Uneven Borders, Coloured (Im)mobilities: ID Cards in Palestine/Israel

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The Israeli state apparatus mandates differentiated IDs to Palestinian citizens of Israel, Palestinian non-citizens in East Jerusalem, Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. The bureaucracy of Palestinian ID cards since 1948 has rendered Palestinians more legible for the security interests of Israel while simultaneously discriminating Palestinians from Jews as unequal citizens and non-citizens. The ID card regime, and less so the permit regime, limits Palestinian geographic movement and economic mobility while simultaneously permitting freer Jewish-Israeli flows and mobilities. ID cards demonstrate the power of the Israeli regime to produce distinct people and bind them to specific territories (such as the Palestinians), while allowing others (Jewish-Israelis) to ‘trespass’ over those same boundaries. Through ID cards borders are erected between Jewish and Arab people, not Israeli and Palestinian territory. The ID card regime puts into question the nature and territorial boundaries of ‘Israel’, and the geopolitical existence of the ‘Palestinian Territories’.

The quintessential Palestinian experience . . . takes place at a border, an airport, a checkpoint: in short at any of those modern barriers where identities are checked and verified.¹

The borders [of the Jewish state] will not be fixed for eternity.

— David Ben-Gurion, 1937.²

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WHERE DO ISRAEL’S BORDERS LIE?

Upon the insistence of its first Prime Minister, David Ben-Gurion, Israel’s Declaration of Independence did not define the state’s borders so as to keep the option for future expansion possible. Already by the time statehood was declared in May 1948, Israel had expanded beyond the boundaries of the Jewish state delineated in the 1947 UN partition plan; it expanded even more in the months leading up to the Armistice Agreements in 1949; and has been expanding ever since (with the one occasion of ‘shrinking’ when it returned the Sinai to Egypt between 1973 and 1982 which it had held since the 1967 war). Although the Green Line was considered the de jure border since 1967 according to UN Resolution 242, Israel has long since trespassed it in (mis)appropriating Palestinian land well beyond it. Some have posited that settlements have played a major role in delimiting the boundaries between separate Israeli and Palestinian territories, and certainly settlements can be understood as the edifices that initially ‘ruptured’ the 1967 boundary. Since 1967 and despite the 1991–1993 Oslo Accords, that ‘rupture’ has expanded into a wider-reaching network of Israeli control over Palestinian space in the territorial expansion of settlements and burgeoning settler population, the shifting and growing matrix of bypass roads and checkpoints, military zones and ‘green areas’ deep in the West Bank, the widening buffer zone around the Gaza Strip, the enlarging of Jerusalem’s boundaries, and so on. But the boundaries of the Israeli regime are much more fuzzy, wide-reaching, and dynamic, in that the breadth and width of control over Palestinians exists throughout the territory of Palestine/Israel, seeping through multiple spaces of Palestinian individual and collective life.

The rationale of defensible borders, even if they are blurred or ever-shifting, is deeply tied to Israel’s view of its own existence or threat to its existence. Israel claims that one of the primary reasons that it has survived is due to maintaining, as Yigal Allon has argued, “defensible borders.” In fact, Allon’s question, posed in 1976, could be the mantra of the Israeli state: “what borders will provide Israel with that essential minimum of security?” Yet while axiomatic to Israel’s foreign and national policy, borders are extremely paradoxical elements, bringing into question the very nature and extent of the Israeli state and consequently the ‘Palestinian Territories.’ First, Israel is a ‘de-bordered’ state insofar as it is the nation for the world’s Jews, not simply for Israelis who may or may not be Jewish, such as the 20% of the population within ‘Israel proper’ which is Palestinian. Second, Israel has yet to define either its external borders with its neighbouring countries (particularly Syria and Lebanon) or make clear where its internal boundaries with any future Palestinian state, if at all, would lie. There is an important contradictory logic here of not having stated borders but wanting to enforce and defend them. Given that Israel is ‘de-bordered’ it should come as no surprise then that “border policing does not happen at the territorial limits
The clearest way to grapple with these contradictions is to consider a not-at-all insignificant piece of paper called an ID card. Identification cards (by which I mean specifically the physical card, referred to by Palestinians as hawiya) are bordering mechanisms that the Israeli state apparatus enforces, resulting in uneven im/mobilities based on ethno-national and paradoxical geographic distinctions. In Palestine/Israel, there exists a colour-coded bureaucracy which issues Palestinians in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, East Jerusalem, and Israel different ID cards. These ID cards are prosaic ‘things’ that ultimately determine Palestinians’ geographic, economic, and social mobility, the mechanisms through which Palestinians are controlled, ordered, and bordered throughout the territory. As Parsons and Salter have argued,

Israel-Palestinian territory and territoriality is fragmented, shattered by colonisation and closure. Settlements and the archipelago solution implied by Israeli policies fragment both Palestinian and potential Israeli territory. . . . Territorial security remains a dominant trope within both national discourses, but in practice anxiety over territory is displaced onto population. . . . The Palestinian population is defined, constructed, and policed through Israeli authorities of identification.  

Reality is more confusing and complicated than Parsons and Salter suggest however, for Israeli territory is not only increasingly expanding but networked and interconnected and Israeli flows are largely unimpeded across Palestine/Israel, while the opposite is true for both Palestinian territory and people. Especially since the Oslo Accords, Israel’s unique colonial project is focused on incorporating as much (Palestinian) territory but with as few Palestinian people as possible. Differentiated ID cards demonstrate the very structure of Israel’s unique regime: limiting Palestinian mobility while largely ‘irrelevant’ as far as they concern Jewish-Israeli flows, bringing into relief the contradictory relationship between colonisation of territory and exclusion of people.

In what follows, I trace the development of the Palestinian ID card since the establishment of Israel. As they are around much of the world, ID cards in Palestine/Israel are instruments of a widespread surveillance mechanism and a principal means for discriminating (positively and negatively) subjects’ privileges and basic rights. I approach ID cards as mundane manifestations of state processes which do not operate as a separate reality behind a piece of paper, but as symbolic resources which ID cards draw on and which permeate everyday life in powerful and paradoxical ways. Vital in the control and differentiation of Palestinian populations across the territory of Palestine/Israel, ID cards border some subjects more than others based in large part on the Israeli state’s logic of ‘securitization of borders,’ itself based
on segregating Palestinians from each other and from Jewish-Israelis.\textsuperscript{10} The ID card regime in Palestine/Israel demonstrates how the political (b)ordering of spatiality, bodies, and boundaries is manifested at local and micro-level practices. ID cards allow us to rethink Israeli colonial mechanisms, and bring to the fore questions of citizenship, borders, and the institutional materiality of the state apparatus in everyday life.

**COLOURED DISTINCTIONS**

ID cards – and identity more generally – have played a central role in Palestinian life since the beginning of the twentieth century. Palestinians were subjects of the Ottoman Empire which issued Palestinians travel documents. Under the British Mandate of Palestine, Palestinians became “Turkish subject[s] habitually resident[s] in the territory of Palestine,” holding Mandate identity cards.\textsuperscript{11} In the aftermath of the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, Palestinians inside the new Israeli state were issued ID cards, while those in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip were usually given temporary documents from Jordanian and Egyptian authorities, respectively. After Israel’s occupation in 1967, Palestinians in East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip were issued different cards by Israel. Since 1967, all adults in Palestine/Israel have been issued ID cards required to be carried at all times. But not all cards are created equal.

Mandatory state-issued ID cards were introduced in Israel in 1949 after the November 1948 census. All Jews born or residing in Palestine prior to the establishment of the state of Israel in May 1948 or arriving from elsewhere were given Israeli citizenship and national ID cards in 1949. This is still the case. Today, all Jewish-Israeli citizens hold blue ID cards whether they live in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, a settlement, or an outpost in the West Bank. Further, as per Israel’s Law of Return, any Jew, anywhere in the world, qualifies for ‘return’ to Israel, and thus can be granted Israeli citizenship and the accompanying blue ID card (all cards are actually off-white, but referred to as coloured according to the coloured plastic case they are required to be carried in).

The granting of ID cards for Palestinians is more complicated and constrained. Palestinian residents of Israel had to prove continuous residence in Israel between 1949 and 1952 in order to qualify for Israeli citizenship, granted, in theory at least, in 1952.\textsuperscript{12} As Ilan Pappe notes, “The worst offence [for Palestinians inside Israel during the late 1940s and early 1950s] was not being in possession of one of the newly-issued identity cards,”\textsuperscript{13} as that would be terms for loss of property ownership and in some cases expulsion. Israeli ID cards were issued to the approximately 160,000 Palestinians not expelled from within Israel – the population that comes to be referred to by the Israeli state as ‘Arab-Israelis,’ by themselves as ‘Palestinians from the
inside’ or ‘1948 Palestinians.’ They were granted ID cards and citizenship not to incorporate them into Israeli civic and political life, but to prevent the return of the 750,000-plus Palestinian refugees who had been expelled or fled, then considered ‘absentees’ and thus denied Israeli citizenship and any possibility of return. Between 1952 and 1967, the only Palestinians mandated ID cards were those inside Israel, living under military rule until 1967. Today, like their Jewish counterparts’, these citizens’ cards are blue.

Between 1948 and 1967 Palestinians residing in East Jerusalem and the West Bank were issued temporary Jordanian passports, downgraded to travel documents in 1988 after Jordan relinquished its claim to the West Bank (1967 in the case of East Jerusalem); and those in the Gaza Strip, Egyptian laissez-passer documents. After Israel’s occupation in 1967, all Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs), but not East Jerusalem, were issued orange or red ID cards. Beginning in 1988, any Palestinian from the OPTs barred from entry into Israel (usually, but not always, a person with a previous arrest record) was issued a green card. Orange, red, or green, these did not serve as travel documents nor granted Palestinians any political rights or Israeli citizenship. Rather, they would render Palestinians ‘legible,’ to borrow James Scott’s term, to Israeli military forces primarily as means of control and surveillance.14

After the Oslo Accords, the responsibility of issuing ID cards to Palestinian residents in the OPTs was handed over to the Palestinian Authority (PA) in 1994, but with approval and enforcement solely the decision of the Israeli state apparatus. Palestinians must obtain ID cards (and any permits to enter Israel, and by extension to travel outside) through District Civil Liaison Offices (DCL). DCLs are legacies from the days of ‘official’ occupation (1967–1991) and the Civil Administration arm of the military which governed Palestinian civilian life. The process is fraught in a bureaucratic labyrinth and arbitrariness in decision making which is entirely hidden from Palestinians which can neither be held accountable nor appealed to. In the post-Oslo era, local DCLs have become nothing more than literal liaison centres which simply deliver ID and permit requests to respective Israeli authorities such as the Ministry of Interior, the military, the border patrol, the police force, and the secret service (known as Shabak) – the institutions that make up the ID regime apparatus. Thus, the bureaucracy of ID cards is one of many examples of the “charade of prosthetic sovereignty” obtained by the PA.15 Moreover, only Palestinians who were residing in the Territories prior to the Agreements qualify for Palestinian citizenship and passports, as well as children born to these. Post-Oslo, a small number of Palestinians were permitted to obtain Palestinian citizenship, some through family reunification programmes, and some who were part of the PLO ‘returnees’ (around a thousand Palestinian VIP passports were also issued to Palestinian elites, red in colour – a policy which has been discontinued since the outbreak of the Second Intifada in 2000). In general, Palestinian refugees and exiles outside
Palestine/Israel are not permitted, by Israel, to obtain Palestinian citizenship. Unlike the world’s Jewry who can ‘return’ to Palestine/Israel and obtain citizenship and ID cards, most Palestinians are automatically excluded from their historical homeland, let alone allowed (Palestinian or Israeli) citizenship. For those Palestinians who did qualify for cards, their new carrying cases were green, with Arabic script and PA insignia. Those who previously held red or orange ID cards did not necessarily see value in obtaining new green cards, since they were functionally no different than the older ones issued directly by Israeli authorities. Red ID jackets were discontinued in the mid-1990s, when the colour led to confusion among Israeli border patrols with the red Palestinian VIP passports.

Palestinian counterparts in East Jerusalem remain an exceptional case. Although Israel annexed Jerusalem in 1967 and continues to expand the city’s municipal boundaries, it did not, and still does not, incorporate the city’s Palestinians as Israeli citizens, granting them instead ‘temporary residency.’ When Israel conducted the 1967 census, 66,000 Palestinians resided within the newly defined boundaries of East Jerusalem, but only those physically present at the time were permitted residency status, thus excluding students, workers, vacationers, and those visiting family outside the city and/or the country. Between 1967 and 1973, Israel permitted a limited number of Palestinians to return as war refugees, but those allowed into Jerusalem, and to obtain subsequent Jerusalem ID cards, have always been minimal; and between 1973 and 1993, none were permitted in Jerusalem. By and large, since 1967 Israel has pursued “a program of de-Arabization in Jerusalem, including policies aimed at reducing the size of the Palestinian population.”16 encouraging the departure of Palestinians by policies such as the revocation of ID cards, expanding the municipal boundaries and increasing Jewish-Israeli residence, imposing limitations on Palestinian building and infrastructure, making it virtually impossible to secure commercial permits, demolishing houses, and denying family reunifications. In the words of Jeff Halper, Palestinians in Jerusalem are subject to “ethnic cleansing by bureaucratic strangulation.”17

A small number of Palestinian Jerusalemites were eligible to apply for Israeli citizenship, first in 1967 and then immediately following the Oslo Accords in the early 1990s. To obtain citizenship, Palestinian Jerusalemites had to swear allegiance to the State of Israel, demonstrate proficiency in Hebrew, relinquish citizenship of any other country (unlike Israeli Jews), and generally provide a slew of paperwork that was difficult for many to obtain; in any case, “the overwhelming majority [of Palestinian Jerusalemites] declined” to obtain Israeli citizenship.18 Since the status of Jerusalem was postponed for yet-to-happen final status negotiations and not included as part of any Palestinian ‘sovereign’ area in the Oslo ‘peace process,’ the PA is not permitted to grant Palestinian Jerusalemites Palestinian citizenship or ID cards.19 Most Palestinian Jerusalemites thus remain citizenship-less. To travel
abroad they use temporary Jordanian passports or Israeli-issued travel permits. However, as residents of Israel they are also issued blue ID cards that look identical on the outside to those mandated to Israeli citizens. But one should not judge an ID card purely on the basis of its cover.

All the ID cards contain the usual information one might expect: name, date of birth, place of residence, marital status, where the card was issued, etc. There are some differentiating details however. Present-day blue ID cards are in Hebrew and imprinted with the seal of the state of Israel (as were the older red and still-present orange cards), whereas green cards are in Hebrew and Arabic and have the PA emblem. Most important however is the unique Israeli label of ‘nationality,’ particularly as a means of distinguishing between blue ID card holders – by virtue of holding a different colour, OPT-Palestinians are already distinguished. Until 2005, under ‘nationality’ Israeli citizens were listed as either Jewish, Arab, Druze, Bedouin, or from the country/ethnicity of origin if a non-Jew who is also a non-Palestinian (all orange and green card holders’ nationality is ‘Arab’). Differentiating among Arab communities (Arab versus Druze or Bedouin, for example) has been a long-standing strategy of the Israeli state apparatus to segregate the Arab community and weaken its already minority status within the state. In the case of Palestinian Jerusalemites, nationality is marked as Arab with the further distinction of citizenship: until 2002 (misleadingly) listed as Jordanian, thereafter blank. Orange and green cards do not list citizenship, presumably because Israeli authorities who mandate the cards do not recognise ‘Palestinian’ as a form of citizenship. If it’s sounding confusing, it’s supposed to be. Since Judaism continues to be the basis of Israeli political and national identity, it might help to think of blue ID cards in different ‘hues’: true-blue for Jewish-Israelis, Arab-blue for Palestinian citizens of Israel, others-blue for Israeli citizens who are neither Arab nor Jewish, and blue-green for Palestinian Jerusalemites. Israel is the only government in the world that denotes ‘nationality’ on ID cards; and one of only two to issue different cards based on territorial distinction as in the case of Palestinian Jerusalemites (Spain issues distinct cards for its citizens in its North African enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla). A handful of other countries still note ethnicity (Bhutan, China, Ethiopia, Vietnam), race (Malaysia, Singapore) or colour (Dominican Republic) on contemporary cards. All cards in Palestine/Israel also include the category of religion (in common only with Afghanistan, Brunei, Egypt, Jordan and Turkey). For those with Arab nationality, religion is listed as either Muslim or Christian. For Jewish and Druze ‘nationality,’ the religion is the same, respectively. Since the mid-2000s, blue ID cards no longer spell out ‘nationality,’ since marked only with eight asterisks. There are details on the card itself however that continue to differentiate Jews and non-Jews: first, the date of birth follows the Hebrew calendar for Jews, and second, all cards are numerically coded, so that the digitisation of the numbering reveals to the authorities the identity of the ID holder. Palestinians
inside the OPTs are still differentiated by colour. In short, both the carrying cases and the information on ID cards serve to differentiate the population across Palestine/Israel. Orange, green, or shades of blue; in Israel, East or West Jerusalem, the West Bank, or the Gaza Strip; with a PA or Israeli seal; all cards are mandated by the Israeli state apparatus.

BORDERING PALESTINIANS AS IM/MOBILE SUBJECTS

A double-process of inclusion and exclusion is the case for all Palestinians, albeit in different forms, colours, and numbers throughout Palestine/Israel. In what follows, I analyse how the ID regime demonstrates Israel’s approach to the colonisation of Palestinian territory and simultaneous exclusion of Palestinian populations. I suggest that uneven mobilities over a stratified territory result from differentiated ID cards, and argue that Israeli control extends over Palestinian territory, spatiality, corporeality and identity. Further, that Israel issues differentiating ID cards to all Palestinians brings to question the very nature of the state, its supposed democratic ethos, its role and responsibility as occupier, and its territorial boundaries – and by extension, the geo-political existence of the ‘Palestinian Territories.’

Behind a confusing bureaucracy lies a system of population and territorial management whose roots stem from a longer tradition of a key component of state power and control. ID cards share a common history with other systems of identity registration, such as censuses and passports, as modernist instruments of control connected to a state’s desire for surveillance, itself couched in a universal, non-discriminatory language of security, safety, and technological/bureaucratic advancement. Identification documents reflect a state’s need to supervise growth, supervise the spatial distribution and social composition of its population, automate the deprivation and/or entitlement of privileges and rights to circuits of civility ranging from suffrage to education, and control movement in/out of its territory.

In Israel, the issuing of differentiating ID cards stems from a larger strategy of accounting for and controlling different populations differently and unevenly. As Anis Kassim notes of the larger project of the state of Israel, so it is for the practice of issuing differentiating ID cards: “if the creation of a Jewish state was intended to ‘normalize’ the status of Jews, it also ironically resulted in ‘abnormalizing’ the status of the Palestinians.” That doesn’t mean that Palestinians fall through bureaucratic cracks, quite the opposite. As John Torpey explains of modernist states’ need to fix identity to their subjects generally, “states must embrace societies in order to penetrate them effectively. Individuals who remain beyond the embrace of the state necessarily represent a limit on its penetration. The reach of the state, in other words, cannot exceed its grasp.” ID cards provide
Israel the means to render Palestinians more legible, accessible, embraceable, for the ‘security’ interests of state, while simultaneously discriminating Palestinians from Jews thus ensuring the former remain unequal citizens. Adriana Kemp describes this contradiction, in reference to Israel, as follows: “while the ethnonational drive is to exclude and segregate the ‘Other,’ the governmentality logic strives toward an ever more total incorporation of the minorities as subjects of the bureaucratic, disciplinary, and administrative mechanisms of the state.” Kemp’s following remark about the limits imposed on Palestinians inside Israel are evident in the context of IDs: “at once included via the mechanism of formal citizenship and excluded from the community of fate . . . Palestinians stand at the center of the state desire for control, discipline, and regulation of the most minute levels of conduct of those who are members of the society and polity yet do not belong to them.” Kemp’s remark about the limits imposed on Palestinians inside Israel are evident in the context of IDs: “at once included via the mechanism of formal citizenship and excluded from the community of fate . . . Palestinians stand at the center of the state desire for control, discipline, and regulation of the most minute levels of conduct of those who are members of the society and polity yet do not belong to them.” From its beginnings, Israel was established “through an inborn distinction between country, statehood, and citizenship” whereby the national identity of Israel’s citizens and the state itself were determined by religious identity. Differentiated blue cards demonstrate that in Israel citizenship does not serve as an inclusionary mechanism but embodies the structure of social and political inequality. Moreover, since not all Palestinians are Israeli citizens, nor live in ‘Israel proper’, differentiated ID cards of all colours further illustrate Israel’s ethnic and territorial segregation of Palestinians.

Green, orange, or not true-blue, ID cards ‘embrace’ Palestinians everywhere and anywhere in Palestine/Israel. First, Israeli state authorities issue all cards whether in Israel ‘proper’ or the depths of ‘Palestinian Territories’, whether directly through the Israeli Ministry of Interior or behind the masquerade of an autonomous PA apparatus. Second, occupation should not be understood as a temporary project external to the Israeli regime, and thus by any means over, but essential to Israel’s continued system of control. The Oslo ‘peace’ agreements helped ‘normalise’ the occupation, resulting in a Palestinian landscape that has experienced a shift in the method of Israeli control, but not its withdrawal. Third, Israel’s internal borders with an independent Palestinian state have never been stated, defined, or agreed upon. A ‘border’ is erected: but it is not between Israeli and Palestinian territory, it is between Jewish and Arab people.

All Palestinians are doubly included-excluded by the Israeli regime, not only those with blue ID cards (citizens of Israel and Jerusalem residents). ID cards reveal the dual process of colonising territory and excluding populations by ‘embracing’ the latter both through bureaucratic means such as ID cards and strangulating them through territorial boundary mechanisms such as walls and checkpoints. Neve Gordon has argued that post-Oslo the Israeli regime has increasingly tried to ‘separate’ rather than directly colonise the Palestinian population in the Palestinian Territories based on a logic of ‘we are here, they are there’ (we being Israeli). This logic, Gordon clearly states,
does not signify a withdrawal of Israeli power from the OT [Occupied Territories], but is used to blur the fact that Israel has been reorganizing its power in the territories in order to continue its control over their resources. . . . The Oslo Accords . . . signified the reorganization of power rather than its withdrawal, and should be understood as the continuation of the occupation by other means. The difference then between the colonization and separation principles is that while the first is interested in both the people and their resources, even though it treats them as separate entities, the second is only interested in the resources and does not in any way assume responsibility for the people.29

This does not conflict with the governmentality logic of the Israeli regime to incorporate Palestinians as subjects of control and surveillance. ID cards – whether differentiated by asterisks, numbers, or colours – highlight this dual process of the colonisation and incorporation of Palestinian territory and the separation or exclusion of the Palestinian population.

Drawing on the historical cases of Nazi Germany, apartheid South Africa, and Communist China pre-1980, John Torpey maintains that the use of internal passports in contemporary times (which function in the same manner as green and orange cards here) to control movement within state boundaries “bespeaks illegitimate, authoritarian governments lording it over subdued or terrorized populations. Internal passports and passes constitute a reversion to practices generally abandoned by democratic nation-states by the twentieth century.”30 When administrative controls on movement operate within a state, and especially when done so to the detriment of a particular “negatively privileged” group, as the Palestinians here, “we can reliably expect to find an authoritarian state (or worse).”31 In this case, ID cards are part of the corresponding (super)structure of Israel’s settler-colonial regime, in which are embedded the laws, institutions and coercive mechanisms which buttress Judaeo-supremacy over Palestinians.32

Whether in North America, Australia, or South Africa, natives/conquered inhabitants have been crowded into reservations, their political communities destroyed, their economic practices rendered dependent and/or peripheralised, and ‘managed’ through similar bureaucratic mechanisms to current-day Israel’s in order to facilitate the exploitation of their natural resources, land, and labour. The issuing of separate ID cards and permit passes which also functioned as labour cards were key to South Africa’s apartheid regime for example.33 Non-colonial regimes have also used the equivalent of ‘internal passes.’ For example, the Soviet Union had a combined system of ‘internal passports’ and housing registration which restricted the movement of Soviet subjects as a means of preventing collective farmers from leaving the countryside. More horrifically, the Hutu/Tutsi ‘ethnic’ differentiation marked on Rwandans’ ID cards, legacies of Belgian colonialism, made genocide a lot easier to carry out – a demarcation now erased
on Rwandans’ cards. Unfortunately, human history is rich with such examples; in Palestine/Israel this practice has not vanished into history books but continues in full force.

Once ID cards become mandatory (in Israel since 1949; in the OPTs since 1967), they become, in the first order, markers of subjects’ citizenship/citizenship-lessness, and by extension, the means of access or exclusion to social benefits such as health care, education, and welfare. This is the case within both the Israeli state and the Palestinian proto-state. As much as ID cards have been necessary for the Israeli state to control and surveil Palestinian populations, they also have become necessary since the Oslo Accords for the operation of PA bureaucracy in the Territories (again, this dynamic has not decreased Israeli controls, rather Palestinians must now contend with two oppressive regimes; in the case of the Gaza Strip, since 2007 the second oppressive regime is no longer the PA but Hamas). Within the post-Oslo OPTs, ID cards are necessary not just for crossing checkpoints or ‘trespassing’ within Palestinian areas, but for all necessities of life and internal bureaucracy. For example, ID cards are mandatory for financial needs: opening a bank account, withdrawing money from a teller, applying for a credit card, applying for a job. Any governmental and/or civil transaction requires an ID: registering a marriage, death, or birth; accessing health care benefits; high school matriculation; paying taxes; obtaining a permit for private construction needs such as expanding one’s home. In order to vote in parliamentary or presidential elections Palestinian ‘citizens’ must submit their ID cards to PA election authorities. Refugees who need to apply for any formal UNRWA request – whether food supplies or registering children at school – will be asked for their bawiya, above and beyond their UNRWA-issued cards. In short, life without an ID for any Palestinian adult would be impossible, for it provides a ‘citizen’ the necessary access to circuits of civility – no different than in other modern states.

The second order, and more importantly here, is the issue of mobility, by which I mean geographic movement and economic and social mobility. As John Torpey writes, ID cards are part of a process to “deprive people of the freedom to move across certain spaces and to render them dependent on states and the state system for the authorization to do so.” In other words, (legitimate) mobility becomes the product of state intervention and power. Tim Cresswell suggests that the term ‘mobilities’ describes movements shot through with relations of power/knowledge, and simultaneously corporeal practices that are experienced and representations that (re-)iterate meaning(s). He further suggests these materials and meanings are constantly in the process of intersecting and interacting, leading to dynamic and contingent mobilities. As such, the relative immobilities that ID cards enforce on Palestinians (taken together with ‘physical’ mechanisms such as checkpoints, bypass roads, walls, settlements, etc.), must be seen in relation to the relative mobilities they create for Jewish-Israelis. The double process of a
‘de-bordered’ nation (for the world’s Jews) and of trespassable internal ‘borders’ for Jewish-Israelis results in the bounding and bordering of Palestinians inside Palestine/Israel and by and large the exclusion of Palestinians outside. This unevenness of borders for Palestinians and Jewish-Israelis problematises the very nature and (territorial) extent of both the Israeli state and the Palestinian proto-state.

Only Palestinians in the OPTs are issued green/orange cards thereby containing them within specific boundaries and rendering them dependent on the Israeli state apparatus for the ‘authorisation’ to move across certain spaces inside and between the OPTs. Jewish-Israelis are given blue cards no matter where they reside and do not require permits, thus have different laws that apply to them which are not infringed upon by the same territorial boundaries. Jewish-Israeli settlers and ‘out-posters’ especially enjoy a kind of mobile sovereignty accompanying them wherever they go or reside in Palestine/Israel. Put another way, the ‘truer blue’ an ID card is, the more its holder is granted free mobility and rights and protection from the Israeli state. The legal distinction between those who are due the protection of the Israeli state is ultimately based on an ethno-national category demarcated by orange, green and blue, and more recently within blue cards by a numbering system, which bleeds over any territorial ‘boundaries’ for Jews, but not for Arabs. Thus the entire territory of Palestine/Israel is stratified: made largely accessible to Jewish-Israelis; less so for ‘Israeli-Arabs’ (not permitted into settlements for example); even less for Palestinian Jerusalemites (who increasingly face ID revocation and eviction); and bordered for Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Put another way, orange and green ID holders are ghettoised while blue ID holders (especially Jewish ones) enjoy mostly free mobility.

Only since the second intifada (late 2000) are blue ID holders advised not to be in some Palestinian areas, purportedly for their own security. Officially, Jewish-Israelis are permitted to move around freely in Oslo-designated Areas B and C (accounting for more than 70% of the West Bank) but are not supposed to enter Area A and the Gaza Strip, although this can be overruled by military orders. The ‘rules’ are sporadic and inconsistent, but the Israeli regime does not actually prevent Jewish-Israelis from entering anywhere in the OPTs. Moreover, unlike a Palestinian who risks imprisonment, beating, ID-card revocation, eviction, and a range of other punishments, should he be caught with the ‘wrong’ ID card or without a permit, rarely is a Jewish-Israeli punished for being in Area A.38 In general then, Jewish-Israeli mobility is largely un-bounded either in Israeli or Palestinian spaces, whereas Palestinians are often forbidden from moving within their own spaces, let alone in/out of Israel. This policy should be understood as a means of fragmenting, separating and segregating Palestinians inside Israel and East Jerusalem from Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and between and within the latter two.
Control over Palestinian mobility takes place through the issuance of ID cards as well as the discretionary moments/places of checkpoints, bordering them both through walls and bypass roads and bureaucratic paperwork. As Parsons and Salter note, “Israeli practices illustrate the blending of the macro-politics of defining the inside/outside with the micro-politics of population control.” Borders on Palestinians are instituted through a dual process of physical/geographic manifestations (checkpoints, walls, etc.) and through the more dynamic administrative bureaucracy of orange, green and ‘not true-blue’ ID cards. ID cards are the encasing mechanisms that determine the geographic (and often economic) limits of Palestinians’ open-air prisons. Thus when speaking of borders in Palestine/Israel, we should consider them mostly as processes (unilaterally) imposed on Palestinians.

ID cards further serve as the apparatus of the Israeli regime’s extension of control over the entirety of Palestine/Israel, without any clearly demarcated beginnings and endings. First, the Green Line is ruptured in providing Jewish-Israeli settlers blue ID cards, or turned into a zone that separates Jews and citizen- and non-citizen-Palestinians, so that “the incongruity between the definition of an Israeli within the Green Line, and the residence of people considered as full Israelis in occupied territories beyond the state’s boundaries . . . [renders] ‘Israel Proper’ . . . a political and territorial entity which has long ceased to exist.” Second, taken together with its ‘de-bordered’ and largely de-territorial nature by being open to the world’s Jewry, “Israel’ as a definable democratic-political [and territorially contained] entity, simply does not exist.” The flip side is that neither do the Palestinian Territories.

It is not a matter of where we are to geographically place the boundaries – the Green Line, the 1967 borders, around Areas A, along the wall and buffer zones – but of recognising that borders are drawn on individuals, unevenly mapped onto the stratified territory of Palestine/Israel. Differentiated ID cards are widespread administrative and bureaucratic means of limiting and restricting Palestinian mobility, but they also define the nature of individual and collective Palestinian identities. In other words, “restrictions on space restrict time; restriction on bodies restrict identities.”

ID cards determine the identity of and borders around Palestinians – i.e., giving meaning to, providing a limit on, and fixing conclusively – and determine their ensuing rights and privileges, or lack thereof. For Palestinians, ID cards are decisive, and sometimes prove fatal, since the Israeli state apparatus has the unique power to determine one’s ‘identity,’ decide whether one is ‘guilty,’ should be taken to prison, allowed to pass a checkpoint, or be evicted. ID cards are subject to interpretation by government officials, police officers, border officials and soldiers on behalf of the state. A Palestinian can shout at, plead or even flirt with a soldier at a checkpoint for example; but there is no recourse to appeal or intervene in the soldier’s decision who doesn’t have to explain or substantiate his decision – and very often doesn’t.
In fact, a Palestinian has no means to hold the largely faceless, nameless and ‘invisible’ regime accountable.

Whenever and wherever Palestinians hand over their ID card to an Israeli soldier, police officer, border patrol, or other official, the card becomes the physical substance through which their relationship, as well as the relationship between the ‘invisible’ apparatus and Palestinians, is mediated. Thus the ID serves as a point of physical and tangible contact between Palestinians and the Israeli state, the space where the Israeli logic and bureaucracy of population control, state securitisation and surveillance meets Palestinians. Identity is fixed to a person but also fixed on a piece of paper (or plastic) without which one cannot exist, neither literally nor metaphorically. The ID then is the mediated ‘space of the border.’

The issue is not simply to juxtapose Jewish-Israeli/settler mobility with Palestinian immobility, but to recognise that living with and through im/mobility is a crucial and historically long-standing issue for all Palestinians, no matter their physical location. Being Palestinian is having to live with, negotiate, challenge, and resist various mechanisms and power-struggles over movement and sedentariness. Since 1948 the strangulation of Palestinian mobility has had its ebbs and flows, but has generally gotten tighter with increasing levels of bureaucracy added to the ID regime that restrains Palestinians.

Economic Immobility

After the 1967 occupation, Israel ordered a mandatory collective permit over all OPT-Palestinians to enter Israel, which metamorphosed into the current individual permit regime after the first intifada (1987–1993). In 1972, ‘exit orders’ were instituted for OPT-Palestinians to go between East Jerusalem, the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and Israel (overnight stays were not permitted for inside Israel). The permit regime dates back to 1981 when the Israeli military established the Civil Administration to separate the military actions of the army in the OPTs from the management of Palestinian civilian life. In 1989 the army demanded workers from the Gaza Strip to carry a magnetic card as a prerequisite to obtain permission to enter Israel or Israeli settlements, where a substantial number of Gazans used to be employed, indicating that the subject was not classified as a ‘security threat’ by the Israeli military and state apparatus. In 1991, closure became enforced on the entirety of the OPTs and all OPT-Palestinians had to obtain individual permits (known as tassrib’ in Arabic) to enter Israel and East Jerusalem, whether to work, visit, or pass through. Instituted in 1991, full closure of the OPTs and the requirement of individual permits were argued to prevent Palestinian suicide attacks in Israel; although the first suicide bombing attack inside Israel did not occur until April 1994. Since the early 1990s, magnetic cards have become required for all OPT-Palestinians as a pre-condition
to apply for a *tassrib*. And like ID cards, permits are not created equal – some may be valid for one day only, for certain hours during a day, for certain areas, and so on. Today, to get to East Jerusalem for example, an OPT-Palestinian packs his wallet thick with documents: his green or orange *hawiyah*, a *tassrib*, and magnetic card – which doesn’t necessarily guarantee that the soldier at the checkpoint will let him through however.

The permit regime’s origin was a form of labour card, akin to the ‘reference cards’ doled out in apartheid-era South Africa, thus should be largely understood in its economic function for a colonial regime. All OPT-Palestinian workers who are legally employed in Israel and/or Israeli settlements – dwindling amounts that they are – must have Israeli companies, organisations or individual patrons initiate the permit process. A Palestinian from the OPTs cannot enter Israel without a *tassrib*. In other words, without a patron in Israel to begin the process of permission, a Palestinian is perpetually imprisoned in the OPTs. This system reinforces dependency on individual Israeli employers, renders workers vulnerable to exploitation, increases the potential for unfair labour practices, and ensues in cheapening the already-cheap labour Palestinians provide. The exploitability of Palestinian labourers for employers’ benefits in this case results from a complex political and bureaucratic process. Here, the practice of ID cards doesn’t simply prevent entry into Israel but functions as a way to discipline Palestinians to work hard and accept low wages. As Neve Gordon explains,

The permit regime applied individual mechanisms of differentiation, so that people were denied a permit to their personal background (e.g., membership in a political party, participation in protests, being a friend of people who actively resisted the occupation, etc.). This kind of differentiation can be seen as an attempt to secure and uphold the correct conduct promulgated by disciplinary forms of control. In other words, work was transformed from a right to a privilege, something that could be revoked at any time if the worker did not conform to certain standards of behavior.

A Palestinian is tolerated as unit of labour, while explicitly stigmatised as a person, or member of a family or community, let alone a ‘nation’. The permit regime also results, combined with other realities, in illegal Palestinian employment in Israel, which further results in driving labour prices down and increased unfair labour practices. “In order to extract the resources they need to survive . . . states must embrace – that is, identify and gain enduring access to – those from whom it hopes to derive those resources”; these resources are equally economic. The impact of the permit regime and concomitant revocation of permits, especially combined with the post-Oslo ‘separation’ between Israelis and Palestinians, has been economically devastating:
Since 1993, Israel’s mass revocation of individuals’ permits at various times has prevented Palestinians from working in Israel, sent unemployment soaring, and created rising poverty through the Occupied Territories. Israel’s use of the permit system . . . as well as its revocation en masse, are the primary factors in the stagnation and decline of the Palestinian economy subsequent to the signing of the Oslo Accords.  

Scholars who have focused on closures, the permit regime, and checkpoints usually tend to focus on the impact these have on the limitation of movement of ‘productive’ Palestinians; or see movement restrictions in relation to the settlement process. This is certainly the case, but it is more complex and widespread. A Palestinian can only obtain a magnetic card if she hasn’t been deemed a ‘security threat’ and obtain a *tassrib* because a sponsor in Israel began the application process on her behalf. Most OPT-Palestinians who need to get to Israel for non-work reasons – to visit family members, pray at al-Aqsa mosque, or pass through on their way to other countries require a *tassrib* – do not have Israeli sponsors, and thus rarely obtain permits. There exists a paradox in that the ID card may provide a Palestinian the means of mobility, but also, more often, immobility.

Contact Point

For Palestinians, the implications of holding a *hawiya* (and a magnetic card and *tassrib* for those who need to enter Israel) are central to their life chances, as they enable them to move around and gain access to resources and rights. They are the means that determine Palestinians’ economic and social mobility. Yet, as Tobias Kelly shows in his research in Palestine/Israel: “The implications of holding identity documents are always partial and unstable . . . the result is that even as people try to gain a measure of security through holding the right documents, these same documents also mean that their lives are shot through with fear and uncertainty.” In other words, here, differentiated ID cards function as both necessities for ‘bare life’ and as a means of condemning Palestinians to their lesser status in a perpetual ‘state of exception.’ It is not simply the permit regime that is central to Israel’s administration of a peculiar colonial bureaucracy that denies individuals and collectives on the basis of race; it is ID cards. ID cards come first, and are of greater importance for daily life, both in the ‘Palestinian Territories’ and in ‘Israel proper’. Moreover, the *tassrib* regime (along with the physical ‘borders’ of checkpoints, settlements and walls) aims to shape and administer only the moving Palestinian subject, while ID cards shape and administer the subject as a whole, moving or not. ID cards administer and constrain Palestinian identities. On the one hand, Palestinians need ID cards for every aspect of life from movement (in their own areas, not simply into East Jerusalem and Israel) to health care and retrieval of
income; on the other hand, with an orange, green or non-true-blue card in hand, Palestinians are subjects of Israeli bureaucratic domination that already serves the purpose of segregating them and may very well end in ‘transferring’ them.

In April 2010 for example, Israel passed a military order defining anyone in the West Bank without a permit as an ‘infiltrator,’ rendering the person a criminal offender liable for eviction and seven years’ incarceration. This policy was instituted mostly as a means to ‘evict’ holders of Gaza IDs back to Gaza; although the practice dates back to the early 2000s. In another example, holders of Jerusalem IDs are increasingly threatened to have their IDs revoked. After 1967, Israel revoked cards for Palestinians who left the city for seven years or more and who had not renewed their ‘exit’ permits (needless to say Jewish-Israelis did not need ‘exit’ permits to leave Jerusalem). In 1995, the Ministry of Interior changed the regulations, neither announcing its policies, nor warning Palestinian Jerusalemites of the possibility of losing their status and their homes, and applied the regulations retro-actively. The 1995 ‘center of life’ residency requirements demanded of Palestinian Jerusalemites are “difficult (if not impossible), complicated, and ultimately decided by a bureaucrat at the interior ministry.” The onus has fallen on Palestinian Jerusalemites to prove that their ‘center of life’ is in Israel and that they reside inside Jerusalem municipal boundaries, requiring a burden of documents that are not easy for many to obtain, including giving confirmation of employment within the boundaries of Jerusalem, confirmation that all their children have been enrolled in Jerusalem schools since the age of six, and providing copies of bills for at least the preceding seven years for taxes, electricity, water, and telephone (electricity, water and telephone services are not always available however in Palestinian areas of Jerusalem, thus the demand itself guarantees that many Palestinians will be unable to prove their continuous residency). In 2006, more than 1,360 Palestinian Jerusalemites had their cards revoked, a 600% jump from the previous year; in 2008, more than 4,500 Jerusalem IDs were revoked.

The very real threats hanging over Palestinians with green, orange or Jerusalem-blue ID cards symbolise the difficulty and often impossibility of Palestinians to move, live, and work across Palestinian territories (never mind Israeli territories), the enforced fragmentation of Palestinians from each other, the menacing prospect of eviction from Palestine/Israel altogether, and the determinative importance of an ID card as a border.

The ID card regime is symbolic, especially post–‘peace process,’ of a ubiquitous contact ‘point’ through which Palestinians encounter the Israeli state. It is the mechanism through which Palestinian spatiality, territoriality and corporeality are more and more penetrable, and penetrated, by the Israeli regime. ID cards are one of the most tactile, everyday, mundane yet fundamental spaces where Israeli imposed ‘borders’ frame Palestinian bodies.
Palestinians in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Jerusalem and ‘inside’ Israel, claim that the state of Israel through various methods simultaneously attempts to thwart, isolate, fragment, transfer and erase them away: slowly kill them all; send them off to neighbouring Arab countries; strangle them geographically, politically, economically, and militarily until they accept their subordination. This is not a chimerical claim of ethnic cleansing, but a reality that can be analysed as a ‘problem’ of the geo-political conditions of Palestinians’ status. Moreover, it is no secret that “the mere existence of the Palestinian people is a major strategic impediment to the realization of classical Zionist ambitions”; and thus, exclusion, throughout Palestine/Israel, “forms the logical background of a segregational policy that erects defensive walls of legal, institutional, and physical kinds to prevent Palestinians access to land, institutions, or other rights that could threaten Jewish hegemony.”57 These realities seem to form a cognitive dissonance: on the one hand the Israeli state is accused of trying to eradicate Palestinians, on the other hand the state institutes an impressive infrastructure of control and containment based on Palestinians’ continued presence in Palestine/Israel. In other words, there may very well be a practice of fragmenting, isolating, transferring, and erasing Palestinians, but they need to be counted, documented, monitored, and controlled first. The low-tech and prosaic means of power that is the ID card speaks directly to this disconnect.

The ID card is more than the means through which the Israeli state apparatus controls and surveils Palestinians, it is also the means through which it borders them and limits their mobility. The Israeli state practises, and arguably perfects, a logic of territorial and population control, monitoring and bordering. One form is hi-tech: unmanned aerial drones, x-ray machines, remote-controlled cameras, radars, and surveillance techniques that instill fear and awe; another form is physical and geographically violent: walls, fences, checkpoints, turnstiles, settlements, bypass roads, fighter jets, bulldozers and machine guns. But against the hi-tech fantasy and development of Israeli surveillance, and against the state’s desire to deploy, in the words of the Israeli Ministry of Defense “advanced technological systems that will minimize human friction,”58 lies one of the most systematic means of corporeally fixing identity to and erecting boundaries around Palestinians. Orange, green, and various shades of blue ID cards remain a most effective and low-tech means of surveillance, bordering, and differentiation and an important nexus of Israeli power. Nigel Parsons and Mark B. Salter draw on Michel Foucault to argue that “biopolitical power is precisely not about prohibition or incarceration but in the management of flows and norms” leading them to suggest that the wall snaking through the West Bank does not incarcerate the Territories but “radically constricts the flow of population (and goods). Palestinians can still pass through the
barrier – the issue is then not enclosure, but control of porosity.” 59 This is partially true, but more complex and temporally contingent. Throughout the 2000s, the barrier/wall has gotten increasingly fortified and checkpoints more stringent, thus fortifying enclosure for Palestinians. On the other hand, such fortifications are only relevant for Jewish-Israelis, especially settlers and out-posters, insofar as they create a sense ‘security.’ In other words, by the end of the 2000s, walls, checkpoints and physical barriers incarcerate Palestinians, and ID cards and the permit system help enforce this incarceration. By determining Palestinians’ identities and mobilities, and controlling porosity, the Israeli regime practises both forms of enclosure and discipline. This suggests a number of issues.

First, even in the hi-tech age of ‘societies of control’ – to evoke Gilles Deleuze’s term – of free-floating controls, dispersed and ubiquitous systems of people-tracking, roaming surveillance, fixing identities through bio-metric means and computer databases 60 – low-tech forms of control are still important. In fact, they’re quite effective. In examining ‘technologies of control’ it is important not to simply consider these as hi-tech, electronic, digital, or indeed entirely ‘new’ mechanisms, but to recognise that a much older and more ubiquitous ‘low techno-politics’ continues to function powerfully, in this case with longer colonial roots. 61 ID cards in Palestine/Israel are unquestionably (low) technologies of administration and control, but they also serve to contrast hi-tech means that seek to achieve the same or similar goals. Israel enjoys a monopoly on where to draw and how to secure its shifting ‘borders’; it surveils, controls, and ghettoises its non-Jewish citizens and non-citizen subjects; it segregates, fragments and evicts Palestinians. It does so primarily through the mundane and low-tech form of the ID card.

Second, ID cards demonstrate that we have not at all reached the age of the ‘end’ of borders or the decreasing importance of territoriality in a state’s power. Rather, ID cards demonstrate the power of ‘non-traditional’ low-techno-political forms of borders and the continued importance of territoriality. What exists are multi-dimensional components that ‘mark’ and stratify territory and people, different mechanisms through which society – or parts of society – are controlled, ordered, and bordered. Borders are not simply the physical barricades that are erected, but also the points of contact, the spaces of mediation between one actor and another. And in the case of ID cards these are more effective in seeping through ubiquitously in everyday life than their more ‘physical’ counterparts.

Third, ID cards demonstrate the extent to which political control and organisation of space and borders happen at local and micro-level practices, and extend through various ‘spaces’ of social and economic life, on an everyday and mundane basis. ID cards are part of the institutional materiality of the state apparatus’s constitution in subjects’ everyday social, economic, and political life. The bureaucracy embedded in the ID card – institutions such as the Ministry of Interior and the military apparatus, the national and global discourse about security and states’ territoriality, the cards’ colours and what
kind of information is encoded on them – exemplifies a particular political logic of modern-day Israel: to count, document, monitor, control and limit Palestinians, and, importantly, simultaneously keep Jewish-Israeli mobilities largely free-flowing. Once instituted, the ID regime’s potency is methodical, expansive, and prosaic, reminding Palestinians of their subjective and ‘sub-standard’ position vis-à-vis (Jewish) Israeli power, no matter where it emanates from: low-level actors that make decisions about Palestinians’ identity, mobility, and rights on the spot, or the ‘invisible’ apparatus itself.

It is tempting to try to find that spot from which Israeli control emanates, tempting to focus on the web of checkpoints, settlements, bypass roads, and walls/fences as the multi-tiered ‘centres’ that fragment and border Palestinians. I’m not suggesting that these regimes be thought of independently – an ID card is required to pass a checkpoint, determines which side of the wall a Palestinian may ‘trespass’ over, permits one kind of person to drive on a bypass road and live in a settlement or not. But ID cards are much more pervasive in their fragmentation and segregation of Palestinians, for they determine how a Palestinian can live in every corner of Palestine/Israel. Prosaic materials for life, ID cards enforce controls over multiple aspects of Palestinian mobility: economic, social, political, geographic, as well as enable/deny one access to circuits of civility. ID cards are both a means of control and a means of exclusion. And they are both the contact point and at the same time ubiquitous.

Fourth, that Palestinian social life is suffused by Israeli state bureaucracies and practices further demonstrates the spatial reach of Israel’s power and its geographical unevenness. In fact, territoriality becomes a product of social and material practices that are marked by ‘uneven’ developments. Furthermore, Israel’s (and by extension, the Palestinian Territories’) territoriality is complicated by Israel’s largely ‘non-existent’ boundaries. More specifically, ID cards demonstrate the power of the state to ‘produce’ distinct people and bind them to specific territories, while allowing others to ‘trespass’ those very same ‘boundaries.’ Thus Israeli control over territory is not simply about controlling movement in space, but the production of uneven restrictions over territoriality, corporeality and identity.

Fifth, what ID cards suggest is that ‘borders’ for Israel are there to be ‘securitised’ against Palestinians, to prevent Palestinians from trespassing them (territorially, economically, politically, symbolically and otherwise) but not necessarily for the Israeli state itself (and, by extension, for its citizens). Israel wants to, and arguably needs to, according to its own discursive, political, ideological logic of being existentially threatened, enforce its ‘borders’ and yet enjoys leaving them undefined, in some cases rupturing them, in some cases rendering them irrelevant and trespassable, and in other cases still, expanding them. This brings into question not only whether there exists such an entity as ‘Israel proper’ – clearly, neither territorially, nor in terms of the reach of a state apparatus, and otherwise, does that seem to be the case – but also what kind of state Israel actually is. Related to this is the shifting
definition of the ‘Palestinian Territories,’ which remain open to Israeli flows, while shrinking for Palestinian ones. This brings up a further point about the ‘death’ of the nation-state, borders, and territory in the globalised age. Palestinians are still seeking a nation-state, and this necessarily requires the establishment of clear borders (and not simply ones that are unilaterally and unevenly imposed on them by another political entity) and territorial control within those. This has been true for nation-states since the Westphalian era, and continues to be.

In conclusion, ID cards are manifestations of power, representing a bureaucratic and tactile response to Israel’s geo-political ‘problem’ of Palestinian presence in Palestine/Israel, creating particular kinds of bordered identities and im/mobilities. Israel enjoys a monopoly over where and how to mark and enforce the boundaries between itself and Palestinians in a largely expanding manner. But these are contradictory and uneven borders, and not simply in the geographic form of settlements or walls. The space of the border that an ID card creates is mostly ‘soft’ and trespassable for the Israeli state apparatus and some of its citizens, but ‘hard’ for Palestinians. Further, the relative ‘irrelevance’ of borders for Jewish-Israelis contrasted to the more determinative bordering of Palestinians manifested in ID cards, happens on either ‘side’ of the Green Line, throughout the territory of Palestine/Israel; and in the case of permitting Jews from all over the world to ‘return’ to Israel but preventing Palestinians from doing the same, well outside the larger territory. Israel’s borders then are not easily mapped along any (geographic/territorial) boundary, but on Palestinian mobilities and flows. The answer to Yigal Allon’s question (‘what borders will provide Israel with that essential minimum of security?’) is then quite simply: the Palestinian body.

ID cards speak directly to that cognitive dissonance that Palestinians live with: fearing that the Israeli state wants them disappeared yet simultaneously rendering them subjects of the Israeli bureaucratic machine. But there is no dissonance. There is rather a low-techno-political means of control and surveillance that serves the Israeli state’s dual purpose of managing territory and subjecting (parts of) the population. In order to control and penetrate a subaltern group the state must ‘embrace’ it first, what the state chooses to do afterwards becomes almost ancillary. There exists no contradiction then between being bordered and evicted, between being documented and being ‘erased’: the practice lies at the heart of Israel’s unique colonial regime.

NOTES


6. In the 1960s, Yigal Allon was leader of the Israeli Labor party. As Deputy Prime Minister he came up with the Allon Plan which carved the West Bank into two zones surrounded by Israeli-controlled ‘buffers’. The post-Oslo division of the West Bank into more-or-less three zones surrounded by Israeli settlements and security buffer zones to the east and west can be said to have taken their cue from Allon. At the time he formulated this question, Allon was Israel’s Minister of Foreign Affairs. Yigal Allon, ‘Israel: The Case for Defensible Borders’, *Foreign Affairs* 55 (1976) pp. 38–53.


8. Ibid., pp. 718–719.


10. On security and borders in Israel, see Falah and Newman (note 3).


12. Ibid.


17. Jeff Halper quoted in ibid., p. 196.


24. Torpey, ‘Coming and Going’ (note 22) p. 244, original emphases.
26. Ibid., pp. 73–74.
29. Gordon (note 28) p. 200, original emphasis.
30. Torpey, ‘Coming and Going’ (note 22) p. 245.
31. Ibid., p. 243.
34. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (known by the acronym UNRWA) is the only agency dedicated to helping Palestinian refugees in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria.
35. Torpey, ‘Coming and Going’ (note 22) p. 239.
38. Only some Jewish-Israeli peace activists have been arrested while exiting Area A; B’Tselem, personal communication via e-mail, 19 Aug. 2010.
40. Yiftachel (note 4) p. 383.
41. Ibid., p. 377, original emphasis.
43. Tawil-Souri, ‘Orange, Green, and Blue’ (note 9).
45. See Avram Bornstein, Crossing the Green Line between the West Bank and Israel (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 2002); Leila Farsakh, Palestinian Labour Migration to Israel: Labour, Land, and Occupation (New York: Routledge 2005); and Kelly (note 37).
47. Torpey, ‘Coming and Going’ (note 22) p. 246.
50. Kelly (note 37) p. 90.
51. An argument made by Berda (note 49).


54. Rubenberg (note 16) p. 207.


59. Parsons and Salter (note 7) p. 703.

