**Biopolitics and Checkpoint 300 in Occupied Palestine: bodies, affect, discipline**

The quintessential Palestinian experience, which illustrates some of the most basic issues raised by Palestinian identity, takes place at a border, an airport, a checkpoint: in short, at any one of those many modern barriers where identities are checked and verified … For Palestinians, arrival at such barriers generates shared sources of profound anxiety (Khalidi 2010, 1-2)

**INTRODUCTION**

Checkpoint 300, also known as Gilo Checkpoint, is the main crossing point between Bethlehem and Jerusalem. It serves large numbers of tourist bus groups and pilgrims as they travel along the Hebron road to visit the Muslim, Jewish and Christian sites in Bethlehem. Passage for Palestinians, however, is allowed only on foot and at a separate complex, 100 metres or so away from the gate reserved for vehicles carrying international visitors. Every day between 5am and 8am, 4,000 to 7,000 male workers cross the checkpoint to reach their places of employment in East Jerusalem and Israel (EAPPI 2014). In this article we examine how the stratification of space and discipline of bodies at the checkpoint works to support the settler colonial project of the Israeli state through the insertion of workers into the Israeli labour force for the building of settlements, while simultaneously regulating the sexual division of labour of the Palestinian population.

Checkpoints are a primary technology of the occupation of Palestine. In recent years, a number of the 98 fixed checkpoints[[1]](#footnote-1) - such as Checkpoint 300 - have been developed into ‘terminals’, an upgraded border-crossing[[2]](#footnote-2) with ‘extensive infrastructure’ (B’Tselem 2017). The transition from checkpoint to terminal has been both architectural and administrative with the Israeli government claiming that these airport-like buildings make for more humane passages between parts of the West Bank and Israel (see Mansbach 2009; Weizman 2012, 139-160). In reality, the larger checkpoints serve as a ‘façade of legitimacy’ (Kotef & Amir 2007, 982), or the ‘normalisation’ (Mansbach 2009) of Israeli colonial control where Palestinians are subjected to ID card confiscation (Tawil-Souri 2011); gendered discrimination (Braverman 2011); arbitrary detention (Kotef and Amir 2011); humiliation (Griffiths 2017); and surveillance (Mansbach 2009). For the movements and lives of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians in the Occupied Territories, these impositions are profound. Helga Tawil-Souri claims checkpoints and terminals are ‘the new Palestinian icon’ (2011, 23); Rashid Khalidi labels them ‘the quintessential Palestinian experience’ (2010, 1; also: El Haddid 2009); and Nasser Abourahme asserts: ‘crossing barriers is perhaps the single most definitive experience in contemporary Palestinian life’ (2011, 453). These, and many other reflections (for example: Barghouti 2008; Habibi 1986; Pappé 2006; Said 1979; 1995), attest to the prominence of checkpoints in the making of Palestinian subjectivity under the Israeli occupation.

Accordingly, for political geographers and social scientists in cognate fields, checkpoints and terminals have come to critical attention as political architectures of ‘observation and control’ (Weizman 2012, 139-60) and border mechanisms that function to create, rather than merely reflect, national identities and subjectivities by means of ‘engendering systematic violence’ (Jones 2016, 10). In the case of Palestine, the work of Michel Foucault has sharpened analytical focus on the development of checkpoints in the context of tensions between territory and demography (for example: Parsons and Salter 2008; Zureik 2001) and on the relations between sovereign, disciplinary and biopolitical modes of power (for example: Gordon 2008). In this work we learn how Palestinians are subjugated via a politics of life - centred on ‘phenomena characteristic of a group of living human beings constituted as a population: health, sanitation, birth rate, longevity, race’ (Foucault 1997, 73) – to meet the demographic objectives of the Zionist project (see Zureik 2011, 6). In Israel’s mode of settler colonialism, belief in the divine right of the Jewish Nation to the Holy Land perpetuates the privileging of the lives of Zionist settlers at the expense of the Palestinians and their homes and livelihoods (Piterberg 2008, 62; Veracini 2013; Wolfe 2006, 388-390). Checkpoints are one of the key quotidian security apparatuses that function to manage the population in accordance with Israel’s demographic anxieties around Palestinian population size and mobility that are seen to threaten the survival of the Israeli population (Hayamel et al. 2017; Pappé 2006; Parsons and Salter 2008, 708). Biopolitics, in this sense, is not only at work in the immediate space of Israeli checkpoints, but also is at the heart of the occupation itself.

Aside this work, a broad body of literature has grown around the notion that, especially in the aftermath of the bloody Second Intifada (2005), Israel’s occupation is characterised by a ‘politics of death’ whose ‘paradigmatic practice’ is ‘the extrajudicial execution, which in contrast to incarcerations or even torture, does not intend to shape or alter Palestinian behaviour, but to do away with “recalcitrant” individuals’ (Gordon 2008, 207; also: Ghanim 2008; Lloyd 2012; Mansbach 2009; Mbembe 2003). Glenn Bowman, for instance, has written of how Israeli border practices enter ‘the socio-spatial consciousness’ of Palestinian society to effect ‘dehumanised’ exclusions from a juridical order (2007, 131-2). Camillo Boano and Ricardo Martén have similarly asserted that the West Bank Wall is an ‘operative device’ that creates a ‘genuine space of exception: a sovereign act of land appropriation and delimitation produced via a strategy of inclusive exclusion’ (2013, 10). Through this Agambenian exception, they argue, Palestinians are rendered an ‘urban *Homo Sacer*… the paradigm of an exceptional production of space by decree – a member of a largely waste, invisible, poor marginalised subpopulation whose rights are potentially suspended’ (2013, 16). In these and many other accounts (Abujidi 2009; Ball 2014; Hanafi 2009), prominence is lent to the analogy between Palestinians under Israeli occupation and Agamben’s figure of *Homo Sacer* whose exceptionality as ‘bare life’ mobilises the threat of death in a particularly macabre mode of subject-making (Agamben 1995). It is therefore this politics of death and a turn to Giorgio Agamben’s (1995) reading of Foucault that has, for the most part, framed discussion of Palestinian subject-making in the spaces of security apparatuses in the West Bank and Gaza.

While this commitment to Agambenian accounts of the functioning of power through and over death provides a robust mode of understanding the late period of the post-Oslo occupation (see Gordon 2008), such fidelity to thanatopolitical readings of security apparatus and Palestinian subjectivity, as Martina Tazzioli has argued, assumes that the ‘order of citizenship’ constitutes the primary mode through which mobility is regulated (2015, 52). The focus on inclusion/exclusion, moreover, not only sidesteps the broader ‘economy of powers’ (Tazzioli 2015, 51) of governance and resistance at borders, but also risks overlooking the complex ‘reproductive and productive politics of population management’ (Repo 2016, 111). Such analyses reveal, for instance, the ways that the regulation of borders is often entangled with global capitalist attempts to regulate labour mobility (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013) and how this is in turn tied to both the needs of the labour market and demographic questions of reproduction and care, as feminist scholars have highlighted (Hochschild and Ehrenreich 2003). A shift in focus away from a pre-determined logic of inclusion/exclusion therefore extends our attention beyond the Checkpoint’s immediate powers of subtraction to the production and ordering of subjects and bodies.

In this article we therefore seek to go beyond the thanatopolitical approach to examine checkpoints as regulatory sites that, by distributing bodies and affects, uphold a sexual division of labour that is materially bound up with Israeli settler colonial projects. In doing so, we follow Silvia Federici’s argument that accounts of biopolitics that proceed from the ‘viewpoint of a universal, abstract, asexual subject’ (2004, 16) are unable to capture the ways in which body politics, especially the regulation of the sexual division of labour, are integral to the reproduction of capitalism and colonialism. This calls for attention to bodies and the organisation of localised and intimate social relations (e.g. Pratt 1991, Stoler 2002) around checkpoints in ways that are foreclosed by an Agambenian framework. Our aim is thus to bring debates on security architectures and Israeli settler colonialism into contact with Foucauldian feminist scholarship that urges us to think about power outside the confines of the state or law, and focus instead on how the organisation of bodies, families, labour and care are at the core of attempts to normalise and regulate populations (Cooper 2017; Federici 2004; Lettow 2015; Weheliye 2014).

With these interventions in mind, we approach disciplinary power as not so much a matter of ‘deduction as of synthesis’ (Foucault 1991, 153) so that disciplinary controls, such as checkpoints, bring together various knowledges that underpin the ‘controlled insertion’ (Foucault 1981, 141) of Palestinians into the economic, social and political life of the occupation. The practices involved in these insertions and control are always situated in ‘a certain “political economy” of the body’, where ‘the body is directly involved in the political field’ (Foucault 1991, 25); an array of political technologies, including architectures, are thus deployed to target bodies, to know, control and train them; to render them docile, submissive, and useful. This requires a focus on the microphysics of power, in other words, the forms of power that work ‘by reordering material space in exact dimensions and acquiring a continuous bodily hold upon its subjects’ (Mitchell 1991, 93-4) through techniques of discipline and persuasion that are both corporeal and affective.

We therefore complement and counterbalance existing literatures on checkpoints and subject-making in Palestine by (re)integrating the sexed and raced body into the biopolitical analysis of checkpoint security in the West Bank. In doing so, we contribute to research on settler colonialism and political security architecture more broadly by examining how the checkpoint is not just exclusionary, but organises and renders bodies and their affective capacities useful for the settler colonial project both in and outside the checkpoint. We do this through an analysis of the bodies moving through the space of Checkpoint 300 in the context of the broader Israeli biopolitics of governing and controlling the occupied Palestinian population. The article proceeds in three sections. We first set out a theoretical framework for the article that explores the biopolitical through a focus on bodies, discipline and affect. Drawing on four research visits in the summers of 2015 and 2017, the second section gives an account of how the space of Checkpoint 300 enacts corporeal and affective discipline. We discuss the Checkpoint as a complex space that is functional, hierarchical and subjectivising. In the third section, we deepen our analysis of the ways in which the Checkpoint produces and governs a heteronormative sexual division of labour that is conducive to Israeli state biopolitics by a) upholding patriarchal relations and b) producing a docile male Palestinian labour force to build settlements for the Israeli population. This discussion builds towards the main argument of the article: the subject-making processes at Checkpoint 300 work to differentiate and govern Palestinian bodies in ways that are tied to the broader biopolitical objectives of the Israeli state. We close with reflection on the contributions of such an understanding of checkpoints in Palestine and beyond and draw attention to the important future lines of inquiry indicated by the research.

**BODIES, DISCIPLINE AND AFFECT**

According to Foucault, biopolitics, or, the ‘political ordering of life’ (1981, 123), is organised around two axes, an anatomo-politics of the human body and a biopolitics of the population. The former is centred on ‘the body as a machine’: its disciplining and optimisation to maximise its usefulness and docility, and its ‘integration into systems of efficient and economic controls’ (1981, 139). If this pole is characterised by various discplines, the other is shaped by interventions and regulatory controls targeted at the level of population as a totality for its administration and calculated management. These two modalities of power are not opposed but complementary, functioning on different scales of the ‘controlled insertion of subjects and objects to the capitalist machine of production’ (Foucault 1981, 145). Our interest in this paper lies particularly with the disciplinary axis of power, and how the broader Palestinian population is tied into the Israeli machine of settler colonialism through the production and governance of subjectivity through various political technologies - in this case the checkpoint. Therefore, in what follows, we elaborate on the disciplinary and affective dimensions of space relevant to our present focus.

The prison, school, barracks, and factory feature in Foucault’s work as disciplinary institutions that distribute bodies through individuating practices that render them more productive through isolation and the enforcement of organised movement. Such practices are individualising in the ways that they mobilise detailed knowledges of the human body to align the time of a person’s life with the ‘temporal system of the cycle of production’ (Foucault 2015, 211). This is not only observable on a broad scale in the calculated directing of groups of bodies and prevention of ‘imprecise distributions’ (1991, 143) (e.g. vagabonding) that ties a labour force to certain localities and habits, but it is also perceptible on a micro-scale, in the imposition of particular gestures and behaviours that make bodies more efficient (1991, 152, 201). Power on this micro-scale operates – to use one of Foucault’s more visceral images – on ‘the soft fibres of the brain’ that constitute ‘the synaptic contact of bodies-power’ (2006, 40). Such an ‘anatomo-politics’ (Foucault 1981, 139) approaches ‘the individual as an affective being who can ‘control’ unruly passions through physical action’ (Anderson 2012, 31) to integrate conduct into efficient spaces of control. Individuating techniques, therefore, must be understood as corporeal, as generative forces that intervene on the body’s capacities as constitutive elements of a totality of bodies or population, the combined coordination and regulation of which is at stake.

In geographical literatures, this corporeal aspect to Foucault’s work has provided important perspectives on contemporary forms of disciplinary and biopolitical power (see Anderson 2012; Philo 2012). This has coalesced with an existing interest in affect to produce a rich literature that has looked beyond the basic institutions of confinement, education and production to examine the biopolitical optimisation of bodily movements in diverse contexts, from airports (Adey 2009; Martin 2010), swimming pools (Lang 2010) and factory farms (Taylor 2013) to kitchens (Walkderdine and Lucey 1989) and plantations (Weheliye 2014). These diverse studies highlight the multiple ways in which spaces mobilise and manipulate the body, its movements, and affective capacities. In addition, moving away from Foucault’s Eurocentric focus, important studies have elaborated on the relationship between disciplinary power and the colonised body: Timothy Mitchell (1991) reimagines Jeremy Bentham’s panopticon as a colonial invention to demonstrate how disciplinary techniques facilitated the integration of colonised lands and peoples into the capitalist machine of production; and Ann Laura Stoler reminds us that the ‘macropolitics of imperial rule’ also permeate the ‘microsites of intimate and familial space’ (2002, 19) through the production of variously raced and sexed subjects. These perspectives illustrate that the disciplinary sequestration of space is crucial in the development of imperialism and the biopolitical management of lives and labours of colonised peoples.

As a sequestered space within the broader sequestered space of the West Bank, it is also relevant to consider the affective dimensions of Checkpoint 300 in the context of the broader biopolitical management of Palestinian life. Our interest, therefore, is in the ways that the affective impositions on the individual body are tied to the management of the population as a totality. Persuading the body to submit to power in this sense takes place in what Diana Coole terms ‘the “somatic dimension” … where power is etched onto the body and communication takes place through a mute yet eloquent corporeal syntax’ (2005, 129). The ‘synaptic contact’ (to use Foucault’s imagery) between bodies and power is made, Coole continues, in ‘material and affective worlds, where … violence assaults the flesh with raw immediacy’ (2005, 129-130). Crucial to our analysis here is the recognition of an affective political pedagogy of disciplinary spaces where such “assaults” on the flesh – or affective experience - create shared places where ‘people learn political fundamentals through their experiences’ (Aaltola 2005, 270). This disciplinary function rests on the notion that affective experience leaves ‘a trace within our constitution’ (Al-Saji 2000, 56) and is a central tenet for prominent writers on affect: as William Connolly writes, each sensory experience leaves a ‘deposit’ in ‘“affectively imbued memory banks” [that] might later yet encourage a disciplined train of thought’ (2002, 71). From this perspective, if we take seriously the Palestinian experience of checkpoint spaces as ‘sources of profound anxiety’ (Khalidi 2010, 1-2), and we recognise checkpoints as ‘geographic manifestations of Israeli control over Palestinian life’ (Tawil-Souri 2011, 13), then it follows that thorough examination of embodied experience in such spaces of colonial control can bring insight into the broader biopolitical management of Palestinian life.

Through this theoretical framework we can begin to analyse the ways that the affective space of checkpoint terminals imposes disciplinary sequences on the daily movements of Palestinians that are related to Israel’s biopolitical management of the occupied population as a whole. For our analysis below we draw on these theoretical positions to discuss the ways that Checkpoint 300 disciplines the affecting body towards the biopolitical end of producing a submissive and useful population.The data used here comes from four research visits to the West Bank in the summers of 2015 and 2017, the more recent trips focused on the early morning crossing between 4-7am. We both crossed the Checkpoint on foot through the lane used by Palestinians (this was necessary also for the fact that the ‘humanitarian lane’ for non-Palestinians) and between us we have crossed Checkpoint 300 more than 20 times. During each crossing we took photographs, made voice memos and, after crossing the Checkpoint, wrote field notes. We also attempted to interview, briefly and informally, through an interpreter, people who were crossing, but this – as we expected – proved quite difficult, and, at times, inappropriate (not to mention the suspicions it would arouse among Israeli security personnel). The account of crossing the checkpoint, therefore, seeks to include a limited number of Palestinian voices that we have drawn from reputable journalistic writing on Checkpoint 300. While this is not interview-based research, the small number of testimonies referenced below, we feel, serve to enrich the account of the embodied experience of crossing the Checkpoint.

Our choice of Checkpoint 300 stemmed from an interest in the development of terminals and their growing importance in governing the Palestinian population. Along with Qalandia (between Ramallah and Jerusalem), Checkpoint 300 is the largest of the terminals that regulate the passage of Palestinians in the West Bank to East Jerusalem, the Jerusalem metropolitan area and wider Israel.[[3]](#footnote-3) Between them, Qalandia and Checkpoint 300 handle thousands and thousands of Palestinians who are forced to integrate the hours-long passage into their daily lives in order to reach their places of work. While scholarly work exists on Qalandia (for example Tawil-Souri 2010; 2011) - and other large checkpoints such as Huwwara, south of Nablus (see Kotef and Amir 2011) – Checkpoint 300 has not received similar attention, even despite a good amount of investigative journalism in the quality press (Al Jazeera 2016; Belfast Telegraph 2009; Booth and Taha 2017) and reports by Non-Governmental Organisations (B’Tselem 2016; EAPPI 2014; Machsomwatch 2016), on which we draw in the following account.

**CHECKPOINT 300 AND THE CONTROL OF PALESTINIAN LABOUR**

In this section, we analyse how the spaces and practices of the Checkpoint distribute and discipline Palestinian bodies. We discuss how the various parts of the Checkpoint (corridors, turnstiles, metal detectors, cameras, identity check booths) render it a complex space that is functional, hierarchical and, ultimately, subjectivising in ways designed to make controlled use of the labour of Palestinian male bodies. We focus on the Checkpoint’s physical design that disciplines the flow and form of movement: the control of time, pace and direction; what individuals can move with (e.g. wheelchairs, pushchairs, walking aids) or carry (work tools). We then examine not only the ordering of hierarchical relations between Israelis and Palestinians, but also the manufacture of competition among Palestinians trying to cross the border. We finally discuss how the aforementioned organisation of time, space and pace in the Checkpoint all work enable the disciplined insertion of Palestinian men into the Israeli labour force to build illegal settlements on occupied land. Checkpoint complex is therefore not just a violent expression of the racist logic of Israeli settler colonialism, but also works to materially enable Israeli colonial expansion.

In our description of the Checkpoint, we demonstrate that it clearly does not function to the end of assuring a safe and efficient crossing for Palestinians. Rather, it seems designed to ensure a particular type of Palestinian is able to endure the daily crossing, one whose cheap labour serves the exigencies of the Israeli economy. This economic function is quite apparent: approximately 92,000 men have permits to work in Israel and they remain a primary source of low-paid labour on which the Israeli economy grows; 36,000 of the men work in settlements, mostly in construction – building the houses that are the first line of the occupation (Middle East Monitor 2017). The incentive for the men is that they can earn up to five times more than they can in the West Bank, even despite that settlement businesses often exploit the legal ambiguity of settlements under Israeli law to employ Palestinian workers under worse conditions than they would be able to employ Israelis.[[4]](#footnote-4) redictabpt such conditions are 'at they can earn up to five times more the daily crossing, one whose cheap labour serves the IsrPredictably, the vast majority of the men receive no vacation, sick days, or other social benefits, nor are they issued pay slips. In addition, the work is ‘back-breaking’ and health and safety regulations are lax (Al-Jazeera 2016). Only those willing or able to accept such conditions are “granted” work. In other words, just as a physically fit and compliant body is required to make the daily crossing through Checkpoint 300, so too is fitness and acquiescence a requisite for ‘insertion’ into the Israeli machinery of production.

The Checkpoint is built into the Israeli West Bank barrier and can be entered through three lanes, one lane for the few people who have 24-hour permits, a lane for labourers with 8-hour permits and a ‘humanitarian lane’ intended for women, children and elderly Palestinians. The bottom half of corridor walls are built of fortified concrete. The top half is composed of galvanised bars, letting in some natural light. On the Palestinian side a walkway slopes and curves for 50 metres before doubling back and opening into a small enclosure where two IDF soldiers sit behind tinted glass monitoring CCTV screens and regulating the flow of people with a button that starts and stops the adjacent turnstile (fig.1; fig. 2). Beyond this turnstile is a large expanse of concreted land over which Palestinians walk to enter (what Israel considers) the Israeli side of the Checkpoint. In this part there is another caged corridor of around 40 metres that doubles back on itself and a shorter section flanked by tinted glass where soldiers observe and give instructions through a loud speaker system. At this point one must place all belongings on an X-ray conveyor belt and pass through a body scanner and a further turnstile and into a large open space with four booths stationing soldiers behind reinforced glass who check documents. Behind the booths, other soldiers patrol, while some others are positioned with their weapons trained on the queue. Palestinians are able to pass this point once they scan a valid ID card and corresponding fingerprints. There remains just one more turnstile before the journey along the Hebron road can continue towards Jerusalem.



Fig.1 The first corridor of Checkpoint 300



Fig.2 The booth (right) from where two IDF soldiers control the turnstile (left)

The ways in which the checkpoint maintains a sexual division of labour and able-bodied male labour supply is already apparent from the entrance. The humanitarian lane to the right of the main lane is most often closed (and we did not see it open on any of our visits), forcing vulnerable groups to ‘join the very disorderly main lane, where pushing, fighting and yelling is commonplace’ or turn back (EAPPI 2014, 1). Men whose bodies are ageing, injured or weary struggle to make the commute imposed at Checkpoint 300. As one man told us ‘I can’t do this for [much] longer, standing here for hours this early is too much’. The closure of the humanitarian lane also has important normative and gendered effects, as Irus Braverman has noted: ‘the physical design of the new crossings already excludes many Palestinians, especially traditional Muslim women, who must refrain from physical contact with male strangers’ (2012, 312). On the occasions when women do attempt to cross, they are treated in a way that can only act as a deterrent, as this journalistic report on Checkpoint 300 from Palestinian news agency *Ma’an* records:

Palestinian women told *Ma’an* that they were humiliated while crossing the checkpoint, as Israeli soldiers forced them to remove their face veils in front of hundreds of other men and women - an act that can be degrading and embarrassing to devout Muslim women - despite the existence of special rooms in the checkpoint for Israeli soldiers that could have been used in order to provide privacy for the women. (Al-Jafaari 2017)

These rooms are routinely out of service, as are the toilets and baby-changing facilities that were built in preparation for the visit of Pope Francis in May 2014 and have been locked ever since (B’Tselem 2016). During our second trip we travelled through the Checkpoint outside of the busy hours with two Palestinian women with toddlers in pushchairs. Although they did not on this occasion have need for these facilities, their passage was made visibly uncomfortable for the simple fact they had to pass through four turnstiles whose physicality is unforgiving for people travelling with young children (fig.3). Women thus tend to stay away.



Fig.3 a woman passes through a turnstile with a pushchair

For the men, everyday life begins in the crowd that forms from 3am when hundreds of labourers jostle for position before the gate opens to the 8-hour permit lane at 5am (fig.4). There are a number heated exchanges as more men join the back of the crowd and push to create a crush among those ahead. A 2009 reportage in the *Belfast Telegraph* captured the scene: ‘before sunrise … there is scuffling when the tempers of the men, many of whom have been up since 3am, begin to fray as they compete to squeeze into the alley to queue for a lengthy series of Israeli security checks of their IDs, work permits, and biometric palm prints’ (Belfast Telegraph 2009). The crowd is biggest during the these dawn hours. It takes around 10-20 minutes before people are able to progress through the bottle neck at the entrance and file into the cage-like structure that has been constructed as part of the Checkpoint’s ‘upgrade’ to terminal status. Tension and frustration are inevitable in this environment that foments – even encourages – scuffles and the fraying of tempers. Once inside the entrance, the scuffles tend to dissipate as positions in the queue become more or less fixed and the crowd moves in a stop-start fashion. Thus begins the daily commute that compels Palestinian men to leave the home each day as early as 2am and return before 7pm on the expiration of their 8-hour permits (or face a night in a prison cell). Put together, these material technologies constitute the Checkpoint as a spatial and temporal mechanism for tying the daily lives of Palestinian men to the time of the Checkpoint, which in turn serves the needs of the colonial economy of the Israeli state.



Fig.4 The queue outside the Checkpoint at 4.30am 7 September 2017

The economic necessities underpinning the need to cross also creates divisions amongst the men in the hurry to pass through the checkpoint. Half-way along the first corridor, where the bars that encage the queue begin to extend to the roof, a steady stream of younger men take advantage of the small gap between the top of the shorter bars and the roof, climbing over them and forming a competing queue above the heads of those men in the main one (fig.5). They nimbly pull themselves along the bars, moving quickly along while trying not to kick the heads of the men below them, but they inevitably do, to much (understandable) remonstration (fig.6). When they have moved along as far as they can they seek to find a space to drop into the main group having saved themselves a large amount of time. The Checkpoint thus sets Palestinian workers in competition against each other in the race to cross, disuniting them even in the collective cause of completing this punitive commute. The men who clamber over the heads of others break all manner of social codes and create tensions between Palestinians, as Nasser Abourahme observes: ‘at the checkpoint, social norms blur: gestures can be wildly misinterpreted, body movements can seem erratic and unpredictable, civility often hangs by a thread’ (2011, 453). In this way, the Checkpoint foments uncivil acts that hierarchically order relations between the queueing men.



Fig.5 Men climb over the bars above the first corridor



Fig.6 Men moving along the bars above the heads of the men in the main queue

By the turn of the first corridor, all of the men on the bars have managed to lower themselves into the main body of the queue. Forty metres ahead of this point is a small control room where two IDF soldiers work shifts monitoring and regulating the flow of people through the Checkpoint. It is from this room, as Eyal Weizman has noted of checkpoints across Palestine, that ‘soldiers regulate the pace of passage by using an electrical device that controls the turning of the gates … [e]very few seconds soldiers stop the rotation of the turnstiles, so that several people remain caged between the gates’ (2012, 151). From behind tinted glass at Checkpoint 300, the soldiers watch the crowd on two monitors that display camera images from the long curving corridor. They press the button intermittently, orchestrating the pace of movement inside the Checkpoint as a disciplinary practice. This puts the men’s movement completely at the whim of the Checkpoint’s soldiers and technologies, introducing an unpredictability to progress through the corridor where the satisfaction of every move forward is tempered by the knowledge that it will be followed by a sudden jolt to a halt.

The majority of the men depend on a minibus link waiting on the other side of the Wall and, as the human rights organisation B’Tselem reports, ‘drivers do not wait for late arrivals, meaning that delays at the checkpoints are not just exhausting and unnecessary, but may also end in the loss of a full day’s work. Others have their pay docked for the hours they are late’ (B’Tselem 2016). The turnstile thus constitutes a technique that materially enacts the deliberate and violent ‘slow-motion government’ of the Palestinian population that targets the ‘precariousness of life as an instrument’ (Joronen 2017, 9). Precarity of employment is the chief instrument here: missing a transport link to one’s place of work comes with a cost, and the prospect of this introduces an amount of anxiety to the crossing. In the queue (which is visible from the outside), it is the case that many of the men during the morning crossings check their watches and the time on their phones, and they look ahead in the way that people do – in traffic, in a queue – to know something of what is happening ahead. These movements are those of anxious bodies, evidence of the embodied nature of waiting, that which, as David Bissell has written, ‘heralds a heightened sensual attentiveness to the immediate spatiality … [and] to the physicality of the perception of the body itself’ (2007, 285-6). It does not seem overly presumptuous to speculate that the body’s enforced immobility, imposed by the Checkpoint, elevates the anxieties of the waiting men as they take in the immediate and bleak spatiality - of the bars, the concrete, the turnstiles that enforce stillness – and contemplate the possibilities and consequences of lateness and lost work.

The Checkpoint’s affective function thus draws on the potential future of lateness and its negative consequences to ensure a notably anxious form of waiting. In this manipulation of time, the corporeal experience of waiting does not simply extend time but imposes a ‘dynamic *non-linear* sense of temporality’ where the ‘imminence of the event-to-come’ folds through the moment of bodily stillness (Bissell 2007, 282, original emphasis). In these terms, the ‘event-to-come’ carries the threat of missing work and thereby losing pay or future employment – threats that, of course, likely bring manifold further consequences. Brian Massumi terms this dynamic of threat an affective ‘virtuality’ where an imagined – or ‘indeterminate’ – ‘future/event’ collapses time and obscures all other (more desirable) futures: ‘an eventuality that may or may not occur, indifferent to its actual occurrence. The event’s consequences precede it’ (2005, 8). In this light, the scuffles and heated exchanges, and checking of watches and phones, evidence something of the ‘virtuality’ of lateness in the present: the anxiety of lost pay is already playing out – if only partially – in the present.

After anything from 25-40 minutes in the curved corridor, the men enter the “Israeli side” of Checkpoint 300 where the queue narrows to the tighter dimensions of the walls and ceiling of another double-back corridor. Another 25-40 minutes pass before the men approach a metal detector where the soldiers seated behind the tinted glass shout orders over the loud speaker. Typical orders come in Hebrew mostly, but sometimes in Arabic: “remove your belt”; “wait!”; “take off your shoes”and so forth. The detector’s alarm sounds intermittently and people hustle back and forth, each time depositing something more onto the conveyor belt for x-ray inspection. Once through the detector, the men shoulder for space at the other end of the conveyor to collect their phones, bags, shoes. The order of the queue at this point dissipates and, like at the beginning, there are scuffles and tempers fray; the space is too small for so many people. There follows another short wait while each person passes through a turnstile - that every so often locks momentarily with people inside it – and then into an opening of space, a large atrium with signs all around: ‘WELCOME TO INSPECTION POINT: YOU ARE NOW ENTERING A MILITARY AREA … PLEASE PREPARE YOUR DOCUMENTS … PASS ONE BY ONE’. There are four desks, of which we see never more than two working, even at busier times. This is the first point at which Palestinian and Israeli faces meet, and the moment when one’s individual identity must be evidenced from the de-individualising fluidity of the crowd.

After the claustrophobia of the caged-in walkways, the opening of space seems to provide a prompt to move, but in fact this is where more stillness is required. This demands remaining behind a line before being gestured – with an almost imperceptible flick of a semi-automatic rifle - to approach. But there is no line; only an imaginary one that, as Hagar Kotef and Merav Avir describe, is contingent on ‘what the soldiers see as the appropriate distance between the head of the line and the security-check booths’ (2011, 59). The imaginary lines alter from day to day (and most probably from hour to hour) in relation to the distance from the security desk ahead. Because such an ‘imaginary line is bound to be transgressed…[and] transgression carries penalties’ (2011, 59-60), careful self-discipline is required in order to avoid being late for work, or getting there at all. These penalties range from sending ‘transgressors’ to the back of the queue, detaining them for hours, or denying passage. Sometimes ‘whoever finds himself transgressing the non-existent demarcation is badly injured or even killed’ (Kotef and Amir 2011, 60). Such practices at the Checkpoint thus strive to craft a docile labour force through the threat of penalties (which may incur a loss of valuable earnings or employment), or even death.

After the disordered wait behind the imaginary line comes the approach to the inspection point. The desk is in an armoured booth that is raised above ground level by about half a metre, meaning that an approaching Palestinian has to look up at the soldier, who rarely makes eye contact, and a security camera that captures the image of everyone who crosses into Israel. The mismatch in height is symbolic - reflecting a wider ‘politics of verticality’ across the Palestine (Weizman 2012) – but also material in the way it postures bodies and ‘gravitational disadvantage’ orders the passage of powerful affects such as fear (see Griffiths 2017, 622). For most, the interrogation is brief and unpredictable; an ID card is handed over and scanned and there is either a click of the turnstile, or a gesture to move aside for bag inspection and further interrogation. This latter threat is arbitrary, as Tawil-Souri notes of Qalandia Checkpoint: ‘[p]erhaps the soldier frowned on one’s perfume, disapproved of the amount of shopping bags in hand, perhaps he finds one’s face of clothing suspicious, perhaps he’s just having a bad day’ (2011, 11-12). The prospect of a bag inspection carries with it further anxiety because of the simple fact that so many of the men seeking to pass at this time ‘are carrying table saws and joint knives’ for their work in construction (Booth and Taha 2017). The very tools that make work possible, and this journey necessary, become an invitation for punitive measures. It is a cruel irony that these tools are carried – and this entire commute is endured – by so many Palestinian men so that they can work on construction sites, providing cheap labour in the building of illegal Israeli settlements on Palestinian land.

Our examination of Checkpoint 300 reveals a regulatory site for the controlled distribution of bodies and affects. Its corridors, turnstiles, metal detectors and identity check booths present a complex space of hierarchical and functional regulation. The Checkpoint is functional in its physical design that regulates movement, controlling the pace and direction of bodies and it is hierarchical in the ways that it orders relations both between Israelis and Palestinians, but also among Palestinians themselves.

**REGULATING PALESTINIAN LIVES BEYOND THE CHECKPOINT: FAMILIES, CARE, COMMUNITY**

In this final section we examine the ways that the distribution of bodies and affects works to sediment a sexual division of labour that is conducive to Israeli state biopolitics. We argue that Checkpoint subjugates Palestinian men as cheap, compliant labourers and Palestinian women as oppressed others, while maintaining these subject positions through its rules of passage.

A strict permit system regulates the identification and regulation of an admissible Palestinian working population. Men are denied or made ineligible for 8-hour passes for many reasons: having been in prison (60% of the male population);[[5]](#footnote-5) involved in union activity; being either under the age of 30 or over 50; or unmarried and without at least one child; having been dismissed from an Israeli company. The denied persons – many with ‘black marks’ on their ID cards - become an estimated 35,000-strong labour force who stay away from the main Checkpoints to find weaker points in the Wall in order to cross illegally to their places of work. For the men in the Checkpoint, this worse reality is the alternative; those crossing without documentation are (even more) expendable and therefore (even more) exploitable. In this way, the Checkpoint capitalises on a population with little alternative and thus takes on a subject-making function of producing a compliant labour force comprised – exclusively – only those men with bodies fit enough to withstand the physically demanding and psychologically demeaning commute. These bodily capacities, it follows, are harnessed into a ‘machinery of production’ (Foucault 1981, 141) that turns on back-breaking days of expendable, unorganised and tractable labour.

A picture thus begins to emerge of how the disciplinary function of the Checkpoint, in Foucault’s words, ‘increases the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishes these same forces (on political terms of obedience)’ (1991, 138). The slow and humiliating micro-processes of the Checkpoint work to discipline and render docile the labouring bodies that flow through it. The enforced stillness, restricted movement, agitation, anxiety and so forth corporealise the co-constitutive hierarchical relations between coloniser and colonised (Pratt 1991, 6). The embodied experience serves as an intense daily reminder to Palestinian commuters of their inferior status. As an “assault” on the flesh, as Diana Coole terms it, the concomitant and unquestionably negative ‘political fundamentals’ (Aaltola 2005, 270) embodied in the Checkpoint might be likened to what Lauren Berlant refers to as ‘political depression’, marked by ‘hopelessness, helplessness, dread, anxiety, stress, worry, lack of interest’ (2005, 8). The hours spent in the Checkpoint are characterised by such depressive affects; the corridors and turnstiles come together to produce an apathetic body, where subjects are too tired to think, much less to organise, calling to mind Helga Tawil-Souri’s reflection that ‘the moment of the checkpoint makes it nigh impossible to contemplate more important – political - thoughts’ (2010, 18).

In aiming to quell resistance, the Checkpoint depends on the construction of the threatening Palestinian (often male) Other to reproduce the logics on which its existence depends. The disorderly or “uncivil” Palestinian is both produced for and by the Checkpoint as an ever-present liability and threat that requires constant vigilance. The distributive segments and practices of the Checkpoint both perpetuate the sense of disorder that needs management, and continually re-establish the disciplinary effect of order. As Mitchell writes, the ‘question of achieving the continuous appearance of structure or order’ runs parallel to ‘the problem of “disorder”’ (1991, 79). The Checkpoint also produces the unruliness it tasks itself to order: the race to cross means that some men are prepared to climb over the heads of members of the same community. In this way, the Checkpoint’s control of movement seems designed to discipline such uncivil, primitive subjects, seen as unfit to rule themselves, rendering the occupation a rational and legitimate solution.

At the same time, the Checkpoint’s affective impositions work to disrupt social relations in Palestinian society. In particular, the Checkpoint plays an important role in reproduction of a heteronormative sexual division of labour in Palestinian society. As we have outlined above, the Checkpoint coordinates the lives of Palestinian men to the time of the Israeli security apparatus. In their absence, women too are tied to the regulatory time of the Checkpoint. In order to gain an 8-hour permit, the Israeli state stipulates that men must be over the age of thirty, married and have at least one child.[[6]](#footnote-6) The Checkpoint and its permit system is therefore based around the norm of the able-bodied family-supporting male labourer. Given the long hours that Palestinian men must give up for the commute, it means that as husbands and fathers they are left with little time to spend with their wives and children, or see friends and neighbours. As this account from a Palestinian father illustrates:

It’s cold and dark when I wake up, and the rest of my family is asleep … I do this every morning … so I can cross through to work in Israel and make some money to feed my eight children … When I get back, I have an hour or two before I have to sleep, so I can repeat the whole day again. (Al-Jazeera 2016)

Women are left at home to carry out care and domestic work that facilitate the men’s ability to spend so many hours outside of the home as wage labourers. Meanwhile, men spend the majority of the day working or commuting to work through and in spaces that foreclose any other ordering of domestic and social life. In this way, the constraints imposed by the Checkpoint ensure that Israeli governmental practices not only metaphorically but also materially ‘penetrate the most seemingly intimate spaces of everyday life’ (Ritchie 2015, 623). The resulting strict reproduction of a sexual division of labour in Palestine materially reproduces the subject positions advanced by the ‘Brand Israel’ campaign narrative that paints Israel as cultured, progressive and modern, and Palestine as primitive, backward and intolerant (Puar 2011, 138; Ryan 2017, 478). [[7]](#footnote-7) Therefore, because the Checkpoint governs the forms, practices, affects and schedules of Palestinian families, the Checkpoint must also be seen as a material part of the neo-colonial production of Palestinian families and communities (see Harker 2012, 863).

**CONCLUSION**

In this article we have argued that subject-making processes at Checkpoint 300 work to differentiate and govern Palestinian bodies in ways that are tied to the broader biopolitical objectives of the Israeli settler colonialism. While thanatopolitical accounts of security architectures have enriched understandings of the state of exception and exclusionary practices that define mobility regimes and settler colonial governance (see Gordon 2008), this article demonstrates how favouring a more open-ended enquiry around the production of subjectivities opens up avenues to examine the ways that such political architectures and technologies are also generative of everyday life and its political, personal and economic ordering.

By focusing on bodies, subjectivities and affects rather than logic of subtraction, we have sought to examine the logics ordering bodies both within and beyond the security apparatus. In the context of our case study, drawing on research on the biopolitics of economic production and feminist critiques of biological and social reproduction, we have traced how the stratification of space and discipline of bodies works to support the settler colonial project of the Israeli state through the production and management of a docile yet physically able male Palestinian labour force. Checkpoints are therefore important political technologies regulating the insertion of Palestinian workers into the Israeli labour force, often to the end of providing low-paid labour in settlement construction.

The Checkpoint also plays a role in maintaining the sexual division of labour in Palestinian society by limiting women’s access through a combination of spatial and regulatory mechanisms, The enforced long duration of the commute on top of working hours mean that community and family life are interrupted for the families whose men work in East Jerusalem and Israel, also preventing the labour force participation of wives who must remain and assume all responsibility for care and domestic labour. In short, the Checkpoint is not just a border technology nor simply a technology of subtraction and erasure: it also biopolitcally orders and manages the lives of Palestinian men, women and children, and the relations between them in the Occupied Territories.

This localised case is therefore related to wider debates around settler colonialism, not only by further recognising the complex relations between ‘replacement’ and exploitation (Gordon and Ram 2016; Wolfe 2006), but also by showing how colonial architectures order and govern intimate, social and communal relations. The case relates also to wider analytical agendas in political geography to do with, for instance, the embodied dimension of (im)mobility, where the body is targeted by security apparatuses that seek to ‘imagine and render a specific kind of body-subject capable of being affected’ (Adey 2009, 283). Specifically, our study points to the connection between affective bodies and the level of population in the regulation of reproduction and labour, moving towards an understanding of the ways that affective life has becomes an ‘object-target’ for biopolitical intervention (Anderson 2012), also under neo- and settler forms of colonialism.

Future inquiry might build on these arguments. Our research has focused mainly on the experience of male Palestinian labourers, while making partial claims on the corollary experiences of the women – wives, mothers, sisters, daughters, friends – who are unwilling or unable to share in the same limited and constrained mobilities of the men. So while checkpoints are considered as the ‘quintessential Palestinian experience’ (Khalidi 2010, 1-2) that has profound effects on Palestinian sensibilities, women are often not considered part of this experience. If we understand the border as carrying effects that extend beyond the physical border between territories (see Amoore 2006; Balibar 2002), then further inquiry must consider the ways that Israeli instruments of security have a hand in shaping the lives of all Palestinians, not only those in immediate proximity. Only in this way will we better understand the biopolitics of this violent occupation.

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1. The number of checkpoints changes constantly. This figure is provided by B’Tselem (2017). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The obvious corrective here is that Israel does not have declared borders and 48 checkpoints are ‘internal’ and monitor movement of Palestinians between Palestinian towns. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. There is no official list of terminals provided by the Israeli state. The human rights NGO, B’Tselem, classes only Qalandia and Checkpoint 300 as terminals, while Machsomwatch lists six checkpoints as ‘terminals’: Jalame, Irtah, Ras Abu Sbeitan, Reihan, Qalandia and Checkpoint 300. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Most settlement companies pay Palestinian workers less than Israel’s minimum hourly wage of 23 shekels ($5.75), with most of these workers receiving eight to 16 shekels per hour ($2 to $4) (Human Rights Watch 2016). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Note, this category is not ‘having served a prison sentence’, since a great many of Palestinian men are not sentenced but detained arbitrarily without charge (Human Rights Watch 2016) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Though these requirements are subject to constant change, it is very rare for a Palestinian man under the age of thirty to be granted a permit because they, apparently, represent the greater risk for security. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. This is evident most recently, for instance, in an interview with Yair Lapid, a widely tipped successor to Netanyahu, who characterised Palestinians as ‘people who hang gay people from telephone poles … who think it’s ok to beat your wife … who think it’s ok to burn churches, to kill Jews and Christians just because they’re Jews and Christians’ (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hyb\_28GTAbk) [↑](#footnote-ref-7)