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Occupied intimacies: Borderisation in Palestine, Georgia and Western Sahara

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ABSTRACT: In this article we explore and compare three different cases of military occupation: the Israeli occupation of Palestine; the Moroccan occupation of Western Sahara; and the Russian occupation of Georgian South Ossetia. Building on ethnographic fieldworks carried out in 2022 and 2023, we show that these contemporary military occupations manifest themselves as evolving processes of dominance which extend beyond direct military force and violence and into the intimate social relationships of their subjects. Control is exercised through multiple acts of 'borderisation', which causes separation and rupture by placing people on different sides of physical and bureaucratic borders. This, we demonstrate, effectively disrupts occupied peoples' ability to do family. Being unable to take your elderly relative to a doctor's appointment or to visit the grave of your deceased brother are not only practical obstacles, but they also have moral and existential implications. The disruption of kinship practices should therefore not be taken lightly. Rather, this is revealed as a core mode of domination and control, which threatens intimate aspects of life. Ultimately, the effects of this go beyond individual tragedies and unfulfilled kinship obligations. As the occupations become protracted, social divisions as well as cultural transformations are cemented.

Keywords: military occupation; kinship; family; borders

Introduction

In this article, we explore how contemporary occupations manifest themselves in the everyday lives and intimate social relations of occupied people. Studies within political anthropology have been concerned with new forms of sovereignty, political conflict, and modes of domination appearing in post-colonial settings after the cold war (see e.g. Comaroff and Comaroff 2006; Dunn and Bobick 2014; Yurchak 2014). Wars have increasingly become hybrid configurations of state and non-state actors employing a multiplicity of strategies and tactics and are intimately linked to the globalised political economy. In today's conflicts, the lines between war, organised crime, and human rights violations are more and more blurred, and international laws often fall short (Nordstrom 2004; Sausdal and Vigh 2019).

Below, we build on these general insights and show that such hybrid complexities of dominance and legality also characterise contemporary military occupations. They are particular kinds of political conflicts, with specific consequences for daily life. Their protracted and politicised nature requires us to move beyond conventional understandings of military

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occupations as states of exception and rethink them as dynamic and ongoing processes.

The three examples of such on-going occupations we focus on here – the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories, the Moroccan occupation of Western Sahara, and the Russian occupation of the Georgian territory of South Ossetia – go back to 1967, 1975 and 2008 respectively. In and around all three territories, people are placed in prolonged states of liminality. Dominance is exercised through a complex of tactics and strategies that seek to legitimise and consolidate the occupation through the creation and recreation of physical, bureaucratic, and symbolic borders and boundaries. We conceptualise this as a continuous process of borderisation. This analytical lens allows for a dynamic understanding of how, concretely, contemporary occupations affect and direct people's daily lives and their possibilities to form and maintain intimate relations. Importantly, these relations are not limited to the occupied territories but extend to social spaces beyond these, such as displaced and borderland communities. In this sense, the occupation operates beyond the area under military control.

The context of contemporary occupations presents methodological challenges for anthropologists working primarily through on-site fieldwork. Challenges include difficulty accessing occupied areas, security concerns of both researcher and interlocutors, and politically sensitive as well as traumatic topics of conversation.[1] In the case of Western Sahara, fieldwork was carried out during one month in the Sahrawi refugee camps in Algeria as Padrón Hernández was deported when trying to enter Moroccan-controlled Western Sahara. Interviews were also conducted with Sahrawis in Morocco, Spain, and Sweden. In the latter cases, interlocutors were either living in the diaspora or on a temporary visit abroad from Moroccan-controlled Western Sahara. In the case of Georgia, Gotfredsen carried out fieldwork for four months in villages in the borderlands between Russian- and Tbilisi-controlled territory and in IDP settlements among Georgians displaced from South Ossetia, since the security situation was too uncertain within areas controlled by Russia. When it comes to Palestine, Gren was the only researcher in this project able to enter occupied territories. Fieldwork was conducted during three months in and around East Jerusalem, Ramallah, and Bethlehem. This was, however, a period of political unrest with many Palestinians killed and arrested as well as clashes between Palestinian militia and the Israeli army. Travelling through the West Bank was complicated and risky due to closed checkpoints, army sieges, and Palestinian national mourning days.

In sum, while some interlocutors were living in occupied territory, others had been displaced or found themselves in militarised borderlands. Making their relational spaces the object of study shows that the effects of occupation extend beyond the territory under military control. Regardless of where they resided, our interlocutors and their families were all affected by occupation.

This article proceeds as follows. First, we provide some background on military occupation as a concept as well as the history of border regimes in our three cases. The following section introduces our analytical framework, building on scholarly work on borderlands, borderisation, and kinship. We discuss borderisation as an aspect of military occupation, connecting it to how we see borders, boundaries, and borderlands, in relation to

[1] All personal names have been changed to pseudonyms. Often, we have avoided or changed details in the interlocutors' stories so as to protect their integrity. Difficult topics such as disappeared family members were approached in a sensitive manner, letting the interlocutors decide what they wanted to tell us.

contemporary anthropological understandings of kinship as relational and situational. Then we discuss and exemplify how physical and material aspects of 'borders' have influenced our interlocutors' abilities to do family. After that comes a section on how borderisation is upheld with administration and the issuing of documents. Next, we give examples of the symbolic workings of borderisation, and show how our interlocutors, with limited agency, attempt to resist and contest borderisation in symbolic and performative ways. Finally, we summarise our findings and draw conclusions.

Background: Three cases of military occupation

In legal terms, occupation has been defined as territory placed under the authority of a hostile army. It is assumed to be a temporary state related to war or change of governance and limited to the physical territory that is under foreign military rule (Hague IV, art 42). However, to explain what occupation 'does' in social and cultural terms to the affected communities, we go beyond this legal definition (see e.g. Visweswaran 2013:15). Firstly, the temporary aspect of occupation is contradicted by the fact that several contemporary military occupations seem permanent. Secondly, and as mentioned, the effects of the occupation extend beyond the physical territory under military control. Lastly, military occupation is not only a legal issue but a highly political one (Bhan and Duschinski 2020). The protracted occupations are often disputed and depending on position and political views, a situation might be seen as 'occupation', 'invasion', 'administration', 'liberation' or 'special military operation', for instance.

Each of our cases represents a disputed territory under long-term military occupation with several similarities and differences. They have different colonial and imperial histories, commenced at different historical times. Their natures are highly politicised, and the international community judge the legality of their practices differently. However, despite differences at the macro level, our ethnographic material shows that in each case, the occupying regimes shape practices and create new patterns related to kinship and intimate relationships in similar ways.

Our three cases indicate that far from belonging to the past, colonialism and imperialism are very much alive. Both Palestine and Western Sahara are former European colonies that never achieved self-determination. Palestine went from British colony to Israeli settler colonialism and occupation while Western Sahara went from Spanish colony to Moroccan settler colonialism and occupation.[2] Both feature a history of resistance and a contemporary struggle for self-determination. They also share failed attempts at establishing independence with the help of the international community and law.

The territory of South Ossetia, on the other hand, has an imperialist history. It was initially created as an administrative unit under the Russian Empire and later turned into an Autonomous Oblast within the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic. As the Soviet Union disintegrated and Georgia sought independence, nationalist claims caused tensions. Georgia declared independence from the Soviet Union in 1990, prompting South Ossetia to make a counter-declaration of independence from Georgia (de Waal 2010: 139). To this day, South Ossetia defines itself as an independent polity while relying heavily on Russian support.

[2] See Padrón Hernández (2025) for an exploration of Western Sahara as a settler colony and Wolfe (2006), among others, for an exploration of the Israeli settler colonial project.

Since the 2008 war between Russia and Georgia, this support includes direct control of the *de-facto* but unrecognised border separating South Ossetia from Georgia. Georgia and an overwhelming majority of the international community considers this as illegal under international law and recognises South Ossetia and Abkhazia as being occupied by Russia, condemning its military presence there.

Since we focus on borderisation and its implications, a closer look at the border situations in our three cases is warranted. The term borderisation derives from the Georgian context, where it was first used by the European Monitoring Mission, to describe the situation in the South Ossetian and Abkhazian borderlands, after the 2008 Russo-Georgian war. It refers to the Russian installation of fences, concertina wire, and signposts, indicating an international state border. Through these material manifestations, a previously invisible and 'elastic' administrative boundary line (ABL), allowing people to move back and forth between the territories, became a visible and rigid de facto (if unrecognised) border (Boyle 2016). Borderisation has been accompanied by what Georgians refer to as "creeping occupation" – step by step, fences and barbed wire have been moved further into Georgian land, seizing more territory (Toal and Merabishvili 2019). For those displaced by the war, as well as those living in the borderlands, borderisation means restricted movement that separate displaced families and borderland village communities from places and people inside the occupied territory (Larsen 2017). While the landscape around the occupied territory is punctuated by material installations, large stretches of the ABL remain unmarked or only indicated by dirt piles or unfarmed land. For villagers living in the borderlands of Georgian-controlled territory, this causes uncertainty and fear of accidently crossing the invisible parts of the line while working their land or herding. There are regular instances of locals being arrested, beaten, and detained by Russian border patrols, and numerous reports of people being 'kidnapped' from the Georgian side (Gotfredsen 2024; Otruba 2019; Brun 2019).

In the case of Western Sahara, Morocco built a wall in the 1980s, converting the flowing fronts of war into a de facto border between two territories. This wall consists of a long, heavily mined sand berm with military outposts, covering part of the contested border. To this day, it separates the two thirds of Western Sahara controlled by Morocco from the one third controlled by the Sahrawi liberation movement POLISARIO.

The history of borders in the Sahara Desert is complex. Deubel (2012: 296) points at the "persistent ambiguity" that has characterised the region with unclear borders during the colonial period. Depending on the political and military situation, the borders of Western Sahara have changed, at times being stricter and at other times being more porous. Similarly, the borderlands are more or less dangerous, depending on the intensity of military activity. As we will see below, borders between Moroccan-controlled and POLISARIO-controlled Western Sahara were very strict during the first war (1975-1991) while the truce and the political process of carrying out a referendum as well as new technologies of communication (see e.g. Boulay 2016; Deubel 2012; Almenara 2022) made cross-border contact easier during the 1990s and beyond. However, there is no linear development from rigidity to easing. In 2021, there was a return to arms which made the POLISARIO-controlled part of Western Sahara dangerous to inhabit and traverse. This part of Western Sahara used to be inhabited by nomads and their herds and utilised as a route between the refugee camps in Algeria and neighbouring Mauritania where Sahrawis also live. However, during Padrón Hernández's fieldwork it was a dangerous place where humans as well as livestock

and vehicles became victims of Moroccan military drones. This restricted cross-border face-to-face contact, and forced families residing there to flee to the refugee camps in Algeria.

Even if the issue of borders as well as the ways in which Sahrawis have managed cross-border migration have varied (see e.g. Boulany 2016; Reis 2023; Wilson 2017), this article focuses on the effects of the shift from the strict war-time borders to the cautious easing up of borders post-1991.

Like the other two cases, Palestine also features borders that have changed in nature over time and space. The first Israeli-Arab war in 1948 physically divided the British Mandate of Palestine into Israel, Gaza, and the West Bank, divisions that were segmented by Israeli occupation. Since 1948, the borders have at times been rigid, at others more fluid (Gren 2007). Compared with today's situation, it was relatively easy to cross and interact over borders after the occupation in 1967, opening for work, trade, and social relations (Bornstein 2002).

However, in the 1990s, Israel initiated a system of military checkpoints, restricting Palestinian mobility, and in 2003 Israel started to build a controversial wall, further preventing movement. This wall has never been finished and there are still some places where Palestinians cross into Israel from the West Bank without having ID cards and permits checked, as Gren observed in 2023. Land confiscations, firing zones, roadblocks, and growing Israeli settlements, as well as the roads connecting these, also separate Palestinian villages, towns, and governorates from one another. The different intensities of military activities and settler violence make these borderlands uncertain and dangerous to navigate.

In Gaza, the border situation is different. Since 2005, there are no longer any Israeli settlements and checkpoints inside Gaza, but the Strip has been under siege since 2007 when Israel and Egypt closed the entry points. Gaza has been called the 'world's largest outdoor prison' since Gazans are locked in by walls, fences, checkpoints, and military surveillance. Combined with the intense military attacks by Israel, starting in late 2023, the sealed borders have created a situation that is genocidal. At the time of writing, there is a growing risk that Israeli troops will remain present in Gaza in what is called a 're-occupation', and possibly also annex the West Bank.

Common to our three cases are periods of war and flight, as well as the establishment and continuous enactment of physical, bureaucratic, and symbolic borders. Many Georgians, Palestinians, and Sahrawis have been displaced due to extensive violence and ethnic cleansing. Many remain in refugee camps separated from their original homes and from family members living on the other side of a 'border'. In all three cases, dominance is exercised through a complex of tactics and strategies that continuously seek to legitimise and consolidate the occupation (Calis 2017). The creation and recreation of borders and boundaries is one way in which this is done. These de facto borders are militarised, fluctuating, and often ambiguous, which calls for conceptualising them in a processual way as border*isation*. Because they feature decades-long disputes, the nature of these borders shifts over time, creating arbitrarily violent places. Sometimes, these border regimes divide and fragment social life, while in other situations, relations can be maintained and/or re-created. Before illustrating this through our ethnographic material, we develop our analytical framework regarding borders and kinship.

Borderisation, borderlands and kinship

In our analysis of the effects of borderisation, we focus on the installation of material barriers, de facto state borders, and similar restrictions on physical movement as outlined above. However, we also take borderisation to include the social taxonomies, bureaucratic categories, and administrative practices that (strategically or arbitrarily) place people differently in relation to borders (e.g. Tawil-Souri 2011; Isidoros 2018). Moreover, we exemplify how borderisation consists of symbolic and performative acts that are often resisted symbolically and performatively, despite limited possibilities to act. In sum, as an analytical lens, borderisation draws attention to multiple processes of boundary making that structure movement and geography, but also social relationships and cultural practices, in and around occupied territories. These practices of boundary making, we suggest, are central to the occupying forces' ongoing efforts to legitimise and consolidate control beyond its military presence.

Our conceptualisation draws on insights developed in the anthropology of borders and borderlands in recent years. As a term, borderland directs our attention to friction, difference, and processual boundary making (e.g. Alvarez 1995; Donnan and Wilson 2010). Borderlands are spaces of ambiguity, negotiation, and contestation, with interlinkages across and between entities. Several ethnographies have shown how these properties and practices of borderlands crystallise in contested spaces and militarised conflict zones (see e.g. Ticktin 2022; Navarro-Yashin 2012; Weitzel 2022; Bornstein 2008; Cons 2016). This scholarship on borders and border-making shows us that borders are not fixed, natural containers of national territories. Rather, it demonstrates that establishing, circumventing, and/or confirming bounded sovereign entities, require state officials and ordinary people alike to engage in extensive "border work" (Reeves 2014). Some border work is done through documentary practices within 'violent' bureaucracies when occupied people apply for ID cards and permits, for instance (cf. Abdelhady et al. 2020; Drybread 2016). Identity documents are techniques of governance although inherently unstable and possible to manipulate, as Kelly notes (2006: 91). In that sense, borderlands are everywhere central to the making of the state, and to affirming and negotiating its territorial integrity (Das and Poole 2004; Hansen and Stepputat 2001). Cons (2016: 7) proposes that we conceptualise borderlands as "sensitive spaces", characterised by overlapping claims to sovereignty, and illustrative of "the anxieties, uncertainties and ambiguities undergirding territorial rule". Sensitive spaces, argue Dunn and Cons (2014), produce incomplete and unstable rule, which in turn, generate "burdened agency" as people navigate and make decisions in fundamentally unpredictable terrains.

We take occupied territories to assume similar qualities, and investigate them as highly militarised sensitive spaces illustrative of anxious and ambiguous rule (Calis 2017). Further, we propose seeing borderisation in its multidimensional aspects as an analytical extension of the spatial dimensions discussed by the scholars mentioned above. We use the term to flesh out the multi-layered ways in which contemporary occupations manifest themselves in the everyday lives of their subjects and their relations of family and kin.

Contemporary studies of kinship within anthropology conceptualise family and kin relations as processual, as created and constituted through practices of "relating" (Carsten 2004) and "kinning" (Howell 2003). Rather than being merely biological, kin and family are 'done' through continuous practices of care; through mutual acknowledgement of rights and obligations; through participation in rituals; and through sharing day-to-day

experiences and spaces (Drotbom and Alber 2015). These ongoing practices extend beyond the living to the deceased, as well as the not yet born, to ensure continuity across generations (Tsintjilonis 2004). However, since kinship is not given but done, it can also be undone. Processes of kinning are, in other words, always negotiable and selective. Abram and Lien (2023: 2) propose the concept of "de-kinning" to underline that kin relations can be dissolved, undermined, or denounced. When it comes to our interlocutors' experiences, such de-kinning can both be actively attempted (to gain identity papers, for instance), and a regretful unmaking of family due to migration, separation, bureaucracy, or violence.

The violence many of our interlocutors have experienced tends to question what is taken-for-granted in social life (Das 2007). The remaking of social relations in violent settings often comes through a repetition of quotidian routines and the upholding of obligations (Gren 2015). However, violence also brings ruptures that are impossible or difficult to mend (Segal 2016).

Recent studies of kinship have shown that in cases of cross border migration, the ways in which kinship is practiced, performed, and imagined are deeply entangled with state politics (Andrikopoulos and Duyvendak 2020; Declich 2020). The ability to legally move across borders as well as to re-settle is dependent on documented descent and origin. This is based on an idea of "kinship-as-being", fixed to national soil through ancestral roots and sedentarism (Malkki 1992). Contrary to this idea, migratory contexts demonstrate "kinship-as-doing" as people connect to new people and places, reworking categories, and imagining future ties (Carsten 2020). Doing family often depends on the ability to move between places and people (Aydemir 2021; Gotfredsen 2024). Empirically, we illuminate what happens to the doing of kinship when such movement is severely constrained by borderisation and unpredictable, militarised, 'sensitive' terrains.

Separation and disruption: Physical barriers and administrative categories

As outlined above, doing kinship requires shared practices, and often also shared spaces. Our cases feature the installation of 'hard' borders as means to separate different territories and restrict or completely prevent movement between them.

In the Sahrawi case, the war-years of 1975-1991 meant a total separation between Sahrawis in refugee camps in Algeria and those in Moroccan-controlled Western Sahara respectively. One consequence of this was the inability to properly do so-called 'milk kinship'. Milk kinship is common in the Middle East and North Africa, and creates kinship ties that run parallel with blood lines. This type of kinship is made when a woman breastfeeds a child she has not given birth to. Breastfeeding makes her the milk mother of this child and creates incest taboos as if they were her biological child. It does not, however, affect inheritance or property rights. In Sahrawi society the decision to create this tie lies in the hands of women. Looking specifically at milk sons, Isidoros (2017) argues that it is a way for women to expand their networks of support and solidarity in a society where women traditionally had little contact with their sons-in-law.

Isidoros (2017) describes the combined incest taboos of blood and milk as "extremely complicated" and they heavily narrow down the people a specific individual can marry. To know about your milk relations and the incest taboos created by these ties, you need access to information provided by your older relatives (and specifically your biological mother). While blood kinship is carried with you in your family name, milk kinship requires learning

about your kinship ties from older relatives. For many Sahrawis, this was made impossible when families and kin groups were separated during the war. However, as things changed and people as well as information started travelling from one side of the wall to the other, knowledge of milk kinship resurfaced with devastating consequences for some marriages.

During fieldwork Padrón Hernández heard an anecdote that had the feel of an urban legend and was told as a funny story:

> Two male friends in the camps were in the final preparations for their weddings and they were very happy. This was in 1996 or 1997 and people started fleeing to the camps [from Moroccan-controlled Western Sahara]. A person that came was a family member of one of the men and was horrified when he found out who he was about to marry: "Don't you know you are related by milk?". The wedding was called off and the heartbroken man went to his friend to complain. "Quick!", the friend responded, "Let's finalise my wedding before someone comes from the occupied areas and tells me something I did not know!".

Other, more serious, stories were told about married couples with or without children who were forced to divorce when someone came from the occupied territories and revealed they were related by milk.

The people involved in these stories were unable to do kinship correctly. Firstly, they were unable to fulfil their obligations of solidarity, care and filial duty towards their milk kin due to lack of knowledge about the kinship. Secondly, they were unable to follow the incest taboos created by milk kinship, forming marriages that were against proper kinship structures. Thirdly, they had to undo these incestuous kinship ties and, in some cases, handle the delicate issue of their children's place in the kinship structure.

Today, milk kinship is practised both in the Moroccan-controlled areas and in the refugee camps in Algeria. The separation between Sahrawis living on different sides of the wall has become both more porous and more rigid than ever because of modern technology. On the one hand, smartphones allow people on both sides of the wall to communicate. On the other hand, Moroccan drones patrolling a wide area around the border have made physical movement more dangerous than ever. Women cannot create milk ties without physical access to babies. In that sense, the separation between the areas is consolidated as new generations are born. They will have access to their parents and full knowledge of their milk relations, but they will not have access to potential milk kin on the other side of the wall. Milk kinship thus lives on but cannot reach beyond the physical limitations set up by the occupation.

The separation and rupturing effects produced by the construction of 'hard' borders also extend themselves to traditional practices and obligations towards dead kin and in the afterlife (see Tsintjilonis 2004). In all three cases, years of separation meant that people lived through decades of not knowing about the life or death of husbands, wives, and other relatives. This made it impossible for people to do kinship in the 'proper' ways. For instance, not knowing if you are a widow or not leaves you in a social, moral, and spiritual limbo. It becomes impossible to either re-marry or to 'properly' pray for a husband who might be deceased. It can be equally disturbing to be unable to bury and mourn those relatives that one knows are in fact dead. As noted by Engelke (2019: 33): "No dead are more dangerous and disturbing than those unsettled. […] cheated proper rites of burial and commemoration" (see also Levine 2010).[3]

[3] Hertz (1960 [1907]) uses the concept of "bad deaths" to talk about situations in which survivors cannot perform appropriate rituals of disposal and mourning. Performed correctly, funeral rites are means of conquering death and asserting social continuity and preventing a disrupted social order.

During fieldwork in the IDP settlement Tserovani, populated by people displaced from South Ossetia during the 2008 war between Russia and Georgia, Gotfredsen visited a middle-aged woman called Nino. As many others in the settlement, Nino had been displaced from Akhalgori municipality, now under Russian control. Nino's mother was one of those – predominantly elderly – Georgians who had remained in the town even after Russian take-over. Nino and her family had tried to convince her mother to move to Tserovani years ago, but she had refused. She wanted to remain in the house where she had lived her entire adult life with her late husband and where she had brought up her children, and she refused to leave the graves of her husband and son.

Talking about her mother's death one year earlier, Nino explained:

> Now when the roads were closed, my mother got covid-19. My mother did not tell us that she had the virus. When we finally took her out of Akhalgori she died within three days. We were not allowed to bring her here until her health condition became very serious. When her condition worsened, she was taken out by ambulance, and on the Georgian side a Georgian ambulance took her. We buried my mother in Kanda, but she was against it because my brother is buried in Akhalgori. She even made a grave for herself in Akhalgori, next to my father, but we weren't able to take her there.

The death and burial of Nino's mother away from her home is another example of kinship ties ruptured by borderisation and it illustrates concerns connected to upholding proper relations with dead kin. Many Georgians think of the afterlife as a mirror world of the living, sharing similar social and geographic features. This means that being buried in the same geographical place as one's kin ensures that the dead receive the newly deceased in the afterlife. If buried in the right place, the afterlife is a familiar social world, a place populated by those relatives and other important relations who have already passed away. Similarly, if buried in a different geographical location, the dead risk ending up in a lonely and unfamiliar place in the afterlife where no one knows them, and they know no one (see Dunn 2017: 188-189). This is the backdrop to Nino's distress with burying her mother out of place – separated from her late husband and son. However, the alternative, her mother being "alone in Akhalgori" without living relatives to care for her was equally or even more disturbing to Nino. Regularly bringing food and wine to the grave of a loved one is seen as connecting worlds as the living share food and drink with ancestors, who have their own feast in the parallel world. It is an obligation of the living family to ease the afterlife of the dead person, ensuring connection and exchange between generations. Had Nino's mother been buried in the family grave inside South Ossetia, none of her living kin would have been able to care for her and for the connections between generations and worlds. Russian borderisation is thus undoing the social and spatial connections between the world of the living and the world of the dead. It disrupts practices and continuities, but it also inserts uncertainties and worries about how future deaths will be handled.

In the Palestinian case too, family members are effectively separated from one another by physical barriers such as roadblocks, checkpoints, military areas, and 'the wall'. The Israeli border police and army uphold these physical aspects of borderisation by stopping Palestinians to check their ID cards and permits in a routinised manner (Calis 2017). Borderisation is in this case intertwined with bureaucratic categories and permits, creating a complex ID card regime (Hastings 2023; Tawil-Souri 2011), which extends beyond Israel 'proper' and its citizens to include all people and territories under Israeli rule. One effect of

this regime is the obstruction of traditional settlement patterns and the kin obligations that follow with 'living close' to your patrilineal kin.

Gren interviewed a young man, Amir, who had grown up in Jerusalem, close to his maternal grandparents, which was an anomaly since Palestinian society is normally patrilocal. Amir's father came from the West Bank and part of his patrilineal extended family still lived there. However, Amir's close family resided matrilocally in Jerusalem so as to get the advantages of being residents of Jerusalem and holders of Jerusalem ID cards.[4] If his mother would have left Jerusalem for the West Bank, she would also have risked her right to the city where she was born and raised. Journeys to the father's West Bank village were possible, but a hassle since the roads were bad and Amir and his family needed to pass several Israeli checkpoints and settlements. Although being able to visit his father's village at times, Amir explained that he often felt like a stranger since he never lived there. He was also frustrated that he could not care for his aging paternal aunt as he would have wanted. The aunt could not come to visit Amir's family in Jerusalem both because of her deteriorating health and the difficulties obtaining a permit to visit Jerusalem as a West Banker. In this case, borderisation jeopardises belonging to both people and place and the obligations that come with doing family. It enforces social transformation against the will of occupied Palestinians.

Until now, we have focused on physical borders and barriers, and their consequences for family relations. We will now turn to how these physical borders are made 'hard' or 'porous' through the construction, manipulation, and navigation of bureaucratic categories.

Kinning and de-kinning: Navigating bureaucratic categories and permits

The case of Amir shows how the ID card regime separates Palestinians by restricting their freedom of movement in different ways. Another consequence of the ID card regime is the difficulties faced by Palestinian married couples with different ID cards. These couples have to live apart during long bureaucratic processes of 'family unification' to eventually reside together as a family in annexed Jerusalem or other places inside Israel. The Israeli authorities oversee this bureaucratic process, and Israeli legal frameworks and procedures apply. In 2002, during the second uprising (i.e. *Al Aqsa Intifada*), Israel banned all family unification applications between Israeli Palestinian citizens, as well as Jerusalem ID card holders, and their Palestinian partners from the occupied territories. This decision was justified by security concerns after an individual who had obtained their residency in Israel, thanks to family unification, carried out a suicide bombing. The ban meant that one of Gren's interlocutors, a middle-aged man called Marwan, lived separated from his wife and children for several years while waiting for the bureaucratic process related to his application for family unification to be resumed after the ban. Marwan is from the West Bank, while his wife and children are Jerusalemites. In 2021, after waiting for family unification during

[4] Palestinians residing in Jerusalem have been issued Jerusalem ID cards that give them rights to vote in municipal elections as well as work and live in Jerusalem, although they do not hold full Israeli citizenship. Palestinians with Israeli citizenship have (on paper) full political and social rights in Israel proper. Palestinians in the West Bank or Gaza do not have any rights inside Israel and, 'legally,' they can only visit, work, or access health care in Jerusalem and Israel by obtaining special permits. Neither are Palestinians free to move between Gaza and the West Bank without the consent of Israel. The advantages that come with Israeli citizenship and Jerusalem ID cards bestow a higher status than the ID cards of West Bankers and Gazans. This establishes a hierarchy between Palestinians.

20 years of marriage, Marwan finally received a temporary residence permit in Jerusalem so he could live with his family. When Gren interviewed him, Marwan explained that he was cautious not to visit his West Bank relatives 'too often', following the advice of his lawyer. Marwan needed to prove to the Israeli authorities that his life was indeed in Jerusalem since he soon had to renew his residence permit and feared a rejection.

Applying for family unification opens you up for scrutiny and makes you vulnerable to the judgement of the occupying power. For Marwan, this meant less interaction with his relatives residing in the West Bank.

Similarly, some Palestinians in similar situations to Marwan's had reportedly been warned by the Israeli security police to not attend family events such as weddings or Ramadan celebrations where they risked meeting politically involved relatives. In general, Israel considers and deals with Palestinians from the occupied territories as 'security threats.' The 'wrong relative' might be a person that Israel sees as political and dangerous enough to imprison. They might be involved in armed resistance but can also be political leaders, journalists or NGO staff. Other people who are unfavourable to be related to include camp refugees and villagers close to settlements. Israel often seems to deem them 'political' by their mere existence. Gren also had an informant in the process of divorcing her husband since his repeated imprisonments on political grounds made it difficult for her to renew her Jerusalem ID card, according to her lawyer.

In Georgia too, the pursuit of the necessary permits to cross between Georgia proper and South Ossetia was fraught with uncertainty and affected relations to close kin, who had remained within South Ossetia after the war. Contrary to other villages and towns in South Ossetia, the 'bordertown' Akhalgori remained populated by Georgians after the war and until 2020 it was possible to obtain a permit to cross back and forth between the town and Tbilisi-controlled territory. Many residents of the IDP settlement Tserovani still had family living on the Ossetian side and some had previously been permitted to move back and forth for work and seasonal residence. This was, to the regret of many, not an option anymore. Since 2020 all crossing points have been closed and there have been virtually no 'legal' means of entering South Ossetia from the Georgian side. In 2022, however, the Kremlin-backed Tskhinvali authorities temporarily opened three crossing points over Easter. In local media and Russian discourse, this was presented as a gesture acknowledging the importance Georgians attach to visiting family, and particularly the graves of their relatives during this religious feast. However, it was not possible to cross, unless one had South Ossetian 'citizenship' or had obtained a special permit. The procedures and requirements for how to get the permit were unclear to people Gotfredsen talked to. The opaque bureaucracy surrounding the permits prevented some from even trying to apply. For those who did manage to apply and get permission, the bureaucratic process implicitly acknowledged the dominance of the Russian occupier and local South Ossetian authorities, which they considered to be Russian puppets.

Also in our third case, the Sahrawi, administration and permits have, at times, been vital in order to meet relatives on the other side of the border. For many, the first possibility to reunite with relatives on the other side since the war was within the UNHCR program for Confidence Building Measures (2004-2014). The program featured permits issued by the UNHCR in coordination with Morocco and POLISARIO. People from the camps in Algeria travelled to the Moroccan-controlled areas to visit family there for some days and

vice versa.[5] At preparatory meetings, UNHCR staff advised Sahrawis to refrain from any political activity or expression during the visit. According to El-Hendi et al. (2018: 7), "it was stressed that any politicking from refugees during the visits could endanger the entire programme, and jeopardise other refugees' opportunities to see their families."

Some of Padrón Hernández's interlocutors clarified that several people had been able to participate in the visits from the camps to Moroccan-controlled areas despite having a history in POLISARIO. However, one interviewee, at the time living under Moroccan control, was not deemed eligible to participate due to his political activism: "I had been in prison and my family had been threatened. I always registered with MINURSO to be able to go to the camps to visit but they [the UNHCR] said I was wanted by the police and they did not let me go." He eventually fled to the camps in Algeria due to the repression he faced by the Moroccan police.

While permits give the impression of 'easing' the hardness of borders in our three cases, they become sites for sophisticated expressions of modes of domination. Applying for a permit places the applicant at the mercy of the occupying power that decides to grant the permit or not. The requirements might mean that the applicant is forced to prioritise the relationship with certain relatives over others – uncles in the West Bank get fewer visits to secure a permit to reside with a spouse in Jerusalem – or reconsider the expression of their political position or activism.

Symbolic aspects of borderisation and their contestations

In addition to physical and bureaucratic aspects of borderisation, our fieldworks give examples of multiple performative and symbolic barriers that military occupations set up and that occupied populations need to handle. Given the highly restricting physical and administrative borderisation at play in our cases, resistance related to separation and to disrupted kin practices was often symbolic.

A common story among Palestinians from mixed residence status families was that the family member with an 'inferior' ID card (i.e. from the occupied territories) would only be let through Israeli checkpoints if they walked by foot. The other family members who held 'superior' ID cards (i.e. Israeli passports or Jerusalem ID cards) would drive through the checkpoint and wait on the other side. Gren's interviewee, an upper-class woman in her mid-50s, exclaimed: "This is just a humiliation in my opinion! Would I have been a problem for their security if I had stayed [in the car] with my family?"

Another example of a performative and symbolic borderisation is the Israeli authorities' practice of keeping certain dead bodies of Palestinians in Israel, either in a morgue or burying them in military cemeteries, thus refusing to release bodies to grieving families. Since the person is already dead, there is seemingly no other reason for Israel to keep the body on the other side of the border, out of reach of the family, than to performatively display power. This serves to collectively punish the family and local community awaiting the funeral of a martyr, followed by the practices of visiting and praying at martyrs' graves. Mostly the bodies that are kept are Palestinians who violently attacked Israeli military personnel or

[5] The popular name for this program is "the MINUSRO visits" and more than 20,000 Sahrawis participated in it (El-Hendi et.al. 2018; Jacobsen 2017). The visits were eventually stopped over disagreements related to the list of eligible travellers. The program also consisted of phone centres where people could call their relatives and cultural seminars including people from both sides of the wall.

civilians (i.e. Palestinians who were killed by the Israeli forces without carrying out any violence themselves are normally returned). A woman Gren interviewed about her dead son, who had exploded a bomb among Israeli bus riders, had not received his body from the Israeli authorities several years later. This seemingly meaningless but deeply symbolic display of power from the part of the occupiers was met by an equally symbolic action by the grieving family: the making of an empty grave waiting for the body (cf. Levine 2010). Despite not having a body to bury, the martyr's mother regularly visited the grave, cleaning it up, and putting flowers at the site. In this case, borderisation carries symbolic weight but so does people's creative ways to resist it.

In the case of Georgia, the opening of temporary crossing points between Georgia proper and South Ossetia for Easter, can also be seen as a performance of power wrapped in 'good will' and respect for religious and cultural practices. Nevertheless, and as mentioned above, many of the people Gotfredsen talked to refrained from applying. This was partly due to the bureaucratic opacity surrounding the permits, but it was also a refusal to acknowledge the power of the occupier to issue permits or deny entry to what is rightfully Georgian territory. Instead, more creative means of honouring the dead were sought.

For instance, in the border-village of Ergneti in Georgia, Lia brought red eggs to the fence and lit a candle for her father and other paternal relatives buried in their native village, now out of reach behind the fence. Until she can fulfil her obligations fully, she explained, she will continue to do this every year as a sign of her grief of not being able to reunite with them at Easter. But she also did it out of spite and to show her resistance towards the occupier, as she claimed. This small ritual was a performative attempt at re-doing the connection with her paternal kin, undone by the occupation. Similarly, there are numerous examples of family members 'illegally' crossing into the occupied territory to fetch soil from village cemeteries to scatter on the graves of their deceased kin who are buried 'out of place' (see also Dunn 2017; Chabukiani 2013).

As described above, Morocco allowed some Sahrawis from the refugee camps in Algeria to visit family on the other side of the border during the ten years of the UNHCR program. Dumaha, a middle-aged woman who had fled on her own as a teenager to the refugee camps, was issued a permit, but refused to refrain from "politicking". To the contrary, she proudly recounted to Padrón Hernández how she refused to acknowledge Moroccan legitimacy to control border crossings:

> I refused to let the Moroccan border police search my bag. I told them: "You are Moroccan and have no right to search my bag. I came here with the UN so they are the only ones that can search it if they so wish. You should just go home." I had tapes with revolutionary songs in my bag that I wanted people from the occupied areas to listen to and I knew the Moroccans would take them[6]. […] The problem was not solved until they brought the responsible for [the local UN mission] and I could leave the airport with my tapes.

These examples of resistance reveal that the possibilities for changing the physical and administrative aspects of borderisation, and how they affect kinship practices, are very limited. Resistance is thus mostly consigned to the symbolic. As the occupying force control

[6] Music and poetry have prominent places in Sahrawi culture and in the anti-colonial struggle. Listening to or performing songs and poems with revolutionary lyrics is criminalised in the Moroccan-controlled areas and can lead to harsh repression and/or incarceration.

territory and people, the occupied people exercise their limited agency to contest and resist the terms under which this is done. New ways of carrying out lifecycle rituals and honouring kin obligations are devised, and the terms under which permits to visit family are issued are contested. While not changing the physical and administrative borders, these acts of resistance contest the occupying power's authority to control the border and, by extension, the most intimate aspects of people's lives.

Conclusion: Occupied intimacies

In this article, the three contemporary military occupations of Palestine, Western Sahara, and the Georgian territory of South Ossetia reveal themselves as evolving processes of dominance which extend beyond direct military might and violence. Control is exercised through multiple acts of borderisation, which manifests itself as separation and rupture by placing people on different sides of physical, bureaucratic and symbolic 'borders' and thus affects how, and if, family obligations, such as honouring one's dead relatives, fulfilling marriage deals, and reproductive normalcy, are achievable.

Comparing our ethnographic material through the analytical lens of borderisation, we draw attention to how the 'sensitive' conditions created by the military occupations people live under constrain their possibilities for doing family. In that sense, the fundamental ambiguities and uncertainties characterising the 'borderlands' created by borderisation extend beyond the physical and administrative terrains, and into family, kin relations, and the longing for "an ordinary life" (Kelly 2008). As we have seen, these relations too become 'sensitive', fraught with ambiguity, uncertainty, and friction.

Being unable to share a meal on the grave of your deceased father at Easter or being hindered from residing with your spouse in your parents' village are not only practical concerns; they have moral and existential implications. The disruption of kin practices should therefore not be taken lightly. Rather, as demonstrated above, this is revealed as a core mode of control, threatening the most intimate aspects of this life, as well as the next. Our material shows how the emotional, moral, and existential importance of kinship forces people to adjust and subject themselves to the occupying regimes, for example by applying for permits to visit or relocate to kin living on the other side of an unrecognised 'border'. However, there is also contestation and resistance. When it comes to the realm of kinship, this resistance is mostly symbolic and performative. It does not change the separation imposed by physical and administrative borders, nor the fundamental existential ruptures. However, it can create novel ways to carry out kinship obligations or use border crossings to actively question the legitimacy of the occupation. The 'burdened' agency manifested in these acts of resistance points towards the dominance of the occupations dealt with here. Moreover, by analysing how people continuously cope with and respond to 'intrusions' into their lives we can rethink occupation as a complex and fluid – as well as disputed and contested – mode of domination.

Ultimately, the effect of occupation on the most intimate aspects of the lives of the occupied go beyond individual tragedies and unfulfilled kinship obligations. As the occupations become protracted, we can see the cementation of forced social divisions as well as cultural transformations.

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