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Strategic Points, Flexible Lines, Tense Surfaces, and Political Volumes: Ariel Sharon and the Geometry of Occupation

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The wording of the 2003 Middle East peace initiative, the “roadmap,” managed – perhaps unwittingly but clearly all the same – to equate the transformation of the built environment with acts of organized violence. Israel is to stop planning, constructing, and populating, and then it is to dismantle settlements built by independent groups in breach of its own laws. The Palestinian authority is to prevent shooting, shelling, and suicide attacks carried out by armed organizations, dismantling their infrastructures and arresting their masterminds in the process. Although the document does not make it clear if it sees the activities of each side as comparable (or merely trapped in a cyclical sequence of causes and effects), never before was the work of architects and planners so clearly equated with those of terrorists.

Indeed, the human and political rights of Palestinians are violated not only by the frequent blows of the Israeli military, but also by a much slower and steadier process in which the totality of the environment in which they live is configured around them as an ever-tightening knot. In this process the transformation of the territories occupied by Israel since 1967 became a parallel conflict carried out with pencil lines on the drafting tables of military and civilian planners and architects. It developed as an “urban war” in which urbanity provided not only the arena of war but also its very weapons and ammunition. Just like a gun or a tank, mundane building matters have been used by the Israeli state to apply its strategic and political agenda. The figure of Ariel Sharon is central to this process. The use of apparently “temporary” security architecture to create permanent “facts on the

ground”; the rejection of borderlines as the limits of state territory; the preference for ever-flexible internal frontiers: above all, this is the spatial legacy of Ariel Sharon.

This chapter attempts to understand the way in which Ariel Sharon imagines territory and practices space. It is an attempt to look at his long-lasting physical oeuvre, the one in which both Israelis and Palestinians must struggle to live, as one architect tries to understand the work of another.

Surface

Israel’s pre-1967 borders were seen by the military as indefensible. Israeli military strategy, conscious of the strategic inferiorities of Israel’s borders, was based on an oxymoron coined in 1959 by Yigal Allon, a Labour politician and a retired military commander: “preemptive attack.” This principle conceived an extensive use of Israel’s superior air power as a volumetric compensation for its planar inferiority. The 1967 war implemented Yigal Allon’s strategy to the letter. With complete control of the skies, the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) was free to progress across the surface, stopping and redeploying along clear, natural barriers.

In the process, the geopolitical balance of the Middle East was radically transformed. Israel tripled the territory under its control. The new lines, stretched now along the Jordan River and the Suez Canal, were seen as the “natural border” of a promised land. This fitted well with a newly developed phantasmagorical attitude of the Israeli state. An unparalleled period of economic prosperity commenced, due, at least in part, to cheap labor drawn from the newly occupied Palestinian population of more than a million people. Gradually, however, the “Occupied Territories” grew too large within the national imagination. This creeping agoraphobia meant that the unfamiliar territories had to be studied, mapped, and domesticated from within. Their edges had to be fortified against the prospect of counter-aggression from the “outside.”

Lines

Under the government of Golda Meir, two Labourites – Haim Bar-Lev and Yigal Allon – were put in charge of fortifying the edges of the Occupied Territories on two different fronts. Allon, then the minister of agriculture, devised and implemented the Allon Plan. This marked out the locations of a series of agricultural outposts along the western bank of the Jordan River. It created a security border with Jordan while consciously aiming to settle spaces only sparsely populated by Palestinians.

The Bar-Lev Line was the military counterpart of the Allon Plan. It was an immense technical undertaking that demanded the shuffling of huge quantities of sand from across the desert to the bank of the Suez Canal. This sand was piled up to form a formidable artificial landscape composed of hardened sand ramparts above ground. A parallel system of deep bunkers and communication trenches was also constructed below the Line. Thirty-five fortified positions (*Ma'ozim*) were spread out along the length of the canal at 10-kilometer intervals. These overlooked the Egyptian positions across the water line from a mere 300 meters.

Points

Ariel Sharon served between 1969 and July 1973 as the IDF's chief of southern command. It was during this time that he – always an overtly political general – broke with traditional military ranks, as well as with his Labour-Zionist upbringing, and affiliated himself with the political right. Sharon was also the only general who dared challenge the logic of defense spelled out by the Bar-Lev Line. He argued, in a series of heated meetings with the General Staff, that the army “cannot win a defensive battle on an outer line.” Instead, he proposed that the IDF should “fight a defensive battle the way it should be fought – not on forward line but in depth” (Sharon and Chanoff, 2001).

To do this he proposed, and partially implemented, a dynamic system of point-based defense in depth. This was composed of a series of strong points (*Ta'ozim*). These were spread out on elevated ground within the terrain on a series of mountain summits that dominated the canal plain. Between the *Ta'ozim* and the canal Sharon proposed to run mobile patrols, constantly and unpredictably on the move. Then, at the first opportunity, Sharon was dismissed by Bar-Lev, his plan only partially implemented.

The principle of a linear defense is to prohibit (or inhibit) the enemy from gaining any foothold beyond it. General Erwin Rommel, commander of the *Wehrmacht* defenses along the Atlantic in 1944, asserted the core of this principle when he argued that the only chance to stop an Allied invasion force was to beat them at the water's edge. But as the Germans knew full well, after their experience with the supposedly impregnable Todt Line, when the line is breached, even at one location, it is – much like a leaking glass of water – rendered immediately useless.

By contrast, defense based on a “network of points in depth” relies on a matrix of interlocking strong points connected by physical and electromagnetic links: roads and electronic communications. Each point can connect and communicate with any other, and each point overlooks, and, whenever

necessary, covers the other with firepower. This creates an interlocking, fortified surface. When the defensive matrix is attacked it can become flexible and adapt to the fall of any number of points by forming new connections across the matrix.

The geography of nodes in a matrix cannot be conventionally measured in distance. “Distance” between nodes is not a measurable absolute but a relative figure that is defined by the speed and reliability of the connection – that is, how fast and how secure can one travel between given points. The network defense is a spatial trap that allows the defenders a high level of mobility while acting to paralyze any possibility for enemy movement. Jeff Halper explains how effective this strategy was in Vietnam, where “small forces of Viet Cong were able to pin down some half-million American soldiers possessing overwhelming firepower” (Halper, 2001).

Breaking the Line

On October 6, 1973, the line that had stood up to two years of Egyptian artillery fire throughout the war of attrition, succumbed to water at the outset of the Yom Kippur war. Egyptian high-pressure water cannons used the water of the Suez Canal to dissolve the hardened sand and melt the formidable artificial landscape into pools of mud. Some 100,000 Egyptian troops were ferried onto the eastern bank, making their way a few kilometers into the Sinai. Then, without encountering much resistance, but scared of entering the fortified depth of Israeli defenses constructed by Ariel Sharon, they stopped and dug themselves in, guns facing east.

Sharon, now a division commander, was the first to succeed in breaking a gap through the new Egyptian lines. He established a bridgehead across the canal over which the Israeli army flowed into the rear of the Egyptians. Cutting off their supply lines, Sharon's forces encircled the entire 3rd Egyptian Army. The counter-crossing of the canal created a bizarre stalemate, with the two armies switched sides across the water line. Such was the power of linear defense that it was crossed twice, in both directions, during a war lasting less than three weeks.

The Yom Kippur war ended in unprecedented public outrage. The heads of the General Staff and of the Labour party rolled, but Ariel Sharon was publicly perceived as the man who saved the nation. The debate around the construction and fall of the canal's fortification, and the trauma of the canal campaign, became deeply etched in the Israeli national consciousness. These events were endlessly replayed and refought, in slow-motion mode, this time on the hills of the West Bank.

Strategic Points

In May 1977 the Likud came to power for the first time in the history of the state. Ariel Sharon was appointed minister of agriculture and took over the ministerial committee in charge of settlement policy. Seizing this opportunity, Sharon started to devise a new location strategy for settlements in order to turn the West Bank into a defensible frontier that would consolidate Israeli control of the Occupied Territories. Having successfully demonstrated the shortcomings of the Bar-Lev Line, Sharon now moved against the second of the Labour defensive lines – the Allon Plan. Seeking to implement the lessons of the Sinai campaign, Sharon claimed that “a thin line of settlements along the Jordan would not provide a viable defense unless the high terrain behind it was also fortified.” Consequently, he proposed to establish “other settlements on the high terrain... [and] several east-west roads along strategic axes, together with the settlements necessary to guard them.” (Sharon and Chanoff, 2001).

Labour had traditionally conducted its state-building policies almost entirely through the construction of settlements. Before the creation of the state it used the “tower and stockade” cooperative settlements to mark and defend Israel’s future borders (Rotbard, 2003a). After Israel’s creation in 1948, Prime Minister David Ben Gurion laid out the so-called “organic wall” composed of a string of development towns inhabited by immigrant communities – mainly Jews from the Arab states, along the state’s new borders (Efrat, 2003). But after the 1967 war, Labour was indecisive about what policy to take with regard to the new territories and was unable to reinvestigate its past pioneering energies. Thus, the government pursued its settlement policies with far less enthusiasm and vigor.

Instead, it was Sharon, the Labourite turned Likudnik, and Gush Emunim, the national religious and messianic organization, who managed to revitalize the pioneering ethos of Zionism. They saw, in the depth of the West Bank, a sacred territory and a defensible frontier – a border without a line, across whose depth a matrix of settlements could be constructed. The “artificially created” Green Line, Israel’s internationally recognized 1949 border, was deeply repressed, and the borders became fluid and elastic again, pulled out to incorporate every new settlement. The open frontier replaced the rigidity of the line and blurred the distinctions between a political “inside” and “outside.” This, in turn, blurred the difference between “the political space of the state and the cultural space of the nation” – a difference “hidden by the hyphenated concept of ‘nation-state’” (Kemp, 2000).

In a famous syllogism, Lenin once described strategy as “the choice of points where force is to be applied.” Points have neither dimension nor

size; they are mere coordinates on the X/Y-axis of the plain and on the Z-axis of latitude. In Israel, the settlement “location strategy” is based upon a close reading of the terrain. Decisions are made with the precision of acupuncture regarding where effort should be concentrated. The fact that in Hebrew the term a “point on the ground,” and sometimes simply “a point” (*Nekuda*), means “settlement” is indicative of a planning culture that considers the positioning of a settlement less in terms of its essence than in terms of its strategic location. Because settlements are autonomous and separate points on a matrix, a reliable communication had to be established between them.

In 1982, a few months before the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, Sharon, then minister of defense, published his *Masterplan for Jewish Settlements in the West Bank Through the Year 2010* – later known as the Sharon Plan (figure 9.1). In it he outlined the location of more than a hundred settlement points, placed on strategic summits. He also marked the paths for a new network of high-volume, interconnected traffic arteries, connecting the settlements with the Israeli heartland. In the formation of continuous Jewish habitation Sharon’s plan saw a way towards the wholesale annexation of the areas vital for Israel’s security. These areas he marked onto the map attached to his plan in the shape of the letter H. The “H-Plan” contained two parallel north-south strips of land: one along the Green Line containing the West Bank from the west, and another along the Jordan valley, accepting the presence of the Allon Plan to contain the territory from the east.

These two strips separated the Palestinian cities, which are organized along the central spine of the West Bank’s mountain ridge, from both Israel proper and from the kingdom of Jordan. Between these north-south strips Sharon marked a few east-west traffic arteries – the main one connecting through Jerusalem, thus closing a (very) approximate H. The rest – some 40 percent of the West Bank, separate enclaves around Palestinian cities and towns – were to revert to some yet undefined form of Palestinian self-management.

The new Israeli settlements, relying on their own weapons, ammunition, and military contingency plans, were to form a network of “civilian fortifications” integrated into the IDF’s overall system of defense, serving strategic imperatives by overlooking main traffic arteries and road junctions in their region. The role of settlements as observation and control points promoted a particular layout for their urbanity (plate 9.1). The layout of a mountain settlement is concentric; its roads are stretched in rings following the topographical lines closing a complete circuit around the summit. The outward-facing arrangement of homes orients the view of its inhabitants towards the surrounding landscape in which “national interests” – main roads, junctions, and Palestinian urban areas – compose a picturesque panorama. The essence of this geometric order is to produce

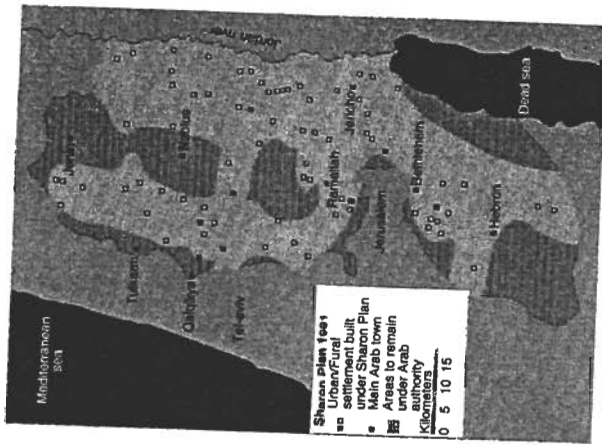


Figure 9.1 The Sharon Plan, 1982. Source: Eyal Weizman.



Plate 9.1 Jewish settlement of Eli, Ramallah Region. Photograph: Eyal Weizman, 2001.

“panoptic fortresses” – optical devices on an urban scale, laid out to generate observation, spatially and temporally, all round. (Weizman, 2002; Segal and Weizman, 2003).

The high ground, on which settlements were located, thus offers the strategic assets of self-protection and a wider view. But beyond being employed militarily, the urban layout of vision also serves an aesthetic agenda: it allows for contemplation over a pastoral landscape evocative of history, one in which biblical scenarios could be imagined and participated in, at least visually. All this feeds the national mythic imagination, giving settlers the sense of foundational authority based on long historical continuity.

In the early 1980s another of the construction frenzies that are indicative of Ariel Sharon’s closeness to executive power had begun. The “biblical” heartland of the West Bank became overlaid by the two symbiotic and synergetic instruments of security: the settlement observation point and the serpentine road network. The latter was the prime device for serving the former; the former overlooked and protected the latter.

Sharon realized the double potential of emerging messianic-religious impulses: to settle a mythological landscape, and to facilitate the desire of the middle classes to push outside of the congested centers of Israeli cities to populate his matrix of points with civilian communities. Unlike Labour’s agricultural settlements of the Kibbutz and the Moshav, the new “community settlements” were, in effect, dormitory suburbs of closely-knit social groups composed mainly of national-religious-professional middle classes.

Architecture was thus conscripted to establish the state’s control of its territories and help make uniform communities. Uniformity of architectural taste was imposed through the repetition of a small variety of single and double family house-and-garden structures. Beyond responding to middle-class suburban aesthetics, the adorning of settlement homes with red roofs, served a further military agenda – identifying these sites from afar as Israeli.

The fact that the inhabitants had to seek work outside the settlements made them rely on the roads to connect them with the employment centers in the metropolitan areas around Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, within Israel proper. This was similar to the way that the American suburbs developed as an offspring of pacified World War II construction technology, and especially around the system of interstate highways, developed to serve the integrated industry of the American war economy. Israeli suburbia made perfect use of the system laid out for mobile defense in depth. The massive system of fifty highways, together with a modern matrix of infrastructure, became effective instruments of development – merging the needs of a sprawling suburbia with national security and political ambitions to push ever more Israelis into the West Bank.

Sharon and the engineers, already experts in military defense works, and now building for civilian communities, thus had to become urban planners. Sharon "got tremendous satisfaction seeing how everything was moving forward, how drawings on a map were every day becoming more of a reality on the ground" (Sharon and Chanoff, 2001).

Sharon's planning decisions, however, were not made according to professional criteria of economical sustainability, ecology, or efficiency of services. Instead, they were guided by a strategic agenda focused on spatial manipulation. Planning under Sharon shed any pretence of facilitating the social and economic improvement of an abstract "public." Rather, it manifested itself fully as the executive arm of the strategic and geopolitical agenda of the Israeli state.

Architecture and planning were thus used as the continuation of war by other means. Just like the tank, the gun, and the bulldozer (see Graham, this volume), building matter and infrastructure were used to achieve tactical and strategic aims. This was an "urban war" in which urbanity provided not the theatre of war but its very weapons and ammunition. It was a war in which a civilian population was drafted, knowingly or not, to supervise vital national interests as armed, plain-clothes security personnel.

But the geopolitical reality of the 1980s and 1990s – after the terms of the 1978 peace agreement with Egypt were fulfilled, after the drying out of military assistance to the Arab states with the collapse of the Soviet bloc, and after the first *intifadah* began in 1987 – presented new dangers to the strategy. The challenges that the state faced arose less from a conventional attack by Arab armor from the "outside" and more from a disgruntled and restless Palestinian population located "inside" the Occupied Territories. The centers and headquarters of popular resistance were deep within Palestinian towns and cities, especially the winding and impenetrable fabric of the refugee camps. In the eyes of the state these over-dense and under-serviced urban environments became the "habitat of terror." The rapid urbanization of the West Bank during the relatively prosperous 1980s was seen by the Israeli security establishment as the "jihad of building" (Graham, 2002; this volume).

Palestinian urban growth, fueled by a rapidly increased population, "illegally" sprawled beyond the "blue lines" that the IDF's "Civil Administration" traced around them as planning boundaries. Cities swallowed towns, and towns, villages, creating an ever-thickening fabric of large continuously built blocks along the main Palestinian traffic arteries. This was especially pronounced along Route 60 – historically, the most important Palestinian route, the one stringing all major Palestinian cities along the north-south mountain ridge. Urbanity became a Palestinian "weapon" of retaliation, threatening to undermine the "other" urbanity of the settlements that was being produced to maintain Israeli territorial control.

The way to contain these urban threats, from the perspective of Ariel Sharon's planners, was to use the weapon of counter-urbanity – or more precisely, sub-urbanity. From the 1980s onwards, Sharon used settlements as an antidote to uncontrolled Palestinian population growth. He placed them as wedges that disturbed the consolidation of large, Palestinian metropolitan centers – those most likely to form the cultural, demographic, and political basis of a viable territorial entity.

Beyond their status as forward positions in the defense of the state from invasion, the settlements were therefore used to allow the state to exercise the task of civilian control. A continuous fabric of homes, industrial zones, and roads were knitted together to act as wedges separating the different Palestinian population centers.

Sometimes the objective of making the settlement act as a wedge was achieved by its very layout. For example, in the case of the settlement-city of Ariel – the largest settlement in Samaria, coincidentally named after Ariel Sharon – the design was stretched into a long, thin form. This was done in order to partially envelop the Palestinian city of Salfit and to cut it away from the villages which made up its regional hinterland economy (Lein and Weizman, 2002).

The small red-roofed single-family home replaced the tank as the smallest fighting unit. District regional and municipal plans replaced the strategic sand table. Homes, like armored divisions, were used in formation across a dynamic theatre of operations to occupy strategic hills, to encircle an enemy, or cut communication lines.

The location strategy employed for the West Bank was based on yet another basic military principle: the axiom that the party to move faster across a battlefield is the one to win the battle. It acted to make a dramatic separation – a differentiation between the speeds by which Israelis and Palestinians could move across the terrain. Traffic arteries are *de facto* separated across national lines: the six-lane bypass roads on which military vehicles and civilian vans can rush between settlements contrast starkly with the narrow, informal dust-roads connecting Palestinian towns and villages. This slowing down of the Palestinian population is what Israeli journalist Amira Hass has called "the theft of time." The architectural research group *Multiplicity* demonstrated that it takes an Israeli driver 90 minutes to cross the West Bank from north to south. The same journey takes a Palestinian driver 8 hours. This assumes that the roads are actually open to Palestinian traffic and that they are not enduring one of the many closures that the IDF enforce (Boeri, 2003).

Jeff Halper (2001) calls the contemporary consequence of this strategic texture in the West Bank "the matrix of control." Within this matrix the inhabitation of nodal points acts as on/off valves regulating movement according to identity. This replaces the necessity for Israeli forces to be

directly present within Palestinian cities. The fixing of the Palestinian population as relatively stationary, and its separation into isolated, immobile islands, makes it much easier to manage and control.

The Battle for the Hilltops

Ariel Sharon, fearing the reversal of his spatial practices, was reluctant to implement his 1982 plan gradually. He believed it was important “to secure a presence first and only then build the settlements up.”

Sharon therefore acted to lay out the entire skeleton of the project, seeding the area with small outposts, some hardly more than footholds, composed of tents or mobile homes. He knew that each of these outposts, once established as a “fact on the ground,” would become a fully grown settlement. (Lein and Weizman, 2002)(see plate 9.2). Defining his policy regarding the West Bank barrier in advance, Sharon advised settlers not to build fences around settlements, but rather to build fences around the Palestinians: “if you put up a fence, you put a limit to your expansion.”

At the beginning of 1983, after the Kahan inquiry into the 1982 massacre at Sabra and Shatila refugee camps in Beirut had found Sharon indirectly responsible, he was forced out of government. His influence on the settlement project was thereafter exercised through an active role in the political

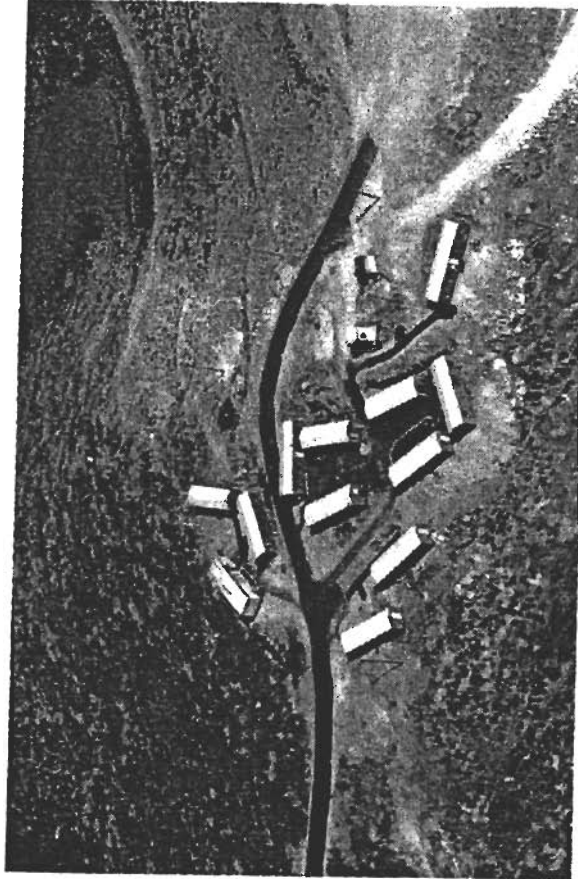


Plate 9.2 The outpost of Mitzpe Dani, Jordan Valley Region. Photograph: Daniel Bauer for Peace Now, 1999.

opposition. In this light, the current scenes, in the context of the “road-map,” of removal and repositioning of the “illegal outposts” – small, ad hoc settlement “seeds” put up by independent groups in breach of Israeli law – thus need to be understood in the context of Sharon’s skeleton strategy.

Soon after it took power in 1992, the Yitzhak Rabin government stopped issuing permits for the construction of new settlements. In response, Ariel Sharon, leading the ferocious opposition to the 1993 Oslo accords, announced the “battle for the hilltops.” He urged young, ideological and religious settlers to “move, run and grab as many hilltops as possible.” In order to stop any further territorial concessions, Sharon thus wanted to replace the suburban culture of the settlements with a renewed frontier mentality.

In the decade since then, these settlers have established over 100 “temporary” outposts on the remaining strategic hilltops beyond the boundaries of settlements, with a total population not exceeding 1,000 (Etkes, 2003). Their aim is to secure the areas in a way that allows them to challenge any proposal for territorial compromise, or at least change the trajectory of any proposed border – if one has to be set – to Israel’s permanent advantage.

The apparent naivety of the forms of outposts hides the fact that, with their potential for immediacy, mobility, and flexibility, these outposts are the perfect instruments of colonization. The prefabricated homes allow for quick, overnight deployment on the backs of trucks or (when a road is not available) even by helicopter. The prefabricated rigidity of the single element allows for an immediate urbanism, based on patterns of quick repetition and distribution. The seed of mobile homes may then be free to transform and develop into a “mature” settlement as conditions allow.

The government’s acts of “dismantling” today are as revealing about the precision of the settlement location strategy as any past decisions regarding the establishment of new settlements. Most outposts spring up again immediately after being removed. Evacuation on the backs of trucks very often means relocation, sometimes even to a more strategic position.

Flexible Line

Points and lines are synergistic systems – the distribution of settlement points across the surface of the West Bank called for a complex set of lines both to connect them (roads) and to protect them (barriers). The latter are concretized by a series of long and interlocking mechanisms: barbed wire, ditches, dykes, and checkpoints.

The new West Bank barrier is a complex set of fortifications measuring between 35 and 100 meters in width, designed to separate the Jewish

settlements and their supportive infrastructure from the Palestinian population (plate 9.3).

The main component of the barrier is a touch-sensitive, "smart," 3-meter high electronic fence, placed on 150 centimeter-deep concrete foundations (to prevent digging under it), topped with barbed wire (to prevent climbing over it), day and night video cameras, and even small radars. Stretched along the east side of the fence (facing the bulk of the West Bank) are a patrol road, a 3-meter deep trench, and two barbed-wire fences. West of it (towards Israel proper) are a trace road – where footprints of intruders are registered – a patrol road suitable for armored vehicles, and some more barbed-wire fences. At some places, when the barrier nears a Palestinian town, the tactically required see-through/shoot-through fence solidifies into an 8-meter high bullet-proof wall. Watchtowers with firing posts are placed at intervals of a few hundred meters along the barrier.

Seven control gates for Israelis and nine for Palestinians are planned in the barrier in order to allow people in and out of the enclosed area. Some twenty-six "agricultural gates" will serve Palestinian farmers whose lands are on the other side.

The project was born on November 2000, in the wake of the collapse of Labour's political project at Camp David, and a little more than a month after the second *intifadah* began. Prime minister Ehud Barak decided that, if the political borders between Israel and a Palestinian state could not be agreed upon, he would set them out unilaterally. Barak approved a plan to establish a linear barrier, roughly corresponding with the Green Line,



Plate 9.3 The West Bank Barrier, Tul Qarem Region. Photograph: Eyal Weizman, 2003.

composed of a series of ditches and dykes designed to prevent the passage of motor vehicles into Israel. Labour, propagating this idea of unilateral separation along a fortified line, has since lost two elections.

Ariel Sharon insisted – up until the day he appeared to have changed his mind – that “the idea [to build the barrier] is populist.” However, on April 14, 2002, two days before the battle for Jenin was concluded and with all other major Palestinian cities firmly in his hands (Graham, this volume), Sharon “surrendered” to the demands of the Labour ministers in his unity government, as well as to growing public pressures. Amid fear of suicide attacks carried out by infiltrators from the West Bank, and awareness that not a single attack had been carried out from fenced-off Gaza, Sharon demanded a “security fence” and announced the coalition government’s decision to establish the barrier.

If the direction and path of a line is the sum total of the force field of pressures that is applied to it, the barrier can offer the clearest diagram of the principle of political and social pressure molded into form. The path taken by the barrier line reflects a momentary balance of all the vectors of influences on it. As the path of the barrier “snakes” southwards, it goes through a process in which political pressures on either side of the proposed structure start echoing each other. In a principle of “positive feedback” these pressures generate ever more radical twists and turns, pushing the barrier ever deeper east of the Green Line into the occupied West Bank.

As the barrier neared their region, settlement councils started applying political pressure for the path to “loop around” and absorb them into the western (Israeli) “inside.” The settlers initially resisted the idea of a barrier that would cut off parts of the West Bank from Israel proper. But once they realized they could not stop its construction, they opted, instead, to try to influence its route. A particularly loud outcry came from the settlement of Alfei-Menashe – a relatively wealthy suburban community. In the first design for the northern path for the barrier, authorized in June 2002, this settlement was left “outside.” The local panic about being “abandoned,” mediated through right-wing ministers, managed to force a revision of the path and the stretching out of a long loop to incorporate the settlement back “inside.” As a result, the Palestinian towns of Qalqiliya and Habla, a few hundred meters apart as the crow flies, found themselves surrounded on all sides by the barrier’s extension, and the connection between them now stretched into a corridor 20 kilometers long.

The path of the barrier was complicated by another series of external influences. Following pressure by government ministers from religious parties, the path of the barrier was stretched a few hundred meters southwards to include an old archeological site believed to be the biblical-era tomb of Rachel. Ten other archeological sites, including one complete Egyptian city, were discovered during the digging works along another

part of the barrier and in some cases the path was changed to bring them back "inside." The desire to match the path of the barrier with subsurface interests meant the incorporation of the water extraction points of the mountain aquifer. The desire to serve Israel's aerial interests meant the appropriation of areas located below the landing paths of international flights.

It seems that the only consideration absent from the vectors of push and pull are those relating to the human rights and daily life of the Palestinian residents of the area. Along the whole length of the built and proposed paths, Palestinian villagers will be cut away from their farmland and water sources. The human rights organization B'tselem estimates that the barrier will negatively affect the livelihood of at least 210,000 Palestinians, and irreversibly damage the economic prospects of a Palestinian state (Lein, 2003).

The central phase of the barrier path, under planning and revision in late 2003, is more strategically and politically sensitive than the built-up northern part. In this phase the barrier is supposed to mediate through the densely populated regions close to the metropolitan region of Tel Aviv. There the largest numbers of settlers are located, built densities are high, and settlement real estate is relatively expensive. Israeli per-capita gross domestic product (GDP) is twenty times larger than that of Palestinians; the economic disparity between the two groups is higher than between any two other neighboring populations worldwide. In the central region, where upper-middle class suburbs crowd against impoverished villages, the economic contrast is even more extreme. It was construction in that zone that generated international public attention. European leaders demanded cancellation of the project. Tony Blair proposed delaying it. And American officials proposed physical reroutings of the map, and even reduced loan guarantees as a penalty for the barrier's construction.

Temporary Permanence

The Israeli government maintains that the principle that guides the path of the barrier involves "temporary and urgent security considerations," not political ones. They also insist that the barrier is not and will not become a permanent border. Barriers are indeed different to borders in that they do not separate an "inside" and an "outside" of a sovereignty-based political and legal system, but merely act as contingency apparatuses to prohibit movement across a territory. Throughout Israeli history, though, the state has always preferred to use temporary security arrangements as a way to create permanent political "facts on the ground." The claim for the "temporariness" of the barrier means that it must be seen as an instrument

of contingency in a temporary state of emergency (Agamben, 2002). But it is precisely the transient nature of Israeli unilateral actions across the frontier of the West Bank that renders them most effective in terms of the occupation. The occupation perpetuates itself through ever-new seemingly "temporary" facts on the ground. It is the "temporality" of conflict that allows the occupation to continue permanently (Azoulay and Ophir, 2002).

Islands

"The more forces there are in the vicinity of a line, the more complex is its path." With these words the modernist painter Wassily Kandinsky set the basis for the formal organization of lines across a canvas in his book *Points and Line to Plane*. "When the force field around a line contains intense contradictions, the line can no longer maintain its graphic coherence and shreds into fragments and discontinuous vectors."

Ariel Sharon recently made public his intention to extend the barrier from being only in front (west) of Palestinian-populated areas of the West Bank to being also behind (east) of them and run through the Jordan valley; thus fully encircling and completely surrounding the Palestinian areas. Under this outline, more than half of the total territory of the West Bank will remain under Israeli control – namely, the two strategic north/south strips of the Jordan valley in the east and the meandering strip next to the Green Line in the west. They would be connected via Jerusalem and other east-west arteries. The resulting layout will repeat almost exactly the "H" pattern envisaged in Sharon's 1982 plan. Instead of a promise for separation embodied within this border-like device, the barrier will complete a project of containment. Not only will the Palestinians be surrounded on the surface of the land, but Sharon will keep effective sovereignty on the mountain aquifer below their feet and on the airspace above their heads. Thus, Israeli control will wrap the Palestinians figuratively and physically from all directions.

The Palestinian state will effectively become a series of landlocked territorial islands, completely surrounded lest they expand, within a Zionist body politic that will cover all the territory between the Mediterranean and the Jordan river. The archipelago of isolated territories around the Palestinian cities that remain, initially under IDF control, will gradually turn into what will become the "Palestinian state within its temporary borders" – the one the current peace process states as its objective. The Green Line, which the Palestinian government would like to see as its border with Israel, is 350 kilometers long, but the total length of barriers projected to be constructed between Israel and the Palestinians stretches to more than 1,200 kilometers.

In this geographic arrangement, the Palestinians are simultaneously inside and outside. They are landlocked inside a complete territorial envelopment, without any border save the very long and fragmented one to Israel. But – recalling the apartheid-era South African Bantustans – they are also outside the Israeli state system.

Enclaves/Exclaves

Within both Israeli and Palestinian parts of the West Bank, there will be islands or enclaves belonging to the other zone. A few hundred thousands Palestinians will be left within the Israeli side, while almost the same number of Israelis, in remote settlements and military installations, will remain in pockets of “special security zones” within the Palestinian areas.

To protect these settlements and reassure their inhabitants, a sequence of fortifications identical to those composing the primary barrier is being laid out in enclosed circuits around them. The barrier thus ceases to be a single continuous line: like splintered worms taking on renewed life, it has started curling around isolated settlements and along the roads connecting them.

This is a condition of double enclosure. Settlements are fenced in for self-protection while Palestinian towns are enclosed from outside to prohibit “security threats” from leaking out. With this arrangement, the traditional perception of political space as a contiguous territorial surface, clearly delimited by continuous borders, is no longer relevant. If the relation between the length of a border and the surface of the territory is an indication of the amount of “security” present, then the folds of the barrier line and its separate shreds place “security” measures deep throughout the terrain. In a process that is analogous to the way in which the fjords, islands, and lakes along the Norwegian coast create a whole zone across which water meets rock, the barrier’s folds and twists create an ever-present high-friction zone where civilian populations are pressed against “security” apparatuses.

With this fragmented geography in mind, Sharon has finally merged the two extremes that defined Israel’s relation to its edge. Trying to articulate defense in depth with a line, he has simultaneously created the line of a “border” and the deep conflict space of the “frontier.” The paradox in the fact that it is finally Ariel Sharon that set the borders of the state can thus be resolved. The barrier is not a defeat of his geostrategy, based on the historical rejection of the setting of a permanent border. For in its convoluted path, the one inscribed in the logic of his strategic thinking, the barrier is the direct and logical consequence of his free frontier mentality, which seeks to blur the borders of the state, rather than fix them.

The territorial concessions embedded in the “road map” plan are based on nothing but an acknowledgment of the Palestinian demographic advantage. Sharon is aware that, considering current population growth, there will be a Palestinian majority in the combined territories of Israel/Palestine by 2020. He has thus acted to cut out the Palestinian demographic centers from the legal and effective responsibility of the Israeli state. However, the consolidation of lines so convoluted and discontinuous into such expensive material presence will not end the occupation. Rather, they will offer the means to indirectly consolidate occupation. Israel will go on being a borderless society, left in a perpetual state of fermentation and uncertainty in its identity, with the inconsistent behavior and self-destructive impulses that define its own “borderline disorder” (Efrat, 2002).

A Political Volume

When the barrier is completed, and the temporary–permanent security measures outline the border of a permanent “Palestinian state in temporary borders” scattered on landlocked sovereign islands, yet another territorial paradox will have to be resolved. The fragmentation of jurisdiction across the surface will not be compatible with Sharon’s public pledges that – with the implementation of the “road map” – he will carve out a “contiguous area of territory in the West Bank that would allow the Palestinians to travel from Jenin [the northernmost city in the West Bank] to Hebron [the southernmost] without passing any Israeli roadblocks.”

When Sharon announced this, bewildered reporters objected, and pointed out that the proposed path of the barrier will enclose these cities and set them apart in separate territorial envelopment. Asked how the contradiction between contiguity and fragmentation could be resolved, Sharon responded, probably with one of his famous winks, that this will be accomplished by “a combination of tunnels and bridges.” This type of “continuity” was first realized by Sharon in 1996. As minister of national infrastructure under Benjamin Netanyahu, he inaugurated the first apparatus of vertical separation – the “tunnel road” – which demonstrated that continuity, and separation, could be achieved not on the surface but in volume.

The tunnel road connects Jerusalem with the southern settlements of Gush Etzion and further, with the Jewish neighborhoods of Hebron. To accomplish this it performs a double contortion: spanning, as a bridge, a Palestinian cultivated valley, and then diving into a tunnel under a Palestinian suburb of Bethlehem.

The Israeli writer Meron Benvenisti describes the road as the crashing of three dimensions into six: three Israeli and three Palestinian. Both the

valley that the road spans and the city it dives under are, according to the Oslo agreement, areas under limited Palestinian sovereignty. Thus the physical separation of traffic arrangements is mirrored by a political one – the city above is under Palestinian limited sovereignty while the road below it is under full Israeli sovereignty. By introducing the vertical dimension, in similar schemes of over- and under-passes, linkage could be achieved between the different territorial islands.

The last territorial paradox of the frontier could thus be resolved. Israeli/Palestinian roads and infrastructure would connect settlements/Palestinian towns while they span over or under Palestinian/Israeli lands. Consequently, and hand-in-hand with the planned completion of the barrier, plans are under way to transform Route 60 – the main north-south traffic artery connecting all major Palestinian cities – into an elevated construction placed on stilts allowing for Israeli east-west routes (those making the H plan) to pass undisturbed underneath it. At the point where these roads cross, sovereignty will be divided along the up/down axis of the vertical dimension.

In the West Bank, bridges are no longer merely devices engineered to overcome natural boundaries or connect impossible points. Rather, they become the boundary itself. Indeed, a new way of imagining territory has been developed for the West Bank. The region is no longer seen as a two-dimensional surface of a single territory, but as a large “hollow” three-dimensional surface, within which the West Bank can be physically partitioned into two separate but overlapping national geographies. Within this volume, separate security corridors, infrastructure, over-ground bridges and underground tunnels are woven into an Escher-like space.

With the technologies and infrastructure required for the physical segregation of Israelis from Palestinians along complex volumetric borders, it seems as if this most complex geopolitical problem of the Middle East has gone through a scale-shift and taken on architectural dimensions. The West Bank appears to have been reassembled in the shape of a complex building with its closed-off enclaves as walled spaces and its bypasses as exclusive security corridors. The barrier is but the surface component in an occupation that will continue underneath and above the surface – in the effective Israeli control of the water aquifers under Palestinian areas and in Israeli sovereignty over the airways and electromagnetic fields that will allow constant Israeli air force control above the territory. The volumetric technologies of separation might well be geometrically creative and “interesting” in planning terms. But, in essence, they are the very familiar and traditional, absolute and hermetic borders, here disguised within the Trojan horse of spatial radicalism.

The attempt to imagine a spatial-technical design solution to the conflict – one based on different paths of partition achieved by barriers, tunnels,

and bridges – has thus reached its most extreme and dystopian logical conclusion and end result. This conclusion is too complex to offer security (unless the entire resources of the state are constantly drafted to maintain and service its length). It is too intrusive and aggressive to offer the appearance of a just solution. And it is too expensive to be economically viable in the long run.

Could the politics of borders and partition be replaced by a more viable alternative – based on inclusion, democracy, and human rights?

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TOWARDS AN URBAN GEOPOLITICS

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