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On: 13 September 2014, At: 07:40

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



## Settler Colonial Studies

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rset20>

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Published online: 10 Sep 2014.

To cite this article: Emile Badarin (2014): Settler-colonialist management of entrances to the native urban space in Palestine, *Settler Colonial Studies*

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/2201473X.2014.955946>

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## Settler-colonialist management of entrances to the native urban space in Palestine

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In the pursuit of ethnically based settlements, Israel continues to illegally confiscate Palestinian land and populate it with settlers. A system of spatial control was devised to maintain the pace of settler spatial expansion. It is an ad hoc and elastic system that is continuously revised and upgraded, while new elements are added to it. This paper studies the entrance/exit element that was added to the control infrastructure after the second *Intifada*. The entrance/exit construct is an added detail in a spatial order that seeks to process the 'entrance into' and 'exit from' Palestinian urban areas, enclaves or reservations. This order aims to constrain the Palestinians into an increasingly shrinking space within the accumulative settler-colonialist process of land expropriation. Furthermore, this structure provides reference nodes that offer a perspective from above over the native space and movement. Consequently, these elements should be seen as physical structures that modulate both humans and space.

### Introduction

Since the beginning of the second Palestinian *Intifada* in 2000, Israel has been developing control and surveillance systems in the West Bank, of which the 'Separation Wall' is by far the most notorious and visible example. The system grew in depth, sophistication and brutality and now affects virtually every aspect of Palestinian everyday life. Recently, entrances to, and exits from, Palestinian urban spaces were redesigned afresh to emphasise the already established settler-colonialist hierarchies through the erection of further military infrastructure.

This militarised spatial infrastructure aims to facilitate the acquisition of the natives' space. It constitutes and modulates power relations between natives and settlers. The conceptual and empirical examination of settler-colonial conditions demonstrates that land appropriation, the 'elimination' of the indigenous population and their social structures, and their replacement with settlers are the inherent objective of settler-colonialism. Unlike colonialism, which aims to exploit the natives, settler-colonialism seeks an outright elimination of the natives and their structures in order to make space for settlers.<sup>1</sup>

This article critically investigates specific elements in the infrastructure that governs movement and space in and out of the native urban environments in the West Bank. Namely, it examines the visible Israeli military structures located at the entrance of numerous Palestinian towns, villages and refugee camps. The analysis also offers a reflection on the ethical and political impacts of this architecture on everyday life.

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To that end, I analyse the role these physical structures play in actualising, governing and regulating the privileged subject-position of the settlers. The entrance/exit structure constitutes ethno-religious-motivated borderlines between the territorial modalities of Areas A, B and C in the West Bank as a self-evident fact of life.<sup>2</sup> In other words, architecture and urban planning are used here to transform imaginary lines drawn on maps in Oslo between 1993 and 1995 into a material reality that disrupts the socio-economic fabric and gives discrimination a spatial form. Indeed, the constant creation of new facts is a key settler-colonial strategy.

The particular design of entrances to and exits from Palestinian urban spaces in the West Bank constitutes a power relation between people, movement and space in a way that renders the Palestinian spaces as a danger zones, hence settler/Israeli interaction with the 'unruly' population of those areas is premised on an assumption of delinquency. The power relations that flow from this edifice are this article's subject of enquiry. The entrance/exit structures, and the way they punctuate space and motion, elucidate the techniques of control, observation and hierarchy employed by the settlers in seeking to appropriate additional land. I argue that the new entrance/exit structures perform a dual function. First, they have the power to observe and modulate motion, and they are objects of observation. Second, they construct ambiguous relationships between what is visible and what remains invisible.

As outlined below, the following five principal elements characterise the entrance/exit structure: watchtower, signpost, steel gate, concrete blocks and layout of the road junction. Together, these elements perpetuate and guarantee a system of control and domination over space and motion that serves the eliminatory nature of settler-colonialism. This article's first section establishes a brief contextual historical background. It attempts to explain the process of controlling and re-ordering movement that followed the Oslo Accords between the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) and Israel. The rest of the paper analyses the discursive implications of the entrance/exit architecture.

### The peace process and motion processing

Interpretation of textual or material objects is always *situational*.<sup>3</sup> One needs therefore to *situate* spatial objects within a wider political context to understand their meanings and functions. To that end, it is worth going back in history to see what it tells us about the spatial codification envisaged by the Oslo peace process that began in 1993.

The Oslo peace process coincided with another process concerning the governance of Palestinian movement. In the early 1990s, Israel started redeveloping a control system, whether through agreements, or by creating facts on the ground, to dominate and constrain the Palestinian space. Jeff Halper alludes to a three-level 'matrix of control' that Israel uses to manage space and human life in the West Bank. The matrix includes military control, construction of new facts on the ground, and bureaucratic and legal mechanisms. Put together, the matrix makes Israeli spatial control more economical and effective, and masks its impacts on virtually all aspects of Palestinian life.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the control matrix is beneficial for all sectors involved in the colonisation industry in Israel, whether at the level of military or academic industry.<sup>5</sup> The constant erection of new facts on the ground, such as building new roads, settlements, military posts, etc., produced a situation in which the Palestinian spatial imagination and movement patterns became contingent and constantly mutable. Through its bureaucratic monopoly, Israel determines who can and cannot use space. The Israeli-controlled permit system and a persistent inspection regime inform how the Palestinians circulate in space.<sup>6</sup>

The matrix regulates movement over the two sides of the so-called 'Green', '1967' or 'Armistice' line that divides historic Palestine into two areas: those which Israel seized in May 1948 and those it captured in June 1967. In 1987, the first *Intifada* broke out and evolved into a wide

popular disobedience and resistance campaign against Israeli colonisation. The *Intifada* obstructed Israeli transportation patterns; therefore, the question for Israel became how to regulate motion across the Green Line. This dilemma was addressed through a policy of spatial ambiguity and complex governance tactics guided by an ethno-religious binary distinguishing between Jewish and non-Jewish residents. The Palestinian built-up areas were called *Shtahim* (meaning 'territories' in Hebrew, more on this later). The elasticity of the concept of 'territories' is compatible with settler-colonial shifting of frontiers. Indeed, the area of the Palestinian spaces has been diminishing due to continuing Israeli settlement expansion.

This movement control apparatus has been in constant evolution since the early 1990s. Since then, the Israeli authorities enforced the permit system over the Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza. Based on a set of Israeli-defined criteria, such as age, gender, marital status, intelligence record, mood of the Israeli officer, etc., the permits to cross the Green Line are either granted or denied. Consequently, Israel sets two conditions on movement: first, by defining the spatial boundaries for those to whom it grants movement permits and, second, by shrinking at will the spatial domain of those who do not meet specific criteria. This framework flexibly expands or contracts the natives' mobility and their usage of space.

In seeking to meet new contingencies that came about with the signing of the Oslo Accords, a new 'mechanism that facilitates the entry and exit of people and goods' was advocated.<sup>7</sup> The underlying subtext of the word 'facilitate' warranted procedures that have deepened the structure of control. It was already obvious even then that that 'mechanism' was not intended to 'facilitate', but rather to further aggravate the situation of the Palestinians. Hence, its designers counted on 'modern procedures' for moral validation and to mask its implications. For example, Israel and the PLO agreed that 'to maintain the dignity of persons [i.e. Palestinians] passing through the border crossings', they would 'rely heavily on brief and modern procedures'.<sup>8</sup> The Palestinian ability to move in their spaces is governed and institutionalised through 'special arrangements' that may be withdrawn. Though these procedures were intended for external border crossings (e.g., Jordan–West Bank and Gaza–Egypt), they were also deployed internally inside the West Bank and in Gaza until 2005.

Abstract concepts are not without their own internal politics and orientations. William Connolly's scrupulous analysis explains how political concepts and abstractions impact on human behaviour and perception.<sup>9</sup> In 1993, the Israeli concept of *Shtahim* was re-projected on Palestinian spaces, but this time with Palestinian and international recognition.<sup>10</sup> The West Bank and Gaza were generically conjured up as 'Areas', before being territorially partitioned and reclassified into Areas A, B and C.<sup>11</sup> Area A stretches over territories densely inhabited by the Palestinians, that is, the main built-up areas such as towns, villages and refugee camps. The Palestinian Authority (PA) is responsible for the civil and security affairs of these population clusters. Local Palestinians use the phrase *manatiq el-sulta* (meaning 'the PA areas' in Arabic) to designate the PA-run towns. Area B could be characterised as a buffer zone around and between Areas A and C. The governance over this zone was split in accordance with a security-civilian binary, with Israel taking responsibility for security and the PA managing the civilian affairs of Palestinians living in the area. Finally, the rest, which accounts for approximately 60% of the West Bank, is considered Area C and remains under full Israeli control. Most of the Jewish settlements, industrial and agricultural facilities, and bypass roads are situated in Area C.<sup>12</sup> However, this division has no bearing whatsoever on Israel's overall sovereignty over Areas A, B and C. Israel is still the sole sovereign power over historic Palestine.

The present spatial governance in the West Bank plays a significant role in furtherance of Israeli settler-colonisation of areas that Israel considers a priority. Territorial differentiation gives Israel a free hand to expand its settler population and infrastructure in Area C, and restrict Palestinian development in Area C, with the purpose of making the socio-economic life of the

Palestinian residents unsustainable and thereby driving them out in the long run. In this context, Israeli control of the Palestinian population centres (Area A and to some extent Area B) is sub-contracted to those Palestinians (i.e. the PA) who are willing to ‘coordinate’ with Israel. Israel, however, maintains direct control over movement into and out of these centres. Against this brief spatial governance backdrop, the analysis turns now to the specific structures of entrance/exit placed at the border of Palestinian spaces.

### **Militarised urban entrance/exit**

In *Hollow Land*, Eyal Weizman provides an inspiring analysis explaining how Israel employed architecture and spatial planning to control the West Bank. He levels his analysis against the backdrop of the Israeli occupation of parts of Palestine since 1967.<sup>13</sup> Instead of focusing on ‘occupation’, I approach the Israeli spatial practices as part of a settler-colonial project.<sup>14</sup> This project is essentially eliminatory, rather than simply aiming to dominate, regulate or manage the natives, though it does not exclude the latter practices. In terms consistent with the tenets of settler-colonialism, Edward Said interpreted Zionism, the ideology that guides Israel’s policies and practices, ‘as practical systems for *accumulation* (of power, land, ideological legitimacy) and *displacement* (of people, other ideas, prior legitimacy)’.<sup>15</sup> In 1948, Israel expelled half of the indigenous population of Palestine and eliminated their towns. Since then, the expulsion of Palestinians continues.<sup>16</sup>

Weizman examined several key Israeli techniques and infrastructure (e.g. settlements, the Wall, checkpoints, border crossings and aerial surveillance, among others) that further reinforce Israel’s grip over space. Not only is geography constituted as an ‘elastic’ medium, but the very techniques and infrastructure that make spatial elasticity possible are themselves elastic, temporary and usually open for development, revision and add-ons.<sup>17</sup> For instance, checkpoints were supplied with add-ons to meet ‘humanitarian’ standards.<sup>18</sup> However, temporariness did not affect efficiency – quite the contrary. These temporary techniques and infrastructure restrict Palestinian access to their land and establish concrete settler projects on expropriated land. The Israeli strategy represents such steps as temporary and ad hoc measures, but with time they become permanent facts.

While the construction of the Separation Wall in the West Bank was underway, Israel added a new feature to that infrastructure to oversee and modulate movement into and out of the Palestinian spaces. Today, there is a military edifice at the entrance of almost every Palestinian city, village and refugee camp in the West Bank. The brutalist architectural style the designer adopted for the entire entrance/exit structure is consonant with its repercussions on Palestinian life. The entrance/exit is characterised by five-key components, though sometimes not all components are available.

The first component consists of a cylindrical precast concrete watchtower resembling those visible at airports. It is surrounded by concrete walls (Figure 1). Tinted bulletproof glass windows aligned around the tower’s head enable the soldier stationed at the tower to survey the vicinity in every direction. The tower’s head, and CCTV cameras and telecommunication aerials mounted on external walls and on the roof, make it possible to see from within, without being seen from outside. They also provide a permanent position for conducting visual surveillance and observation over a 360-degree field of vision at any given moment. A square or rectangular four-metre precast concrete fortification wall topped with coils of barbed wire usually surrounds the watchtower. At a glance, the watchtower appears deserted and unmanned during the day; at night, however, beams of warm amber light coming from powerful floodlight projectors reaffirm its visibility, activity and existence. The dispersion of watchtowers is a means to enable the examination of space, people and motion.

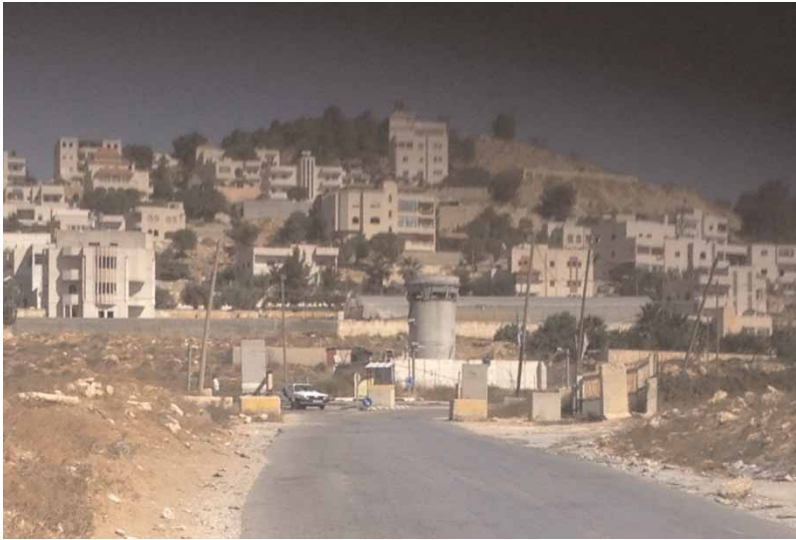


Figure 1. Israeli military installation at the entrance of Dura and Al-Fawar refugee camp, south West Bank, 2013. Author's image.

The bare concrete watchtowers are very distinguishable from Palestinian cubic white-stone buildings. Therefore, as objects of observation, the watchtowers are discernible reference nodes that offer a perspective from above, over the natives and their spaces, and impose hierarchies over them. The natives' space and body are always placed under, and subject to inspection and verification. Furthermore, the spatial environs are coordinated and identified in relation to this network of nodes. Watchtowers are strategically positioned to offer the maximum long-and-wide-range vision over surrounding spaces. In general, they stand at the border zones separating Areas B and C. In this way, what were words and lines on paper became material facts bifurcating the West Bank and Gaza into discrete political spaces, a fragmentation that proved detrimental to Palestinian social and economic development.<sup>19</sup>

The second component of the entrance structure is textual. Every entry to a Palestinian built-up 'Area' is marked by a sizable red signpost, measuring approximately two metres in height and one in width (Figure 2). The sign communicates mainly with Jewish settlers in the West Bank as the signs textual composition indicates. The sign faces travellers moving towards Palestinian towns and is written first and foremost in Hebrew, followed by a careless translation into Arabic and then English. The Hebrew script is always at the top and more visible than the Arabic translation despite the fact that the overwhelming majority of people living in the West Bank speak Arabic as the first language.

Neither the sign's colour nor its text is without ethnic subtexts. The red background conveys a warning. The English translation of the Hebrew text reads as follows: 'The area ahead of you is Palestinian Area A, No entry for Israelis, entry to this area is a violation of law.' There is no mention of which law it refers to, let alone of the multiple Israeli and Palestinian legal regimes that apply in this area. This omission reflects a broader Israeli supremacist attitude and mode of thinking. The Israeli law is the only significant one. Apart from conveying danger, insecurity and the inevitability of falling foul of the law, the message systematically de-informs all regarding what actually lies behind the sign. Such linguistic indeterminacy makes the signpost replicable and generalisable. The statement constructs every 'Palestinian Area' as a source of delinquency as it disregards the names of the Palestinian towns behind it. They are all an undifferentiated





Figure 2. A red sign at the entrance of a Palestinian town warning Israelis off travelling to ‘Palestinian Areas’, 2013. Author’s image.

‘Area A’, as articulated in Article XI of the Oslo II Agreement signed in 1995 by Israel and the PLO.<sup>20</sup>

The terms ‘territories’ or ‘Areas’ are exclusively used to identify Palestinian-inhabited spaces. In essence, these designations represent an Israeli version of the concept of ‘reservation’ used in other settler-colonial cases to define spaces on which native communities were allowed to live. This terminology is selectively applied to the natives’ spaces as a means to downgrade their society and right to the land, and to efface the particular identity of each locale. Conversely, the settlers do not live in ‘Areas’. They dwell in specific spaces identified by Hebrew names.<sup>21</sup> (Indeed, as they impose the settler narrative, spatial re-designation and de-designation are powerful devices of elimination.) The differences could not be more marked. As access to settlements and their environs is restricted to Jews only, and Palestinians would encounter punitive consequences if they were caught within the boundaries of a settlement (with the exception of Palestinian construction workers holding special permits), one would expect a similar structure at the entrance/exit of settlements. But all entrances and junctions leading to Jewish settlements appear normal, named, safe and modern. There is no sign to warn non-Jews against accessing settlements similar to the red signpost seen above. For Israelis, access prohibition is assumed to be self-evident, natural and unquestionable.

The third component is a yellow steel gate installed on roads leading to the ‘Palestinian Areas’: Palestinian towns, villages and camps. The gate is the most significant sign of the entrance/exit structure. The Israeli military is the only authority that can open or close the gate. The Israeli authorities kept the steel gate at the southern entrance of the city of Hebron (near Beit Hagai settlement) shut for 12 years (2001–2013). Direct transportation between southern Palestinians towns and villages and the rest of the West Bank became impossible.<sup>22</sup>

The fourth component consists of approximately a dozen cubic concrete blocks deployed over each side of the road. They are arranged to compose a double bend to force approaching drivers to travel at a very low speed. The blocks also provide a shield for Israeli soldiers, especially the U-shaped ones topped with sandbags. The concrete blocks, an essential part of the physical structure

of the checkpoint matrix in the West Bank, are permanently deployed but not always staffed. Indeed, the entire infrastructure that governs movement is already in place and can be activated at any time. This makes this type of spatial governance effective, swift and economical.

The final component is the layout of road junctions. Historically, topographical consideration determined the order of movement and original transportation routes in the West Bank. However, with the advance of the Israeli settler-colonial policies, existing transportation routes were revised and new ones were built to facilitate land expropriation, inhibit the natives' spatial expansion and maintain the settlers' well-being and security. These routes are known as 'bypass roads'.

To maximise the utility of the entrance/exit edifice, the layout of road junctions between Areas B and C were redesigned afresh to benefit from standard traffic norms. The new road layout hides racial hierarchies and discrimination behind the cloak of traffic rules. Under the new layout, when driving into, or out of, Areas A and B, one must give way to vehicles on the bypass road (Figure 3). In other words, the traffic rules compel Palestinian drivers to give way to the settlers' vehicles on the bypass road. This allows the settlers to travel unhindered while Palestinians are forced to wait.

Furthermore, roads into Areas A and B, the first mile in particular, are usually deliberately left in poor condition (Figure 4). This neglect further marks the ethnic, political, economic and spatial disparities separating the native and settler populations. Put simply, the poor state of the roads leading to the Palestinian areas visually differentiates the settler and native spaces, and signals the unruly nature of the latter.

The watchtower, signpost, steel gate, concrete blocks and roads junctions are the basic components of the entrance/exit of Palestinian populated centres. Put together, these standardised components constrain the Palestinian spatial mobility at a relatively low cost. These structures are economical, generalisable and replicable all over the West Bank. Indeed, an individual soldier stationed at a watchtower may effectively observe, judge the situation and analyse the imagery coming from the CCTV cameras. When necessary, s/he may call for military backup to be deployed on site to activate the checkpoint or shut the gate; once the job is complete, the



Figure 3. South entrance of Bethlehem, Google Maps 2014. Author's illustration.





Figure 4. Gated entrance of Al-Fawar refugee camp located in southern Hebron, 2013. Author's image.

backup force can leave for another task. Third, the junctions' layout itself is designed to exercise systematic power to modulate movement. The layout imparts a speed and priority differentiation between native and settler vehicles to cater for the latter's comfort and safety. The natives are forced to travel at a lower speed while giving way to settlers.

The current spatial order in the West Bank is fixated on surveillance techniques that help sustain power differentials between native and settler. Foucault's analysis of disciplinary power shows that the major effect of surveillance is to stimulate a sense 'of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic function of power'. To do this, he adds, 'power should be visible and unverifiable'.<sup>23</sup> That is precisely what Israeli surveillance does in the West Bank. In fact, the visibility of watchtowers coupled with other elements of the entrance structure induces a schema of self-inspection in which power operates through rules and norms, without being directly exercised. In other words, behaviour is regulated from within. Power is deployed within carefully planned spatial patterns and within the subject itself. The desired spatial order establishes its own logic and routines and enmeshes them into the social fabric to become a reality of life. For instance, Palestinians in the West Bank recognise when it is dangerous to move, what roads is best to take and what sort of permits must be carried without being told to do so.

The power of the entrance structure not only originates from its ability to occlude movement, but also from being very visible in the context of a complex and erratic transportation network. The watchtower, red signpost, steel gate and concrete blocks are overpowering objects of observation. They produce a unique twofold state in which natives and settlers are at once objects and subjects of observation. They are objects of observation from the perspective of the soldier in the tower or that of the CCTV cameras, and they are objects of observation from the perspective of the Palestinian residents observing from below these physical structures. However, each interprets this reality differently, depending on his/her positioning.

Devices of surveillance are dispensed in space to observe (by the usually invisible soldier inside the watchtower, and by CCTV cameras) and to be observable. The two objectives (observing and being observed) are performed simultaneously. The power of observation provides

analytical tools that orient human behaviour and the perception of spaces. Spatially, these structures register reminders and draw imaginary lines between different territorial classifications, while keeping Palestinians and settlers alert to their respective unprivileged and privileged subject-positions.

In this function of power, both natives and settlers constitute an object of analysis and an analysing/observing subject. On the one hand, the observer inside the tower, whether human or machine, observes, registers, examines and judges the behaviour of Palestinians as they approach Area C, an area reserved for settlement expansion. On the other hand, for the natives, visibility is a reminder that their physical existence and spaces are under constant scrutiny, which provokes ongoing insecurity and anxiety.

Thus, when enmeshed within a wider economy of control and dispossession (e.g. the Separation Wall, checkpoints, permits, the population registry), the entrance/exit structure helps producing self-regulating subjects from within. Spatial order provides cues and orientations suggesting how one should behave and what to expect, while present-day spatial settings in the West Bank therefore create a complex, labyrinth-like reality that interrupts and distorts the native/Palestinian consciousness of space and expands that of the settlers.<sup>24</sup> In the West Bank, space is always in the process of becoming something else. Contingent frontiers, which are 'often more dangerous and deadly than [ ... ] static, rigid one[s]', are embedded in the settlers' perception of space.<sup>25</sup> That is because fixed frontiers contravene settler-colonialism's ethos of elimination. However, temporary ones that may be eventually transcended are well suited to help absorbing further land. As Said pointed out, spatial elasticity accommodates the Zionist praxis of *accumulation* through the persistent creation of new 'facts on the ground' (*avadut al ha-karka* in Hebrew). Accumulation is a crucial feature of Israeli settler-colonialism.

## Conclusion

The physical infrastructure that sustains the Israeli settler-colonialism in the West Bank evolved over time. Initially, it began in the 1970s as a persistent settlement project to control the hilltops of the West Bank, to provide Israel with a panoptic perspective on the Palestinian population and to encircle their towns. Today, about 245 settlements and their related infrastructure splinter the Palestinian space into separate populated cells.<sup>26</sup> In the early 2000s, Israel deployed the entrance/exit structure to govern the Palestinian movement in and out of these cells. The entrance/exit structure, in conjunction with the bypass roads encircling Palestinian built-up areas, is an effective spatial gating device that has transformed Palestinian population areas into cells in a much larger open-air prison.

The entrance/exit structure is an additional layer in the spatial apparatus of settler-colonialism that operates in the West Bank, which gives ethno-religious identities a practical form and palpable shape in everyday life. This infrastructure provides the mechanism by which space may be limited or expanded. The persistent visibility of the entrance structure enforces a state of contingency, perplexity and uncertainty upon the daily movement of Palestinians within their immediate environment. The ultimate objective of this apparatus is to normalise land appropriation and settlement expansion.

## Notes on contributor

Emile Badarin is a researcher in the Middle East politics and Israel–Palestine conflict at the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies in Doha. He is currently writing a book on the formation and evolution of Palestinian political discourse between 1948 and 2010. His work cuts across the disciplinary boundaries of International Relations theory, discourse analysis, settler-colonialism and peace building.

## Notes

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8. *Ibid.*, emphasis added. Israeli practices of spatial control evolved and developed to incorporate even 'humanitarian requirements'. For more on this, see Eyal Weizman, *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation* (London: Verso Books, 2007), 149–54.
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