THE OCCUPATION OF THE SENSES: THE PROSTHETIC AND AESTHETIC OF STATE TERROR

NADERA SHALHOUB-KEVORKIAN*

Colonial and settler colonial dispossession is performed through various forms of violence, justified by cultural, historical, religious and national imperatives. In this paper, I define one of these forms of violence as the occupation of the senses, referring to the sensory technologies that manage bodies, language, sight, time and space in the colony. This paper analyses the parades, marches and festivals performed in the Palestinian city space of occupied East Jerusalem; shares the slogans, chants and graffiti used by Israeli civil, religious and nationalist entities; and explores what is lived, seen, heard, felt and smelled by the colonized to uncover the political violence implicated in the occupation of the senses.

Key words: occupation, senses, aesthetics, Palestinians, East Jerusalem

Introduction

This article examines the occupation of the senses of the colonized in occupied East Jerusalem (OEJ). By ‘occupation of the senses’, I refer to technologies that manage language, sight, sound, time and space in the colony; the administration of who acts, who speaks, who gives birth and how, and who walks/moves/drives where and how; and what kind of language, music, smells, marches, colours, cultures and scenes are promoted and inscribed over the spaces, lives and bodies of the colonized. Thus, my inquiry is concerned with the ways in which the settler colony uses sensory stimuli in a confrontational manner and with the aim of invading the realm of experience of the colonized, producing exclusivity and hegemony on the basis of cultural, religious, national and security claims (Mbembe 1992).

Dominant criminological approaches privilege the study of interpersonal crime, policing criminality and terrorism, fear of crime, and other related trends of crime prevention and punishment. This article examines an ignored field of criminology that studies violent aesthetics, the aesthetics of violence and, more precisely, criminality against the senses. Art, graffiti, parades, music and advertisements, in addition to spaces such as streets, churches, mosques and city centres, are important sites for criminological inquiry. The sovereign’s everyday acts of policing such spaces, which produce social and political separation, present an explicit aesthetic narrative of control that privileges one group over another. The study of criminalities enacted in the sensory realm raises troubling complexities for theorizations of crime and punishment. Critical criminology must further investigate the ways in which images of power, aesthetics of violence and theatricalities of control invade the senses of oppressed populations. By considering state performances of criminalities against the senses, the present article

*Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian, Lawrence D Biede Chair in Law, Institute of Criminology, Faculty of Law, School of Social Work and Social Welfare, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Mt. Scopus, Jerusalem 91905, Israel; nadera@sh-ke.com.

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examines how the sovereign constructs, labels and communicates the inherent ‘born criminality’ of otherized groups.

My central argument is that in order to understand colonial violence as it manifests itself in the occupation of the senses and its inscription of pain onto the bodies and lives of the colonized (Ihmoud 2015; Savigh 2015; Shihade 2015), we must go beyond traditional examinations of relations of domination and control. Not only through occupation of territory and the building of walls, checkpoints and other modes of separation are state apparatuses multiplied, transformed, circulated and deployed to further produce the prominence and exclusivity of the colonizer’s regime (Hammami 2015; Rouhana 2015), but also through sensory and embodied means. Utilizing various sensory phenomena (e.g. graffiti, sound, vocabulary, narratives, smells), the settler colony institutionalizes itself to cement its legitimacy and hegemony.

Based on the subject matter analysed in this article, I claim that there is a plurality of spheres that are not governed by a single organizing principle but are rather operated through various tightly entangled colonial logics (Kēhaulani Kauanui 2008). Those spheres are legitimized, institutionalized, ruled and mobilized by fluid settler colonial identities (religious, cultural, musical, historical, political) working in tandem to optimize and ratify the absolute domination of the official regime. For instance, the occupation of the senses may appear to function separately in the public sphere (polis)—where it is primarily a biopolitical device—and the private sphere (oikos)—where a combination of biopolitical, disciplinary and necropolitical (Mbembe and Meintjes 2003) mechanisms enforce a more extreme form of domination over Palestinian bodies and senses—yet both operate under the same colonial logic of domination.

In this paper, OEJ serves as a case study to demonstrate and analyse the mechanism of the occupation of the senses. As part of its colonial-territorial project, Israel began its occupation (or de facto annexation) of East Jerusalem in 1967 (Benvenisti 1996). Since then, as in other areas in historic Palestine, the Israeli state has enacted a regime of policies intended to promote the Judaization of the land and to eradicate any Palestinian presence (Masalha 1997). It is an Israeli state policy objective to achieve a ‘demographic balance’ of 28 per cent Palestinians and 72 per cent Israeli Jews in Jerusalem (Shragai 2010). To this end, Israeli authorities maintain total control over residency status in OEJ, with the government revoking the residency rights of at least 14,000 Palestinians since 1967 (OCHA 2014). Moreover, freedom of movement in the city is strongly limited by checkpoints, roadblocks and the separation wall (OCHA 2014).

This study was not conceptualized as a multisensory analysis project from the outset, but rather developed from my own lived experience as a Palestinian residing in the Old City of Jerusalem. The methodology employed was based on participant-observation in everyday activities in a militarized area: walking to work, caring for a family, speaking to colleagues and friends and observing fleeting moments of disruption where the colonized call the dominant order into question.

Critical criminology suggests that the carnivality of state violence that I witness and study in OEJ can be conceptualized through physical and emotional attacks against everyday life (walking in the street, going to school, reaching health clinics, etc.). The violence of the sovereign power, as I wish to argue and analyse, attacks the senses of the otherized subject and moves through urban spaces and everyday acts. Such performances of power allow the hegemonic group to maintain its exclusive privilege of violence, cruelty, humiliation and the outlawing of the ‘other’, who is deemed a ‘no-body’

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The mundane uprooting and dispossession of Palestinians in service of an ideology of Jewish exclusivity and supremacy is performed via relentless efforts in the public and private realms of Palestinian existence, culture and tradition, coupled with daily practices of physical violence. In essence, the biopolitics of OEJ are manifested in the continued dispossession and trauma of the colonized (Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2014).

Leading into my analysis of the occupation of the senses, I begin by considering aesthetic and symbolic violence against Palestinians in OEJ, with a focus on visual displays of power: such as the state-sponsored Jerusalem Light Festival and the ‘price tag’ attacks and graffiti used by some Jewish groups. I then discuss marches and parades through colonized space, where the visual intersects with other stimuli to produce a more complete colonial regime of control over Palestinian sensory experiences. From there, I deal with various biopolitical and necropolitical manifestations of the occupation of the senses. First, I consider punitive Israeli legislation which imposes mandatory minimum prison sentences on Palestinian stone-throwing minors. Next, I discuss demographics and birth in the colonial context, arguing that the dynamics of occupation extend to the experiences of pregnant and birthgiving mothers, penetrating their senses and their wombs. Drawing on fieldwork conducted with Palestinian children who have been shot in the eyes and/or blinded by live fire, I also consider the maiming of children’s sight by Israeli soldiers as contributing to the occupation of the senses. Finally, I argue that the occupation of the senses culminates in necropolitical acts of extreme embodied violence committed by official institutions of the state—as in the extrajudicial execution of alleged Palestinian attackers—and by militant actors sustained and supported by the state—as in incidents of excisionary settler violence against Palestinian children. I conclude by proposing the need for a new criminological approach that takes into account the sensory realm.

**Criminology and Aesthetics**

In recent years, criminologists have moved away from standard approaches to employ new multidisciplinary techniques and insights in the analysis of images. Visual criminology, a subfield which emerged as a result of this shift, is defined by Rafter (2014: 129) as ‘the study of ways in which all things visual interact with crime and criminal justice, inventing and shaping one another’. This definition is notably relational, eschewing a simple shift in subject matter. Indeed, many have argued that a critical criminological approach towards aesthetics must go beyond the mere insertion of images into a text-heavy discipline and must instead seek ‘a new methodological orientation towards the visual that is capable of encompassing meaning, affect, situation, symbolic power and efficiency and spectacle in the same “frame”’ (Hayward 2010: 3). Young (2014: 161) proposes the paradigm of ‘criminological aesthetics’, in which we analyse both ‘the images themselves and the relation between the spectator and the image’, as an alternative to static models.

Visual criminology has considered the ethics of visual and photographic representations of criminal atrocities (Carrabine 2014), dealt with the use of imagery in the media to make unwanted populations appear dangerous (Banks 2012), analysed the central role of visual representation in law enforcement (Finn 2009) and examined ways in which the visual could be deployed to liberatory political ends, particularly in the struggle against mass incarceration (Brown 2014; Schept 2014). Some scholars have
also applied the insights offered by visual criminology to colonial contexts. Discussing indigenous art as a critique of colonial law, Cunneen (2011) argues that images can serve as an anti-hegemonic tool in the context of colonial state crimes. In his view, the visual sphere enables access to the subaltern perspectives of the colonized, whereas official written documentation erases colonial crimes or reinforces existing power structures. However, as the content analysed below demonstrates, an equivalence of text with colonialism and image with anti-colonialism may be too simplistic.

The theorization in this paper addresses the ways in which the use of violent imagery and sensory stimuli by colonial governments can itself constitute a state crime. Whereas traditional criminological approaches define violence in legal and physical terms, neglecting to consider aesthetic and sensory forms of oppression, I consider how actions which are not defined under formal law as crimes (and do not necessarily involve direct physical violence) nevertheless form part of the settler colonial state’s criminal apparatus. Moreover, seeking to build upon the framework of ‘criminological aesthetics’ (Young 2014) and its focus on the visual sphere, I argue for a critical criminological approach that can account for sensory experience as a whole.

Spatial and Sensory Colonization

Israel’s occupation of East Jerusalem can be contextualized within a long history of Zionist incursions into Palestinian space and place, dating back to the founding of the Israeli state itself (Masalha 1997). Sari Hanafi (2013: 191) conceptualizes Israel’s colonial project as ‘spacio-cidal’, i.e. intended to bring about the dispossession of land, and the ‘voluntary’ transfer of Palestinians away from colonized space. To this end, Israeli territorial control is enacted through various disciplines: archaeology produces historical knowledge that advances Israeli territorial colonization (Abu El-Haj 2001); architecture (including the ‘apartheid wall’) serves as a mechanism of spatial domination (Hatuka and Kallus 2006; Levine 2007; Weizman 2007; Chiodelli 2013); and theology is deployed to support claims to land (Lustick 1988; Hanauer 1995). The exertion of authority and domination over space can be understood as a common feature of settler colonial movements: ‘Territoriality is settler colonialism’s specific, irreducible element’ (Wolfe 2006: 388).

Through what I term the occupation of the senses, colonized space is permeated with colonial sensory stimuli. Existing literature dealing with sensory aspects of political hegemony has focused primarily on aesthetics. Some scholars have noted that the diffusion of state imagery into public space can serve to articulate colonial power. By displaying the Jordanian flag, constructing desert outposts and holding ceremonial army parades, the British mandate authority ‘made [itself] known to [its] citizens’ in colonial Jordan (Endelman 2015: 199). In apartheid South Africa, public state markers, such as monuments and street names, were used to form and display an exclusionary settler ethnic identity (Grundlingh 2001; Vestergaard 2001). Dictatorial and fascist states—such as Italy under Mussolinig (Berezin 1997)—saturated public areas with imagery valorizing their respective regimes. Thus, colonial and authoritarian regimes alike publicly project state aesthetics to display their power.

In the Israeli case, it is well established that state imagery represents the Jewish population and excludes Palestinian citizens, shaping Jewish-Israeli national memory and reinforcing a hegemonic Zionist ideology (Mayer 2005). Unlike in some other settler
colonial contexts—such as colonial Algeria, in which the French state held Bastille Day ceremonies (Jansen 2013)—Israeli state cultural events are not intended to assimilate the colonized Palestinian population, but rather to express visual control over space. Right-wing Israeli rallies, for instance, serve as venues for the projection of colonial symbols into the colonized space of OEJ. In their visual content, they are reminiscent of marches held in the settler colonial context of Northern Ireland, which are used by loyalist organizations as a means of displaying flags and banners (Brown and MacGinty 2003) and defending hegemonic state symbols in response to perceived threats (Stringer and Hunter 2014).

Providing a potentially relevant theoretical framework for considering Israeli aesthetic violence, Gil Hochberg (2015: 3) argues that an ‘uneven distribution of “visual rights” undergirds the relationship between the Israeli occupier and the Palestinian occupied’. For Hochberg, ‘[h]ow much one can see, what one can see, and in what way one can see or be seen’ are outcomes of socially constructed ‘visual arrangements’ produced and sustained by power relations (Hochberg 2015: 5). Complicating accounts which posit a direct relationship between vision and power, he argues that ‘while seeing (and being seen) commonly ensures political empowerment, these positions may in fact function as oppressive forces’ (Hochberg 2015: 7). Moreover, he suggests that

[p]olitical transformation and empowerment […] are dependent on opacity, the ability to disappear, blindness, failed vision, and invisibility at least as much as they are on visibility, being visible, or having access to the gaze. (p. 7, emphasis in original)

Thus, relations of visibility are structured on a deeply hegemonic basis, with both the projection of visibility and the ability to make oneself invisible serving as means of domination when employed by the colonizer.

While aesthetic violence and visual imperialism have received more academic attention than other hegemonic uses of sensory phenomena, some scholars have also considered sonic aspects of political power. Some focus on collective singing in fascist marches by considering its role in fostering exclusionary in-group identities (Clark 2013) and analysing the political symbolism expressed by the music’s auditory content (Machin and Richardson 2012). Other works have dealt with the deployment of music by imperial powers as a weapon of torture, particularly in the US-led ‘war on terror’ (Cusick 2006; Johnson and Cloonan 2008; Carlson and Weber 2012).

The Aesthetics of Violence

The Israeli state often hosts allegedly benign cultural, artistic and musical events in the city of Jerusalem. The Jerusalem Light Festival, for instance, is a state-sponsored annual event held in OEJ, in which illuminated displays and visual artworks are projected onto buildings in the Old City. The festival’s official website describes the event as follows:

We invite you to walk along the illuminated trails and take part in this very special event that combines the enchanted atmosphere of the Old City with innovative and inspiring installations. You can wander the Old City’s picturesque alleys, walk among breathtaking works of art from Israel and abroad, and see mesmerizing artistic shows and presentations and huge video projections screened on the Old City’s famous buildings and its ancient ramparts. (Festival of Light in Jerusalem 2015)
The Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2014b) describes the Light Festival similarly as ‘a magical, compelling, multisensory celebration of artistic ingenuity. Visitors will be entranced by the interplay of light and color within the familiar Old City setting’ (Figure 1).

Fig. 1 Images displayed during the Jerusalem Light Festival (photo credit: Reuters, Guy Shachar)
Such descriptions situate the Light Festival as a cosmopolitan artistic and cultural spectacle absent of any political content. As OEJ becomes transformed into a mystical and ancient atmospheric venue, the realities of Israeli colonization and demographic manipulation efforts are obfuscated. The Old City becomes like a museum exhibit rather than the living and breathing site of contestation between a settler state and a native population. Moreover, as the state literally projects itself into colonized space, the ways in which the Light Festival serves to reinforce its power over colonized territory are hidden from view. ‘Culture’ and ‘art’ serve as allegedly neutral and apolitical spheres, while in fact facilitating the signification of the space as Israeli.

Supporting the notion that state-sponsored cultural events in OEJ can be separated from the ongoing colonization of the city, Jerusalem mayor Nir Barkat situates the Light Festival directly within Israel’s efforts at ‘rebranding’. He claims, ‘The Festival of Light in the Old City has become a strong international brand that is attracting hundreds of thousands of visitors to Jerusalem from within Israel and outside it’ (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2014b). Barkat’s focus on tourism and international image demonstrates that the Light Festival forms a part of Israel’s efforts to portray itself as a liberal, artistic and cultured country (Schulman 2011).

Further, in a statement made prior to a recent Light Festival, Barkat emphasizes Jerusalem’s pluralistic nature: ‘Jerusalem is a massive mosaic of people and communities, views and sites, smells and tastes that can all be found in the Old City’ (All About Jerusalem 2015). While deploying a multiculturalist discourse, Barkat fails to mention the deep racialized power inequities that shape life in the city. Thus, the façade of cultural diversity masks and ultimately reinforces Israeli-Jewish dominance. Pointing to the ‘views and sites, smells and tastes’, Barkat highlights the sensory experience within the city yet ignores Israel’s role in imposing sensory domination over the colonized. Portraying Jerusalem as a bustling city being entered and exited by tourists, he neglects the severe limitations on Palestinian freedom of movement. During the festival, such restrictions are augmented and the presence of police is increased as part of the colonizer’s reorganization of the space.

Yet Palestinians resist the state’s command over the city during such events by continuing their normal activities, even while subject to securitized policing for doing so. This refusal expresses what Rancière (1992) terms ‘equality’, or ‘a set of practices guided by the supposition that everyone is equal and by the attempt to verify this supposition’. Equality is ‘not a value given in the essence of Humanity or Reason. Equality exists, and makes universal values exist, to the extent that it is enacted. Equality is not a value to which one appeals; it is a universal that must be supposed, verified, and demonstrated in each case’ (Rancière 1992: 58). Thus, Palestinians in OEJ cannot simply appeal to their shared humanity (which the colonizer will reject), but rather are forced to constantly enact their humanity in the face of denials. Continuing to engage in normal activities becomes a challenge to ‘the hierarchy of places and functions’ (Rancière 1992) because the continuation of life—in that we too go to work and school, feed our families, speak our own language—is a reminder of radical equality. While Israeli distribution of the sensible seeks to define Palestinians as criminals in every interaction, Palestinians reject such imposed definitions by performing their fully human subjectivities.

Light displays were similarly used in OEJ during the 2015 Hanukkah celebrations, in which images of dreidels, menorahs and other traditional Jewish symbols were
projected onto the Old City’s walls. This more explicit use of Jewish imagery is a means of declaring to whom the space belongs. The projections are intended for both self and other—not only signalling to Jews that they are the owners and masters of the city, but also sending an exclusionary message to Palestinians. Such aesthetic Judaization of the space mirrors the actual process of replacing the native with settlers (Figure 2).

Fig. 2 Images projected onto the walls of the Old City during Hannukkah celebrations (photo credit: RealJStreets)
A more blatant and exclusionary form of aesthetic violence can be found in the graffiti produced by the Israeli-Jewish religious nationalist movement Tag Mehir (Price Tag). Tag Mehir is a movement that commits allegedly retaliatory acts of physical violence and crime towards Palestinians, as well as producing graffiti with hateful, racist messages on Palestinian private property and public sites. While often portrayed as a small group of vigilante extremists, the movement is allied with the goals of the state and consistent with Zionism's history of settler colonial violence (Shalhoub-Kevorkian and David 2015).

Though Tag Mehir commits a wide range of violent acts against Palestinians, their visual manifestations (e.g. graffiti) form part of the settler colonial aesthetic landscape. The content of Tag Mehir graffiti ranges widely, including justification for violent acts (‘Retaliation against Arabs’; ‘There will be war over Judea and Samaria’); the names of settlements or individuals; Jewish nationalist symbols (David’s shield and the fist of Kach); anti-Christian and anti-Muslim messages (‘Jesus, son of Mary the whore’; ‘Muhammad is a pig’); messages promoting the eviction of non-Jews (‘Get out of here’); text glorifying the Jewish people (‘Jew, smile, you are the son of God’); and necropolitically charged juxtapositions between Jewish life and Palestinian death (‘The people of Israel live, death to Arabs’) (Shalhoub-Kevorkian and David 2015). These messages, written in Palestinian private and public spaces, converge to produce a violent aesthetic atmosphere for the colonized and legitimate crimes against them. Whereas the colonial nature of the Jerusalem Light Festival is shrouded, the actions and graffiti of Tag Mehir can hardly be more overt. The graffiti constitutes a more extreme and genocidal form of aesthetic violence, reflecting and foreshadowing actual acts of brutality towards Palestinians. Ultimately, however, both operate under the same colonial logic, serving to reinforce Israeli visual (and actual) domination over Palestinian space (Figure 3).

Despite the prominence of Tag Mehir imagery in occupied space, counter-symbolism displayed publicly by Palestinians challenges the visual order imposed by the colonizer. For instance, in OJE, colourful congratulatory posters are frequently placed on the doors of Palestinians returning from the Hajj and many native Christians place crosses on their homes and churches. While Zionist graffiti may degrade Islam or Christianity, such imagery re-signifies the space by reiterating the native’s presence. In such a manner, the ‘void’ or ‘supplement’ excluded from the policed public sphere is rearticulated (Rancière 2010: 36) by disrupting the state’s attempt to impose exclusively Jewish imagery over the city.

**Zionist Marches and Parades in Palestinian Space**

Visual imagery is not the only sensory means through which the state enacts control over OJE. As demonstrated by Israeli-Jewish nationalist parades and marches that take place in the city, sight is but one of many senses impacted by the occupation. The Israeli state supports a number of public parades and festivals, which both enforce the separation between the colonizer and colonized and enable the colonizer to enter and dominate colonized space. Such marches are a venue for the imposition of a range of colonial stimuli over the senses of the colonized population.

As Rancière explains, the distribution of the sensible ‘reveals who can have a share in what is common to the community based on what they do and on the time and space in which this activity is performed…it defines what is visible or not in a common space,
“Muhammad is a pig.”

“Arabs out”

Fig. 3 Instances of Tag Mehir graffiti, reading ‘Muhammad is a pig’ and ‘Arabs out’, respectively (photo credit: Reuters, Flash90)
endowed with a common language, etc’ (2013: 8). In opposition to the police is ‘politics’, a process which challenges ‘the “normal” distribution of positions that defines who exercises power and who is subject to it’ (Rancière 2010: 30). Rancière notes that ‘[t]he essential work of politics is the configuration of its own space’—i.e. the delineation of the terms of political discourse, who can participate and who is excluded, which forms of speech and expression are understood as legitimate and which are dismissed (Rancière 2010: 37). While Rancière is primarily referring here to discursive space, such processes are often also mapped onto physical territory, such that territorial relations of power mirror the ways in which certain groups are excluded from the political process. As with the parades in OEJ, they serve as a mode of policing which reminds Palestinians of their status outside the process of decision-making and space of the city (Rancière 1999: 9).

Such a spatialized enactment of power occurs annually during the Jerusalem Day Parade. Jerusalem Day is an Israeli national holiday celebrating the ‘reunification’ of Jerusalem—i.e. the occupation of the Eastern part of the city in 1967. Each year, the date is marked by Israeli-Jewish parades through the Old City, intending to penetrate Palestinian space and pervade Israeli flags and other Jewish nationalist symbols. Palestinians are obliged to close their stores and remain confined—or more precisely, imprisoned—in their homes. The parade serves to glorify the Jewish people through chants and slogans such as ‘David, King of Israel’, ‘the nation of Israel is alive’ and ‘the Chosen People and Promised Land’, which appeal to the young and old to enjoy the land as a sacralized settler colonial entity. In the 2015 parade, over 30,000 young religious and nationalistic Israeli Jews rampaged throughout the Old City of OEJ chanting ‘Death to Arabs’, ‘Muhammad is Dead’ and other racist slogans, restructuring the sensory experiences of Palestinians in the space. Racialized and gendered dynamics of power are visible and audible in Israeli marches. Chants sung during the Jerusalem Day Parade, such as ‘the women of Israel are for the people of Israel’, illustrate a gendered obsession with racial power, purity and preservation. These marches often involve the participation of Lehava, an anti-miscegenation group particularly focused on preventing relationships between Jewish women and Palestinian men. However, these marches are suffused with latent gendered and sexual symbolism, serving to represent the Jewish penetration of Palestinian space.

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To use Rancière’s concept of la police, the performance of the settler colonialists on Jerusalem Day orders Palestinian bodies in OEJ, ‘defin[ing] the allocation of ways of doing, ways of being and ways of saying, and see[ing] that those bodies are assigned by name to a particular place and task’ (1999: 29). As a result, the parades are reflections of Rancière’s perceived performance of Otherization, which ‘sees that a particular activity is visible and another is not, that this speech is understood as discourse and
another as noise’ (1999: 29). Jewish semiotic signifiers are seen and heard, while signs of a Palestinian presence in the city are rendered imperceptible.

By physically using racialized separation blockades, the police, the military and other forces ‘maintain safety’ during such parades, performing a clear racialized aesthetic of biopolitical power. This racist logic can be seen in other colonial contexts, such as South Africa. Noting that the rights of black people to live in the city of Johannesburg were constantly threatened during apartheid, Nuttall and Mbembe (2007) argue that race, particularly in colonial societies, is used in urban settings as a weapon in the production of barriers and asymmetrical privileges.

Although obscene and grotesque workings of power and aesthetics promote racism in the city at all times, during parades and other festivities, regulations and laws further promote the colonial regime—upholding the colonizers as the protectors of ‘security’ in the city, the holiness of Jerusalem, and law and order. In OEJ, the colonizer uses all necessary means to maintain full control over space, place and time, producing necropolitical consequences for Palestinians.

The Jerusalem Day Parade, as well as other festivals in OEJ, claims the unity of the Jewish people and their biblically based entitlement to the city, thereby denying any division in the state, repressing voices of resistance and forcibly continuing the dispossession of the colonized. Similarly as in Togo and Cameroon (Mbembe 1992), the legitimacy of the state is confirmed through its totalizing claims of control over the city and the populace.

Rancière (1999) demonstrates that the state itself establishes the distribution of the sensible. This distribution is particularly relevant in the settler colonial context, as it enables not only the policing and control of the colonized and their territories, but also the reproduction of spaces, places and bodies. Furthermore, this aesthetic of racialized separation, as Rockhill explains, ‘presupposes a prior aesthetic division between the visible and the invisible, the audible and the inaudible, the sayable and the unsayable’ (cited in Rancière 2013: xiii). Through the performative or theatrical characteristic of the parades in the Old City of Jerusalem, this division is made more clear. While these marches take place, Israeli Jews temporarily confiscate the streets, transforming areas of OEJ into neo-territories via processions that are meant to intimidate and incite fear. The mass dispossession and commodification of Palestinian spaces and their conversion into Jewish theological and national sites is characterized by an excess of Israeli flags and other state symbols. These are to claim power, to construct historical legitimacy and to impose excessive sensory stimuli over colonized subjects. Thus, Israeli marches simultaneously occupy the senses of the colonized and open new spaces for the sole use of the colonizer.

From the Occupation of Land and Life to the Occupation of the Senses

The above analysis of Israeli marches indicates the need to move beyond the framework of visual criminology towards a more comprehensive paradigm that includes not only aesthetics but also the range of sights, sounds, smells and embodied experiences imposed by the settler colony on its subjects. In this section, I will discuss additional manifestations of criminalities against the senses and consider how they express domination over racialized and colonized subjects. I begin by discussing new Israeli
legislation that allows for long-term incarceration of Palestinian alleged stone throwers. Next, I examine how the occupation of the senses is performed over women’s birthing bodies and their newborn/unborn children. I consider how abusive aesthetics and the occupation of the senses are inscribed over children’s sight, maiming their ability to see. Finally, I analyse extreme acts of embodied violence by Israeli settlers to demonstrate that these represent the ultimate culmination of the occupation of the senses. I conclude by arguing that occupation of the senses is part of the racial arrangement of the colonizer’s regime.

**Israeli legislation and the occupation of the senses**

In mid-September 2015, the Israeli Justice Minister, in keeping with a Security Cabinet decision, published a draft law, to remain in effect for the next three years, mandating a minimum four-year sentence for alleged stone and Molotov cocktail throwers. Such a minimum sentence does not exist for any other offense in Israel, not even rape or manslaughter. This seemingly arbitrary decision is inconsistent with Israeli sentencing policy, and as some legal experts argue, will create ‘distortion, injustice and lack of coherence’ (*Ha’aretz* 2015).

Israeli law enforcement authorities already have a free hand in issues related to ‘security threats’, particularly in relation to stone throwers—often referred to as ‘terrorists’. Thus, the proposed bill will not change the realities in OEJ regarding excessive use of violence against Palestinians, or the hasty and unjust arrest of youth and children. But it will surely expand the perceived sense of power among law enforcement authorities (including the military, police and judges) to use force and administer sentencing. It will further sanction the invasion of Palestinian neighbourhoods and homes with dogs, jeeps and modern weaponry. They will not perform ‘justice’, but rather theatrically assert their power over the acts, mobility and spaces of the colonized, particularly Palestinian children, 500–700 of whom are detained and prosecuted each year in Israeli military courts, typically on charges of stone throwing (*Defense for Children International Palestine* 2015).

The new bill comes as a reaction to acts of resistance by youth whose sensory experience has been structured by the occupier since birth. They see soldiers on their streets; they smell skunk water in their alleyways; they hear police patrols and settlers chanting hate slogans in their neighbourhoods. The imprisonment of minors for stone throwing can also be conceptualized as a sensory punishment, stripping youth of a normal childhood by inhibiting their ability to enjoy the colours, sights, sounds, tastes and smells of the outside world. In this manner, legal means are used to enforce the occupation of the senses on children (*Shalhoub-Kevorkian* 2015b).

**Birth, motherhood and the occupation of the womb**

A further manifestation of Israeli control over Palestinian sensory and bodily experiences occurs within the mother’s womb. Regarding Israeli demographic racism, academic literature has considered ‘the significance of population and reproduction in thinking, creating and sustaining the Israeli nation-state’, as well as the ways in which Palestinian reproductive practices express ideas about nationality, class, gender and the
body (Kanaaneh 2002: 23). Equally, in other nationalist and colonialist contexts, birth-giving has particular political importance. In Serbia, nationalist ideological attempts situate women as ‘mothers of the nation’ who bear responsibility for its ‘biological and cultural reproduction’ (Bracewell 1996: 25). In India, Hindu nationalism portrays Muslims as attempting to take over the country through their high fertility rates (Moodie 2010). In colonial and postcolonial Kenya, Thomas (2003: 4) considers reproduction and its regulation as ‘fundamental to the construction of political and moral order’, advancing the concept of ‘the politics of the womb’. With Palestinian newborns labelled as a ‘demographic threat’, some scholars argue that demographics in Israel have undergone a process of ‘deep securitization’ (Abulof 2014: 396).

Rather than serving as a neutral and objective record, demographic data on OEJ from Jewish-Israeli institutions often serve the narrative that Palestinians are a demographic threat to the Jewish state (Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2015a: 201–5). Through the strategic use of such data, the settler colony attempts to justify its policy of preventing Palestinians from receiving birth certificates for their children born in the city. The Israel National Council for the Child (2015) reveals that in 2015, over 127,000 children in OEJ were without any residency status. This denial of identification is apparent in the Citizenship and Entry into Israel Law (passed in 2003) which prohibits Palestinian spouses or children of Israeli citizens and residents from receiving citizenship or residency in Israel.

The colonial discourse of ‘demographic threat’ manifests not only in birth statistics, but also in the lived experiences of pregnant women in OEJ. I borrow the voice of Salam, a 21-year-old mother, to elaborate how occupation of the senses invades space, time, the womb and the sensory experiences of birthing mothers:

The days before my delivery were very tough here in the Old City; the settlers kept on attacking our streets, fighting with our family members, and the Israeli police were throwing tear gas bombs at us and arresting Palestinians all the time. I spent the five days before my delivery suffocated by the tear gas, coughing all the time, with red eyes, unable to sleep from fear that the health of my newborn would be affected. When my contractions started, it was Yom Kippur, and the settlers around us did not allow us to even walk in the street. My husband needed to bring a taxi as close as possible to our house…and that took more than three hours, as the soldiers refused to allow the taxi to come in…I was waiting alone, forever, on the corner of the street in pain. My water broke, my pain exacerbated, my breathing stopped, fear and silence filled the area…. [I] ended up fainting in the street from pain, horror and loss. I woke up in the hospital, I am still in pain, and my baby is suffering from breathing problems… but we both made it. I know that my baby, with our love and care, will soon be in good health… This is what I want to believe.

Salam’s narrative of birth, pain, suffocation and hope starkly displays the realities of settler colonialism and its regime of control. Terror, a mechanism used to implement this regime of control, is ‘the mediator par excellence of colonial hegemony’ (Razack 2005: 360) imposed over Palestinian birthing bodies through the denial of accessibility. In Salam’s testimonial (as with other Palestinian birthing women), the body encompasses physical space and time, becoming deeply implicated in her experiences. Ironically, time comes to be conceptualized in her words as a place/space of timelessness, an eternity of waiting and wishing for the multiple assaults on her daily life to be over. Thus, for the colonized, as Fanon explained, ‘to live means to keep on existing. Every day is a victory’ (1963: 308–9).
The maiming of sight

The maintenance of control over Palestinian sight is a structuring principle of settler colonial rule in OEJ. Israeli aesthetic performances of power (graffiti, parades, festivals) are at some level dependent on Palestinian sight, which is called upon by the colonizer to confirm the Jewishness of the space. If and when the sight of the Palestinians challenges such commandments, the settler colonial regime dictates their sight should be maimed.

I analyse this violent disciplinary performance of settler colonial criminality by considering the case of Muhammad, who was only five years old when he was shot in the eye by Israeli soldiers (Ma'an News Agency 2014). He had just exited the bus on his way home from school. As he explains in a personal interview:

I was very hungry and I ran home. But I frightened the soldiers because I was rushing and they shot me in the eye...and now, I have metal under the skin of my cheek...I can barely see, and I have bad, bad headaches [...] I can’t see well...and...I don’t want to be hungry again.

Muhammad’s injury is indicative of the regulation of movement, power and sight in the settler colonial context. The actions of the Israeli authorities intended to reproduce the politics of the colony and the power of the colonizer over the sight of a five-year-old. The attack on Muhammad’s sight represents the culmination of a trajectory of domination, taking aesthetic control to a more forceful level in the performance of power. The shooting is then a manifestation of terror and the involuntary imposition of disability onto the colonized subject.

Here, disability is not a medico-biological condition, but rather one that is politically induced. The maiming of children who are unable to defend themselves is intrinsic to the function of the colonial war machine. The blinding of Palestinian children clearly demonstrates what Puar (2015) refers to as the Israeli state’s biopolitical ‘right to maim’. Similarly, Elaine Scarry (1985) maps the manner in which militarized mutilation works to ‘unmake’ human beings precisely by destroying their sentient capacities. Thus, the settler colonial rationale to viciously discipline the native aims to not only control the movements and acts of the colonized, but also to tame the psyche and police the senses.

Extreme Embodied Violence

The occupation of the senses provokes and promotes totalizing acts of excisionary bodily violence, representing the culmination of Israeli domination over Palestinian sensory and embodied experiences. Recent theorizations of embodied violence have drawn upon Douglas’ classic analysis (1976: 116), in which ‘[t]he body is a model which can stand for any bounded system’. Some literature focuses on the performative nature of embodied ethnic violence, with scholars considering its theatrical elements (Appadurai 1998) and its cultural meaning (McDonald 2009). In this framework, sensory and bodily violence towards Palestinians might be considered a form of public performance, particularly in light of the text and symbols often left in graffiti by its perpetrators (Shalhoub-Kevorkian and David 2015). Others focus on the role of bodily violence in the production of subjectivities—by making the subjects of violence into ‘knowable types’ (Wilcox 2015: 10) and ‘inscrib[ing] difference’ onto colonized bodies (Pierce and Rao 2006: 5). Drawing on this scholarship, Israeli acts of extreme sensory and
bodily violence can be understood as productive of the racial identity of the Palestinian ‘profane’ other and also of Israeli ‘sacredness’ and ‘exclusivity’ (Sayegh 1965).

Some acts of embodied violence are directly committed by Israeli state entities, as in the Palestinian uprising in October and November 2015, when Israeli authorities used lethal force against Palestinian stone throwers and alleged attackers. Various Israeli political figures have promoted this policy of extrajudicial executions. Yair Lapid from the Yesh Atid party stated, ‘You have to shoot to kill anyone who pulls out a knife or a screwdriver’, while Interior Minister Gilad Erdan declared that ‘every terrorist should know that he will not survive the attack he is about to commit’. Jerusalem police chief Moshe Edri said, ‘Anyone who stabs Jews or hurts innocent people is due to be killed’ (Klein 2015). Even absent formal regulation, the ‘right’ to hastily shoot stone throwers and others who act in resistance to Israel’s policy has existed for many years. This has left many Palestinians in fear of being abused, uprooted or arrested, and under threat of being physically injured or killed. The immediate shooting of alleged Palestinian attackers forms part of a regime of power that includes aesthetic and criminal violent intentions, penetrating the space, life, body and senses of the colonized. The viral videos of Israeli mobs chanting, celebrating and yelling obscenities at dying Palestinians, which emerged during the upsurge in violence in October and November 2015, demonstrate that the colonized are subject to continued sensory invasion until the point of death or, in a necropolitical fashion, even after death. As ‘Death to Arabs’ is chanted by settlers in front of a dead Palestinian, as in the case of Fadi Alloun, the vocalized representation of violence and the reality become unified.

Illustrating la police’s redistribution of the sensible (Rancière 1999), a vicious disciplinary attack took place in July 2015, when a group of religio-nationalist Israeli settlers burned the home of an entire Palestinian family in the occupied West Bank village of Duma, killing an 18-month-old baby and his parents and severely injuring his four-year-old brother. Such extreme forms of embodied violence, directed towards a family in their home space, may be viewed as the logical culmination of parades which promote the expulsion of Palestinians from the polis. In addition to invading the senses and the public and private spheres, violent, state-approved marches also reproduce the structures of Jewish supremacy which give legitimacy to such cruelty. Through the distribution of the sensible (Rancière 1999), the state builds a system of self-evident facts that discloses the positions of those within it—and, I would say, without it.

Similar dynamics were at work in the July 2014 kidnapping and burning of Palestinian teenager Muhammad Abu Khdeir by a group of Israeli-Jewish settlers in OJE. Abu Khdeir’s murder was preceded by violent anti-Palestinian rhetoric from various spheres of Israeli society, including calls for vengeance by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu after the kidnapping and killing of three Israeli teens. The attacks cannot be divorced from previous attempts to dehumanize Palestinians, enacted through Netanyahu’s assertion that ‘[t]hey sanctify death while we sanctify life’ (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2014a). This statement intended to produce a moral gap between the civilized Israeli colonizer and the barbaric colonized Palestinian. Such dehumanizing rhetoric interacted with existing Israeli processes of domination over Palestinian senses and bodies to produce an extreme and intimate act of violence. The act of burning a child alive represents the necropolitical culmination of the occupation of the senses; the fulfilment of the settler colonial ‘logic of elimination’ (Wolfe 2006) through the total erasure of the sensory experience of the colonized.
Furthermore, the Israeli state’s withholding of the bodies of alleged Palestinian attackers killed during the recent wave of violence in 2015 demonstrates the continued sensory control enacted by the colonizer even after death. The state’s inability to correctly identify the nature of anti-colonial violence may be understood through Rancière’s theorization of an extreme form of ‘disagreement’, in which ‘X cannot see the common object Y is presenting because X cannot comprehend that the sounds uttered by Y form words and chains of words similar to X’s own’ (1999: xxi). The colonizer cannot comprehend that anti-colonial violence is a response to the much greater violence of colonialism; rather, it is understood merely as an expression of the savagery, barbarism and fanaticism of the native. Thus, the state attempts to re-establish certainty through the inscription of power over the dead Palestinian body.

**Resisting the Distribution of the Sensible**

Though this paper deals primarily with the politics of sensory control, the dynamics of settler colonialism involve not only the impact of oppressive systems on colonized subjects but also their agency to challenge such systems in various ways. How might Rancière’s analysis of challenges to the police order help us understand Palestinian resistance to the occupation of the senses? Rancière explains that those excluded from the technocratic decision-making process form ‘the supplementary part in relation to every count of the parts of the population’ (2010: 33). Fleeting moments of resistance occur when this ‘part of those without part’ disturbs the conventional order by asserting itself within public discursive space (2010: 36). For Rancière, this constitutes the essence of democracy, ‘The one who belongs to the demos, who speaks when he is not to speak, is the one who partakes in what he has no part in’ (2010: 32). Indeed, Rancière’s theorization, although not discussing colonization, underlines the fundamental legitimacy of such intrusions by the excluded and uncounted.

Challenges to the predominant ‘distribution of the sensible’ in the Palestinian context often occur on a microcosmic level, reversing the very same forms of spatial and semiotic oppression enacted by the Israeli state. Forms of Palestinian aesthetic resistance, which break the domination of Israeli sensory stimuli, have manifested themselves through dabke performances by students at Birzeit University in the face of mass arrests,1 parkour teams in Gaza who reformulate space that has been subject to Israeli attacks2 and the repurposing of police barriers for sport by children in East Jerusalem.3 Each of these practices of resistance emanates from an instance of Israeli oppression and alters its terms to rearticulate the presence of Palestinians. Such reversals of standard spatial and sensory relations of power challenge the police order and re-engage Rancière’s ‘politics’—that which ‘breaks with the tangible configuration whereby parties and parts or lack of them are defined by a presupposition that, by definition, has no place in that configuration’ (1999: 29–30). Sensory stimuli and spatial control mechanisms which were

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designed to be oppressive are reimagined by the colonized as a means for asserting their place in the city and polity. Thus, the Israeli state’s attempts to maintain the dominant distribution of the sensible through the projection of colonial stimuli and the exclusion of Palestinians from space are constantly challenged through moments of aesthetic and semiotic resistance, large and small, where politics is again brought to the fore.

**Conclusion: The Importance of Not Losing Sight**

This paper uncovers how the occupation of the senses, in its use of aesthetic violence, invades the spaces, homes, streets and bodies of the colonized to generate forms of racial exclusivity. The state justifies such exclusion as necessary for preserving the cultural, religious and national identity of the colonizer. By showing that occupation of the senses is performed through historicized religious, nationalist and/or cultural ‘modernizing’ claims, the discussion reveals colonial disruptions of sensory, physical, psychological and epistemic comprehension to maintain Palestinians as profane ‘no-bodies’ (Da Silva 2009).

In OEJ, the space of the colonized is open to the improvisation of the colonialist. Thus, Jerusalem is constantly subject to the invention of new festivals, occasions, parades and marches. In the nostalgic pathos of a ‘united Jerusalem’—with its parades, marches, songs and slogans acting as microaggressions towards the colonized Palestinian—aestheticized sensory and physical violence produces and is produced by the ethnocratic nature of the city. The occupation of the senses comes to be inscribed over the bodies, spaces and lives of Palestinians, reproducing a multiplicity of violent theatrical practices that are performed daily to assert Jewish exclusivity and supremacy.

The obscenity of the colonizer is displayed through the performative aesthetic of events like the Light Festival and Jerusalem Day which ultimately reinscribes the dominance of Jewish citizens and Jerusalem Day. Settler colonial modes of domination and violation invade the most intimate spaces, not only to perform, but further to constrain, caution and toy with the colonized psyche. The political work of the occupation of the senses transforms spaces of life into spaces of death and reinforces the necropolitical structure of the settler colony.

Further, the settlers’ obsession with making Judaized claims to the city comes to fruition through the occupation of the senses. The colonial regime works to inculcate a sense of control among the colonizers, while instilling discipline and obedience among the colonized. Settler colonial aesthetic and sensory displays of power act as a mode of fascism that ultimately aims to render the colonized senseless. These mundane aesthetics of violence aims at ‘indigenizing’ the settler by producing a space that is filled with colonial symbolism and sensory signifiers. Thereby the colonizers furnish official public/political proof that the land belongs to them, enhancing their glorification.

Further, I argue that the marking of power by maiming a child’s sight, produces and reproduces injustice by dispossessing the colonized of the space and also dispossessing the colonized body of its own senses. The colonial practice of marking and maiming the body through various modes of sensory violence demonstrates that the colonized city is a space of exterminability—a necropolitical space that exhibits the settler colonial economy of death.

The occupation of the senses is constantly resisted by the colonizeds’ efforts to challenge the imposition of colonial symbolic content through counter-hegemonic
reclamations of colonized spaces. Such resistance to the dominant sensory order occurs on an asymmetrical basis, rejecting traditional deliberative practices and consisting instead of radical rearticulations of Palestinian place in the polity and territory.

As shown by the content analysed in this article, the field of criminology must become more attentive to crimes committed in the sensory realm. Modern ‘maximum security’ prisons and ‘black sites’, in which the sensory experiences of the occupants under the total control of the sovereign power, are particularly important loci for further analysis. Such practices as solitary confinement, sensory deprivation, sleep deprivation, enforced physical pain, waterboarding and the use of music in torture demand criminological analysis attuned to sensory and embodied aspects of crime. Existing frameworks of ‘visual criminology’ (Rafter 2014) and ‘criminological aesthetics’ (Young 2014) have enabled scholars to critically approach a wide range of visual evidence and analyse the relationship between crime and imagery. Criminologists must further these paradigms to consider the political work and embodiment of state criminalities against the senses, what I define in this paper as the occupation of the senses.

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