“Nationality Undefined”
The Politics of Place-Making Through Spaced-Subjects in Riklis’s The Syrian Bride

LINDA QUIQUIVIX
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

GIORGIO HADI CURTI
San Diego State University

Abstract
In this paper we examine the politics of identity, mobility and place in the context of the Israeli military territorial occupation of the Golan Heights. More specifically, we seek to highlight an expression of contested place-making in Eran Riklis’s The Syrian Bride (2005). We argue that this film not only provides an illustration of ordinary people caught up in the fight over power, territory and identity in the occupied Golan, but points to problematic conceptions of space and place which have affective and violent consequences for people’s everyday lives. By paying special attention to borders, identity and the roles they play in processes of mobility and movement in The Syrian Bride, we discuss how the distribution and use of identification documents serve as components in larger processes legitimizing Israeli dispossession of and spatial control over indigenous peoples. Strategies or attempts to fix bodies in space and place, we argue, deny the possibility that society and space could be ordered or encountered much differently – a fact The Syrian Bride movingly challenges.

Introduction
The insistent demand for the annexation of the Golan came mainly from the advocates of settlement who, for some reason, are possessed with the belief that the imposition of Israeli sovereignty will strengthen their hold on the Golan Heights. From a practical point of view the [annexation] will not affect any change in the Golan except that the Druze, who did not wish to acquire Israeli identity, will now become Israeli subjects but not exactly citizens.

—Haaretz editorial, 15 December 1981; reprinted 1982
In this paper we examine how clashes over identity and mobility in the 2005 film *The Syrian Bride* are inseparable from clashes over territory and place. The film, directed by Israeli Eran Riklis from a script co-written with Palestinian citizen of Israel Suha Arraf, takes place in Majd al-Shams, the largest indigenous village in the Occupied Golan Heights on a day a border wedding is to occur. Border weddings, or wedding ceremonies where matrimonial partners are required to exchange vows on opposite sides of electrified borders and policed spaces, are phenomena somewhat unique to the Israeli-controlled Golan Heights. We argue that the distribution and use of identification documents for the control of mobility at such manufactured border spaces are legal components of larger processes legitimizing Israel’s dispossession of and control over indigenous peoples. Within the micro-political mo(ve)ments of the film, we explain how the place-making strategies and the placement of subjects on occupied land elaborates Israeli techniques of laying down “Truths” in the Foucauldian sense, which also point to possibilities of resistance and resilience in the face of subjugation and colonization.

By focusing on how the (dis)placement of Druze subjects in the Golan Heights is accomplished through the distribution and uses of identification documents, we point to important legal and identificational components of the state in producing *territorial Truths*, or what is more commonly known as ‘facts on the ground.’ We pay special attention to the role border-crossings play in this process – a process in which the control of mobility (with)in space becomes crucial. The increasing fortification and militarization of state borders, coupled with passports and other identification documents, serve as legal discourses for the production and maintenance of spaced-subjects through different tools of power. In this way, subjects serve as territorially discursive bodies where the presence of specific people in certain spaces is meant to produce a certain form of place, static and contained by border fences, militarized personnel and fortified walls. The passport, itself an internationally recognized arbiter of identity, communicates not only belonging but also place in this analysis: we understand its issuance can be described as the staking of the state’s flag onto the subject. Further, through the use of these documents subjects themselves can be described as state’s flags staked into the land. *The Syrian Bride* highlights such a project of place-making through the entangled production and maintenance of bodied subjects and legal documents—expressing this as a relationship wherein resistance and transgression – and thus different relations of space and power—are never fully absent.

**The Druze and the Occupation of the Golan Heights**

Although demographic pushes for Jewish immigration into—and the subsequent construction of Israeli settlements onto—occupied territories are among the most cited methods of producing facts on the ground or territorial Truths, other processes have also been recognized as important material and imagined productions of Israeli
territorial legitimacy (see Curti 2008). Nadia Abu El-Haj (2001), for example, has pointed to Israel’s national obsession with uncovering Jewish archeological artifacts as a practice through which national identity—and national rights—have long been asserted. Meron Benvenisti (2000) has examined early Zionist cartography and its production of what he calls “white patches” on the mental maps of Jewish immigrants into Palestine who held no place for the indigenous inhabitants in their perceptions of the landscape. Widespread Israeli public opinion of the Golan Heights and its population before the occupation was similarly regarded in these ways. It was understood largely as an empty land awaiting Israeli development, inhabited by only a few thousand people (Abu Fakhr 2000, 1). Expectedly then, the fact that 94 percent of the indigenous population fled or was expelled from the region on the eve of or during Israel’s occupation in 1967 rarely accompanies the Golan narrative in Israeli discourse (Tarabieh 2000, 2).

When Israel took the Golan Heights during the 1967 War, the region witnessed the largest per capita population transfer in the history of the Middle East; from its total pre-war population of over 130,000, only 6,396 indigenous Golanis remained in the Golan (Central Bureau of Statistics, Israel 1968, cited in Tarabieh 2000). When Israel annexed the territory in late 1981, it erected a Jewish settlement two weeks later, only a few hundred feet from the cease-fire line with Syria (Tarabieh 2000). Since this time, the number of Israeli settlements in the Golan has grown to thirty-four, with a total population of approximately 17,000 by 2000 and 20,000 by 2009 – approximately the same as the number of Syrians in the Golan Heights (Abu Fakhr 2000, 7; CIA 2009). Outside of Syria, the Golan Heights as a disputed territory receives relatively modest interest in geopolitical, activist, and academic discourses of the larger Arab-Israeli conflict, which has been increasingly characterized as a Palestinian-Israeli conflict since the Oslo Accords of the early 1990s. While occupied East Jerusalem, also annexed by Israel, receives significantly more attention than the Golan because of its ostensible religious, historical, and cultural significance, the fact that its negotiation is easily represented as a “zero-sum game” (DiGangi 2006, 4) between dichotomous and irreconcilable identities (e.g. Palestinian vs. Israeli, Arab vs. Jew) plays a not-too-small role in larger considerations for analysis. In this light, attention paid to the material and affective realities facing the indigenous population of the occupied Golan Heights presents a more complex reality. In many ways the Golanis’ daily experiences under occupation differ from those in Gaza and the West Bank as Israel has attempted to legally transform the Golan Height’s small, remaining indigenous population into Israelis – a population it largely categorizes as “Druze.”

As one of the multiple ethno-religious groups of the Middle East, the Druze have complex and indeed malleable identities inseparable from the political and national milieus and states of modernities in and through which they exist. In any state context, to identify as Druze is to identify as a minority. To identify or be identified as Druze in Israel proper is to be a “good” Arab – or sometimes not Arab at all (Firro 2001, 40). Such
classifications have been policy since Israel’s inception. Confronted with a significant non-Jewish Arab population within its boundaries having gone unexpelled, Israel has categorized this population into discrete nationalities including “Arabs,” “Druze,” “Circassians,” and “Bedouin,” with the intention of fragmenting indigenous collective identity within Israel (Hajjar 1996, 2). The Druze in Israel, or the “favored minority,” have had exceptionally friendly relations with the Israeli state at least since the 1948 war through an historic alliance with the Zionist movement (Hajjar 1996, 3). This experience differs starkly with the Druze in the Occupied Golan Heights.

Soon after the creation of modern Israel, the Druze remaining within its borders were granted a “new formal status,” becoming the only minority group subjected to compulsory military service, and having been issued identity cards on which “Nationality: Arab” was replaced by “Nationality: Druze.” Protests were met by official harassment of Druze intellectuals, students and religious figures who refused to accept this designation (Firro 2001, 45). The Druze in the Occupied Golan Heights have been considerably more resistant to becoming Israeli-imposed subjects. They have, by and large, refused to obtain Israeli citizenship altogether, protesting the demand that they should carry Israeli identification cards from even the first days of annexation (Shlaim 2001, 394). Their political sympathies have clearly favored the Palestinian cause and many are confident that the Golan will eventually be returned to Syrian control, remaining mindful that collaborating with Israel could render them “traitors” by the Syrians if and when this were to occur (Kennedy 1984, 52). These campaigns and movements to resist Israeli subjectification have been remarkably effective. Of the 20,000 indigenous people living in the Occupied Golan Heights, only about 1,500 “Druze Zionists” have chosen Israeli citizenship (Avni 2006), which includes an Israeli passport. Those wishing to travel internationally are issued a laissez-passer (literally “let pass”). The laissez passer
(sometimes laissez passer) is issued by various countries for citizens who lose their passport abroad and need to return to their home country. It is also issued to those who the local authorities seek to deport. In the space for “Nationality,” the word “Undefined” appears.

With the laissez-passer, a small number of Golani Druze are permitted to cross the demilitarized zone into Syria often for work or studies, sustaining kinship ties across boundaries. Largely excluded from such concessions are former prisoners and the families and relatives of the imprisoned, whose standards of general services even within their day-to-day lives are harshly contingent on vocal support of the Israeli presence in the Golan (Tarabieh 2000). Where this may become a problematic factor is in the context of border weddings, phenomena somewhat unique to the Golan Heights and which often take place among partners who meet for the first time on either side of the electrified fence at a place now dubbed Shouting Hill. Monitoring these cross-border weddings are Red Cross workers at Quneitra Crossing, a military and United Nations passage. According to the Red Cross, 67 Syrian brides have crossed into the Occupied Golan Heights since 1993 and 11 brides from the Occupied Golan Heights have crossed into Syria (Mitnick 2007). Because both crossing into Syria by Israelis, and crossing into Israel by Syrians is legally forbidden, wedding parties are unable to gather collectively for a celebration in either territory. Ceremonies must take place at the border so all can attend in a proximate space, albeit separated by an electrified fence. Riklis witnessed and filmed a similar event which became part of his documentary, Borders (1999). The Syrian Bride is loosely based on that stressful day at the border.

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**The Syrian Bride**

*The Syrian Bride* is set against this entangled context of power relationships, complex identities, legal documents and constructed borders. It follows a Druze family in Majd
al-Shams, the largest Druze town in the Occupied Golan Heights on the wedding day of the family’s youngest daughter, Mona (Clara Khoury), who is to marry her fiancé at the border later that day. Her betrothed is a famous Syrian soap opera star living in Damascus whom she has yet to meet in person. Mona’s brother, living in Syria, has helped arrange the wedding. Mona and her fiancé’s respective wedding parties, separated by the border, will be unable to cross to collectively gather for a celebration in either territory. We learn at several moments that once Mona is to cross the demilitarized zone (dmz) into unoccupied Syria to live with her new husband she will effectively give up her right to live in or visit the Occupied Golan Heights; she will ‘officially’ become Syrian, rendering her forever physically cut off from her family in Majd al-Shams.

Modeled after the numerous weddings that have taken place at the border, Mona’s wedding is supposed to follow a simple precedent as is explained by a conversation between two Red Cross workers at the United Nations building near the start of the film. There has been a pro-Syria march in Majd al-Shams that morning celebrating Bashar Al-Assad’s rise to the Syrian presidency following his father’s death, an event which has now made the news. While watching the coverage on television, a new Red Cross worker wonders if a problem will arise at today’s scheduled border wedding. The veteran Red Cross worker, Jeanne (Julie-Ann Roth), has conducted numerous weddings during her time in the Golan and explains to the new worker the conditions upon which border weddings are allowed to take place. We learn quickly that Mona’s father Hammed (Makram Khoury, Clara Khoury’s actual father) was previously imprisoned by the Israeli authorities for his vocal and political pro-Syrian support and has recently been released. The morning of the wedding, he jeopardizes his probation by participating in a march in support of the younger Al-Assad. An Israeli police captain stops Hammed at the protest and reminds him that he is allowed neither at the protest nor at his daughter’s wedding at the border zone. Hammed defies the orders and steps back into the march. When the family gathers at the border, the police captain will learn Hammed has gone to the wedding and has broken the law by entering a closed military zone. The captain, however, backs off from his threats of arrest after one of Hammed’s sons pretends to be his attorney and challenges him to produce an official arrest warrant.

We must take at least a brief moment to ponder this scene and its portrayal of Israel’s occupation enforcement agencies and actors as operating through a legal rationale protective of all subjects, especially as it relates to Riklis’s claim of inspiration from actual events. In a 2005 interview Riklis states, “I was portraying reality in this film, and reality is complicated and complex.” But Nazareth-based journalist Jonathan Cook (2005) addresses this point in his broader critique of the film, arguing “[n]ot only can Israeli officials arrest anyone they please in a closed military zone—and declare pretty much any space and place such a zone—but they can jail them using an administrative order. Such an order does not require that charges be laid and the detention cannot
be contested in court.” Nadia Abu Zhara underscores the use of identity cards in such discriminatory practices. She explains the very real ways “entitlements can be amalgamated into a single document…and then withheld arbitrarily to enable coercion” (2008, 176). With such realities in mind—realities of which Riklis and especially Arraf are very likely well aware—we can read this scene not as an attempt to push the narrative through contrived and artificial plotting or as a simple appeasement to Israeli Jewish and international audiences, as Cook (2005) argues. Rather, it can be affirmatively understood as an expression of the complex and negotiated natures of social relationships and spatial productions, as a possibility for resistance and resilience in the face of subjugation and occupation, as the micro-processual ways in which horizontal relations of power erode dominance and control in and through different encounters; a component of what Doreen Massey (2005, 111) calls “the chance of space” wherein “otherwise unconnected narratives may be brought into contact, or previously connected ones may be wrenched apart” – a theme central to the film.

In a brief scene shift to Jerusalem, an Israeli government notary (Robert Hoenig) is on the telephone, reassuring the person he is speaking with that he has the new border stamp for the day’s wedding. He is urged to press it down on paper to ensure that it is, indeed, functioning properly. It is this procedure which will cause the day’s dramatic events. When the Israeli government notary arrives at the border post and stamps Mona’s laissez-passer with the new stamp – an Israeli exit stamp – we soon learn that this is a new procedure that, while required of everyone leaving the Israeli-occupied Golan to cross into Syria, will not be accepted by Syria. When Jeanne, the Red Cross worker facilitating the wedding, walks Mona’s laissez-passer through the demilitarized zone into the Syrian border post to receive Syrian permission, the Syrian crossing official sees the Israeli exit stamp and refuses to recognize the entire procedure as valid. From
the Syrian official’s perspective, Mona is not exiting Israel – she is exiting the Golan Heights, which is part of Syria. To participate in a bureaucratic process that recognizes the occupied Golan Heights as part of Israel would mean a concession the Syrian government has not been willing to make for decades. Because Syria considers Mona to already be in Syria and Israel considers her to be in Israel, Mona cannot cross from a place one side says does not exist to a place the other side says does not exist.

Attempting to rectify the situation as best she can, Jeanne engages in a back-and-forth crossing between the Syrian and Israeli posts. As the equally frustrated Israeli notary proceeds to go home, Jeanne pleads for him to “Just erase the stupid stamp!”, increasingly worried that more holdups could mean she will miss her flight home. The notary concedes after hesitation, calling for a soldier to bring him correction fluid. Jeanne makes her way back to the Syrian post with Mona’s laissez-passer, a rectangle of correction fluid covering the Israeli stamp. When Jeanne arrives at the Syrian post she finds that the guard she had been speaking with throughout the ordeal has now gone home. His replacement sees the ‘erased’ stamp, wants nothing to do with it, and when Jeanne tries to explain he says he has no idea what she is talking about, recommending she come back another day when the previous guard is back on shift. Jeanne crosses back toward the Israeli post, proven ineffective and feeling defeated. As she walks by the family waiting at the gate, she sadly informs them that there will be no wedding and continues walking away. Surprised and upset, every family member follows her away from the gate and a heated argument ensues.

Mona remains seated near the gate. The camera shifts our attention from Mona and her family to a United Nations vehicle about to cross into the Golan from Syria. The gate opens effortlessly as it had earlier in the film for Jeanne and other United Nations vehicles. While Mona’s family and Jeanne continue in their argument, Mona’s
sister Amal (Hiam Abbas) turns to where they had all left Mona and peers upon an empty chair where Mona sat only moments before. Realizing what is happening, Amal runs to the gate and sees Mona has left the occupied Golan Heights through the recently opened gate and is now determinedly approaching the un-Occupied Syrian border. The film ends before we learn the outcome of Mona’s transgression; its consequences left for us to ponder through both the hope and the despair of the love and (dis)connection created through the wrenching apart and coming together of different spatial relations set in motion by her act. In the moments where international actors and legal documents become mediators in and appendages of the contested spaces of the Golan Heights, it is quickly made obvious the many ways space concretely matters and does not matter for different people with different identities. Mona and her family are unable to officially participate in the bureaucratic hold-ups at the border, although it is their lives any political outcome will most immediately affect. Ostensibly, they can only wait as a Red Cross worker, worried about the possibility of missing her flight home to France, hurries between the Israeli and Syrian military posts in an ultimately futile attempt to rectify the situation. Indeed, this element of the film is but a micro-illustration of both the ineffectiveness and disinterest of international third parties as arbiters of Israeli-Arab territorial disputes.1

The border is no place for “non-place”
The Syrian Bride illustrates how contested spaces are made more materially accessible for those with less political investment in the meaning and purposes of these spaces: time and again international Red Cross workers and United Nations vehicles easily transcend the border; the gates opening for them before they reach either post as to hardly disrupt their movement. Their border crossings—always seamless, rarely with moments of waiting—take place against a backdrop of families on either side of the
boundary who can only dream of experiencing such mobility. As Mona, her family, and the Red Cross worker find themselves entangled in the absurdity of bureaucracy where border post actors refuse to budge in their positions, the Red Cross worker is increasingly willing to give up. Mona’s family can only intervene by firmly requesting that the worker do all she can to see that Mona can cross into Syria because, as Mona’s sister Amal says, “If she does not get married today she will never get married.”

It is in and through these vastly different experiences and investments where we see the difference mobility makes even today, as high modernist descriptions of a “flat” world (Friedman 2005) abound from the ethnocentric and economically privileged standpoints of the highly mobile. Marc Augé (1995) has written of an anthropology of “supermodernity,” and asks that we consider places of transit as “non-places,” calling for new conceptualizations of places/spaces characterized by human mobility. For Augé, spaces of transit are not actually “places,” which he defines as sites where people are rooted historically in time. Certainly, the film’s Red Cross worker, Jeanne, can be said to easily fall within the rubric of Augé’s “supermodern subject.” She can be considered emblematic of someone for whom a space of transit, the border crossing, does not exist because she has relatively little time investment there – but this is not how Golanis, Syrians or even Israelis experience the site. Complicating Augé’s analysis in contexts from below is his assumption that these spaces are meant to and actually do function as transit spaces. The contrary is the reality for the many for whom they serve as barriers to mobility. Homi Bhabha (1992) points out, it is perhaps easy to make theory-level assumptions about mobility by those who are highly mobile: “The globe shrinks for those who own it,” Bhabha writes (1992, 88), “But for the displaced or the dispossessed, the migrant or the refugee, no distance is more awesome than the few feet across borders or frontiers.” For those for whom borders, checkpoints and other transit spaces are spaces of waiting, they do indeed become “places” per Augé’s own definition. Augé’s
analysis simply cannot apply to those living alongside a border or to those whose survival is thrown into question by not being able to cross. For these people a border is immediately consequential at various levels – from the geopolitical to the everyday.

Definitions of who can belong where are shaped and contested every day by subjects involved in state projects of exclusion and control, leading to an institutionalization of identities that manifest themselves in the forms of “little things” (Thrift 2000), such as identity cards (see Abu Zhara 2008), passports, and other material and linguistic objects of identification and documentation. Borders, whether themselves materially manifested as militarized bodies, walls, fences, gates, or airports, coupled with identification documents, not only facilitate movement but also limit or deny it. As transit spaces, they work to restrict movements of people, impose divisions between groups, and control development and standards of living – processes implicated both with(in) hegemonic configurations of power and validations of territorial control (see Curti 2008). Visually, they serve to show us who is in charge; materially remind us of dominant ideologies or economic interests; symbolically broadcast a statement about the status of space; and concretely engender a sense of loyalty to place. It is in these ways that etched borders, identity cards and productions of space themselves are materially active, through internalized forms, in subject production and maintenance, and point to how border crossings and the documented forms of identity they operate through serve as power discourses actively producing particular Truths about place via inclusion and exclusion of certain subjects.

A PROGRESSIVE SENSE OF “THE GROUND”
Michel Foucault’s work on sexuality (1978) provides a relevant parallel to how the use of passports and travel documents serve to both construct Truths of embodied subjectivity and produce power of and over place. In his examination of the ways in which medical and psychiatric discourses in the Victorian era actively produced particular ideas about sexuality, leading to categorizations of normal vs. abnormal bodies, he describes how such discourses operated on subjects through the production and internalization of self-knowledge. We can productively work with Foucault’s insights to see that critical to border integrity is the production and maintenance of border subjects through the distribution and utilization of passports and other travel documents as mechanisms to identify, define and police bodies on the ground. Spaces of the body—and bodies in space—become ordered by and through specific governmental rationalities attempting to control and define not only the qualities and identity of space and place, but through the control of bodies in time the histories of spatial narratives. As Margo Huxley (2007, 194) discusses in her exposition of Foucault, “Spatial rationalities postulate causal qualities of ‘spaces’ and ‘environments’ as elements in the operative rationales of government, and these postulates can be examined as truths having histories.” In this context of Truths we can speak of the historical narratives of border crossings as
mechanisms of power similar to Victorian era medicalizations of sexuality or Bentham’s Panopticon: as schemes, diagrams, models or tests serving the “ongoing aims against which programmes of government are evaluated and adjusted, with the continuous aspiration...that reality can be made to conform to the truth of these schemes” (Huxley 2007, 194; see also Elden 2001, 145-150). It is these schematic Truths materialized through border passes, passports and national identification cards, and which serve as forms of constraint, that space and place bodies in ‘appropriate’ space-times; bodies thus becoming expressions of power in the maintenance and validation of territorial claims of occupation and control (see Curti 2008). As Foucault (1980, 131) makes clear:

[T]ruth isn’t outside power, or lacking in power...truth isn’t the reward of free spirits, the child of protracted solitude, nor the privilege of those who have succeeded in liberating themselves. Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it includes regular effects of power.

It is through the widespread governmental requirement, acceptance and use of objects of identification at border crossings that they become indelibly attached to bodies as effects of power: a “geopolitics of embodiment” (Acuña Moenne 2005, 176; see also Thrift 2000) and “biopolitics of international relations” (Salter 2006, 179) re-producing and reinforcing divisions by making True historical and geographical distinctions between ‘us’ and ‘them.’ And because these Truths come partnered with (im)mobile subjects to be allowed in and forbidden from places, these knowledges also attempt to produce propertied and territorialized spaces – our place as opposed to their place: an effort towards the impossible and, more often than not, violent task of purifying space (see Massey 2005).

This point is reflected in The Syrian Bride when Syrian officials refuse to participate in a process that entails even a minimal recognition of an Israeli exit stamp on someone’s identification card from the Occupied Golan Heights, because this very act of recognition, even on paper (or perhaps, especially on paper), would affirmatively contribute to the discourse that the Golan is, indeed, part of Israel. But what does this Syrian refusal tell us about place and space, and more specifically the Golan Heights? Building on and combining Foucault’s insights that there is not one “True” sexuality or sexual identity and Massey’s (2005, 145) argument that “you cannot...purify’ spaces/places,” it follows that there is no one True, fixed, static territory – from the ‘scale’ of the body to that of the state. Massey (1991; see also 2005) has advanced this idea with her classic critique “A Global Sense of Place” wherein she argues against Euclidean, or object-oriented, spatial conceptions which support the idea that single, unbiased representations of places are possible, or even desirable. In line with Foucault’s critiques on subjectivity, Massey writes, “If it is now recognized that people have multiple identities then the same point can be made in relation to places” (1991, 153).
In putting forth the idea that places are not set things but working (and worked) processes, Massey asks that we conceptualize places not as static but as dynamic, without set, closed boundaries, and as sites of multiple identities and histories. Massey’s arguments are not meant to deny the uniqueness of place, but that uniqueness must be analyzed as a politically negotiated consequence of the multiplicity of intersections, flows, power structures, discourses, and subjectivities that compose it; in other words, that “real political necessities are an insistence on the recognition of...specificity and an address to the particularity of the questions they pose” (Massey 2005, 175). Thus, not only do traditions and cultures change and transform over time, the meanings and questions assigned to particular places or traditions vary from group to group and individual to individual—but these changes and differences take place always within and through political contestations where the instability of meaning may also serve certain structures of power and interest (Massey 2005, 175)—a fact we see as Mona is left stranded between the territorial negotiations of identities of a (not so) simple stamp.

Thus, while works like Foucault’s and Massey’s provide rich insights into the stakes mobility holds for place, it is Riklis’s film that unfolds their complex geographical relationship in an affectively (and effectively) indicative way—permitting us to think of the micro-space of Quneitra Crossing through different geographical sensibilities. Massey’s conceptualization of place is written in the context of the local and global, and indeed, in many ways, she blurs the boundaries between the two. Riklis materializes these complexities of space in *The Syrian Bride* by weaving together the realities of “the chance of space” through different protagonists with different capacities for, stakes in and privileges of movement and mobility. In the process Massey and Riklis together offer important challenges to meta-notions of the erosion of place through globalization and the universality of supposed time-space compression, concepts which have produced real anxiety over the annihilation of the local and have given rise to defensive and reactionary responses such as nationalism, competitive localisms, and antagonism to newcomers and ‘outsiders.’ Massey explains that this anxiety is underpinned by a dubious conception of place. “Can’t we rethink our sense of place?” she asks, “Is it not possible for a sense of place to be progressive; not self-closing and defensive, but outward-looking? A sense of place which is adequate to this era of time-space compression?” (Massey 1991, 147). As we have attempted to point to here, key to this question is the reality that different people are affected in different ways by time-space compression because of their particular identities, and how these identities are indelibly linked to closed and static conceptions of space and territory. Time-space compression needs social differentiating: not all bodies can or will experience time and space in the same way—and, indeed, what may be a matter of time-space compression for some identities may be violent expansion or even amputation for others. This is not just a moral or political point about inequality—although, as Massey makes clear, “that would be sufficient reason to mention it” (Massey 1991, 148)—it is also a conceptual point about power
which she calls the “power geometry” of time-space compression, a systematic way of positioning individuals and groups in highly uneven ways. This point underscores not merely the issue of who moves and who does not (or who can move and who cannot), although this is of course an important element; it is also about power relations and how they effect and order flows and movement, blockages and motilities (see Salter 2006; Pickering and Weber 2006). Different social groups have distinct relationships to this: some people control space more than others; some initiate flows and movement, others do not or can not; some are more on the receiving end of spatial barriers than others; some are effectively imprisoned by space (Massey 1991, 149). Yet, as the events unfold in The Syrian Bride, the narrative reveals that even in this effective imprisonment the possibility of change, transformation and resistance can never be eradicated: there is no – nor can there ever be a – purification of space/place. In this, the film presents a challenge to the – and calls for a new – spatial politics of Israel/Syria in particular and the Occupied Territories more generally.

Considerations

Control of people’s mobility through international borders is part of a sustained process of place-making in a way Massey has argued against. Too often, boundaries are viewed as ‘obvious’ characteristics of the state, as ‘natural’ phenomena, or its crossings merely transit spaces, making it difficult to critically analyze their power and function. But we must acknowledge the underlying motives of those seeking to construct place in container form. Mobility, as Tim Cresswell points out, is a deeply threatening and transgressive behavior often described as “deviant” (1993, 250; see also Pickering and Weber 2006). In an increasingly mobile society the perceived assault on place integrity is becoming an ever-so visible concern for the state, communicated in the non-verbal language of a wall, fence, or military attaché along different borders and boundaries and materialized at the scale of the body through legal documents. Examining border crossing processes, therefore, can help address larger questions about the different territories states seek to bound while simultaneously highlighting mechanisms and relations of power between subjects and the state, pointing to very real ways that “space and time are pliable and moveable constructions that might or might not correspond to the spaces and times of nation states” (Smith 2003, 562).

Checkpoints, border fences, concrete walls, armed bodies and imprisonment have become part of the everyday conditions of Palestinians in the Occupied West Bank and Gaza. This is well recognized. Much less attended to are similar Syrian, and especially Syrian Druze, experiences in the Occupied Golan Heights. The ability to move in(to) and out of places is coupled with the expectation that persons know where they belong and do not belong. In turn, this seeks to communicate to them who they are and who they are not, where they should and should not be placed. The ordering of society in this way is alarming in its consequences. In contrast to characterizations of certain
privileged discourses, material boundaries and border crossings are far from benign, and we must acknowledge the underlying motives of those seeking to construct place in container form through one-sided power geometries, while drawing attention to the oft-disrupted and emotionally violent space-time impacts on lives entangled in these processes. The Syrian Bride, a film where a wedding ceremony is to take place at a border crossing, provides an expression and example of ordinary people caught up in Israeli strategies of place-making through the bureaucratic (dis)placement and production of subjects in the Occupied Golan Heights. Such actions, as this paper has argued, attempt to fix identity and meaning, denying the possibility that society and space could be ordered differently. Mona’s resilience and transgression of the border, however, stand as testament that they can.

**Endnotes**

1 And, indeed, this situation presents the seemingly paradoxical case of “Israeli-Arabs” – an identity imposed by Israel on indigenous inhabitants in attempts to distinguish their struggles and sever them from wider Palestinian collectivity. While such an identity may seem unproblematic on its face, recent statements by Israeli government officials such as “Once a Palestinian state is established, I can come to the Palestinian citizens, whom we call Israeli Arabs, and say to them ‘you are citizens with equal rights, but the national solution for you is elsewhere,” and “The idea is to maintain two states for two peoples, that is my path to a democratic nation,” (Haaretz 12 November 2008) point to its de facto contradiction.

2 This is notable as there are also approximately 2,000 Syrian-Alawites living in the Golan Heights (CIA 2009).

3 One relevant example is the fruitless call for the return of the Golan Heights to Syria with the passage of U.N. Resolution 242 shortly after Israeli occupation began in 1967, and again with the passage of U.N. Resolution 487 days after annexation.
References


