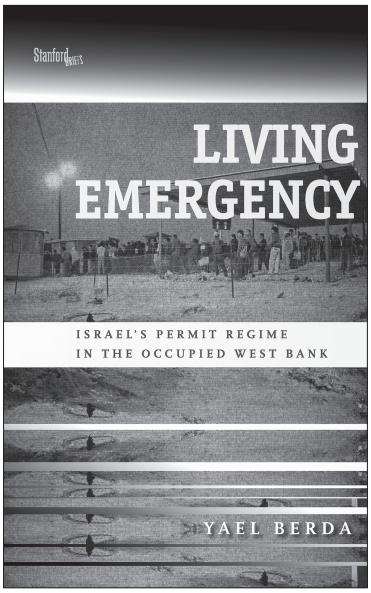

Living Emergency: Israel's Permit Regime in the Occupied West Bank, by Yael Berda. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2017. 152 pages. $12.99 paper, e-book available.

REVIEWED BY MICHELLE D. WEITZEL

Israel justifies its more than fifty-year-long occupation of the Palestinian territories, and the severe restrictions it places on Palestinian mobility, in the name of security for the Israeli state and its citizens. Control of territory and population in service of this professed goal is achieved through a host of repressive mechanisms—some patently visible, such as the 125-mile separation wall; and some more obscured and protracted, such as the de-development process that has left the Palestinian economy disadvantaged and dependent on Israel for survival. In *Living Emergency: Israel's Permit Regime in the Occupied West Bank*, human rights attorney and sociologist Yael Berda examines the opaque clerical and administrative process that grants or denies Palestinian movement, portraying the decision-making and arbitrariness of what Berda calls the "bureaucracy of occupation" (p. 12). *Living Emergency* argues convincingly that the permit regime functions in ways that exceed the security logics it is meant to uphold, operating instead as a powerful mechanism of population management and deepening Israeli control and surveillance of everyday life in Palestine.

In Berda's narrative, the efficacy of the permit regime is founded on three interconnected modes of control: First, the 1967 census of the occupied Palestinian territories (oPt), which became the key source of data about Palestinians and the administrative foundation for identity documents essential to Palestinian mobility and life. Second, spatial closure, precipitated by the 1968 Entry to Israel Directive, which made entry and exit permits mandatory and shifted the authority to grant these permits from the Ministry of Interior to the regional military commander. Third, a discursive shift, consolidated between the outbreak of the Second Intifada in 2000 and the conclusion of Operation Defensive Shield in 2002, in which Palestinians went from being conceived of as civilians in need of governance to a dangerous enemy population wherein every resident represented a potential security threat. This reconceptualization led to a "security theology" (p. 34) that institutionalized and normalized administrative procedures originally intended as exceptional emergency measures. Berda suggests domestic factors triggered this discursive shift toward emergency, but given the time period in question it might have been illuminating to contextualize the emergent rhetoric within the framework of Israel's response to global events, such as the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

The consignment of West Bank Palestinians to categories of risk—as with most classification schemes—led to the radical abstraction and standardization of individual lives. In the absence of refined information, people were judged on characteristics such as age, family ties, hometown, religiosity, and political activism. These traits in turn linked to threat indices that calculated risk

to Israeli national security. How one scored in relation to these criteria determined eligibility for the much sought-after permits as the state began to enforce the closure directive.

The jurisdiction to determine individual risk, as well as the authority to dictate criteria that structured the evaluation of risk itself, fell to the Shin Bet as the other agencies dealing with the oPt lacked a specific security focus and sought to evade blame that might be levied if a Palestinian resident of the West Bank were to attack Israel. As the demand for risk evaluations of the Palestinian population grew, so did Shin Bet's standing vis-à-vis other elements of the bureaucracy. The Shin Bet's decision-making, including the logic that informs the labeling of individuals as security threats, is classified even as it is constantly changing. Berda reveals how the resulting opacity within the system, and the lack of recourse, generated a sense of paralysis and confusion and had a chilling effect on political activity and active citizenship as Palestinian residents of the West Bank feared their actions would be penalized. Berda also correctly highlights the emergence of the permit regime alongside a framework of labor economy, again emphasizing the ways closure constructs permits as tools of political power both for Shin Bet agents extorting intelligence and Israeli contractors interested in maintaining a steady flow of cheap labor. Palestinians' dependence on freedom of movement for their livelihood rendered them vulnerable to the vagaries of this permit regime. In carefully narrated personal accounts garnered from hundreds of interviews, court cases, and ministry archives, Berda reveals the administrative morass that Palestinians navigate, characterized by clerical redundancy; an absence of transparent authority; radical unpredictability in terms of rules, operating hours, and prerequisites for obtaining clearance; and an uncritical reliance on classified information that remains outside of the purview of the Palestinian who is affected by its ruling.

The bureaucratic failure inherent to the system, which Berda characterizes as "effective inefficiency," (p. 112) does not represent a lack of power—rather, it produces specific results for governing the oPt: first, in creating Palestinian dependency on the administrative system, it maintains and widens the scope of surveillance and control; second, it creates uncertainty and disorientation in Palestinian society through the prevention of mobility. The resultant suspicion among Palestinians under occupation is underscored by the individualization of the relationship between the Palestinian subject and the Israeli state: although their political experience under the permit regime is a collective one, Palestinians must negotiate their cases in isolation. Berda portrays a vision of power not as omnipotent and seamless, but uneven and full of contradictions—one that terrifies not in spite of its fragmented nature but by capitalizing on chaos to reinforce its own sovereignty. This argument is similar to the case made recently by Hagar Kotef in *Movement and the Ordering of Freedom: On Liberal Governances of Mobility* (Duke University Press, 2015) regarding Israeli control over mobility at checkpoints. Berda may profitably be read in conversation with works that understand the dangerous potency of capricious power in procedural violence.

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