

The Israeli mobility regime and its impacting on Palestinians

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Introduction

The research setting for this article is Palestine-Israel, an area known for being highly controversial and politically unstable. Since the establishment of the state of Israel in May 1948, the conflict regarding land and territories, and the crucial question of who is most entitled to control and live in the area, remain the focal points for both parties. Under the Oslo II Agreement, the control over some areas of Gaza and the West Bank were transferred to the Palestinian National Authority, as the West Bank was divided into three types of areas, namely area A, B and C (Newman, 1997, p.4). Area "A" consists of 18% of the West Bank and includes all the Palestinian urban areas (except for East Jerusalem), and refers to cities under the full control of the Palestinian National Authority. Area "B" includes all Palestinian villages and rural areas, and covers a total of 22% land. In these areas, Palestinian jurisdiction is responsible for the civil control, while security controls are shared between Palestinian and Israeli authorities. The rest of the West Bank, area "C", represents the largest territory, as it covers 60% of what we know as Palestine. These areas include all of the Israeli settlements in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and these are under the full control of the Israeli authorities (Kołodziej, Garner, Azza, n.d; Newman, 1997, p.5). However, although this area falls under Israeli control, the Palestinian authorities remain responsible for providing educational and healthcare means for Palestinians, living in areas C. Thus, all Palestinian residents in area C are under military law, while the Israeli settlers are under Israel's civil law (Kołodziej et.al, n.d).

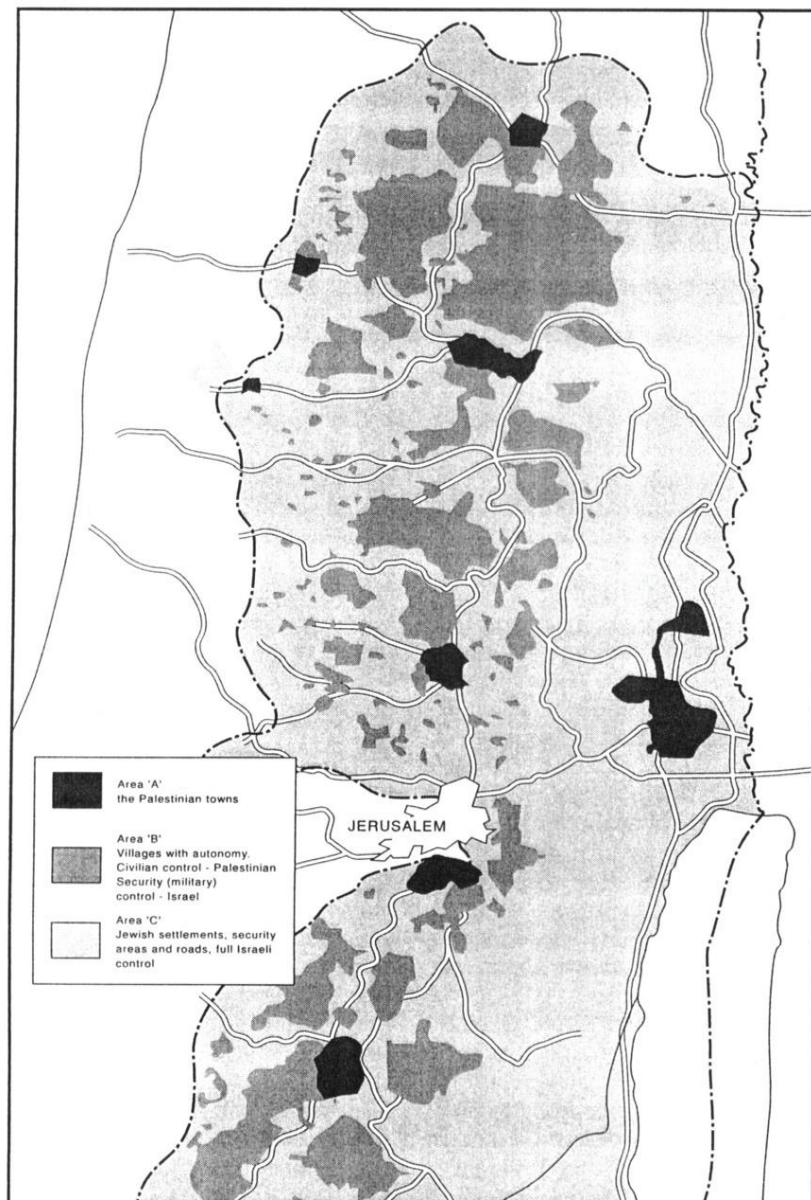


Figure 1: The Oslo II Accords (Newman 1996: 366).

After the second intifada (popular uprising against Israeli military occupation) in 2001, the Israeli authorities decided to build a separation wall, known as the West Bank Wall, with the purpose of separating Palestinian territories from Israeli territories (Jones, Leuenberger, Wills, 2016, p.1). Under the justification of "protecting Israel", the Israeli authorities have introduced several regulations such as, buffer zones, differentiated IDs, checkpoints, turnstiles, bypass roads, military zones, watch points, amongst other security measures. This was done in order to ensure, hinder and control unwanted entry from Palestinians, into Israeli controlled areas (Ben-Eliezer, Feinstein 2007:

171, Giacaman, Khatib, Shabaneh, Ramlawi, Sabri, Sabatinelli, Khawaja, Laurance 2009: 839, Tawil-Souri 2012: 170-172). In the following paragraph, I trace the impacts of the Israeli mobility regime and demonstrate some of the discriminatory practices that are inherent in the (political) system imposed by Israel on Palestinians. This study will be based on Palestinian tourism actors' experiences in the tourism field, and the concept of "mobility". By departing from theories of mobility, this study reveals how Israel's security regulations and implementation of security measures, work as instruments of a widespread surveillance mechanism. It further showcases these measures, as a principal mean for discriminating Palestinian's basic freedom to move across certain spaces.

Mobility theory

Questions related to the concept of mobility, primarily include issues of movement, too little movement, or too much of the wrong sort of movement (Hannam, Sheller, Urry, 2006: 2). Schiller and Salazar (2013) point out that the issues of (im)mobility are, to a great extent, based on certain safety institutions and risk factors, in which mobility is perceived as something dangerous and threatening, whereas immobility is considered necessary to ensure "political and personal security" of some nations and people (p.184). According to Shamir (2005), mobility is closely connected to globalization processes, which ultimately have resulted in an era of growing restrictions on movement (p.197). Shamir (2005) argues that mobility regimes are based on a paradigm of suspicion, in which power holders use an integrated "risk management system", to limit the mobility of some people, if their mobility is perceived as a threat or a risk of crime, immigration or terrorism (p.200). The "suspicion" paradigm presents four elementary forms, which constitute some of the physical features of the mobility regime. These include: borders and fences, quarantines and gated communities, osmotic properties, and profiling (Shamir 2005: 203-213). In this conceptualization, it is demonstrated that (im)mobility rests on human's identity, locality and social and economic status. The suspicion paradigm reveals the unequal power structures that exist, among primarily two "groups" of people or countries. These two groups consist of a "dominant group" and a "dominated group". The dominant group is characterized by their power to stigmatize, isolate and increase the immobility of the dominated groups, by controlling their exit privileges. At the same time, the dominant group can exercise their power to isolate themselves from the suspect group, by controlling their ability of entry into certain designated social spaces (Shamir 2005: 206). Thus, mobility is largely caught up in power geometries of everyday life, whereto the development

of new technologies assists to increase the mobility of some people and increases the immobility of others (Hannam et al. 2006: 3). Ahmed (2004) stresses that increasing mobility for some people essentially means the exclusion of other people, who are not considered equal (p.152). According to Schiller et al (2013), there are several "intersecting regimes of mobility that normalize the movements of some travelers while criminalizing and entrapping the ventures of others" (p.189). Thus, although Schiller et al (2013) acknowledges Shamir's (2005) conceptualization of the "mobility regime", the authors highlight the necessity of understanding the movement of imaginaries, and the role which imaginaries also play in determining the (im)mobility of nations and people (p.191). The term 'regime' refers to both the role of individual states and of changing international regulatory and surveillance administrations, that influence individual (im)mobility (Schiller et al. 2013: 189). In this study, Shamir's (2005) conceptualization of the "mobility regime" and the "paradigm of suspicion" will be used, in order to understand the physical features of the Israeli mobility regime and its impact on Palestinians ability to move.

Research methods

The empirical data for this article was conducted during my two weeks visit in January 2018, where I travelled around the region, and stayed in both Israeli and Palestinian territory. During my stay, I met with local Palestinian tourism actors, families, shop owners and non-governmental organizations such as the Danish House in Palestine (DHIP) and the Alternative Tourism Group (ATG). I gathered my data through the use of ethnographic methods (Adams 2012: 339, Hammersley, Atkinson 2007: 3). In this study, it was important to get an understanding of the factors that influence and limit the Palestinians, in their daily lives and gain insight into how Israel's regulations affect the Palestinian tourism actors work in the tourism field. Therefore, my ethnographic work entailed obtaining ten unstructured in-depth interviews (Bauman, Adair, 1992: 10), participatory observations, engaging in informal conversations with Palestinian taxi drivers, local shop owners, employees, local residents and foreign tourists and taking field notes throughout my field trip. The use of the unstructured interviews, allowed the informants to navigate the conversation around subjects that matters to them and affects them in their daily lives (Qu and Dumay 2011: 243). As a result, many new topics, issues and themes were raised, which allowed me to generate further questions. The information gained from the interviews, was supported by participatory observations and my field notes were used to assist in the understanding of issues, such as the context of the interviews and the characteristics of the Palestinian community.

Following the fieldwork, the data was categorized and analyzed using means and elements from the grounded theory approach (Junek and Killion 2012: 325). This entailed using the selective coding technique on my transcribed data, in which I categorized the data through the identification of themes, patterns and issues that emerged continuously in my material, after which I chose my theoretical frameworks to assist me in examining my data. Lastly, I conducted a thorough desk research, using search engines to assist me in gaining an insight into relevant theories.

Analysis

In this case study, it becomes evident that the mobility regime in Palestine-Israel have great consequences, for the Palestinians living conditions. Palestinians daily lives are centered around a regime based on closures, permits and licenses, which determine all movement and traffic into- and out of Palestine. Thus, this article discusses the Israeli security system and its impacts on local Palestinians in the region. During all the interviews with the Palestinian informants, issues of movement, traveling and entry to Israeli territory, were expressed. The challenges that Palestinians face on a daily basis, exist on different levels and are caused by the numerous control regulations, which Israel imposes upon Palestinians. When interviewing Rami, the director of the ATG, it was stated that the restrictive system imposed upon Palestinians, is both complex and complicated, which makes it difficult for Palestinians to navigate around. Rami stated:

“Of course we are living in a difficult situation. We don’t have freedom of movement as other people have these privileges, and as you know Palestine is divided between different categories, so even if we were to talk about Palestinians themselves you cannot consider Palestinians inside Israel the same as Palestinians in Gaza. Everybody have their own restrictions, reality, challenges and space of freedom and movement”

Essentially, Rami’s statement implies that Palestinians that are living in the West Bank, are subject to many more restrictions than Palestinians living in East Jerusalem, Haifa or other Israeli areas. This was further supported during an informal conversation with Isa, a local Palestinian young man from Haifa. Isa stated that he is one of the fortunate Palestinians that holds the Israeli citizenship, referring to his ability and freedom to move and travel more easily, than Palestinians from the West Bank or East Jerusalem. Isa was one of many Palestinians to explain that the Israeli government, differentiates between Palestinians and Israelis who live in Jerusalem, as Jerusalem, in many ways,

is perceived as a war zone, due to the many clashes in the area between the Palestinian and Israeli residents. Through my fieldwork, it became clear that the Israeli government regulates and determines the mobility of Palestinians and Israeli residents, based on a risk management system (Shamir 2005: 200). In this case, the risk management system distinguishes and discriminates between Israeli and Palestinian residents, by only limiting the mobility of the Palestinians in Jerusalem, as the Israeli government assesses that Palestinians from this area represent a greater risk factor than the Israeli residents, or for instance the Palestinians from Haifa. However, during the interviews with the Palestinian business owners, tour guides and the DHIP, it was stated that while Palestinians from (East) Jerusalem experience more restrictions than for example Palestinians from Haifa, Palestinians from (East) Jerusalem are still more mobile, than Palestinians from the West Bank, living in areas such as Ramallah or Hebron. According to Tawil-Souri (2012), these different levels of (im)mobility result from the fact that since 1948, the Israeli authorities have handed out differentiated ID cards to Palestinian residents, which function as an instrument to control and limit the Palestinian geographic (and economic) mobility (p.153). Hence, the ID cards system becomes a visible evidence of the symbolic discrimination, that Israel executes. In addition, this mean that Palestinian citizens of Israel, are subject to other restrictions than Palestinian non-citizens in East Jerusalem, just as Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza are subject to other restrictions than Palestinians from the two aforementioned areas. Thus, Palestinians ability to move is, (1) defined by which area in the West Bank one is from, and (2) based on which ID card they are in possession of, as each of these areas constitute its own risk and dangers, according to the Israeli government, which ultimately either eases or restricts Palestinians' access to movement, economic and social resources. The numerous regulations Palestinians are subject to, specifically in the West Bank, has taken its toll on local Palestinians on several levels. Palestinians from the West Bank are facing economic issues and social inequality due to their immobility, restricted import/export permits and scarce access to resources. During the interview with Malik, a young Palestinian tour guide from Nablus, it was stated that the regulations he is subject to, prevent him from travelling and move freely to other cities in the region. Malik explained that his inability to move, hinder him in performing guided tours outside of his respective city, which makes it difficult to have a regular income. In great frustration, Malik expressed:

” We that are living here in this part of the country (the West Bank), are living our lives as if we are in one big prison, and that involves everything”

The causes of the Palestinians' struggles and the contributory factor that enables Israel to control and determine the mobility of Palestinians, lies in the simple fact that the Palestinian authority lacks control over Palestinian borders. The Palestinians' lack of control over national and regional borders, has enabled the Israeli political system to both set and control the parameters, of national (and international) movements. Given Israel's means and power to determine the mobility of individuals in the region, Israel has immobilized the Palestinian population, by implementing numerous security measures that makes it difficult (and in some cases impossible), for Palestinians to cross national, regional and international borders. The physical features of the Israeli mobility regime are visible everywhere in the region, especially when travelling from one area to another. During my fieldwork I chose to stay in Ramallah (area A) for a few days, from which I travelled to other cities and areas such as Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Hebron. As I crossed from one area to another, I observed that all traffic was going through a border control, before being allowed access to the area in question. At the checkpoints, Palestinian non-citizens and Palestinians from the West Bank had to get out of a bus and go through another control check undertaken by Israeli soldiers. At the same time, other passengers in the bus (tourists and citizens of Israel) had to remain seated, and two soldiers would board the bus and control passports, visas and other relevant papers. Based on an assessment of people's papers and permissions, the soldiers would determine whether or not one was allowed to cross the border, at each checkpoint. When interviewing Palestinian tourism actors in the West Bank, who try to cross the checkpoints on a daily basis, it was stated:

“Most of the tour guides working in Hebron faces problems with the soldiers in charge of the borders on a personal level... of course it is a problem when I can't take my client to other places than Hebron”

During another interview with Salah, a Palestinian non-citizen from East Jerusalem, who owns a tour operator company, it was said that Palestinian tour operators face great challenges in applying and obtaining approved visas and permits, for travelling to Israeli territories. Saleh explained that:

“In many cases if a Palestinian operator applies for a visa for one of his groups, chances are not all of them would be approved, or the whole group would be disapproved. There have been cases where a Palestinian tour operator has a list, submit it, and 90 percent get rejected. He takes the same list gives it to an Israeli tour operator for money, and they all get the visa, so this is a huge

disadvantage”

According to Israeli authorities, Israel’s main reason for restricting Palestinians ability to move, is due to security reasons. In fact, the Israeli authorities has previously stated that the primary reasons for Israel’s survival, is due to their “defensible borders” (Tawil-Souri 2012: 154). The rationale of defensible borders, is deeply tied to Israel’s view of its own existence or threat to existence (Tawil-Souri 2012: 154). However, Israel’s execution of the mobility regime, suggests that the national security is based on Palestinian mobilities and flows, rather on geographic or territorial boundaries. Thus, as the Palestinians are perceived as a threat to Israel’s further existence, Palestinians are being stripped of their freedom to move on equal terms as Israeli residents, and therefore blocked from working outside of their respective city. Following Shamir’s (2005) illustration of the paradigm of suspicion, Israel’s increased control and implementation of borders in the region is an attempt to separate and isolate themselves from “suspect people”, such as the Palestinians. This is done by Israel implementing national and regional borders, and carrying out related rules and regulations in the name of “securing Israel”, to protect a perceived Israeli stable and secure social district from unwarranted Palestinian infiltration. The Israeli government’s double standards makes it possible for Israeli residents to travel and move freely, whilst limiting the Palestinians ability to move more and more. This suggests that that Israeli territories act as gated communities, while the West Bank areas function as quarantines. Instruments such as checkpoints, document controls, permits and licenses are installed outside of Israeli territories, to make it difficult for non-Israeli residents to enter Israeli controlled areas. This indicates that the physical features of Israel’s mobility regime, in this case, work through the prevention of entry, while the same borders and checkpoints in the West Bank, work through the prevention of exit, as the Palestinians are experiencing major challenges in traveling outside of their respective city. In addition, this observation was supported during the interview with Amir, the local guide from Hebron, as he explained that Israel’s implementation of checkpoints, is an attempt to make it more difficult for Palestinians to travel outside of the West Bank, as well as to make it more time-consuming for tourists, to travel into the West Bank. Then, Israel’s use of visa regulations, serve as a tool to sort between people, by distinguishing those people that are allowed to cross borders, from those that are considered to be a threat, and therefore not allowed to cross borders. Thus, the visa systems assist the Israeli government, in further limiting and controlling the movement of the Palestinians from the West Bank, by subjecting them to a particular treatment of protocols and procedures, which hamper their ability to move. This was

further supported during the interview with Rami, as it was stated that Palestinian tour operators from the West Bank, have to apply for a special "guide visa" from the Israeli authorities, if they wish to perform tours in Israeli areas. However, according to Rami, since the year 2000, the Israeli government has refused to approve Palestinians guides permits. Rami stated that the tourism field in the region, is highly centered around the political situation, which explains why the Israeli government refuses to increase the number of issued guide permits, to Palestinians. Thus, based on this, and in light of the Israeli government's double standards, highlighted above, one could claim that Israel's mobility regime is based on discriminatory procedures and practices, rather than on an assumption that local Palestinians constitute a danger or a risk for Israel. Consequently, these procedures assist Israel in hindering and limiting the Palestinians ability to provide for themselves. In this case, Israel hinders Palestinian tourism actors, in developing a Palestinian tourism sector and increase the economic flows, to Palestinian areas. The checkpoints, permits and other control measures, are just some of the physical elementary features of Israel's mobility regime. Issues regarding negative notions and imaginaries of Palestinians are also great challenges that several of the local Palestinian informants mentioned. Malik stated that a huge disadvantage that Palestinian tourism actors' experience, is that the tourists' first impression of Palestine and Palestinians, is not presented by Palestinians themselves. Rather the tourists' first "encounter" with Palestine, is big red signs that are placed outside of all entrances into the West Bank, which warns tourists against entering the area, and inform them that entering this place is dangerous and even life threatening. Malik explained that the signs assist Israel in strengthening the negative images of Palestinians, which consequently makes it difficult to develop tourism initiatives and increase the tourism flows to the Palestinian side. According to Malik, the signs cause tourists to develop a wrong idea of who Palestinians are, which ultimately scare tourists to travel into Palestinian areas.



The warning sign.

Schiller et al. (2013) have pointed out the crucial role of which imaginaries play, in both determining and defining the (im)mobility of nations and people (p.191). In this case, it seems that the negative imaginaries of Palestinians, along with Israel's implementation of borders, checkpoints and security procedures, play a crucial role in defining and determining both the tourist flow to the West Bank, as well as the Palestinians ability to move. This is further confirmed during several of the interviews with the local tourism actors, as they expressed that the negative imaginaries about Palestinians, are problematic in two ways. Firstly, the negative stereotypical images of Palestinians make it difficult to increase the tourism activities in Palestinian territories, and secondly, the negative imaginaries of Palestinians assist in legitimizing the restrictions and limitations of the Palestinians mobility. Thus, this demonstrate how the Israeli mobility regime operates on several levels. Aside from the regime's practical and visible features, such as the checkpoints and military zones that restrict local Palestinians in their physical mobility, the hidden elements, such as the tourist's response to the signs and the negative imaginaries, also play a great role in undermining Palestinians' ability to move and chances to develop a tourism sector in Palestine on equal terms as Israelis.

Conclusion

Israel limits and controls the mobility of the Palestinians living in the West Bank and Israeli territories, by subjecting Palestinians to particular discriminating regulations, treatment and procedures that hinder them in crossing borders. Israel's ability to maintain the high level of control over the Palestinians mobility, is enabled by the Israeli mobility regime, which encompasses numerous elementary features, all of which work through the prevention of exit from the West Bank. By fragmenting Palestine into three areas and handing out differentiated ID cards, Israel has succeeded in limiting both the geographical and economic flows and mobility into the West Bank. Thus, Israel's mobility regime has caused different levels of (im)mobility in Palestine-Israel, as the ability to move across borders is either permitted or restrained, depending on which ID card the Palestinians possess and where they live. Israel's implementation of numerous security measures, is an attempt to maintain the defensible borders, which accordingly is one of the primary reasons for Israel's survival. Consequently, this mean that Palestinians from the West Bank are more or less physically immobilized, while Palestinians from East Jerusalem or Israeli territories, holding the Israeli citizenship or non-Israeli citizenship, move more freely across borders, as they are perceived to constitute less of a threat. From a tourism perspective, the analysis demonstrated that the immobility of Palestinian from the West Bank, means that tourism actors living in area A, B or C experience great challenges when working as tour operators, as the many restriction imposed upon them, hinder them in executing guided tours outside of their respective cities. The Palestinians' limited ability to move and their lack of control over own borders, further challenge the Palestinians in increasing the tourism flows to the West Bank, due to the negative stereotypical image of Palestine and Palestinians.

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