



FENCING IN AND OUT

Israel's Separation Wall and the Whitewashing of State Violence

*"Walls work. Just ask Israel."
US President Donald Trump*

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This article documents Israeli Jews who live next to the barrier, down the center of the country that Jews call the seamline and Palestinians the Triangle¹. This relatively small group of some 40,000 Jews—mostly middle-class and secular—live among some 300,000 Palestinians, who like them are located west of the separation barrier and holders of Israeli IDs. With generous subsidies, given in the early 1990s, the state encouraged them to Judaize this region, yet they differ from West Bank Jewish settlers in being motivated primarily by a quest for “quality of life” (*eichut hayim* in Hebrew) within Israel proper. Still, the reality of being surrounded by Palestinians, inside and outside what they call “the fence,” brings the Israeli-Palestinian conflict close to home permanently, although they persist in not framing their reactions to the situation as political.

The article is based on a segment of multi-disciplinary, multi-sited research on the security concerns of Jewish and Palestinian Israeli citizens, and their ethical positions regarding asymmetrical war conducted in 2015–2017. We explore the substance and patterns of conflict as everyday life among Jewish and Palestinian citizens of Israel. Our study follows previous observations about

1. This article draws on a collaborative, inter-disciplinary project among the three authors. The research was made possible thanks to the generous support from the Israel Science Foundation (grant#1092/15).

Israeli security rituals (opening bags, security checkups etc.) as bodily practices of “feeling normal” (Ochs), the prevalence of political apathy or active disengagement among Jewish Israelis, and the selective practice of retreating into “small worlds,” intimate sites, and communities (Natanel). In keeping with feminist security theory, we have been guided by a focus on the anti-heroes of the conflict, exploring its varied effects on people differently located within the ethno-national-gender order, particularly those living near the borders. Incidentally, we found that all of them, including the Palestinian citizens who are susceptible to manifold political and class insecurities, attempt to live normal lives and to strike the best liberal bargain (Sa’ar) that they can, by making the most of their consumer affluence, freedom of movement, and whatever political rights Israel offers them. The region we focus on in this article is a 60-odd kilometer strip along the Green Line in the center of the country, from Rosh Ha’ayin/Kafer Kassem in the south to Um al-Fahem in the north. We did research with members of both national groups living there, but here we focus on Jews.

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A graffiti mural on a segment of the Israeli-Palestine wall depicting US President Donald Trump stroking the Israeli wall admiringly. Printed with permission from a video by Angela Tripp.

Trump’s affinity for walls as part of a politics of fear and segregation is hardly unique. It resonates with growing agitation in many rich countries now facing the repercussions of their excessive extractions of the planet’s natural and human resources: huge differences in income and living conditions, and influxes of migrants fleeing globalization’s more severe effects, including global armament, climate change,

and over-production/consumption. Gated communities have proliferated with the emergence of “fortress cities” (Low) that police and enforce social and class divisions. Yet refortification of states is still relatively under-conceptualized. In this rapidly expanding global security theater, Israel as a fortress state has high symbolic capital, as it is seen as a counter-terrorism success story and a breeding ground for top security technologies and expertise. On closer inspection, Israel seems also to be a good case for understanding the more mundane effects of walls, fences, and security scares.

As shown in our ethnography, the Jewish residents’ attitudes to living in close proximity to Palestinians range from dislike/suspicion, fueled by a belief that it brings down the value of their properties and the overall level of their safety, through disinterest, which occasionally slides into irritation at hazards and nuisances that they ascribe to Palestinians (notably noise, air pollution, and bad driving), to proactive initiatives to engage in Jewish-Arab dialogue. Yet across the board they *refuse* to engage in discussions about what Israelis typically regard as “political issues,” namely the occupation, the West Bank settlements project, or the separation barrier’s infringement on Palestinian Authority (PA) territory. Whether they identify as politically right, center, or left, they share a vigorous Zionist identity, strong identification with the state, and a solid sense of entitlement to their privileged lifestyle. They enjoy clear superiority in all civil and social parameters: living conditions, personal safety, community services, authorities’ responsiveness, etc., yet tend to be unaware of the power mechanisms underlying the disparities between their communities and the Palestinians. Alternatively, those who do notice the gaps typically tend to ascribe the poor conditions in the neighboring communities to a mixture of traditional Arab culture and unfortunate discriminatory policies, which they deem correctible.

We argue that the separation barrier plays a role in numbing the political consciousness of Israeli Jews living beside it, and in preserving the cognitive structure that denies the violence underlying their comfortable suburban lives. It creates a dual effect of reassurance and ambivalence, which is grounded in the state’s long-standing policy of ambiguity concerning its eastern border. On the one hand, the robust materiality of the barrier

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creates a clear visual marker of a border. On the other hand, the fact that it runs along the Green Line—the old armistice line that ended the 1948 war—but frequently trespasses eastward onto the West Bank to accommodate Jewish settlements, gives a confusing message. It is unclear whether the barrier, in its present location, is a temporary security device or a milestone on a road to a future political settlement with the Palestinians. This duality is emblematic of a deep aspect of Israeli Jewish perception of the 1967 occupation of West Bank Palestinian territories, which combines acknowledgement and denial.

THE BARRIER

Israel's separation barrier, whose construction started in 2002 following the second Palestinian uprising (*Intifada*), is said to run along the Green Line (the 1949 Armistice Agreement). In practice, though, more than 80 percent of it runs *east* of the Green Line, encroaching on Palestinian Authority territory. Thus Israel uses the barrier to incorporate many Jewish settlements east of the border, de facto annexing some 8.5 percent of Palestinian Authority lands (Busbridge).



The Israel-Palestinian barrier as it appears from one of the Stars villages on the Israeli side, with a Palestinian village in the distance. Photo courtesy of Amalia Sa'ar.

The barrier, which encircles the larger part of Israel's borders, is a multi-layered obstacle. In some places, primarily in Jerusalem and on the rim of other Palestinian communities, it consists of

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high concrete walls. But mostly, rather than a wall, the barrier is a 150 to 300-foot-wide zone comprised of fences, roads, and trenches, replete with cameras, sensors, and other electronic surveillance devices. Israelis can cross it freely back and forth, whereas non-citizen Palestinians need pre-arranged permits and are forced to queue in checkpoints and crowded gates at specific hours, and submit to intrusive searches. This spatial-social manifestation of the prevailing separation regime involves a simultaneous effort to project power by using a visible and massive military-architectural complex (Weizman) *and* by concealing, erasing, and controlling what can be seen behind the barrier (Hochberg).

For Israeli Jews, who are the focus of this article, the separation barrier reflects deep ambivalence regarding the future of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, more specifically regarding Israel's occupation of and massive settlement project in the West Bank. This ambivalence is reflected in the discourses and representations of the barrier. The findings presented below echo familiar disagreements among Israelis on whether to call it a wall or a fence (Wills), whether or not to draw it on the map (Leuenberger), or whether to treat it as a temporary security device to be removed as part of a future settlement or as a step toward settling the Green Line as the final border. Israelis likewise tend to project onto the barrier a range of undecided issues, including identity, security, territory, and borders (Simonneau).

The idea of building a barrier was first promoted by the center-left Rabin government in the mid-1990s, soon after the signing of the Oslo Accords, which were meant to achieve a Final Status Agreement. Initially it drew much resistance from left and right. Supporters of the right-wing Greater Israel camp, who aim to annex the entire or much of the West Bank to Israel, objected to any idea of separation and were concerned that the barrier would reinforce the Green Line as the state's border. By contrast, members of the left-wing peace camp saw it as yet another act of unilateral aggressive imposition, a displacement of the discourse of political dialogue into a discourse of security.

Since the actual construction of the barrier in 2002, the opposing voices from the left have assumed clearer pro-Palestinian undertones, condemning the expropriation of Palestinian lands,

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the severe disruption of Palestinian life in the communities near the barrier, and the overall constraints it entails for Palestinian movement. At the same time, right wing opposition to the barrier has become quieter, as the actual construction was conducted by successive right-wing governments, which concomitantly continued to expand the West Bank settlements and to underscore the barrier's security benefits. Lastly, Israelis from the political center have also largely supported the barrier, primarily because they believe that it increases security. Members of this camp have largely remained silent on the toll it has had on Palestinians' living conditions and movement, on territorial annexation, and on the question of the occupation. While in the initial stages of the erection of the barrier, there was debate that explicitly linked the barrier to the Occupation, the barrier itself has fallen out of political debate among Israeli Jews (even those who oppose the Occupation and settlement project), under the pretext that it's simply about security (Simonneau).

JEWS LIVING ALONG THE BARRIER

There are about 23 Jewish communities along the separation barrier in the area of our study, ranging from very small kibbutzim of less than 500 residents, through villages of some 5,000 residents, to three larger suburban towns with 9,000–10,000 inhabitants each. Together, these communities are home to approximately 40,000 people, excluding the city of Rosh Ha'ayin at the southern end of the stretch, with another 40,000.² Some of these communities date to the 1940s and 1950s, while others were built as recently as the mid-1990s as part of then Housing Minister Ariel Sharon's Seven Stars Plan to thicken the Jewish settlement along the Green Line, where Palestinians form a clear majority. Palestinians in the Triangle region number approximately 300,000 people. They are primarily Muslims living in 30 or so different communities. The six largest are now nominally defined as cities, although they strikingly still lack the infrastructure, planning, and usual features of urban landscapes. The rest are villages, each with several thousand residents.

2. Rosh Ha'ayin is not included in this ethnography.

Back to the Jewish communities: some kibbutzim and villages along the seamline still farm, but mostly these are suburban communities, whose main attraction is that they are located 30–40 minutes' drive from Tel Aviv—the economic and cultural center of Israel—yet still allow middle-income families to own private homes. Typically, the smaller communities tend to be quite homogeneous in their demographic composition. By and large, the residents are of rather narrow class background, ranging from middle class to upper middle class, often also with a shared social background. For example, Anat,³ a resident of one of the community villages and a real-estate agent, said: “Ours is a village of ‘securitists.’ Many senior people in the security apparatus live here. I brought them. I am the realtor for the Ministry of Defense and the Prime Minister’s Office. So I brought here many senior functionaries.” In the larger communities, the range is somewhat wider. Still, the majority live in private houses, either small cottages or fancier villas, with the larger communities also including high quality apartment buildings. The kibbutzim typically feature rather simple looking, small private houses, but the ample, well-groomed green lawns and public spaces, and the high quality educational and recreational services, indicate much coveted upper middle class living standards.

As can be deduced from the respective numbers of Jews and Palestinians in the area, the Jews there are grossly outnumbered by Palestinians. Some of these, those located east of the separation barrier, are part of the Palestinian Authority, therefore classified as Palestinians. Osnat, secretary of one of the long-standing kibbutzim, said as she pointed east to the Palestinian village beyond the separation barrier, barely 500 yards from the kibbutz, “When I was in kindergarten the teacher would walk us over there to watch the olive pressing. They were friends then; now they are terrorists.” Yet the 300,000 Palestinians mentioned above are classified as *Israeli Arabs* and their communities lie a few minutes' drive from their Jewish neighbors. The Jewish communities along the seamline are gated and guarded by local residents, private security companies, civil guards or military units. The massive

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3. The names of all persons and communities have been changed. All quotes are translated from Hebrew.

separation barrier to the east is complemented by barbed wire fences that encircle the entire village or kibbutz, electric gates at the entrance, with cameras, patrols, and related surveillance mechanisms as described below. By contrast, their neighboring Israeli-Arab communities have no gates or fences. These communities lie completely open, with neither physical nor symbolic 'defense' against outside intruders. Jews frequent them to dine or shop. Most of these communities have cheap weekend food markets. Jews also drive there to get their cars fixed or buy building materials. Palestinians, by contrast, go over to the Jewish communities almost solely as day laborers. They are the cleaners, gardeners, cashiers, and builders. Occasionally there is a Palestinian pharmacist or nurse. Oddly enough, Israeli Arabs are also the hired security guards at some of the gates.

Indeed, as our research project reveals in no uncertain terms, the safety levels in these communities are diametrically opposed. The Israeli-Palestinian villages and cities endure soaring levels of insecurity. They have very high crime rates and a huge proliferation of illegal arms, along with an array of environmental hazards and numerous forms of state aggression that range from demolition of homes that are deemed illegal, through regular police raids, to police frisking and other forms of violence, including death by police.⁴ By contrast, the Jewish communities, thanks to the combination of physical fences and elaborate collaborations between the state and the communities, comprise serene and distinctly safe residential landscapes. As one of our interviewees, Hezi, put it: "My daughter, now 21, says she never wants to live anywhere else than in this region," adding emphatically when asked to explain, "It's so safe!"

THE BARRIER(S) AS MITIGATING THE PRESENCE OF THE PALESTINIAN OTHER

With this sharp focus on the tranquil, bourgeois lifestyle, we set out to explore the effects of the separation barrier on Israeli Jews who live beside it. We found that the separation barrier relaxes the landscape by making it safer and by rendering the border

4. Regarding over- and under-policing in the Arab communities, see Ilani; Tibi and Sayid; Ben-Porat et al.

somewhat less ambivalent. This is in stark contrast to its effect on the Palestinians living on its eastern side, who experience the wall as a significant peak in the ongoing Israeli destruction of the material, visual, and abstract Palestinian landscapes (Abu Hatoum; Usher). By significantly bringing down rates of theft, assaults, and explosions, and simultaneously reducing the number of Palestinians walking on the streets of the enclaved communities, the barrier to the east together with the encircling fence, electric gate, the regular patrols of the local civil security officer and the confidence that in case of emergency “the state” will be there for them, make the Jewish residents feel personally safe and the landscape appear peaceful to them.

Without exception, all the smaller communities have regular patrols by motorized security officers, whose salaries are paid through a special municipal tax⁵ or directly by the army. Aiding them are the community secretaries and village chairpersons, who head Local Emergency Units (LEU) of 10–20 volunteers, each in charge of particular institutional spheres (education, health, contact with ministerial bureaucracies, etc.). Together, LEU members form a dense sieve that in times of emergency can effectively locate all the residents, issue orders and directions, identify needs, and activate the relevant services. The teams participate in periodic training and are mobilized in civil emergencies also (people described how the LEUs operated in cases of suicide, fire, and flooding). The heads of the LEUs, together with the security officers and the village secretaries, maintain direct contact with the army. They are notified when the sensors on the fence detect suspicious movement, and relay the residents’ security concerns. By army decision, some of the communities also have civilian weapons-bearing emergency units. Due to this apparatus, Jewish residents along the seamline generally share a sense of a safe and cohesive social environment. No less than on their trust in the state and army authorities, their sense of security rests on a sense of belonging and community, as well as on the utility of having well connected individuals in their local networks.

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5. Local Municipalities Law, Guarding Regulation 1961

That said, as we shall see shortly the Jews' sense of relaxed tranquility is somewhat fragile, readily changeable into a sense of siege sparked by the region's historical frontier legacy (pre-1967) and their being surrounded by Palestinians. This instills in the daily experiences of suburban lifestyle along the seamline a strong sense of ambivalence, which resonates with a deeper *political or ideological* ambivalence of middle-class, center-left secular Israelis regarding the occupation and the political reality *behind* the barrier.

Notably, in keeping with Knesset election results in these communities,⁶ most people we talked to were the traditional constituency of the liberal, secular center-left. They therefore were prepared to consider territorial concessions and to end the settlements project in the West Bank as part of a future political resolution. In contrast to the hard right, which has been in government now for several successive terms, they do not deny the existence of the Green Line. People we talked to were typically aware of the exact location of the Green Line and of the fact that in some places, within or near their residential communities, "the fence," as most of them called the separation barrier, encroached on the West Bank. Nevertheless, they conveniently regarded these lands as de-facto Israeli. "The Green Line has moved," as one interviewee put it. And another, referring to going to visit her cousin in a West Bank settlement in a different region said, "I know it's PA territory, but it's within the fence, so I pretend it's Israeli." Moreover, most of them also tended to endorse the initial political logic that underlined the establishment of their communities: to erect buffers between existing Palestinian communities, preventing them from spreading and creating territorial contiguity.

For the most part though, people were in semi-denial of the political context of their communities' location. The following excerpt is taken from our interview with Hezi, who has been deeply involved in three community villages in the area, all lying right next to the separation barrier. A thirteen year-long resident of Gavish, he was the secretary of Karkom (a neighboring village east

6. Central election committee for the 20th Knesset. votes20.gov.il/cityresults?cityID=1224

of the Green Line but within the barrier) for seven years, and was the secretary of Narkis at the time of the interview.

Sarai Aharoni: Do you treat this [the separation barrier] as a border?

Hezi: No.

S.A.: No?

Hezi: I haven't heard anybody say the word border, never heard this term.

S.A.: Really? So how do you call the...?

Hezi: A fence.

S.A.: A fence? A wall?

Hezi: A separation fence, a peace fence... Listen, it's known... Not to say it, but it's known that at some point this will be the future border. It will be the border. And to your question about Karkom, since the fence is on the east side of Karkom then this is a political statement. It's a political statement, Karkom [being included inside the barrier,] because we talk about the Borders of the Division [*gvulot hahaluka*.⁷] and Karkom is already... beyond.

S.A.: But people don't use the term border?

Hezi: I've never heard anybody in Karkom or in Narkis or in Gavish. This is the first time I've heard the word border. I've never thought about it.

S.A.: And *Gavish* [where Hezi lives] is also not a border community?

Hezi: No, no... I've never heard... I don't use this term either.

S.A.: Does the term "fence-adjacent community" [*Yishuv smuch gader*] make sense?

Hezi: Yes, *yishuv smuch gader* yes. Fence-adjacent or fence-side, that yes. But not border. Not border. No one uses this term. No politicians, not from the right or the left. Also in the army they don't use this term... you know, it's the first time [I've given it a thought]. I'm intrigued.

When we asked Anat, the realtor, if people talked about the occupation, she exclaimed, "The only thing people talk about is the value of their homes." She was exaggerating of course. Also, as a realtor, where *she* thought prices were hovering was what people wanted to hear. She was, however, accurate in describing the mood of families whose major motivation for settling in the area was the search for a suburban lifestyle rather than

7. Hezi here invokes a term used to talk about the pre-1948 UN sanctioned division between the anticipated Jewish and Palestinian states.

a mission to Judaize the land. She, by contrast, was socially conscious and ideological. True, in certain respects she too personified the Zionist ethos: living in one of the Seven Stars Plan villages; enjoying personal connections in the security and state systems; having sons who volunteered for elite combat units; and more. Nevertheless, her activism focused on improving Jewish-Arab relations. A self-declared “leftie,” she invited us to interview her at her “favorite restaurant” in the neighboring Palestinian city of Beit Furiq, not a common choice for a Jewish Israeli woman (for example, another woman we interviewed earlier that day had actually warned us not to drive back through *her* neighboring Arab town). During the interview, it was clear that Anat held her relations with Arabs dear. She told us admiringly about the Arab butcher from Beit Furiq, where “all the Jews shop for meat,” who donated money to finance a trip abroad for Narkis’s children’s football club. She talked at length about her teaching Hebrew at an Arab school. At one point in her interview she made a wide gesture to indicate her frequenting Beit Furiq and said, animatedly, “This is Zionism.” At another point she said:

Anat: During Tzuk Eitan [the 2014 violent confrontation between Israel and Hamas in Gaza, which included intense missile launching from Gaza and massive bombardments and a land invasion by Israel] we had here an anti-missile station, so we would prepare food for the soldiers. And the ones who made up the packages were Abed [the butcher] and Khalil [the pharmacist, both Palestinians with primarily Jewish customers]. Khalil sent shampoo and soap and Abed sent the meat. Yes, the soldiers received packages from Abed and Khalil during Tzuk Eitan.

Amalia Sa’ar: But is this common here? Such relationships between Arabs and Jews?

Anat: No, it’s rare. You know what? I’ll give you an example, every so often... our offspring, my own as well as other kids in our village, are all from elite units in the army. We have no defaulters. Zero defaulters. So every so often they [the soliders] come with their entire unit, if they have a training session. So we [the Jewish villagers], we host them in our homes, bake cakes for them, pamper them... You don’t get that in Kefar Saba or in Tel Aviv.

There is a seeming disjunction in this excerpt, where in response to our question about the relations between Arabs and Jews Anat started talking about her Jewish neighbors’ generous embrace of the soldiers. To an outside listener the two topics may seem

counter-intuitive. Not only are the Palestinian citizens [including Abed the butcher and Khalil the pharmacist] categorically excluded from Anat's "securitists" elite group, but its prerogatives—notably the power generated by belonging to the security apparatus and the benefit of getting boutique villages built especially for them—arguably come directly at their expense.

Yet this is not how Anat saw it. Throughout her interview Anat consistently collapsed two themes that emerged as key in her narrative: community cohesion and the "high quality" [*anashim eichutiyim*] of her Jewish neighbors on the one hand, and her good personal relations with Arabs on the other. She shared the former with most of the Jewish residents we talked to, whereas the latter was largely regarded as a more "radical" or "leftie" position. Still, she insisted on integrating the two; hence her statement "This is Zionism" about her good Arab connections. She was a proud Zionist who belonged to the well-connected secular, liberal left. She was not apologetic about her privileges. In fact, she perceived her neighbors' volunteer spirit, including their volunteering for army combat units, as altruism. At the same time, it was precisely this framing that gave legitimacy to her friendships with Arabs, to her being a "leftie." Clearly, *her* national loyalty was above suspicion. For Anat, Hezi, and others we spoke with, the incongruity lay not between the Palestinian and the Zionist perspective but between two intra-Zionist ones: pro-peace and territorial concessions vs. pro-annexation and the inevitability of war. This was the core debate that they were referring to in their narratives. Anat was seemingly oblivious to the potentially offensive significance of her loud declaration, "This is Zionism," with respect to the Arabs among whom we were conversing. She did volunteer work with Arabs. Her husband was among the founders of the *Jewish-Arab Partnership* movement, and she was a member of *Women Wage Peace*. She had even lost a few potential real-estate sales with home-owners in her village who disliked her activism and "Told me so explicitly." Other people we spoke to were more attuned than Anat to the possible contradictions. Hezi, for example, who indicated, albeit more subtly, that he supported territorial concessions and who also reported frequenting Palestinian villages, was nevertheless less romantic than Anat. "The Arab villages, if they

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decide one day to rise up against us, and all of them come and just walk through our villages in the middle of the night... it won't be... they'll have casualties but so will we. God forbid it could do us a lot of damage. It can happen." Admittedly, Hezi's was the only blunt expression of this sort we came upon. Mostly, we heard more subtle expressions of fear, resentment, or hostility toward the Palestinian neighbors, particularly in response to encounters with other elements of the landscape that cannot be fenced off.

ELEMENTS THAT SEEP PASSED THE BARRIERS

The barriers indeed block or strictly regulate the passage of people, but they cannot do so with other elements, notably sound, smell, water, fire, and air pollution. These came up repeatedly in our conversations with the Jewish residents along the seamline. First and most frequent were complaints about the Muezzin, whose calls five times a day to the Muslim prayer many find irritating, to put it mildly. In fact, there was not a single person who did not mention the Muezzin—and never with any prompting from us. Most of our interviewees resented these sounds, which they experienced as aggressive (“Imagine the distress of the kids who wake up at 4 am to the sound of the Muezzin”). Some said they were convinced that the loudspeakers were turned up to spite them. One woman mentioned “incitement,” and when we asked if she understood the Arabic she admitted she didn't but said she was convinced that she could discern the words “Jews” and “Allahu Akbar.” In one long interview with two women in one of the kibbutzim they mapped for us the terrain of insecurity marked by the different Muezzins, each talking about “my Muezzin” as they lived in different neighborhoods and so would get the calls to prayer from different mosques. The friendliest attitudes we heard were spoken by one or two men, who said, “The Muezzin—I've gotten so used to it that I hardly hear it”—again, without our ever asking them directly. And when Anat told us that the houses closest to the barrier were selling for 20% lower than other houses in the same community and still taking longer to sell, she said, “There's a psychological gap. When I bring clients to look at houses [who lie next to the barrier], some will not even get out of the car... Would you like to live next to a fence and a Muezzin?”

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Fires and air pollution are other major concerns. The Arabs, the Jewish residents told us in dismay, are in the habit of burning garbage and agricultural cuttings. That means frequent smell hazards, thick polluting smoke, and not rarely, depending on the wind, fire that breaks out in the bushes and even near the houses in the adjacent Jewish villages. When we asked Osnat, who complained about the fires, if she knew why her neighbors burned waste, she rolled her eyes and said, with a dismissive smile, "Mentality." Indeed, garbage or gleanings are habitually burned in the Palestinian communities, whose residents of course suffer the consequences no less than their Jewish neighbors. One major reason is the poor waste removal infrastructure. With over 20 years' delay in approving the master plans for these expanding communities, many of the newer neighborhoods there lack proper infrastructure of sewerage, water, electricity, roads, and garbage collection, which forces residents to rely on makeshift and unsafe solutions. For example, Hasan, a psychotherapist from Dayr al-Na'im who lives with his wife and children above his parents' apartment in a relatively new neighborhood, said that when they first moved into their new house they would make a pile and burn the waste. After they grasped the damage caused, they invested in two large containers and hired someone to tow them to the public dump. A while later though, a new construction next door demolished the provisional road they had paved and made it impossible for the truck to reach their house. So now Hasan takes the garbage bags with him in the car every morning to dump them in the container on the main street. However, when he is late for work he forgets, and then, particularly on hot days, he returns in the afternoon to a stinking car. "Life's garbage," he said. When recently his father asked the newer neighbors not to burn their waste, they retorted that it was *their* land and they were free to do whatever they wanted. Other, and in fact much more severe sources of air-polluting fires are the regional garbage dumps, legal and illegal, which are invariably located inside the Arab cities even though they serve the entire area. Here, frequent fires caused by chemical reactions are mostly left burning until they die out. A fire investigator from the National Firefighters explained:

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Water cannot douse the fires in mountains of garbage. It takes sand. And we, unlike the local municipalities, don't have tractors and bulldozers... We always come when we're called... [Yet] after we make sure that the fire won't spread, and when by the means at our disposal there's no chance of putting it out, we just let it burn until everything is turned into cinder, even if it takes days... Especially when we're talking about lost debts [reference to the Arab municipalities' endemic deficit], no one's going to pay for us putting the fire out.⁸

A third major source of polluting fires is regulated and unregulated industrial plants of Jewish and Palestinian owners, which again are located inside or right on the outskirts of Palestinian communities. One such area, located *east* of the separation barrier and called, poetically, Buds of Peace, accommodates about 13 production plants that use highly poisonous and inflammable chemical substances. This industrial area benefits simultaneously from the cheap labor of West Bank Palestinians and the poor regulation in the liminal space between Israel and the Palestinian Authority.⁹ Many more polluting industries, again owned by Jews and Arabs alike, are scattered throughout the Palestinian communities also on the Israeli side of the barrier.

Lastly, water: one of the communities we visited suffered severe flooding in 2013 (which incidentally also hit the neighboring Palestinian community), when a stream overflowed because the separation barrier had left insufficient draining space in the event of exceptionally strong rainfall. There were no casualties but the damage to properties was enormous, and it took many families months, or in some cases years, to recover. Four years later, people still talked to us about it as a traumatic event.

DISCUSSION: PARTIAL SEPARATION, PARTIAL MISRECOGNITION

The ambivalence of Israeli Jews and their unclear perception of the separation barrier are hardly coincidental. They are the corollary of a long-standing state policy of blurring the nature

8. Shalita, Chen. "A nightmare in the village: How the pirate fires are making the residents of the Sharon miserable." *Globes*, 26 Sept, 2010. www.globes.co.il/news/article.aspx?did=1000589556. Translated from the Hebrew by Amalia Sa'ar.

9. Landau, Idan. "A polluting plant" *The Hottest Place in Hell*, 23 Sept. 2014. <https://www.ha-makom.co.il/article/idan-landau-nitzaney-shalom>.

of its domination in the West Bank, and of keeping its borders with the Palestinians obscure: dropping them entirely at times, making them seem formidable at others, and ultimately keeping them porous by maintaining an asymmetrical crossings regime (Garb). The separation barrier, despite its tangible materiality, has not changed this policy, as it retains the unclear distinction between an Israeli territory and a Palestinian territory (Simonneau). As Ben-Naftali, Gross and Michaeli argue, Israel's indeterminacy as to the nature of its control over the West Bank—whether or not it is an occupation and whether or not expropriating lands means territorial annexation—has allowed it to pursue the policies of “Greater Israel” in the West Bank without jeopardizing its Jewish majority, while evading accountability in the international community. Inwardly, the state's obfuscating the nature of its domination over Palestinians has been very effective in deflecting political discussion, so that even Israelis who support territorial concessions and a two-state solution often lack the language and the clarity to take a practical stand on matters such as the separation barrier's ample encroachments east of the Green Line.

As shown in the ethnography, the Jewish residents along the seamline experience the separation barrier and complementary fences as seemingly reassuring devices that allow them to conduct their daily lives *as if* the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been settled, although they remain keenly aware that it has not. A similar ambivalence is expressed at the level of political discussions, as residents typically opt to avoid thinking about the barrier in political terms. Instead they think of it as unpleasant (“Would you like to live next to a fence?” as Anat asked) but effective (“We had a thefts' epidemic here before the fence was built and now it has stopped completely,” Hezi told us).

Still, like the clouds of polluted air constantly hanging over their heads, politics and power refuse to disappear from cognition. The following excerpt from a newspaper interview with a resident of Nirit (original name), a community village at the southern end of the stretch, captures well the sense of entitlement and the depoliticized emphasis on “quality of life,” which recurred also throughout our interviews. A woman that the article calls “A” tells her interviewer:

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We moved to [Nirit] a year ago because we fell in love with the place's pastoral character. Everyone here are people who were looking for quality of life but couldn't afford to live on a moshav. We built our home with love, invested everything we had... We never imagined that we would be forced to shut all the windows from the afternoon onwards... The air here is poisoned.

The interviewer asks A, "Did you consider leaving?" A replies:

Why would I leave? I served in the army, I've always worked and never asked for anything from the state. After so many rented apartments I finally managed to build a home. Why would I give it up just because people are saving on garbage removal? When I was building, I had to pay to have the waste removed. The small businesses that burn their waste instead of removing it properly are saving tens of thousands of shekels a year, and nobody's telling them anything.¹⁰

Like most of our interviewees, A was attracted to the peacefulness of the gated community. She did not see the environmental situation in the neighboring Palestinian communities on either side of the barrier, let alone the structural and political violence that belied their chaotic and neglected state on the one hand, and the tranquil appearance of villages such as hers, on the other. However, politics does not remain entirely beyond her and her neighbors' horizon. The cognitive structure that forms their sense of entitlement combines social class ("Couldn't afford to live on a moshav... I've always worked and never asked for anything from the state") and being part of the national majority ("I've served in the army"). According to Bourdieu (*Pascalian*), cognitive structures are not forms of consciousness but dispositions of the body, which are formed and transformed through practice. Like Hezi's daughter's statement that she cannot imagine a safer place to live, A and others were attracted to a space that made them feel at ease. For them the fences, walls, gates and patrols, and the sight of soldiers and armed residents, create a sense of reassurance and serenity.¹¹ They complement the green

10. Shalita, "A nightmare in the village."

11. In a survey we conducted with a representative sample of 721 Jewish and Arab Israelis, 72% of Jewish respondents felt that the presence of weapon-bearing soldiers in public spaces was *very reassuring*. Only 3% of Arab respondents felt the same. When asked about the presence

lawns and red roofs in producing a space that appears beautiful and feels safe. Through these and other practices, such as baking cakes for soldiers stationed nearby, “the law of the social body is converted into the law of the body” (Bourdieu, *Pascalian* 181). Concomitantly, the violence that has made it possible is misrecognized. Yet somatization is multi-directional, and as sounds, smells, water, flames, and smoke cross the fences and walls, it inevitably reinserts violence into residents’ practical consciousness.

Of course, there are varying degrees of misrecognition. Hezi was quite frank both in sharing his fearful scenario of Palestinians rising up against his village and in admitting that the barrier was used as a political and not merely a security tool. Anat told us about her and her husband’s activity for peace and coexistence. By contrast, others, like Osnat, were unapologetic about wanting as little contact with Palestinians as possible. Almost all of them cherished their close affinity with the Israeli security forces. They typically thought that having small arms in their own communities enhanced their security, but that the same was clearly illegal and extremely dangerous in the neighboring Palestinian communities. In other words, people we talked to were quite aware of politics and of their privileged position within the ethno-national power order. At the same time, they evaded our attempts to engage them in explicit discussions about the politics of the separation barrier or about the occupation of the West Bank. Apparently, most were also not in the habit of discussing such topics among themselves.

CONCLUSION

For most of the people we talked to, most of the time, the presence of the border is semi-acknowledged and semi-denied. Borrowing Bourdieu’s ideas on forms of capital and the workings of power (“The Forms”), we may say that the Jewish Israelis living next to the barrier misrecognize power. They detach their social and civil capital—notably their being privileged citizens of the state that controls the natural resources—from the power

of weapon-bearing *civilians*, 26% of Jewish respondents, compared to 13% of Arab respondents, felt that it was very reassuring.

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dynamics inherent in their economic capital and sense of security. At the same time, this collective denial of the workings of power is not hermetic. Differently from Bourdieu's analysis of class distinction ("The Forms"), in which power sophisticatedly disguises itself as culture and historical dispossession are watered down into "personal taste," in the case described here the seams, as it were, appear much looser, so actors readily discern the underlying operation of state power even as they deny some of its political implications, particularly the gap between their liberal self-image and the harsh repercussions of their comfortable lifestyle for the Palestinians. The whitewashing of the occupation of Palestine in Israeli Jews' political consciousness has been extraordinarily effective, as reflected in the intransigence of Israeli public opinion. The separation barrier has certainly played a part in this, although it has been merely one part of a much larger state apparatus designed to produce and upkeep misrecognition.

*Walls,
Material and Rhetorical:
Past, Present,
and Future*

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