Surveillance Sublime:

The Security State in Jerusalem

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No other people has ever heard and accepted the command from heaven as did the people of Israel. – Martin Buber¹

There is a sublime essence to surveillance. The term hints at an Ecclesiastical origin – a combination of the French sur (over) and the Latin vigilāre (a devotional watching or wakefulness) - while the promise of surveillance evokes God-like capabilities: all-knowing, all-seeing, all the time, everywhere. Surveillance has historically been fused with a view of a transcendent, omnipresent, omniscient, and omnipotent God. It is a confluence of organizational and technological changes that reflect the socio-political desires and myths of the particular time and place in which it is enacted. In our current society, surveillance has become enmeshed with, reliant on, and built into various technologies. And the sublime drives our beliefs that technologies can lead society toward a utopia of utmost efficiency, automation, objectivity, supreme mathematical power, connectivity, or the like.² While technologies of surveillance reveal the formation of different political power and methods of governing over the course of history, they also demonstrate our attempts at playing God.

Only in modern history has surveillance taken on a more secular nature. The foremost example of modern surveillance, Bentham's panoptic system, was driven precisely by a desire of secular omniscience, which rested on the kind of rational abstract knowledge prized by Enlightenment thinkers seeking to impose order and rationality. Bentham's prison design consisted of a circular structure with inmates stationed around the perimeter unable to tell whether the manager inside the "inspection house" at the center was watching over them or not. Inmates thus had to act on the assumption that they *were* watched all the time, effectively leading them constantly to control their own behavior. This ingenuous vision of achieving social order sidestepped the need for the watchful eye to be God's. Man and man-made systems could now play the role of overseer. Bentham's principle of observation and control underpinned the design of the modern prison – and, importantly, modern ideals of surveillance – by seeking to restrict and control movement through architecture while allowing a smaller staff to monitor prisoners directly.

Popularized into our lexicon of governmentality through Michel Foucault, Bentham's panopticon has become synonymous with surveillance.³ Foucault argued that surveillance is constitutive, providing the means for authoritative social institutions to construct reality by shaping and managing populations, either for the benefit of such institutions and the classes they served or for more tyrannous purposes. In other words, whether as a "tool used for some of the most socially laudable . . . or [socially] condemnable ends," surveillance became fundamental to a new conception of politics.⁴ Although the power of surveillance was presented by Foucault as coercive and productive, it was surveillance as a morally and epistemologically regulative authority that became the dominant issue for the majority of Foucault's readers, which brings us back to Bentham's panoptic. The panoptic design was revolutionary for it promised maximum control with minimal effort on the part of the controller, and turned the prisoner himself into the (self-)surveillant. The application of panoptic principles of surveillance outside the penitentiary walls, however, was not possible without also transferring the assumption that those being surveilled – or surveilling themselves – had mal intent, were dangerous, or required containment. Indeed, surveillance is often enacted on negative principles; intelligence gathering, crime prevention or investigation, protection (of a process, of people, or of place), and the like often presume that man is inherently sinful. This echoes certain religious beliefs. But God's watching over, while all-powerful and all-knowing, can also be all-loving. Not so surveillance. Surveillance is built on a lack of trust, feeding into a culture of fear and suspicion.

To be sure, surveillance is double-sided. It can be all-embracing and caring (in providing benefits to citizens, for example) as much as it can impose a system of inequality. David Lyon's comprehensive definition recognizes both its productive and repressive capabilities: surveillance is the focused, systematic, routine attention to details for the purposes of influence, control, management, entitlement, protection, and/or direction.⁵ Undertaken by all kinds of organizations – governmental, military, educational, corporate, and others – surveillance is put into place for the pursuit of different end goals, such as security, risk-management, punishment, profit, or even market maximization.

Surveillance is frequently instituted as a means to buttress dominant relations of state power and control, but it cannot be divorced from the context of when, where, and by whom it is used. It reflects the kind of society being built, what kind of human relations exist, what dominant forms of power are sought, and how "others" are oppressed. Therefore, certain political contexts highlight its most sinister aspects.⁶ In the context of Israel/Palestine, surveillance cannot be separated from Zionist strategies to create different categories of people and places, which have ultimately served to dispossess and control Palestinians.

In Palestine, surveillance is manifested through a gamut of discursive, corporeal, and material tools, built on a framework in which Palestinians are categorically suspect. Surveillance keeps an eye on Palestinians while also constituting them as "security threats" or "dangerous populations." It does so through tools of power quotidian and formal, low-tech and hi-tech, and through minutely focused, routinized, and systematic applications that collectively define the workings of the Israeli surveillance regime's management of territory and population.⁷ In other words, in Israel, surveillance hides the more ominous practice of colonialism.⁸

Surveillance is not a neutral process. It is also more than simply a set of technological tools. Rather, it is a system of belief and practice which structures the technologies we create, defines the sovereign's territorial boundaries, and constructs and differentiates populations within that territory.⁹ It is a form of political power.

The Surveillance State

Israel is a surveillance state *par excellence*. Israel boasts a gamut of intelligence-cummilitary organizations, develops and deploys a wide breadth of vigilant and control technologies, and is an established global leader in the sale of surveillance expertise and tools. This stems from a history in which the Israeli state itself was born out of and into a surveillance regime.

As the work of Hillel Cohen, Ilan Pappe, and Michael Fischbach demonstrates, Zionist entities learned and benefited from the British Mandate authorities' hordes of documents that detailed and quantified myriad aspects of daily life in Palestine.¹⁰ Population details, tax lists, land surveys, topo-cadastral maps, along with an array of other tools first deployed by the British in the 1920s, would be of critical importance to win the 1948 war and establish the surveillance state that followed. Zionists directed their first networks of information gathering at the land itself, then at the population, and along the way established various bodies that evolved into the state's "intelligence" institutions – Haganah, Shin Bet, and Mossad, among others. Zionist scholars also produced their own detailed studies of Palestine's Arab population and land-holdings. One of the most well known of these was the *Shai*'s (Hebrew acronym for *Sherut Yedi'ot* – Information Service) massive and secret "Operation Arab Village," which meticulously gathered data on land, population, and various features of Palestinian life.¹¹ The result of these files was "the most striking example ... of the application of intelligence activity to defined military ends."¹² Data about land, water sources, wealth, and tribal rivalries, was supplemented with information on roads, number of weapons available to Palestinians, and the presence of fighters during the 1936–1939 Revolt, creating a true "know thy enemy" set of records, supplemented, after 1948, with the acquisition and theft of most British records.¹³

This history reveals three important issues. First, the boundary between surveillance and military technologies is blurry at best. This was as true for the early years of Zionist strategy as it is today. The Israeli industrial-military complex continues to be deeply intertwined with its technology industry.¹⁴ Moreover, Israeli hi-tech companies, defense firms, the Israeli military, a police force, spy agencies, border control organizations, and surveillance firms all form integral parts of a broader – if misleadingly titled – "security" industry, the brunt of which targets Palestinians as subjects. Second, there is no shift in surveillance methods used before and after 1948 or before and after 1967, just as there is no clear moment of a surveillance regime becoming completely reliant on new technologies. Technologies that were fundamental to early colonial and state control, such as population registries, identification cards, land surveys, and mapping, remain a central part of Israel's surveillance regime. And much surveillance still relies on old fashioned intelligence and data gathering on the ground: a police force, intelligence agents, informants, spies, infiltrators, collaborators, imprisonment, torture and interrogation methods, observation from a distance and direct observation, differentiated infrastructure, territorial mapping, land surveys and registration, urban planning, architecture, watch towers, population registration, censuses, identification papers, and slightly newer low-tech tools such as postal interception, wiretapping, and x-ray machines. While an increasing number of tools - such as drones, remote controlled robots, biometric data collection, and computer viruses – are hi-tech, these do not *displace* low-tech ones, but supplement them. Third, surveillance takes place throughout the entirety of the Israel/Palestine. No doubt Israel has deployed different tools at different times onto different sets of population: for example, the military administration imposed on Palestinian citizens inside Israel in the 1950s and 1960s;¹⁵ or the move to a more technologized and distant surveillance of Gaza since 2005.¹⁶ Collectively, however, the geographic and temporal reach and breadth of the Israeli surveillance regime is formidable and all-encompassing. Israeli surveillance is hybrid: an amalgam of low- and hi-tech means, a set of tools developed equally for defense and offense, for security and oppression, enacted on the entirety of the territory.

A City "United" in Divisions

Jerusalem sits in a sacred place in the surveillance landscape of Israel/Palestine. Neither the territory nor its inhabitants are subject to the same kinds of draconian controls as the Gaza Strip, for example. But given its status as a holy city and Israel's desire to make it the undivided capital of the state, Jerusalem hosts a combination of surveillance methods and means, some in use across Israel/Palestine, others unique. The archetypal celestial city brings to bear a surveillance sublime, driven by ancient Biblical imaginations and modern contestations.

At its simplest, Israeli surveillance revolves around the ability to control two key features of life, evident in the case of Jerusalem: land and people. Since its annexation immediately after the 1967 war, Jerusalem has been under (contested) Israeli control. Over these decades, Israel has expanded the "municipal boundaries" of Jerusalem, while building dozens of settlements inside and around the city in an effort to Judaize the city. The redrawing of territorial limits plays an important role in surveillance and control,

as it determines who falls under the regime's purview. Moreover, territorial expansion cannot happen without surveillance: a regime needs to know how and which territory needs to be demarcated, fixed, protected, and enlarged; it needs to ascertain its safety in ruling that territory, thus requiring clear definitions of territories, borders, and populations. Land surveys and mapping, land laws and regulations, residency permits and citizenship, infrastructure building, among others, have been imperative for Israel's presence in and expansion around Jerusalem.

The control of territory further determines who can go in, who can go out, and who can move around. The successive expansion of Jerusalem's municipal boundaries and controls have not been haphazard, but meticulously calculated depending on the number and intensity of Palestinian populations present, as well as Palestinian populations nearby, which over decades have been increasingly prevented from accessing the city. Increasing the number of Jewish-Israeli residents, imposing limits on Palestinian building and infrastructure, and making it virtually impossible for Palestinians to secure commercial permits, are combined with more overtly violent mechanisms such as house demolitions and land confiscation. Collectively, Israeli planning policies aim to engineer a "demographic balance" in Jerusalem: namely, a 70 percent Jewish majority in the city. An equally complex system of planning and architecture plays an important role in the surveillance regime. Access to infrastructure such as sewage, electricity, and roads; the location of schools and hospitals; the types of stone used to build Jewish-Israeli homes; the impossible permits necessary for Palestinians to build or expand homes; the erection of Israeli flags on top of recently stolen houses inside the Old City; the presence of settlers amid Palestinians - all of these architectural and planning decisions are also components of Jerusalem's surveillance.

If land is the canvas upon which the Israeli surveillance regime is erected, its force is targeted toward Palestinians. Censuses, population registries, identification and citizenship requirements, entry permits, and other techniques of data collection and social sorting are part of the matrix of surveillance. All of these are innately political processes that categorize and sort people according to various criteria that are products of the political imaginings of Israel, rendering, for example, native Palestinian Jerusalemites different than other Palestinians or Israelis. Israel uses censuses as a basic means of gathering data on the identity of the population, while doubling as registration process and creating the political basis for a hierarchical system of citizenship. In the case of Jerusalem, Israeli political power and governance draws on the categorization of people (according to ethnicity, religion, place of residence, and so on) to reduce and negate the local Palestinian population.

Identification is a vital dimension of surveillance practice as well as a mode of discrimination. Israel's program of reducing the size of the Palestinian population inside Jerusalem's municipal boundaries includes encouraging the departure of Palestinians through policies such as the implementation and revocation of special Jerusalem identity cards. Israel increasingly threatens holders of Jerusalem IDs with revocation of their cards, especially since the 1995 "center of life" residency requirements, which demands Palestinians to produce a variety of documents, virtually impossible to obtain, that prove

that Jerusalem is their "center of life." This demonstrates a sinister aspect of surveillance, where the presumption of criminality forces Palestinians to hold permits to live in their own homes. Palestinians' *a priori* guilt is unconnected to any real and specific actions, achieved in the first place through simple data collection.

The Israeli state's logic of a Judaized "holy land" is imposed by a variety of records and data, which serve as agents of surveillance and transformative power. It should come as no surprise that when Israel captured Jerusalem and the West Bank, the taking of the Jordan intelligence agencies archives was among its first actions.¹⁷ Within months of the 1967 occupation, almost every aspect of Palestinian life was surveilled, examined, and registered.¹⁸ The details are dizzying and encompassing: population characteristics, public health, education, urban and rural population, refugees and permanent residents, gender, age, religion, infant mortality rate, population growth rate, poverty level, per capita income; size and makeup of the labor force, scale and type of industries, amount of arable land, kinds of crops planted, number of cattle and poultry; furniture and household maintenance; number of households with electricity, private kitchens, toilets, bathrooms, television sets, sewing machines, gas cookers, electric refrigerators, private cars; changing rates of private consumption, energy and nutritional value of the food supply, the proportion of household wealth spent on heath, education, transportation, and entertainment. Even forms of communication were detailed: phone calls, incoming and outgoing letters, Red Cross dispatches, stamps sold, incoming and outgoing parcels, telegrams and cables.¹⁹ As Neve Gordon writes:

The seemingly endless number of tables, charts, and figures published by the military government, Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics, and the Bank of Israel's Research Department, as well as different government ministries reveals the extent to which the population was monitored and provides a sense of the vast amount of resources Israel invested in ensuring that nothing escaped its observation. Indeed, what comes across very prominently in the reports published during the first years following the war is both the swiftness with which the surveillance apparatus was set up and the degree of surveillance and scrutiny to which the population was subjected.²⁰

It is important to reiterate that a wealth of this information was accessed through the most low-tech means possible: undercover agents, intelligence workers, and collaborators dispersed throughout society, operating from the bottom up and gathering the minutest of details.²¹ A corporeal force continues to take hold over Jerusalem. The presence of the military and, in Jerusalem especially, the police force is formidable. By some estimates, on an average day more than 800 police officers roam the Old City alone, while "during Ramadan there are at least 3,000 officers or more . . . and toward the end of Ramadan there are 5,000."²²

Police presence is further supplemented by new technologies. Indeed, the low-tech means of policing, espionage, implantation of settlers, urban planning, architecture, land surveys and regulations, censuses, population registrations, identification cards, maps,

which together require and create detailed records of the land, people, their movements and behaviors, are only half the story. For example, there exists a "sophisticated electronic monitoring and security systems through which guards are radioed to accompany settlers from the Jewish Quarter or Jaffa Gate or Damascus Gate to their homes, or schoolchildren from their schools."²³ The saturation of closed-circuit television (CCTV) cameras along every stretch, corner, and alleyway of the Old City cannot be overstated. There is a sense that the quarters of the Holy City boasts the biggest concentration of CCTV cameras anywhere in the world. According to national police spokesman Micky Rosenfeld, the Old City has one camera for every 125 residents.²⁴

Since late 1999, two Israeli firms with military origins, the AGM Company and the Mer Group, have installed at least 350 CCTV cameras and sensors across the Old City in a program called Mabat 2000. The Mer Group's chairman of the board explained that "the police needed a system in which 'Big Brother' would control and would allow for an overall view of events in the Old City area," while its website defined the Old City as the "biggest historic centre with maximum security."²⁵ The cameras can be maneuvered 360 degrees to follow and track movements, and range from the aerial view of a parking lot to the detail of a single license plate.²⁶ There may be some truth to a joke told by Palestinian tour guides that if a tourist wants a video souvenir of her trip, she could ask the local police for CCTV footage taken of her.

And as with all technologies, CCTV cameras require human experts behind the scenes: more than a dozen staff members are assigned to different cameras in the Old City's "Observation and Intelligence Center," with special attention paid to the Western Wall, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and the Temple Mount.²⁷ The holier the site, the denser the presence of Israeli police, informants, and CCTV cameras. Since 2015, in an effort led by the United States, in its role of superpower engaged in the so-called "peace process," and Jordan, claiming its historical role as custodian of the site, there is a plan to install 55 around-the-clock surveillance cameras over the 144-square-dunum complex of the Noble Sanctuary which would live stream the footage around the globe over the internet.²⁸ Commenting on the video monitoring system, U.S. secretary of state John Kerry claims the cameras would provide "comprehensive visibility and transparency, and that could really be a game-changer in discouraging anybody from disturbing the sanctity of this holy site."²⁹

While holy sites and the Old City are penetrated by hundreds surveillance cameras, there are hundreds more cameras that are privately installed: in and around settler's homes, gated communities, housing complexes, hotels, and shopping malls throughout the city. Indeed, Israel is a world leader in the development and sale of CCTV technologies and software associated with the analysis of video and wireless data transmission. Israeli companies such as Vigilant, Verint, Sea-Eye, and Camero, whose names hint at their areas of expertise, specialize in advanced image analysis, video surveillance, monitoring systems, and wireless transmission of video data, while products such as "Perimeter Intrusion Detection Systems" boast of cameras that can "see" through walls.³⁰

Observation from a distance by means of electronic equipment – such as CCTV cameras – can be situated along a technological spectrum between wiretapping and

interception of electronically transmitted information (such as phone calls and internet traffic), on the one hand, and aerial imaging, mapping, and profiling through satellites and drones, on the other hand. Surveillance has come to include data mining, geo-location tagging, and website and social media profiling. In the words of Elia Zureik: "Israel is . . . a prime example of an administration that uses tried-and-tested methods of conventional, face-to-face surveillance – informers and secret agents – alongside the highest of high-tech surveillance devices."³¹ In the same way that technology use among Palestinians (and Israelis) have changed, so too has the focus and strength of Israel's surveillance regime. "As technology has changed, the Israeli intelligence arms have adapted. Today, social media apps and the internet writ large occupy their attention in addition to cellular and landline phones and radio intercepts. The past decade or so has seen a new era in communications and intelligence gathering."³²

The Israeli state has invested millions of dollars in surveillance of information transmitted over the internet and communication infrastructures. The most eminent, as well as most secretive, entity tasked with collecting phone calls, text messages, e-mails, and social media posts from Palestinians across Israel/Palestine, as well as broader communications across the Middle East, Africa, and Europe, is an organization called Unit 8200. Often called Israel's National Security Agency (NSA) for its signals intelligence capability, Unit 8200 has become the Israeli military's largest unit, deploying hundreds of soldiers stationed in the Naqab, sifting through millions of Facebook posts, Twitter feeds, telephone taps, and cellular signal geo-locations.³³ Unit 8200 gathers what is considered both clandestine and "open source" information: the first is information that is not publically available, including intelligence gathered from collaborators on the ground, intercepts of phone calls, private e-mails, and images drawn from drones; the latter is content that is freely available without the need for special tools, such as newspaper and magazine articles, Twitter and Facebook posts, radio broadcasts, and academic papers.

More than 400 Palestinians – from Jerusalem, the West Bank, and citizens of Israel – have been arrested for their Facebook posts between October 2015 and March 2016 alone, a number that is sure to increase in the years to come. Palestinian internet users are well aware of being surveilled, and indeed the possibility of arrest as a result, leading some activists to opt out of Facebook and other social media altogether. Surveillance and arrest for information sharing did not emerge only with the rise of social media, of course; during the height of occupation in the 1970s and 1980s, for example, all media and information sources were tightly monitored (and censored), as were graffiti, flyers and political materials, and telephones and facsimile machines.

Israeli surveillance, online or on the ground, is invasive and by definition a breach of privacy – of one's space, time, body, behavior, and actions. It also reveals a governmentality that assumes that the population being surveilled is a knowable entity whose actions and thoughts can be forecasted or preempted. A surveillance regime that assumes that it can figure out when, what, and where a presumed threat exists (and prevent it) or, in some cases, automatically assume particular people are a threat, also implies a surveillance assemblage that is omnipresent and omniscient. It seeks ubiquity in space and time. It attempts to be totalizing, like a sublime power.

Muraqabat al-Raqeeb, A New Jerusalem

The Holy One - al-Quds - may well be watched over by God, but today it is also vigilantly watched over by the Israeli state. This new Jerusalem has been rendered into a "panopticity." Given the establishment of Israel and its presence in Jerusalem as presumably divinely ordained, perhaps surveillance is a call from God himself, a realization of Psalm 121:4: "He who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep."

The equivalent of the panopticon can be found in the images of the God of Judaism, as Father, Lord, Master, Sovereign, who is eternal, almighty, omniscient, omnipresent, and transcendent, and who watches his creation from the top of a panoptic tower. God is the ultimate panopticist, the supreme surveillance camera. But God is also able to "see" and control *psychically*. Recent research in social psychology has demonstrated that thinking of God triggers the same psychological responses as perceived surveillance.³⁴ As such, whether ecclesiastical or secular, constant and inescapable surveillance becomes internalized or written on the heart of the believer. Seen in this light, it seems that the Israeli regime is attempting to be the supernatural moral authority that assumes all Palestinians are born in sin and toward which sanctions must be applied.

Or perhaps the Israeli surveillance regime is a modern rendition of prophet Ezekiel, commanded to stand as watchman for the nation of Israel. Ezekiel also foresaw the fall of Jerusalem, and such an apocalyptic reading could be more appropriate here. The apocalypse is a catastrophic end-time narrative, but it is also a story of redemption and transformation that dramatizes the dialectic between hope and fatalism, between annihilation and transformation. Indeed, in apocalyptic plots of the end of the world, God is a character that sees, records, and rewards or punishes all human actions. Surveillance is an essential technology in the divine economy of the end.

Of course, that mere mortals can presume to know, let alone emulate, the ways of God, is the very antithesis of religiosity. Maybe Israel's extravagant attempt at embracing the Holy City through its surveillance mechanisms symbolizes an altogether more profane meaning. As W. J. T. Mitchell eloquently states, "every holy landscape seems to be shadowed by evil. The tempter looks with an evil eye on the goodly prospect, ready to pounce. The holy place is a paradise from which we have been expelled, a sacred soil that has been defiled, a promise yet to be fulfilled, a blessed site that lies under a curse. The perverse logic of holy landscape seems to turn it from god's gift into an obscene idol. ...³⁵

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Endnotes

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- 11 See Saleh Abdul Jawwad's essay on Haganah Village Files in this issue.
- Fischbach, "British and Zionist Data Gathering," 305.
- 13 Pappe, *Ethnic Cleansing*; Cohen, "Matrix of Surveillance."

- 14 See Neve Gordon, *Israel's Occupation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008); Zureik, Lyon, and Abu-Laban, eds., *Surveillance and Control.*
- 15 See Cohen, Good Arabs.
- 16 See Helga Tawil-Souri, "Digital Occupation: Gaza's High-tech Enclosure," Journal of Palestine Studies 41, no. 2 (Winter 2012): 27–43.
- 17 Cohen, "Matrix of Surveillance," 105. See also: Musa Budeiri, "Controlling the Archive: Captured Jordanian Security Files in the Israeli State Archives," *Jerusalem Quarterly* 66 (Summer 2016): 87–98.
- 18 Gordon, Israel's Occupation.
- 19 Gordon, Israel's Occupation, 40-41.
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- 33 Kane, "Post, Share, Like, Arrest."
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