Biopolitics and checkpoint 300 in occupied Palestine: Bodies, affect, discipline

Mark Griffiths[a,*], Jemima Repo[b]

[a] Centre for International Development, Northumbria University, Newcastle Upon Tyne, UK
[b] School of Geography, Politics and Sociology, Newcastle University, Newcastle Upon Tyne, UK

ABSTRACT

Checkpoint 300 serves a large amount of Palestinian labourers as they make their way to places of employment in East Jerusalem and Israel. The Checkpoint is a large complex of corridors, turnstiles, metal detectors and security desks that control the movement and mobility of these workers every day, subjecting them to enforced waiting, stress and absence from the home. In this article we examine the Checkpoint as a regulatory site of Israeli state biopolitics that, by distributing bodies and affects is productive of particular subjects and practices. We articulate our approach to biopolitics through a focus on bodies, discipline and affect before drawing on research visits to give 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 and propose that 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. We thus argue that 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 reflections on the contributions of such an understanding of checkpoints in Palestine and draw attention to the important future lines of inquiry indicated by the research.

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, p. 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 m or so away from the gate reserved for vehicles carrying international visitors. Every day between 5am and 8am, 4000 to 7000 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] - such as Checkpoint 300 - have been developed into 'terminals', an upgraded border-crossing[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, pp. 139–160). In reality, the larger checkpoints serve as a 'façade of legitimacy' (Kotef & Amir, 2007, p. 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 & Amir, 2011); humiliation (Griffiths, 2017); and surveillance (Mansbach,

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* Corresponding author.
E-mail addresses: mark.griffiths@northumbria.ac.uk (M. Griffiths), jemima.repo@ncl.ac.uk (J. Repo).
[1] The number of checkpoints changes constantly. This figure is provided by B'Tselem (2017).
[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.

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-Haddad, 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, 2007; 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, pp. 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, p. 10). In the case of Palestine, the work of Michel Foucault has sharpened the analytical focus on the development of checkpoints in the context of tensions between territory and demography (for example: Parsons & 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, 2008, p. 137) – to meet the demographic objectives of the Zionist project (see Zureik, 2011, p. 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, p. 62; Veracini, 2013; Wolfe, 2006, pp. 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, Hammoudeh, & Welchmann, 2017; Pappé, 2007; Parsons & Salter, 2008, p. 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 (2000-2005), 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, p. 207; also:, Ghanim, 2008; Lloyd, 2012; Mansbach, 2009; Mbembe, 2008). 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, p. 51) of governance and resistance at borders, but also risks overlooking the complex 'reproductive and productive politics of population management' (Repo, 2016, p. 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 & Neilson, 2003) 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, p. 153) so that disciplinary controls, such as checkpoints, bring together various knowledges that underpin the 'controlled insertion' (Foucault, 1981, p. 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, p. 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, pp. 93–4) through techniques of discipline and persuasion that are both corporeal and affective.

We therefore complement and counterbalance existing literature 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