

Occupied Intimacies: Borderization in Palestine, Georgia and Western Sahara

Abstract

In this paper 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 “borderization”, which causes separation and rupture by placing people on different sides of physical and bureaucratic borders. This, we demonstrate, effectively disrupts occupied people’s ability to do family.

Being unable to pick up your kid from school, take your elderly relative to a doctor’s appointment, or to visit the grave of your deceased brother are not only practical obstacles, 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 the most intimate aspects of life. Ultimately, the effects of this go beyond individual tragedies and unfulfilled kinship obligations. As the occupations become protracted, we can see the cementation of forced socio-cultural divisions as well as transformations.