Borders and Borderlands in Contemporary Culture
Borders and Borderlands in Contemporary Culture

Edited by

Aoileann Ní Éigeartaigh and David Getty

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Editors’ Introduction

This book brings together a series of papers presented at a conference hosted by the Department of Humanities at the Dundalk Institute of Technology in May 2005. The conference sought to explore the realities and representations of borders and border regions in an interdisciplinary way, and to engage with some of the contradictions inherent in critical debates about the role borders play in contemporary culture. The focus of the papers in this book is in fact less on the border, than on the borderlands: the culturally indeterminate areas where identities and political affiliations are constantly negated and negotiated. Central to its overall theme is the negotiation of identity, whether it be individual or group identity, and the problems of contested or fractured identities. The contributors focus not only on political borders but also on the many social and cultural borders that exist in societies. Of particular interest are the ways in which mental or cultural borders can continue to exist long after the abolition of physical or political borders.

In Chapter 1, Lavalette draws on his experience of organising a delegation from Preston in North-West England, to Nablus on the Palestinian West Bank. He discusses the background to the trip and the main experiences his group had whilst there. The chapter also reflects on the ways in which this group of “non-specialists” (with no personal histories of dealing with conflict situations) confronted—or were confronted by-enforced militarised borders in a conflict site in the Middle East. Perhaps most interestingly, the trip allowed them the space to explore the “internal borders” within their own group, and to accommodate the cultural and religious differences that existed.

In Chapter 2, Tedaldi presents the case of the Italo-Slovene border fence in Gorizia as a micro study, considering it in comparison with other Cold War borders. She examines how our understanding of borders has shifted, particularly since the European Union enlargement in 2004. The chapter suggests that borders are now regarded as bridges connecting people through interstate co-operation rather than as points of division. However, Tedali also acknowledges that it is unwise to generalise and take an over simplistic view of border histories and argues that borders maintain their own specificity and should be treated as separate instances.

Chapter 3 discusses the connection between space, place, identity and war with reference to the Eritrean-Ethiopian conflict of 1998-2000. O’Kane suggests that this conflict stemmed from economic incompatibility and irreconcilable identities which manifested themselves through a spatial dimension. Thus the war was about more than a disputed border zone. The chapter examines the ways in which Eritrean and Ethiopian spaces became redefined and how people’s perception of political space can be changed by the historical experience of violent conflict. Such a focus may then allow us to have a better understanding of African patterns of warfare generally.

In Chapter 4, Yndigegn’s underlying premise is that as physical borders disappear new invisible borders appear. He examines the consequences of bordering for the construction of self-identity and reflects on the challenges presented to society as borders are dismantled, leading to increased movement through formerly delineated spaces. He suggests that a crucial factor in the successful adaptation to the globalized
world is the creation of flexible, multiple identities. However, although the construction of such multiple identities might help in the management of a borderless world, it also reveals particular problems that can be associated with global societies.

In Chapter 5, Howard presents a critique of the national census in terms of its exclusion of particular ethnic groups. The implications of this exclusion are conceptual invisibility and marginalisation from the policy process for those groups omitted from the census. He argues that this exclusion is all the more acute in those countries committed to ethnic equality. Activists concerned with ascribed ethnicity and the struggle for recognition then mobilise and challenge such discriminatory practices. Howard’s paper presents an analysis of such a challenge, its central focus being on the decision of the Scottish Parliament, in 2000, to overrule their census administrators and compile a new list of ethnic designations to include an Irish ethnic category in their 2001 census.

In Chapter 6, Leen examines the border as presented in Mexican, American and Chicano cinema. In doing so she considers the work of a number of directors and differing representations of the border. Is it to protect or exploit? Has it created divisions that cannot be healed? Leen suggests that the films researched indicate an engagement with the historical, cultural and social tensions behind those prejudices carried by different communities and what they regard as the “Other”. Such differing representations are, therefore, shaped by the belief that borders can be internal as well as external. It is no longer appropriate to consider borders as simply being a line on a map; the divisions between cultures and peoples are complex and should be recognised as such.

Chapter 7 considers the contradictions at the heart of society as defined by Czech writer Franz Kafka. Ní Éigeartaigh explores how Kafka likens life to a prison cell that imposes regulations on the individual but also offers a form of sanctuary or retreat from the outside world. However, as social and political freedoms increase, particular contradictions in contemporary life have emerged, resulting in a widespread feeling of isolation and a sense of loss of security. The chapter discusses how a number of contemporary fictional characters manage such contradictions by inventing borders in order to feel less isolated. In such a context borders are perceived as offering security and protection from the contradictions in life.

In Chapter 8, Delap, by exploring Scheibe’s The Curse of the Mulatto, investigates the myth constructed around psychosocial disturbances purported to result from the crossing of racial and class boundaries by, he claims, popular literature and science well into the second half of the 20th century. The chapter examines what is referred to as the tragic outcome of transgressed borders between black and white but, through reference to more recent scholarship, discusses how such a perception was in fact misleading and a denial of reality.

Chapter 9 examines the subject positions of “new manliness” and “laddishness” and their roles in discourses on masculinity in contemporary British popular culture genres including men’s magazines. De Gregorio-Godeo suggests that while the characteristics and vocabulary of “new manliness” and “laddishness” tend to be clearly and antagonistically represented in these magazines, the borderlands between them often becomes blurred. By presenting a case study and through critical discourse analysis he discusses the border tensions constituted and articulated in the problem pages in men’s magazines. Such analysis leads de Gregorio-Godeo to argue that both
subject positions should be considered as two sides of the same phenomenon and that this blurred borderline can then be taken as evidence of the shifting masculinities in contemporary Britain.

*Borders and Borderlands in Contemporary Culture* presents a series of papers reflecting the contributors’ own interests in political, cultural, social and mental borders. A wide variety of different political, geographical and cultural borders are discussed. However, the different borders and borderlands reflected upon in this book share a common theme, namely a concern with issues of identity. While the contributors provide a snapshot of thought around this theme, the overall aim of the book is to make a contribution to broader debates in this field of study.
This chapter draws on my experience of organising a delegation from Preston, in North-West England, to Nablus, on the Palestinian West Bank. The trip was organised after I was elected as a local councillor to Preston City Council where I sit for the anti-war Respect party. In November 2003, I presented a motion to Preston City Council to twin the city with Nablus. Although unsuccessful, the motion generated huge publicity in the city and was taken up in the national media.

The motion also registered within Palestine. The week following the debate in the council I received an invitation from the Palestinian Authority to visit the West Bank. The invite was for “an expenses paid” trip; but it was clear that our political opponents would use this against our campaign. I intimated my interest in the trip, informed our hosts I would be paying my own way and asked if some other people from Preston could accompany me. I’m sure the Palestinian Authority expected four or five people. I thought we might get ten. By the time we stepped onto the plane in September 2004, there were thirty-four in our delegation.

The chapter discusses the background to our trip and the main experiences we had whilst in Palestine. The trip took people from a peaceful and secure area of the world into a war-like situation on the occupied West Bank. Part of our story, therefore, is about how we (as a group of “non-specialists” with no personal histories of dealing with conflict situations) confronted-or were confronted by-enforced militarised borders in a conflict site in the Middle East.

The trip also gave us space to explore the “internal borders” within the group. As we moved about the West Bank, Palestinian officials repeatedly told us our group was “unique”. They had never had such a group on an official delegation. They were fascinated by the harmony and dynamics within a mixed group of Muslims and “Christians” (their label, one that many of the white people on the trip—including myself—would reject). They often told us they had never seen “so many men with beards” (our Muslim brothers—but also my Christian father who accompanied us!) and were genuinely shocked that “men with beards” and socialist activists could get on so well.
Their surprise reflected the fact that our group drew people from a wide variety of backgrounds. The thirty-four included (amongst others): two imams, two trade union officials from the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) and two shop stewards from the postal workers union (CWU), three university lecturers, two councillors (and a recently deposed councillor), a Christian Aid worker, a school student, two university students, and two women wearing the niqab (face covering attire), in addition to two who always wore the hijab (headscarf). A flavour of what we “looked like” is given in photograph 1, which shows some of our group meeting Israeli peace activist and political prisoner Mordechi Vanunu:

![Fig. 1-1 Preston Group with Mordechi Vanunu](image)

The fact that this diverse group could travel and live together in such a positive way was no quirk. It was a direct result of how we had grown and worked together over the previous two years as part of the Stop the War Movement in Britain: the most remarkable social movement to shake Britain for at least a generation. One member of our group, Maulana Saeed Ahmed, the imam from Preston’s central Jamea Mosque, has spoken about this aspect elsewhere:

The anti-war activity in Preston was great. It brought people together from various different communities. We had never worked so closely with
socialists and people from peace groups—yet we have all learned something from this great coming together.²

The story of Preston’s trip to Palestine starts in the streets of London and Preston in the run-up to the war on Iraq.

Preston is England’s newest city—in reality it is a medium sized town with a population (in the urban area) of just over 119,000.³ It is an overwhelmingly white, working-class town; only 15.57 percent of the population is drawn from the minority ethnic communities (8.9 percent of these are Muslim, the largest group of which trace their origins to Gujarat).⁴

As the Bush regime announced its intention to attack Afghanistan at the end of 2001, socialists and peace activists in the city (who had been working together since the war on Serbia in 1999) called a protest in the central square. Instead of the usual fifty or so protestors, the square was packed—the majority of protestors coming from the Muslim community.

This was a new situation for activists in Preston. A small minority—made up of a few anarchists, political feminists or members of ultra-left groups—immediately expressed their concern, arguing that the protest was “communalist” or that Muslim men were sexist and oppressive to women, or that women wearing the hijab were in some way subservient, or that somehow the “purity” of the protest had been undermined in some unspecified way.

Equally, it is not the case that the “Muslim community” is an undifferentiated block. There were some (though small in number) amongst the Muslim community who argued against working with non-Muslims, others who argued against contamination from socialists or “extremists”, some who argued that protesting would undermine the community’s influence within the Labour Party, and others who thought the very process of marching or protesting was “unislamic”.

The majority of activists from both communities, however, embraced the opportunity to work closely together. Over the following eighteen months, joint meetings, local marches and transport to national demonstrations were organised.

Joint organisation meant adapting to meet each other’s needs. For those of us on the left this meant adapting to meet the diverse needs and cultural practices of those from minority communities. For example, one of the first national marches against the war on Afghanistan occurred during the Muslim Holy month of Ramadan. In order for practicing Muslims to take part in the march it was necessary to arrange for the daily fast to be broken during the demonstration—and this is what happened. At the appropriate point, as dusk fell, an imam called people to prayer and the Muslims on the demonstration ended their fast, indeed many non-Muslims joined this important symbolic moment by drinking some water and eating a date.⁵ Similarly in Preston, at
one evening protest in the city centre, we held up proceedings for a short period to allow our Muslim brothers and sisters to say sunset prayers.

At meetings it has meant providing the facilities to allow members from diverse communities to attend. For example, it is now common to provide separate seating for those women who want to sit separately. Indeed many meetings will have three blocks of seating: one for those men who want to sit with men, one for women who want to sit with women, and a mixed area (which is always populated by some Muslim women). Initially some people with a history in the socialist and/or feminist movement objected to these moves—but without making such provision many Muslim women would not have taken part in the movement. It was necessary in order to secure the “inclusiveness” of the movement. As a result, one of the strengths of the campaign has been the active involvement of young Muslim women.

Out of the joint organisation of such practical activity developed closer friendship and political ties. A shared language and explanation for what was happening in the world also began to emerge—one that was tied together through a recognition of the role of imperialism in the world (especially the Middle East), of the rise of Islamaphobia and attacks on civil rights.

In the aftermath of the demonstration of 15th February 2003, discussions took place locally about whether anti-war activists should stand against Labour in the approaching local elections. As chair of the local Stop the War Coalition, some activists from the Jamea Mosque in central Preston asked if I would stand. It was one of the safest Labour seats in the city. I did not think I had much chance of winning, and agreed to stand. It was important that I did not stand as a Stop the War candidate—as the Coalition has always had many Labour supporters within its ranks—so I stood on a socialist programme around the slogan “welfare not warfare.”

To my huge surprise the campaign was successful and I was elected to Preston City Council. We quickly had to decide what we should do. We set up surgeries (though we were very shocked to find out no other councillor did this anymore) and looked at ways we could raise issues through the council chamber. At our first meeting after the election we decided to try and twin Preston with Nablus. Palestine had always been a central part of the anti-war campaign and twinning with oppressed peoples has a long history in Britain from the days of the anti-apartheid movement.

In the run-up to the meeting to twin with Nablus we organised two meetings of five hundred people in the city. We spoke to A-level students at a local college. We got support from the local FBU and CWU trade unions and got considerable support within the Muslim and Christian faith groups. Though unsuccessful, the twinning campaign brought significant results in terms of raising awareness about the Palestinians’ plight. It also generated the interest from within the city to form the delegation to Nablus in September 2004.
In the weeks before we set off we held regular delegation meetings. These meetings aimed to: (a) pass on details of our programme; (b) provide people with a few words of Arabic; (c) impart a bit of the history of Palestine; and (d) inform people about the potential dangers they may face. These meetings were usually led by Bashir, a Palestinian living in a near-by town, who accompanied us on our trip and made many invaluable arrangements before we left.

We expected to be delayed getting into the country—indeed there was some anxiety that the Israelis would not let some of us in (especially our two sisters in the niqab)—but it took only two hours to get everyone through customs and immigration in Tel Aviv, which was relatively quick for a large group like ours.

At the airport there was a bus waiting for us and we left to go to Jerusalem (or Al Quds as it is known in Arabic). On the road we passed burnt out tanks and personnel carriers—relics of earlier battles. They were there as part of the “invention of tradition” that is so much a part of the myth of nations, the ideologically-loaded stories that nations tell about themselves. These rusting hulks were there to symbolise what the Israelis depict as their struggle for nationhood and a reminder of what they project as the constant threat from hostile Arab armies that surround them. This in turn is tied into one of the most powerful myths of Zionism: that Palestine was a “land without people” and therefore particularly suitable for a “people without land.”

However, Palestine was very much a land with people prior to the creation of the State of Israel. On our journey from Tel Aviv there were no notices to tell us that we were driving through the remnants of the Palestinian village of Deir Yassin, just west of Jerusalem. The story of Deir Yassin tells what happened to the traditional occupants of the land of Palestine.

On 9th April 1948, Deir Yassin was destroyed by the Zionist terrorist organisations Irgun and the Stern Gang (led by future Israeli PM Menachim Begin). In the village:

250 men, women and children were massacred … in cold blood, many of them lying asleep in their beds. The murderers from the Stern and Irgun gangs … were not satisfied with killing but went on to mutilate the bodies and cut open the bellies of pregnant women. The act horrified the Arab world and made the Palestinians panic, leading to the exodus of whole populations from many cities and towns, fleeing in their thousands in the belief that the same fate awaited ... them. In the months that followed, the Stern and Irgun gangs, in collusion with the Haganah (the Israeli defence forces), launched brutal attacks against Palestinian citizens in Haifa, Tiberias, Jaffa and numerous other Palestinian
towns and villages. By the end of April 1948: “More than half the civilian Arabs of Palestine had become displaced persons, houses were wrecked beyond repair and the people turned into refugees.”

The reality of this process is revealed most harrowingly in the oral testimonies of the refugees. A villager from Safsaf (now called Sifsufa) later recalled what happened in her village when it was captured in October 1948:

As we lined up, a few Jewish soldiers ordered four girls to accompany them to carry water for the soldiers. Instead they took them to our empty houses and raped them. About seventy of our men were blindfolded and shot to death, one after the other, in front of us.

In 1948, Palestinians fled their homes, land and property on “fear of death.” A study carried out by Dr Adel H. Yahya confirms that 85% of those he talked to fled out of fear for their lives, or the lives of their children. They refer to this as the “Naqba”—the great Catastrophe. Today, in other parts of the world, such events are referred to as “ethnic cleansing.” The refugees fled to other Palestinian towns, to Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan, and further afield across the Middle East. This was the start of the “refugee problem” in Palestine: of a people forcibly removed from their homes, land and property and now denied their “right to return” by the Israeli State which often denies their existence.

As we were dropped off at our hotel we could look across the city. The second picture is taken from outside our hotel in East Jerusalem:

![Panoramic of Jerusalem](Fig. 1-2 Panoramic of Jerusalem)
Jerusalem is like two cities in one. The West of the city (the far distance in the photograph) is affluent and “western.” This is the Jewish sector. There are wide roads and motorways. It is clean and thriving. There are very good public services. The same cannot be said of the East. Although citizens in both East and West pay taxes to the same municipal authorities, the level of services is inferior in the East. Rubbish lies in the streets, which are hardly ever swept, for example. This helps fuel the racist insinuation that “Arabs are dirty”—in fact it is a failing on the part of the local State to provide resources in the Arab quarters.

Two members of our party were officials from the FBU. They visited the firestation in East Jerusalem and found a similar story of institutionalised discrimination. In the East there are twenty firefighters to cover the Arab half of the city; in the West there are over seventy. Although they work for the same employer, the Arab firefighters get about a quarter of the pay awarded to firefighters in the West of the city.

The institutionalised racism against the Palestinians now extends to questions of marriage. In 2003, Israel’s Parliament passed a law preventing Palestinians from the West Bank or Gaza who marry “Israeli Arabs” (Palestinians with Israeli citizenship) from living in Israel:

> Israeli Arabs who marry Palestinians from the West Bank or Gaza Strip … either have to move to the occupied territories, or live apart from their husband or wife. Their children [are] … affected too: from the age of 12 they will be denied citizenship or residency and forced to move out of Israel.12

It is the institutionalised, systematised nature of the discrimination against the Palestinians that marks it out as a “new apartheid.” Discrimination is not the act of one or two “bad apples” amongst the Israeli population or the Israeli Defence Force (IDF). Rather it is embedded and regulated in the very operation of the Israeli State.

The photograph of Jerusalem (fig. 1-2) also shows the old walled city—a part of the world with huge significance for the three main monotheist religions. Near the foreground you can see the “Dome of the Rock”, the third holiest site in Islam. Muslims believe that the rock beneath the golden dome is where the Prophet Mohammed ascended to heaven. Adjoining the Dome (to its left on the picture) is the Al Aqsa mosque. On Fridays, during the main Juma prayers, the entire courtyard between the Dome and Al Aqsa is full of people at prayer. The area is able to accommodate four thousand worshippers.

On the far side of the Al Aqsa mosque, touching the mosque’s boundary wall, is the “Western Wall” (sometimes known as the “Wailing Wall”). Jews believe that beneath Al Aqsa are the ruins of the First Temple and the permanent resting place of the Ark of the Covenant. Orthodox Jews believe
that the site above the resting place of the Ark is too sacred for people to walk upon, so they pray at the wall and this has become a focal point of Jewish religious life. For some Zionist organisations, however, the existence of the Al Aqsa mosque is an affront to their religious beliefs. In 1969, a Zionist pilgrim set fire to the mosque causing substantial damage. An attempted incursion into the mosque by security forces and Zionist organisations in September 2000 was met with fierce resistance by Muslims and led to the start of the second Intifada (called the Al Aqsa Intifada by Palestinians).

On our second morning we crossed over onto the West Bank. We went over at the Qalandia check-point. The third picture shows the chaos around the check-point:

Crossing onto the West Bank can be a time consuming affair. As we approached, our bus stopped and we all had to get out and walk. All around there were buses, taxis, lorries and cars. The problem was the number plates. There are three types: plates for Palestinians living in Israel (which are not allowed onto the West Bank); plates for Palestinians living in the Palestinian territories (which are not allowed into Israel); and plates for Jewish Israeli citizens and those living in the settler encampments (which have access to
specially built highways and much freer movement). The consequence of these restrictions for the movement of Palestinians is that they have to get taxis or buses to the checkpoint, get out and walk through the crossing, and then hire transport on the other side.

Adding to this confusion is the checkpoint itself. Long queues are the norm. Soldiers call people forward one at a time, check their passbooks or passports and make a decision about whether they should be let through or not. At Qalandia, when we arrived, there was a very long queue to get across from Ramallah to Israel, but on the day we travelled there were no soldiers at the checkpoint to get into the West Bank. We did experience manned checkpoints later in our trip trying to get to Bethlehem and out of Nablus, and on both occasions we saw people turned back, for no apparent reason, and unable to go about their business that day.

At the various check-points-and elsewhere when we came across the IDF-there was a real sense that the soldiers were acting with impunity. They knew they could do what they wanted and they would get away with it. They represented the dominant power, they were the forces of occupation and in any flare-up it would be “terrorists” who would get the blame.

Just before we arrived in Palestine, soldiers killed Imam al-Hams, a thirteen-year-old school student. She had strayed into a restricted area and was shot. As she lay dying, the Commander walked over to her and emptied his automatic gun magazine into her body. It was this final act that led some of the soldiers to speak out. The Israeli State was forced to investigate, but their initial response was the usual one: she was a terrorist who had attacked first. In late 2005, the Israeli captain was found “not guilty” of any wrongdoing by the Israeli courts.

Impunity breeds notions of superiority. The soldiers were aloof and distanced from those they were calling forward. There was no personal engagement. Administering us through the check-point (or denying this to us) was simply part of their work process. In a sense this process “dehumanised” us to them, we were reduced to mere objects.

From Qalandia we took a short taxi ride to Ramallah. There we came across our first refugee camp-the Al Amari camp. The conditions in the camps are hard to describe. They are overcrowded with half-built concrete homes. The alleys are very narrow, the sewage and sanitation “basic.” It reminded me of the rough construction of working class homes in northern England before the Public Health Act (1875).

The camps are dominated by unemployment and poverty. According to the Centre for Policy Analysis on Palestine: "More than half of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza … live below the poverty threshold.”

The camps are subject to regular incursions by the IDF. There is a constant awareness about troop movements and helicopter gunship activity. Later, on our first day in Ramallah, three helicopters came over-head and
circled the area we were in. Our Palestinian friends told us to move quickly away from the streets. Three helicopters together, they told us, means they are about to attack. Sure enough, the following day we were told that helicopters left Ramallah the night before and went to Gaza where they killed and injured a number of Palestinians. The BBC reported the incident, claiming: “At least 14 people … [were] killed and 20 injured.”

In the camps, there are health and welfare services, but the scale of the task they face overwhelms them. International aid projects try to provide some services via the work of NGOs but they increasingly find themselves forced to undertake more work and projects than they want. The reason for this is that international aid programmes are increasingly affected by the political drives and goals of the major international funders. Increasingly the “development agenda” is shaped by the concerns of global neo-liberals who provide resources within “civil society” to non-state agencies as part of their privatisation agenda. Thus the NGOs find themselves being used by the major western powers to promote a particular ideology of development.

Children in the camps have few places to play. In Al Amari, the one play area (about the size of a private garden in an affluent suburb in Britain) had been attacked by the IDF who had poured poison on the grass and destroyed some of the swings.

Yet the camps were not places of despondency and despair. The overwhelming impression we got was one of community, resilience and struggle. Despite their poverty, the people of the camps were also very generous, we were continuously asked in to people’s homes for tea or food.

The camp also gave us the opportunity to meet some of the camp children:

![Fig. 1-4 Children in Al Amari refugee camp](image)

This photograph shows the happy faces of some refugee children. In most ways they were like children the world over, laughing, playing football and enjoying themselves. However, not surprisingly, the children had been deeply
shaped by the social circumstances in which they and their families lived. They were able, for example, to tell us about guns, different types of bullets, tanks and helicopter gun ships. They also knew the names of the “martyrs” (those who had died as part of the struggle) and the various Palestinian political organisations. Furthermore, although each of the children in the photograph was born in the camp—as indeed were their parents and some of their grandparents—when I asked them where they came from, not one said Al Amari. They all responded by giving the name of the Palestinian village or town that their family had been forced out of in 1948 or during later expulsions and each expressed the hope that one day they would go home.

Yet despite the resilience in the camps, the adults were very concerned about the trauma being imposed on their children. They tried to protect the children, to make life “normal”, but knew that this was impossible and that war, occupation and poverty were having a detrimental impact on the children and their futures. Journalist Sandra Jordan has recently written about this in relation to children in Rafah, in Gaza:

[T]hese are children who laugh one minute and burst into tears the next. Three-quarters suffer from anxiety and nightmares. Many suffer flashbacks of violent events. According to research by the Gaza Community Centre for Mental Health, 55 per cent of kids in hot areas such as Rafah have acute post-traumatic stress disorder.

These children become indifferent to death. … On the one hand, the Israeli soldiers make them feel insecure; on the other, they embrace death because in this society the martyr is celebrated.

Worst affected are those who have seen relatives or friends killed in front of them, but children are also traumatised by shooting, night raids, demolitions and other people’s stress.16

This is the hidden human cost of the occupation. On top of the murder and brutality of the occupation, in addition to the poverty and struggle of life, is the long-term mental health impact of stress and trauma being imposed on the children of Palestine.

For the next two days we were in Ramallah visiting politicians (including President Arafat) and projects. Early on the third morning it was time to move to Nablus.

In September 2004, Nablus was a closed city. The IDF were preventing “internationals” from entering and all roads were blocked. The Palestinian Authorities arranged for us to be moved early (we left Ramallah at 4.30am) and we were taken up the hills surrounding Nablus and smuggled into the city.

We arrived at 7.30am and over the next few days visited the university, the Palestinian Federation of Trade Unions and the Balata refugee camp. Balata is the largest refugee camp on the West Bank and is one of the most
over-crowded spots on earth. Its size means that it also has a huge impact on local politics.

Nablus is a city under occupation. On the days we were there, we experienced raids by the IDF on Balata and a central quarter of the city. On the second morning we woke to the sound of a helicopter gun ship firing off rounds into a nearby residential area.

The university provided us with guides who took us around the “old city” in the centre. The old city has suffered cruelly in recent years. The soap factory has been destroyed. Homes have been destroyed from the inside-though on the outside they do not look badly damaged. On every corner there were people who told us stories of friends and relatives who had been killed, wounded or arrested.

In comparison with Ramallah where Fatah dominates, it was obvious that Hamas was much stronger in Nablus. Yet this is not really surprising. Hamas reject the terms of the Oslo Accord (1992), which led to the creation of the Palestinian Authority in return for Palestinian recognition of the State of Israel. However the Oslo Accord did not deal with the rights of the refugees, specifically the “right of return”, and many in the camps feel the Accord has done little for them. Hamas refuse to recognise the State of Israel and they stand firm on the right of refugees to return to the homes, land and property from which they fled in 1948 and 1967. (Of course many of the street militants within Fatah, especially those politically close to imprisoned leader Marwan Barghouti, have a similar position on these questions). Hamas also provide a network of support and welfare for Palestinians in the camps. This combination-immediate material support for people combined with intransigent ideological opposition to the forces of occupation-explains the growing influence of Hamas, especially in the camps.

In Nablus we also got our first real “up-close” contact with a Zionist settlement (see Fig. 1-5). As we sat having our dinner on our last evening in Nablus, settlers started to fire indiscriminately into Nablus. As far as we know nobody was killed or injured but somebody could easily have been so. There was no particular target. The machine guns were fired off, perhaps for a bit of fun, and certainly to keep the Palestinian population wary and tense.
Discussion of “Jewish settlements” on the West Bank or Gaza does not really give an accurate impression of what these places are like. In reality they are highly militarised fortresses, built on the tops of hills and mountains, overlooking Palestinian villages, towns and cities. They look more like Medieval castles and the windows on the outside walls always point downward making it easier to defend the settlements and to fire into the villages and towns in the valleys. The settlements are also joined together (and to Israel itself) via “exclusive” motorways and highways.

The settlements are also inhabited by hard-core Zionists, those committed to Eretz Israel—the expansion of a “Greater Israel”. Those in the settler colonies, therefore, are politically committed to expanding the State of Israel into Arab lands and expelling Palestinians, once more, from their homes. At present the settlements are expanding on the West Bank. Indeed, over the summer of 2005 when Israel pulled out of nineteen square miles of the Gaza strip they took over twenty-three square miles of the West Bank.18

For our last three days we returned to Jerusalem. The contrast between the West Bank and Jerusalem now seemed stark. One of the ideological claims made by Israel is that it is the only “democracy in the Middle East”. More specifically the claim is that Israel is the only Parliamentary democracy-
though this ignores the fact that there are free elections in the Palestinian Authority. Nevertheless, the claim needs to be challenged somewhat.

Parliamentary democracy exists in various different forms and, historically, it has existed within societies that embody all sorts of inequalities and oppressions. In the US, “parliamentary democracy” at Federal and State level co-existed with “Jim Crow” institutionalised racism in the south up until the 1970s. In South Africa, “parliamentary democracy” co-existed with apartheid. The mere fact of voting does not provide any guarantees about the nature of the society within which the voting process takes place.

Thus, back in Jerusalem many in the group commented on the lack of freedom that they suddenly felt and experienced. No matter where one goes within Israel it is imperative to travel with your passport or, if you are a Palestinian, a passbook. Within Israel we were constantly stopped and asked for our documents.

Then there is the new monstrous wall—or as the Israelis call it “security fence”—that divides Palestinian communities and separates them from their land, water sources, roads, shops and places of worship (Fig. 1-6).

The construction of the Wall started in June 2002. It is estimated that it will reduce the West Bank in size by about 50%.

In May 2003, as the World focussed on the war in Iraq, the Israeli government approved plans to extend the Wall in the Eastern and Southern areas-taking it 15km inside the West Bank. By so doing it stole some of the most fertile Palestinian lands in the
Jordan Valley. The Wall is eight metres high and has a Watch Tower every three-hundred metres. Although there are no maps available it is thought it could end up being close to one thousand kilometres in length by the time it is completed. It is ghettoising the Palestinians and creating “Bantustans”. It alone undermines Israel’s claims to be a “free society”.

Furthermore, Israel is a militarised society. Large numbers of adult Israeli men carry guns, some have very large machine guns strapped about their bodies. Even groups of school students are flanked by older pupils who carry guns.

In this atmosphere I was reminded of the statement that is often attributed to Marx concerning Britain’s role in Ireland: “A nation that oppresses another can never itself be free.” The Palestinians suffer at the hands of a new apartheid. There are pass laws, institutionalised racist discrimination, the apartheid wall and the repeated atrocities of the IDF—the killing of civilians, the “collective punishments”, and the arrests and “administrative detentions” (what is known in Britain as internment). However, the enforced militarised borders of Israel and the ideology of Zionism do not bring freedom and protection for the Jews of Israel. Israel is actually a very dangerous place to be a Jew. As Israeli philosopher Yeshayahu Leibovitz warned in 1968 (just after the Israelis had seized Arab lands in the six day war):

A state governing a hostile population of 1.5 to 2 million foreigners [i.e. the indigenous Palestinians in the newly occupied lands: ML] ... is bound to become a Shin Bet [Security Service] state, with all that this implies for the spirit of education, freedom of speech and thought and democracy. Israel will be infected with corruption, characteristic of any colonial regime.

A restrictive, oppressive, militarised nation is the price Israelis pay for their oppression of the Palestinian people.

Reflecting on our trip to Palestine, each member of the group felt the experience was enriching and life-changing. It was life-changing on two levels. First, the experience of Palestine, the generosity of the people and their immense resilience has deepened our commitment to the campaign to establish a free Palestine. Second, it further deepened our own working relationship. We were drawn from different communities, with different traditions and ways of campaigning. During our experience of working together in the Stop the War movement we started to break down barriers—our own “internal borders”—and this was reinforced during the thirteen days we spent together in Palestine.

I conclude with a quotation from Najwa Kawar Farah, a Palestinian who writes about her experiences of life under Israeli occupation. It would be ludicrous to suggest that we shared any of her experiences, but for thirteen
days we saw, at first hand, the Palestinians struggle for dignity and gained a deeper understanding of their plight:

You will never understand the extent of the Palestinian frustration and anger until you put yourself in our shoes: waking up one morning to find that you have to get a permit to walk on your own land, to find bulldozers coming to demolish your house, to discover that the army have carried out a raid on your son’s university and taken him away—and you would never know where he had gone. Often the verdict would be “administrative arrest” … [which] meant that the military authorities could interrogate your son in whatever manner they chose, inflicting torture for as long as they wish.22

The Palestinian tragedy continues. As teachers, researchers, academics and activists committed to universal values of equality, justice and human rights, we have a duty and a responsibility to ensure that the Palestinian voice is heard and to strive to bring about a just peace for the Palestinians and the Palestinian refugees.
CHAPTER TWO

Chiara Tedaldi

This chapter attempts to take one small step in filling the void of scholarly discussion regarding the dismantling of borders in the aftermath of the 2004 European Union (EU) enlargement. By presenting the case of the Italo-Slovene border fence in Gorizia as a micro study, this chapter investigates how, in recent years, the understanding of borders has shifted and, perhaps, is continuing to shift. Whereas in the past borders have usually been perceived as a source of permanent challenge and insecurity, they are now being given a new interpretation. In light of events such as the 2004 enlargement, borders, particularly those dividing EU members, are regarded less as a point of division between separate communities or “power barometers between neighbors [sic].” On the contrary, they have come to be regarded as bridges connecting people. Thus, one would think that 21st century borders embody the promise of friendship between different cultures and interstate cooperation. However, as the case of the Gorizia fence shows, borders should be given careful consideration. It is not wise to compare them on the basis of apparent similarities. To view the Italo-Slovene border fence in terms of “the last Cold War remnant”, as Reindl does, and/or compare its dismantling on 1st May 2004 to that of the Berlin Wall on 9th November 1989, is to impose on it an over simplified reading of the past which does not stand the test of a closer historical analysis. Although, at first glance, a number of analogies can be identified between the historical circumstances characterising post-war Italo-Yugoslav relations and those between the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and German Democratic Republic (GDR), these two situations, as it will be argued, maintained their own specificity and should, therefore, be treated as separate historical instances.

At the stroke of midnight on 1st May 2004, the EU underwent its most highly publicised enlargement to date. Between the 1970s and the 1990s, four successive waves of accession increased the number of the EU member states from six to fifteen. The first enlargement occurred in 1973, when the founding states, namely Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, the Federal Republic of Germany, France and Italy, were joined by Denmark, Ireland and
Thus, in 2004, after long years of arduous accession negotiations, Slovenia, along with nine other countries, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland and Slovakia, finally achieved the full membership status which they had been seeking since the late 1990s. At a superficial level, this historic fifth enlargement was welcomed by the majority of EU citizens who were already accustomed to the decreasing importance of traditional geopolitical elements such as frontiers and borders. This became most obvious with the incorporation of the Schengen Agreement into the framework of the EU which, since 1st May 1999, allowed the citizens of the signatory countries to cross “the internal borders at any point without checks” and traverse the “external border checks according to a common Schengen standard.” Consequently, borders and boundaries are no longer viewed as insurmountable barriers symbolising political, cultural and ethnic divisions. Such a perspective is reflected in the words of many European leaders who stressed the epic importance of the enlargement as the dawn of a new era which would finally reunify a long divided continent and bring about, as Romano Prodi noted: “A future built on shared fundamental values: those of peace, democracy, the rule of law, human rights and the protection of minorities.”

In this overtly optimistic context, the dismantling of the Italo-Slovene border fence in Gorizia has come to be regarded as a highly symbolic event and its significance as a new beginning is simultaneously political and cultural. Built in September 1947 in accordance with the provisions of the Paris Peace Treaty, this wired barrier was constructed to demarcate the new frontier between Italy and Yugoslavia. As agreed in the Treaty, the town of Gorizia, initially placed under Allied administration, was to be returned to Italy. However, most of its eastern suburbs and hinterland, renamed Nova Gorica, were handed over to Marshal Tito. Inevitably, the border rearrangement provoked a mixed reaction. Although Yugoslav territorial ambitions were not fully satisfied, the Slovene minority living in the area welcomed the creation of what is now known as western Slovenia, regarding it as the answer to the territorial demands of the Slovene partisans. The Italian community living in the area, however, was left with a painful dilemma. On the one hand, they could choose to relocate across the border and hope that, some day, they would be given the chance to be compensated for their material and psychological loss. On the other hand, they could choose to stay as a minority group in a multi-ethnic Yugoslavia. Under the changed political circumstances, many decided to leave their homes, triggering a flight from the region. Those who left not only had to come to terms with their new dispossessed status, but also had to adjust to the sense of
dislocation that was inherent to their condition as refugees, of people longing for what, in the realm of contemporary German literature, is normally referred to as a return to the Heimat.\textsuperscript{10}

Although most Italian expatriates had the strength to endure the intermediate phase that followed, their situation remained problematic and is perhaps best represented in the reflections of the Indian writer Salman Rushdie on exiles, that: “[They] are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at risk of being mutated into pillars of salt.”\textsuperscript{11} While some refugees, in the years of hardship, held on to the distant hope that some day the border question would be reconsidered, the majority embarked on an unrelenting campaign for the re-amendment of the post-war status quo. Their demands were mainly based on the assumption that part of Friuli-Venezia Giulia, known as Gorizia, along with Istria, Dalmatia and the Adriatic islands, had been improperly taken away in the aftermath of World War II. However, there were also a number of other considerations. Firstly, many decided to leave because, at the time, Italians believed Slovenes and Yugoslavians to be not only culturally different but also ethnically inferior. Secondly, many of these exiles held the opinion that living in communist Yugoslavia would involve acclimatising to a system fundamentally different to that to which they were accustomed. Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, many Italians living in the area feared the repetition of the abuses suffered at the hands of members of the Yugoslav secret service, namely the Department for the Protection of the People (OZNA) during the Slovene occupation of the area towards the end of World War II.\textsuperscript{12} As Pirjevec notes, in the Goriziano:

\begin{quote}
The heads of the [Yugoslav Communist] Party had difficulties controlling OZNA, the military secret service, and reducing the number of misdemeanours it committed, as it had separated itself from central control and claimed to be unable to stop partisans’ abuses on [Italian] civilians.\textsuperscript{13}
\end{quote}

It is not within the scope of this chapter to assess the legitimacy of Italian exiles’ requests for restitution. However, it is important to view them as incontestably highlighting Italian dissatisfaction with the territorial rearrangement decided by the Allied powers in the aftermath of World War II.\textsuperscript{14} Thus, it becomes clear why the Gorizia border fence, the physical manifestation of the new political order decided in Paris, has become a symbol of discontent for many inhabitants of the Italian border region of Friuli-Venezia Giulia since 1947.

At the same time, it is apparent that the setting up of physical barriers that took place in post-war Europe was part of a larger phenomenon, not limited to Italy and Yugoslavia. After Italians and Yugoslavs had built their border fence across Piazza della Transalpina in Gorizia, other walls were built.
Some of them were invisible, though palpable, and Winston Churchill’s famous speech describing an “iron curtain” descending across Europe brilliantly serves to highlight that perception. Others, like the Berlin Wall, were extremely visible and provided tangible proof that post-war relations between Eastern and Western Europe, already rather strained, had perhaps deteriorated beyond the point of no return. Most of these barriers were built during the Cold War, a period which from a western perspective was characterised not only by the polarization of the political realm around two prominent and conflicting ideologies, specifically Communism and Liberal Democracy; but also by what was perceived as the effects of such prolonged East-West antagonism, namely the economic deficiencies of Communist countries. Suspicion and reciprocal mistrust, alongside continuous references to Eastern Europe’s increasing poverty, seemingly made borders, border fences and walls necessary as they had the inherent advantage of stressing the physicality of the geographical and political separation between the two blocs. This point is best illustrated by the words of Inglis who, although clearly speaking about the economic shortcomings of the eastern bloc from a western point of view, noted that:

[The Russians] drew the “iron curtain” across the middle of Europe, partly to stop us looking in, partly to stop their own poor wretches looking out enviously at the boundless goods and comforts on our side. Behind the iron curtain were the hapless peoples held captive by the grim-faced Russians and their stooges in office in the satellites; in front of it were ourselves, expressing sympathy for the captives but apologetically remaining very thoroughly armed, in however subdued way.16

Thus, in a continent becoming increasingly aware of its deepening divisions, borders, along with the fences and walls demarcating them, acquired a new significance. Once merely perceived as the controversial legacy of World War II, the border in Gorizia and its border fence, like the Berlin Wall in Germany, began to be regarded as the most tangible proof of the existence of two geographically close, and yet incredibly distant, worlds. On the one hand, as suggested in the previous quotation, there was Italy: a democratic country, like the FRG, taking its first steps towards a brighter future, characterised by post-war reconstruction, the so-called “economic boom” and a growing fondness for consumerism. On the other hand, there was the former Yugoslavia, which, although located just across Gorizia’s fence, was viewed as being as alien to its western neighbour as Russia itself. Having adopted, like the GDR, not only a Soviet-style economic system but also a Soviet-style constitution that included restricted wording on the inviolability of the home, the right to work, freedom of speech, association and religion,
Tito’s Federal People’s Republic of Yugoslavia was perceived by Italians as the very manifestation of that other world, that of Communism.\textsuperscript{18}

However, the Gorizia border fence cannot be simply dismissed as a wall demarcating the ideological conflict that characterised post-war Europe. Most importantly, it cannot be referred to as “the last Cold War remnant of the Iron Curtain” as to do so would be to underscore its role and misinterpret its significance which was, and still is, multifarious. Firstly, it must be stressed that its construction was, as previously discussed, the consequence of a border rearrangement, not of the Cold War itself. Secondly, such border rearrangement was deemed necessary in order to make people on both sides of the fence aware of their changed affiliations, namely that they belonged to the particular country in which they lived. Thirdly, the fence stood as the visible reminder of alleged Italo-Slovene differences, be they political, economic, cultural or ethnic. Nevertheless, on closer examination, one can see that the former Yugoslavia and Italy were not as different as initially thought. It is clear that from a political point of view, the forementioned differences between Italy and the former Yugoslavia were not as profound as elsewhere in the continent. Although run by a coalition that fervently believed in so-called western democratic values, the Italian political scene also featured a strong national Communist Party (PCI).\textsuperscript{19} The leaders of this organisation always tried to work with, and perorate the cause of, their Yugoslav counterpart, at least until Tito decided to detach himself from that stricter form of Communism pursued by the Soviet Union and open a privileged channel with the western powers, in particular the United States.\textsuperscript{20}

Thus, one is left to speculate why the border fence was not dismantled once it had become clear that Tito was to pursue a third way, that of non-alignment.

From a practical point of view, it should be stressed that the Italo-Yugoslav border had been decided under particular circumstances and had, in most cases, divided the terrain without following any consistent methodology. Geographers such as Klemenčić and Gosar have pointed out that:

\begin{quote}
The Italo-Slovene border is in its full length (199 km on land, 29 km on sea) a result of the post-WW2 negotiations of the super-powers. It does not coincide with ethnic delineations or common cultural space, it does not recognise functional areas, it is not a physiographic border, nor is it a geometric boundary. It denies all the commonly known principles of border setting (Klemenčić and Gosar 2000, 130).
\end{quote}

As the division of Gorizia clearly highlights, the border passed through the middle of a town’s square, at times cutting civilians’ living rooms in half, leaving one half on the Italian side while the other was to be considered Yugoslav territory. Citizens who were thus affected by the new situation