ruptures of this latter domain—and the abrupt changes in regime that have characterized Gaza’s history—have marked ruptures in governing practice, but how they have sometimes been absorbed by the continuities of bureaucracy. A question for many readers, then, may be, What relation does this form of government practice have to the Israeli occupation that came after the Egyptian Administration? How many of these techniques continued (and continue) to be deployed? While there were certain, significant, continuities, the occupation marked a more fundamental break. Certain techniques of tactical government were employed, but ultimately, since Israel hoped to achieve greater control over this territory and possibly sovereignty over it, a different mode of operation dominated. Similarly, legitimacy could not be held in abeyance in the same manner as during the Mandate and the Administration, though certain governing practices seemed intended to encourage it.

In contrast to policies surrounding the more recent example of Iraq, Israeli policy at the outset of its occupation suggested a familiarity with Weber’s insights about the importance of keeping bureaucracies intact after changes of regime. At the beginning of the occupation, Israel sought to pursue a policy which it termed “government but not administration.” Existing structures of local government would be maintained and administrative tasks would continue to be executed by Palestinian civil servants. The situation envisioned by this policy was that a Gazan might “be born in a hospital, receive his birth certificate, grow up and be educated, get married
and raise his children and grandchildren—all without having to resort to an Israeli civil servant, or having to see one at all."12 This kind of separation seems designed to encourage the sort of disassociation that was one of the mechanisms through which continued participation in government was made possible during the Mandate and the Administration.

Indeed, many Gazans who had been civil servants during the Egyptian Administration continued in their jobs under Israeli occupation. This decision was a pragmatic one, as one Gazan told me: “When the Jews came in 1967, they asked us to come and work for the police. The policemen asked: How do you want us to work in the police while you occupy us? The Jews said to them: ‘You are not going to fight for us, no, you will only work for your country.’ An officer told me: ‘Don’t think that we will go so easily as in 1956. He who can find a job and feed his children will be the one to win.’ So, I worked.”13

Even as the policy of “government but not administration” was declared, the military government did interfere in administration in an effort to control resistance to the occupation, thereby underscoring the crucial importance of the latter to the operations of the former. In the immediate aftermath of the war, the Israeli officer in charge of Gaza City threatened to dismiss the municipal council and cut off water and electricity services to the city if the council was unable to force Palestinians to turn in their weapons.14 While that threat was deemed excessive and was revoked by the military governor of the Strip,15 continued Palestinian resistance (both military and otherwise) to Israeli occupation made repeated interference inevitable. Resistance took the form of both armed struggle and civil disobedience. As part of the latter “students demonstrated in the school yards and streets, adults boycotted Israeli goods, and lawyers refused to practice in the Israeli military courts.”16 Organized armed struggle against the occupation peaked between 1969 and 1971, when it was largely crushed by the Israeli military under the command of Ariel Sharon.17

Resistance to the occupation in Gaza from its inception suggests that the policy of occupation at a distance was not wholly effective. Yet the many years of relative quiet that followed the initial period of confrontation mean that it was not entirely without success. Israeli efforts to eliminate armed resistance in Gaza had a direct impact on service provision of the sort
explored in this book. One of the most well-known instances of administrative interference around service provision was the dismissal, in 1972, of Gaza City’s mayor because of his refusal to provide municipal services to the Shati refugee camp. Palestinians understood the Israeli demand for incorporation to be part of a project to dissolve refugee-specific spaces in Gaza.\textsuperscript{18} Housing was another site of struggle. Sharon took charge of a project to create wide streets through refugee camps, whose narrow, winding pathways afforded ample ways for resisters to evade detection by the army, and in the process bulldozed large numbers of refugee dwellings. Sara Roy states that “Israel built nearly 200 miles of security roads and destroyed thousands of refugee dwellings as part of the widening process.”\textsuperscript{19}

Infrastructure projects which built roads and created new housing outside of camps for refugees were part of a reconfiguration of space that had more than military value.\textsuperscript{20} These projects, whether early attempts to move parts of the refugee population out of Gaza altogether to nearby al-Arish in the Sinai or the later neighborhood building projects, were read by the population as strategic efforts by the Israeli government to dissolve the category of refugee and thereby to defuse the demand for return. From the perspective of the Palestinians living under its rule, that is, Israeli occupation did not seem restricted to the tactical domain.\textsuperscript{21}

While there were some connections, then, between the period I have considered and the subsequent Israeli occupation, the modes of rule also differed in important ways. Along with a separation of government and administration, over the course of its occupation of both the West Bank and Gaza, Israel has sought to separate population from place. The “government but not administration” policy reflected the occupation’s attitude toward the people of the territories. Toward the land, however, Israel enacted, even if it did not formally state, a claim to sovereignty over the territory. In the projects that have been pursued on the ground in Gaza and the West Bank over the course of the forty-year occupation the difference between this government and the tactical government that characterized the Mandate and the Administration becomes abundantly clear. The projects of settlement building, road construction, and land and water appropriation that have gone on throughout the occupation—and that have increased dramatically in recent years—exhibit none of the restricted scope, scale, and imagination that is a key part of tactical government.\textsuperscript{22}
However little Israel may have wanted to claim Palestinians, it has certainly laid claim to Palestine. This has had important consequences for the sorts of governmental work that were undertaken in the territory and also for the government’s response to resistance to that rule when it has become vociferous and organized. While for much of the first twenty years of the occupation the Israeli government claimed to be managing an “enlightened occupation,”≤≥ the intifada (1987–93) put an end to the imagined Palestinian acquiescence. It became increasingly difficult to distract the population and civil servants from the illegitimacy of occupation, and resistance became nearly impossible to contain. In recognition of the significance of participating in government, during this period many civil servants, especially police, resigned from their positions in the Civil Administration. Unlike the British Mandate, however, which gave up on governing Palestine as soon as abeyance seemed to completely fail, the fact that Israel has had much more certainty about its relationship to the place (a certainty that has been increasingly shaken) meant that resistance led not to the end of Israeli rule but to its increased brutality.

The establishment of the Palestinian National Authority (pna) as a result of the Oslo Accords of 1993 marked an important shift in the dynamics of occupation, but it did not mean its end. In some ways this governing arrangement seemed the successful implementation of Israel’s first occupation strategy, which minimized the number of Israeli soldiers and officials that Palestinians would need to encounter in the course of their daily lives. The creation of the pna did, though, enable Palestinian civil servants and the population to feel that the government could be legitimate. The possibility of legitimacy, in part embodied in the elections for the presidency of the pna and the Legislative Council, remained connected to the hope for an independent Palestine. The prevalence of corruption in pna operations in the ensuing years and people’s disappointment in its progress toward independence have meant that this legitimacy was always contested.

Given how unstable post-Oslo ruling forms have been, a focus on government practice is vital for understanding this recent history. Not only did the pna not exercise sovereign authority over the small part of Palestinian territory it controlled, the bureaucratic operations of government continued to be shared in crucial ways.²⁴ Border crossings, identification documents, and permits of many kinds required Israeli approval, though Palestinian civilians
dealt with Palestinian offices. One effect of the Oslo Accords was the further expansion of an Israeli closure policy (enacted for the first time during the Gulf War in 1991) that dramatically curtailed opportunities for people to work inside Israel. With fewer work options available, civil service employment began to return to its earlier place of prominence in Palestinian economy and society. The export of Palestinian products from the territories and between Gaza and the West Bank was controlled by Israel. When I was doing my fieldwork, Gaza’s insufficient electricity supply still largely came from Israel, and there were frequent blackouts. Palestinians were certainly acutely aware of the limits of the PNA as a government and, after the initial excitement over the establishment of Palestinian governing institutions died down, were extremely critical of the Oslo Accords which had created it.

The tenuous authority of this government was made starkly manifest in the Israeli response to the second intifada, which began in September 2000, and the PNA has been increasingly stripped of any semblance of substantive power. In the course of the second intifada the level of violence of both resistance and repression increased enormously. Even with their focus turned largely toward methods of counterinsurgency that seek to exterminate the leadership of militant Palestinian groups and to restrict the movement of the entire Palestinian population, Israeli forces did not entirely forget the potential of other methods of disrupting political and social life. In April 2002 Israeli forces reentered a number of Palestinian towns, the first large-scale military occupation of Palestinian population centers since the withdrawals under the Oslo Accords. While the stated purpose of this invasion was to crack down on militant activity, Israeli attention extended beyond people and buildings. Rather, the army also attacked the administrative infrastructure of both public and private institutions.

According to a report from Ramallah, in the Ministry of Education “all school test records since 1960” were taken. In the Finance Ministry “all payroll data for the Palestinian Authority seemed to be gone.” The Ministries of Agriculture, Health, Civil Affairs, Statistics, the Land Registry, and the Ramallah Municipality all reported similar losses. Both paper files and computer hard drives were taken. The Palestinian minister of information called it an “administrative massacre” and said it would “lead to chaos.” International officials who surveyed the damage noted that the army “seemed
not to have made a distinction between the political leadership and the civil service.” Asked why the army would undertake such actions, one officer commented that they were searching for security information. “A lot of these places turn up unexpected things by accident,” he said; “documents have a very important value.” Indeed they do, although, as this book has explored, this value does not only or always lie in the specific information they contain. In this case, the seizing of the documents worked to disrupt bureaucratic operations and undermine the capacity for governmental continuity, a “value” no doubt more significant than any “sensitive” information likely to be found in thirty-year-old school records.

One result of the intifada and of Israeli efforts to quash it was thus to pose a greater challenge to the existence of anything that looked like a stable structure and to bring about a further fragmentation of authority. Hamas (the Islamic Resistance Movement), since the first intifada a serious challenger to Fatah, the long dominant PLO faction, and the PLO for popularity among Palestinians, continued its rise to prominence. People supported Hamas because of its apparent lack of corruption, its political positions, and its extensive networks of social services, services that augmented the always insufficient government (and UNRWA) resources. After the death of Yasser Arafat in November 2004, further cracks in governing authority emerged. Reports from Gaza suggest that family ties and militia groups have come to play an increasingly important role as the PNA largely collapsed.27

As the second intifada began to die down, a number of events transpired that had tremendous significance for Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank, and that further highlight the continued relevance of the analytic approach developed here. In August 2005 the Israeli army, after removing its eight-thousand-person settler population, evacuated Gaza. This pullback created new opportunities for contiguity of Palestinian government and new concerns about the boundaries of a future Palestinian state. Part of the discursive and ideological work done around this removal was precisely to reconceptualize Israel’s relationship with this territory. Palestinians expressed concern that this change in Gaza may come at the expense of an even greater entrenchment of Israeli attachment to portions of the West Bank.

In January 2006 Hamas won a majority of seats in elections for the Palestinian Legislative Council. The Hamas takeover of the PNA was a major
blow to Fatah, and it opened a new chapter in the history of government in Gaza. While the PNA had already been weakened by Israeli incursions into Palestinian territory and the concomitant destruction of institutional apparatuses over the course of the second intifada, the international and Israeli response to the Hamas victory was to, essentially, launch an all-out bureaucratic assault on this government. International donors withheld funds, and Israel refused to transfer the tax revenues it had collected from Palestinians, in the process essentially bankrupting the government. As a result, the authority could not pay the salaries of civil servants, salaries on which large portions of the population depend for survival. The crisis produced by the failure to pay salaries further underscores how important civil service employment has once again become. In the wake of the Palestinian capture of an Israeli soldier in June 2006, this financial strangulation was augmented by a direct attack on government officials, as the Israeli military began arresting Hamas government ministers. In the wake of these events and as the PNA seemed increasingly less authoritative, some Palestinians, including Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh, questioned whether it could or should continue to exist at all. In June 2007, after months of Palestinian struggle over authority, Hamas seized control of the Gaza Strip and Fatah then sought to consolidate its power in the West Bank. This circumstance rendered the future of Gaza and its governing condition even more uncertain.

**Anthropology of Government**

At the current moment, uncertainty about the future seems a global condition. While many state structures appear increasingly unstable, this circumstance further accentuates how important an anthropology of government can be. The analytics of government developed here can be useful for understanding rule in circumstances quite distinct from Gaza. For one thing, the particular techniques of reiterative authority and tactical government described here can be found in other places, but in addition an approach to analyzing government that takes as its starting point government’s everyday practices has broad utility. The landscape of possibilities for governing the modern world is diverse, but not entirely disconnected. In offering a description of government at work in particular circumstances, I hope to provide further analytic tools for exploring both this diversity and these connections.
To understand this array of techniques, one needs neither a unitary theory of “modern government” nor a vision of an entirely disparate array of alternative possibilities, but rather a perspective that considers these techniques as part of a broad, interconnected terrain of modern government.28

Government in the era of neoliberalism—a subject of so much recent academic attention—can look different when deployed in the development of what James Ferguson calls “nongovernmental states” in Africa, in the “graduated sovereignty” that Aihwa Ong elucidates in an Asian context, in the entrepreneurial subject that Nikolas Rose identifies as crucial to the “advanced liberalism” of Europe and the United States, or even in the “unitary executive” theory currently popular among certain circles in the United States.29 And yet, as these authors note, these forms share important connections. Neoliberalism is often discussed as a retreat of the state as part of an ideology of privatization. While some people have suggested that this restriction of services might be better described as a reconfiguration of government—one in which security functions may expand even as services decline—the question of how to rule with limited resources which was so important in governing Gaza clearly has continued relevance.30 The Gazan case also underscores that such questions are not entirely new.

After many years of hesitancy to take on the state, anthropologists have increasingly turned their ethnographic attention in this direction, producing innovative and vital accounts of state operations, imaginaries, and effects. Michel-Rolph Trouillot has urged anthropologists interested in such “state effects” to “look for these processes and effects in sites less obvious than those of institutionalized politics and established bureaucracies” and to turn instead to “the seemingly timeless banality of everyday life.” My exploration of government in Gaza suggests, though, that bureaucracy is not as “immediately transparent” in its operations as people may presume and that it is a crucial site for exploring the fundamentals of “everyday life.”31 Indeed, in key ways, bureaucratic life is everyday life. Approaching the study of government through the lens of bureaucratic practice makes it possible to see these connections.

In placing such “regimes of practice” at the center of analysis, they become both the subject and the site of research, thereby enabling a productive reframing of research questions. In this approach, practices cannot be seen
simply as instruments in the hands of particular actors or tools for domination and/or resistance, though they are certainly sometimes that. Practices appear, rather, as techniques—for living, for governing, for shaping social space—that cannot be reduced to singular causes or effects. Research in this vein may be “multi-sited,” following the deployments of particular practices across different locations. It certainly requires a multiplicity of perspectives, hence my reliance on both archival and ethnographic methods. To define practice as one’s research site does not mean saying less about places and peoples, the focus of most anthropological inquiry. On the contrary, as I hope this study has shown, this approach can shed new light on formations of subjects and locales.

As I have suggested, the self-referential reiterative authority that characterized government in Gaza seems to be a general feature of the bureaucratic form, but one that is often masked by other claims about the sources of government authority. One of the loudest such claimants in the modern world has been the nation-state. Nation-states claim to be and to provide everything that was absent from rule in Gaza: a stable framework for government, a clear connection between rulers and ruled, a permanent relation, and, most important, legitimacy. That such stability and legitimacy are often illusory and seem to be increasingly under threat has been much discussed and has often been taken as evidence of the decline of the nation-state, a diagnosis that has itself been increasingly challenged.

In considering bureaucratic operations in Gaza I have been less focused on diagnosing the state of the state in this place that is fairly demonstrably in crisis than on trying to understand the dynamics of governing authority and persistence. Nonetheless, this investigation does propose some central tenets about how we should approach investigation of such ruling forms. If ruling authority even in nation-states has depended greatly on the self-referential mechanisms of bureaucracy, then a rethinking of where the power of that form lies may be in order. Certainly, a faltering in nation-state ideologies should not be presumed to lead automatically to their demise. Saskia Sassen has written about how even with the rise of globalization and the concomitant shifts in nation-state operations, techniques and institutions developed to govern that particular arrangement have continued life, being deployed by new actors toward new ends.
gests, in addition, that important techniques of rule—of producing authority, of managing continuity—are not always derived from the form of its state. Even where a nation-state seems stable, therefore, an examination of government should take very seriously the practices of its bureaucracy.

As my exploration of tactical government has indicated, to put bureaucratic practice at the center of analysis does not require presuming that bureaucracy is an entirely autonomous domain. As Gaza’s experience makes clear, this practice is entirely entangled in the histories, economies, and politics of the places where it operates, even as it is not always directed by them. In Gaza during the Mandate and the Administration, the interrelations between bureaucracy’s general “regularities, logic, strategy, self-evidence, and ‘reason’” and the conditions in which this bureaucracy was enacted gave rise to tactical government as a dominant mode of rule. In other circumstances, other conditions, different styles may be foregrounded. What I offer here is not a universal (or other) model of rule but an analytics of government. An anthropology of such regimes of practice—an anthropology of government—makes it possible to understand how the general and the specific, the regular and the exceptional, work together (and at odds) to shape place, people, and rule.