



Qalandiya: Jerusalem's Tora Bora and the Frontiers of Global Inequality

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Heat, wind, dust, garbage. Cars stuck in line, jammed bumper to bumper – probably a two- hour wait. I squeeze through the few inches between an articulated lorry and the next car. On the other side is a porter shifting two television sets tied to his cart weaving in between the oncoming traffic. *Ramallah, Ramallah Ramallah*, the calls of a van organizer. I shake my head – and point toward the checkpoint. Up through the first set of blocks, the wind blows up white dust from the quarry, the peddlers clutch their sun umbrellas. I pick up my pace, its rush hour. Through the second row of blocks and I can see the crowd up ahead, spilling out from under the zinc roof and concrete pens of the crossing. I reach them and ask an old man, how long he's been waiting: "From the time I was born".

"Open the way, I have children, where's the women's line? A mother is overwhelmed with a toddler, a baby and a heavy shoulder bag. "There's no women's line today, just chaos", replies a young woman "Did they

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close it?” A new arrival asks anxiously.

“We can’t tell.” Comes the collective response. There are maybe 300 people here waiting to cross – too many to be able to see what’s happening up front and more people keep piling up behind us. “For God’s sake stop pushing” – shouts a young woman, “it’s enough what we’ve got in front of us”.

Something sharp jabs my back and I turn – the man looks at me apologetically hugging the culprit – his briefcase. Slowly the crowd are becoming lines up to the turnstiles, but I can’t tell which one I’m in yet. I ask the man in front of me if he thinks this is the line for blue I.D.’s today, ‘You’ll only know when it’s the wrong one’.

We’re close enough to hear the soldiers now. *Irja, Irja* – “go back go back” the screeching voice of a woman soldier. *Ta’al ta’al* “come forward, come forward”. We finally get close to our turnstile and beyond it is a glum looking teenage soldier leaning against the side chewing gum. The man in front of me shows his orange I.D. card and the soldier says “*tasriiich* (permit) over there”, laconically gesturing to the last line. The man looks modest but respectable like a school teacher he’s probably older than the soldier’s father. He starts arguing politely in broken English. The soldier, disinterested shakes his head - “Over there permit”. The man’s shoulders slump, it means a lot of pushing and shoving across two lines. He moves closer to the turnstile and gives another try of patient explaining. The soldier snaps and lunges towards him, shouting ‘*Itlaa, itlaa*’ (get out, get out) – their third Arabic vocabulary word. The man backs -off, mumbling under his breathe and starts to negotiate his way



through to the next line.

I hold up my blue I.D. card, but the soldier is now in a “mood” and ignores me. “Here take this”, a steel walker arrives overhead, and after a shove, an old peasant woman grabs my arm. “Come on Hajji”, as I put her walker on top of the turnstile then we turn and look at the soldier. He sees the walker but won’t look at us then finally relents and waves her forward. She struggles through the first turnstile and slowly makes her way up to the metal spindle then freezes. She stares back at us with a look of utter confusion and fear. She can’t get herself and the walker through at the same time. I glare at the soldier and he waves me forward. The woman soldier on the other side of the spindle is shouting at her to come forward. “God protect us from evil”, the Hajji mumbles as I help her and then the walker through the bizarre contraption. On the other side the soldier girl passes her through without looking at her I.D. card. Just as I pass through the spindle, the girl soldier’s mobile phone rings. I stop while she answers it. I look over at the next soldier, a young man keeps holding up his permit and the soldier keeps shaking his head. He keeps saying he has to go to the Eye Hospital to see his father, and the soldier keeps telling him the permit’s no good. My girl soldier is now giggling with whoever’s on the phone. The young man in the next line won’t quit, “Look, I just want to see my father in hospital!” he shouts. Suddenly another soldier comes over and grabs him by the arm – and violently drags him out of the exit, the young man is still shouting about the hospital. The girl soldier still chatting on the phone, beckons me forward then signals to put my bag down on the concrete block in front of her and with her free hand clumsily fumbles through my



things. I open my I.D. card, she glances at it and waves me through. Outside on the “corrections bench” in the sun, they’re holding the young man who wanted to go the eye hospital. Like everyone else who will pass him on their way out, I lower my eyes.

This description from May 2004 of an ordinary commute across the Qalandiya military checkpoint is one still played out in myriad variations at checkpoints throughout the West Bank – the majority of them, like Qalandiya severing Palestinian communities from each other rather than from Israel. It is a scene that most readily sums up the current existential situation of Palestinians in the occupied territories, so much so that checkpoints have been the subject of not only human rights and World Bank reports but a recurrent theme in Palestinian artistic practise including, cinema, dance, poetry and music. As a macro- structure, the more than 400 checkpoints and roadblocks constitute a spatial regime of incarceration that has delivered more than 50% of the population into poverty and rendered a quarter of them workless. While on the micro level of everyday interaction, they constitute the most visceral experience of Palestinians relationship of inequality with Israel, and a profound reminder of their status as stateless people.

Statelessness is a problem for those exiled or displaced beyond their own borders. Without sovereignty and citizenship you are vulnerable to being exiled or displaced in your own patrimony. This is the signal experience of Palestinian’s under Israeli occupation– unable to exercise rights over their land, resources or movement within their own territory and thus vulnerable to being displaced at will from within and without it. This process has been an ongoing part of Israel’s occupation of the West

Bank and Gaza for almost forty years. But over the past decade has accelerated to unprecedented levels and has now taken on a qualitatively different form. Through large-scale land expropriation for Israeli settlements, the creation of a strategic nexus of Israeli controlled roads and the deployment of a draconian regime of checkpoints and roadblocks Israel has succeeded in creating the total territorial fragmentation of Palestinians within their own land. The Palestinian geography of the West Bank is now a geography of ghettos, myriad unconnected communities whose access to each other is only through an Israeli military checkpoint. And following the building of the Separation Wall, this geography has been made seemingly permanent. Six hundred and forty kilometers long, in places 20 meters high, the Wall in its circuitous path consumes 10% of the West Bank and enlists much of the existing geography of control (including Qalandiya) into its structure. It is no wonder that political geographer, David Delaney has described this as “one of the most intensively territorialized control systems ever created”.²

The result here is that movement, itself, has become central in the struggle between Palestinian survival and Israeli domination. Through enforcing immobility, by making whole areas inaccessible to all or parts of the population, Israel is able to re-territorialize them. This process, is experienced most violently in densely populated areas, because it is here that the wall or a checkpoint seeks to slowly choke a community, making life unsustainable thus creating a slow drift out – into a larger more sustainable ghetto. Thus the system of spatial control is not simply about controlling and containing resistance but is primarily a mechanism of disinheritance. It both enforces inequality and attempts to make it permanent by creating the means to defer and detour around what is necessary to end the conflict. That is to say, it has made a two state solution based on the 1967 armistice lines, a geographic impossibility. Instead, it relegates Palestinians to a series of disconnected ghettos, locked behind high walls unable to make sustainable livelihoods in the present and unable to foresee a viable and independent national future.

But this process taking place in Palestine, though exceptional as a late colonial project (whose motivations are thus primarily territorial) shares some strong commonalities with processes of inequality taking place in the wider world. For instance incarcerating Palestinians in walled ghettos made from fragments of their own geography is what Mike Davis has elsewhere called, “the warehousing of surplus humanity”, which has become a global feature of neo-liberalism at the end of the 20th Century.³ Thus rather than assuming the exceptional nature of what Qalandiya represents in terms of a powerful late colonial project’s ability to reverse or remake a national liberation project – we might better understand how it is linked to a global convergence of new and distinct forms of inequality (and their acceptability) as well as a global convergence in terms of how to control them – through policing and the politics of securitization. In this scenario, Israel is both an avant-garde among those powerful global processes, while its current project is simultaneously enabled by their existence.

Question: What is common to a Royal Palace in London, O'Hare International Airport of Chicago, border areas between Israel and its Arab neighboring countries, an oil pipe-line in Azerbaijan, schools in the U.S., nuclear reactors around the world and a sensitive installation in China?

Answer: All these installations are being protected by Israeli-made perimeter security solutions and fences⁴

The above quote could also have added the use of Israeli “security fencing” technology along parts of the U.S. Mexico border to stop illegal migrants; in Indian-occupied areas of Kashmir against “insurgents”; and pending plans for their use in Brazil in the war against drug traffickers. Taken together they attest to the global normalization of Israel’s particular security expertise in surveillance and border policing. But more than that, they suggest the degree to which, Israel’s approach to dealing with its occupied population at the turn of the 21st century has been paralleled elsewhere in the means states’ use against a variety of unwanted populations, now designated as undesirable infiltrators. Contrary to dominant assumptions, this convergence of approaches preceded the events of 9/11 and the “war on terror” – but began to emerge in the 1990s in the context of what became known as “the new inequality” – an outcome of the global hegemony of economic neo-liberalism.

For more than a decade social scientists across an array of disciplines have been arguing that the nature of contemporary inequality is something radically new, and which continues to grow rapidly and urgently needs to be considered an issue of global concern. Over the 1990s, conventional development economists increasingly warned that global economic inequality had reached unprecedented levels. They showed that while the development compact dwindled or disappeared, economic neo-liberalism over the past 40 years resulted in the number of middle income developing countries dropping by almost a third (from 22 to 8), while the number of really poor nations nearly tripled (25 to 67).⁵ World Bank economist Branko Milanovic, using household survey data uncovered another layer of global income inequality - - indexing it within countries in comparison to regions. He found that while Europe and the US have the highest mean incomes in the world, inequality within individual countries accounts for 80% of total regional disparities.⁶ In Latin America, it is even greater with 90% of income inequality across the region due to huge disparities within countries themselves. Milanovic concluded that inequality within individual countries of Africa, Latin America, Western Europe and North America are more significant than the overall inequalities within their region as a whole.⁷ In sum, globalization has created unprecedented wealth and unprecedented levels of poverty, both between countries and regions of the world, but also, and dramatically so, within individual societies.

Moving to another discipline, urban geography, we find these concerns expressed in the worldwide growth of urban slums and ghettos. UN Habitat calculates that at the end of the 20th century, a full one third of the global urban population (nearly a billion people) live in slums, and in the least developed countries, they represent nearly 80%

of the urban population.⁸ And in contrast to earlier periods, this urban explosion is perverse, in that it has occurred without economic growth and development – but in the context of their collapse. Its cause is located in the re-structuring of third world economies and the retrenchment of the state under structural adjustment that while making rural livelihoods unsustainable, simultaneously emmiserated the incomes of traditional urbanites. UN Habitat contends: “the primary direction of both national and international interventions during the last twenty years has actually increased urban poverty and slums, increased exclusion and inequality and weakened efforts to use cities as engines of growth”.⁹ As such, according to Mike Davis, slums have become a global dumping ground for a surplus population, made radically homeless in the contemporary international economy. They are warehouses behind whose walls people are left to eke out an insecure existence from unprotected, low-waged informal work on unsustainable margins encircling the fortified enclaves of the urban rich.¹⁰

The United States and Europe are not immune from these new trends in inequality although urban sociologists differ in the terms they use to describe them. In the US and UK, it is “the under-class”; in the Netherlands and Germany, “the new poverty”; and in France, “social exclusion” But there is convergence in their analysis of them.¹¹ Namely, that the close of the 20th century has seen a momentous transformation in the roots, make-up and consequences of urban poverty in western society. In the past poverty was largely a residual or cyclical experience of working class communities, it was geographically diffuse and considered possible to be remedied by further market expansion, and the mediation of social welfare. Now, urban poverty appears to be increasingly long term or permanent, is disconnected from macro-economic growth and is centred in marginalized urban neighbourhoods – in which social isolation and racism render economic chasms into social and ethnic ones. Its causes are linked to those global processes that have impoverished vast segments of the Third World; the decline of the old wage labour contract and its substitutions with part-time, flexible, insecure, low skilled and low paid work. It is aggravated by retrenchments in state welfare policy (albeit much more so in North America than continental Europe). And added to states’ urban and housing policies (coupled with racism) has led to a situation in which marginality is played out in distinct urban enclaves – the ghetto in North America and the banlieu in France. Strikingly, this is taking place exactly in the context of unprecedented economic growth and prosperity of European and American cities.¹²

There also seems to be also a global convergence in the modes of addressing the rise of these deepening inequalities. Whereas in the past, solutions were sought in development compacts and welfarism, today they are found in the politics and policies of securitization and policing. Among urban sociologists this is expressed in concepts such as the “criminalization of poverty”, and more recently, “the rise of the penal state”.¹³ In migrations studies, the language used, is “the securitization of migration” and “the re- bordering of borders”.¹⁴ Everywhere it seems that as the state retrenches labour contracts and social support it’s punitive and policing arm has grown dramatically. In the United States over the 1990s, the number of police

doubled, the prison populations rose by more than 60% while the number of families receiving social welfare was cut by 40%.¹⁵ There are now more Americans employed in policing and crime prevention than in higher education. And this immense growth in public security budgets has been outstripped by the growth in private security (now a \$52 million a year industry in the US). Although, these trends are not nearly as dramatic in Western Europe, they are on the rise; prison populations of most EU countries have doubled since the 1980s; welfare systems have tightened, public housing has increasingly been privatized, or left to stagnate and decline. And public security and intolerance of juvenile crime has come to take centre stage in the election platforms of both rightist and Third way political parties. The October 2005 riots in Paris's northern suburbs offer an abject example of what happens when inadequate jobs and welfare supports are met with racism, heightened police surveillance units and nested riot squads.¹⁶ And in the globalizing south where the police often have a deep history of violence linked to repressive states' dirty wars on their own populations we see how the policing of poverty can reach its most brutal. For instance, since Brazil's democratic transition in the early 1990s the police of Rio and Sao Paulo have shot dead more than 3,800 civilians in the process of its law enforcement.¹⁷ Luis Mir, a medical doctor and writer describes the situation of Sao Paulo's slum's as, "The favelas have become concentration camps. There is no health, there is no education, they are encircled militarily. If you leave you are shot. It is not a coincidence that the victims of violence are the same victims as always: the poor, black segregated and mostly youth under the age of 25."¹⁸

Policing and securitization have also come to dominate migration policies. The Shengen agreements and the dissolution of internal borders in the 1990s, resulted in the quantum tightening of Europe's external border controls – both through increasingly exclusivist legislation and massively stepped up physical policing. Europe's borders have been de-militarized in the realm of national security but re-militarized in relation to immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers. This hardened "outer wall" of Europe, has now been ringed by a migration buffer zone. By tying ascension to the EU with compliance in the policing of migration, EU countries have increasingly been able to export much of their responsibility for asylum seekers and refugees to EU candidate states to the east. Now a second buffer is in the making, by attempting to pass responsibility for immigration to the countries of origin of refugees and migrants (and the countries through which they flow) by tying trade and aid to the prevention of and return of "refugee flows".¹⁹ In the words of Amnesty international, this amounts to trading human beings in for financial aid". In the US, it was the North American Trade Agreement (NAFTA) that set the stage for buttressing the border with Mexico, again both through a expanding and deepening restrictive legislation, as well as through actual intensification of physical border patrols. That border, already one of the most the highly patrolled in the world, in 2006 began extending the 35km security fence across California across half the 3,300 km length of the border.²⁰ In both the US and Europe, however, the outcome of these policies has not necessarily been an actual decrease in the entry of migrants and refugees. Instead, what they have accomplished

is to drive labour migrants and asylum seekers into the criminal realm – into the hands of a booming industry of human smugglers and traffickers – making the process of migration more expensive, dangerous and often deadly.²¹

Importantly, these trends in policing and securitization, either in inner cities of the North, or across borders between North and South far predate the spectre of global terrorism launched by the events of September 11. But those events provided these earlier agendas with new vitality and ideological vigor and enabled an elision between the ethnic underclass with the problematic and rhetoric of ant-terrorism in Europe, as well as the elision of the trans-national migrant with the trans-national terrorist there and in the US.²²

In sum, these processes have resulted in the production of a new and expanding form of global inequality whose features have much in common with the contemporary situation of Palestinians living under Israeli occupation. They include:

- In the words of Alain Touraine, inequality is now as much about being “in or out” as it is about being “up or down”. It has increasingly become a matter of being included or excluded, integrated or segregated.²³
- The new inequality more than ever is spatialized. There are particular geographies and landscapes of exclusion, marginality and stigmatization where space and inequality become conjoined (the ghetto, slum, favela, the border and prison).²⁴
- The corollary of this spatial dimension is the issue of mobility. While global capital and the global elite are hyper-mobile and extra-territorial, the global underclass are made immobile and forcibly territorialized.²⁵
- Citizenship has become a major institution of inequality. While citizenship rights often ameliorated the poverty of the past, today’s inequality unmakes citizenship (as in social citizenship). While at the same time, formal citizenship has ceased to guarantee access to mobility.²⁶

The inequality being made through the imposition of the regime of control and territorial incarceration in the West Bank, clearly shares much with its global counterpart. It differs in so far as its motivations are not purely economic, but colonial and territorial. And unlike elsewhere, lacking even formal citizenship, Palestinians are made vulnerable to this process as an entire nation. At the same time, the extent to which this new phase of inequality undoes existing citizenship rights, in practise disenfranchising persons of their formal political rights, suggests that the radical homelessness of Palestinians is becoming the shared fate of much of the world’s poor. Indeed, like the Palestinians they are being made homeless at home and stateless in the global economy.

But the making of victims by these processes is just one part of the story. What also needs to be seen (if they are ultimately to be undone) are the creative forces of survival their victims deploy against them. In the Palestinian context, it is remarkable the extent to which analysts as ideologically diverse as the World Bank, Machsom

Watch, radical geographers (Eyal Weizmann) and critical political thinkers (Adi Ophir) have been incapable of recognizing any form of Palestinian agency when representing the unfolding of these processes of inequality in the occupied territories. Everywhere projects of making and enforcing inequality generate everyday tactics of survival, which in and of themselves create infinite tension points and resistances to the smooth functioning of systems and technologies of domination. Building walls and prisons, deploying more border controls or guards, developing ever more sophisticated technologies for surveillance, policing and incarceration takes not only tremendous resources, but infinite amounts of human energy and ingenuity. This is because on the other side there is not passive acceptance of these forces, but immense human will and agency being constantly rallied against or around them. Of course, the power and resources of the forces of domination and control are much greater – but they can never totally foreclose the effects of infinite acts of creative survival by an entire population.

So let us return to Qalandiya. Prior to becoming a strategic point on a military map, Qalandiya was simply a place in which diverse communities and physical topography created a particular human landscape, but one that already reflected some core inequalities. On its North side, lies Qalandiya Refugee Camp, home to 10,000 refugees now into their third generation. On its south side, is the neighbourhood of al Ram – home to families displaced by Israel in 1967 from Jerusalem's Old City. The two communities once separated by a road, in 2001 now became separated by a checkpoint. A situation aptly described by a camp resident as, "I used to start a cigarette here and finish it over there – now it's two years and I don't know what there looks like". To the North of the refugee camp, is the Israeli settlement Kokhav Yachar, housing 4,000 Israeli settlers on land expropriated in 1981 – they have their own bypass road which allows them to reach Jerusalem in 15 minutes without even passing their neighbors. East of the Camp a series of stone quarries create an environmental disaster but one which became the community's only route out when the checkpoint was closed to them for more than a year. And finally, on the camps western border is a small airport that was the West Bank's international airport until 1967, when Israel took it over. I was told that due to the airports existence next to the Camp, over three generations of young refugee boys had dreams of becoming airline pilots.

The checkpoint itself started in 2001 as a few soldiers behind sandbags and concrete blocks who intermittently stopped people traveling on the road. Over the next four years it became a continuous work in progress, as it expanded into an evermore stringent and permanent series of barricades. Until finally it has taken over a few square kilometres of the landscape where a fully-fledged high-tech "terminal" has been installed which is a main crossing point in the Separation Wall, that has been built across the original road.

During that time not only has its physical structure been in a constant process of change – the rules of who, what and how to cross have been in a permanent state of flux. In the first period everyone could cross after an identity check, then only private cars and pedestrians could, and at times, only pedestrians. This was followed

by the most restrictive period when no West Bank identity card holders could cross south. Then they could only if they were a woman or a child under 14, or were over 60, then over 50, or 14 and had permits and on and on. And even within the overall “rule structure” of whom or what could cross during a particular period – there was always the individual whim of the soldier – as suggested in my diary description at the opening of this paper. .

What checkpoints create is not pure immobility, but immense chaos. Although the IDF calls Qalandiya an “isolation checkpoint” and its often described as separating Ramallah from Jerusalem, it actually lies 10 kilometers inside the West Bank and sits across the main road artery that runs through the once continuous Palestinian suburbs that run from Ramallah all the way through East Jerusalem. But the main reason for where it is located is that it sits on a larger strategic crossroads – a point at which the main North South artery in the West Bank crosses the main East-West artery. Thus within the overall spatial regime (varying between 450 and 650 roadblocks and checkpoints), Qalandiya has not just divided East Jerusalem from its West Bank hinterlands, but has completely isolated a number of surrounding communities from each other, while serving as a strategic bottleneck for the larger population needing to move from one side of the West Bank to the other. But this description barely begins to address what Qalandiya has accomplished. Manuel Castells has called modern societies “network societies” – they depend on complex networks of information, people and goods that connect through space.²⁷ Thus, the checkpoint created not simply a problem of movement for people and goods, but was akin to a tectonic explosion that caused a massive web of ruptures across infinite networks of social and economic relations all across the West Bank. As such, more important than the finite impact of goods not reaching their markets or students their schools was the wider devastation caused by the ruptures of the complex circuits through which the host of social relations flow and circulates that make among other things, commerce and education possible.

An immediate response to the imposition of this devastation by checkpoints is therefore attempts to re-organize those shattered circuits that make the operation of regular life possible. And the place to begin this is at the very epicenter in which they were shattered and where chaos is most concentrated and emanates from. Thus the main thing that is needed is new ways to try and re-impose order from chaos – new systems to re-organize those shattered networks in systematic and regularized types of ways – either enabling people and goods to go through the checkpoint or around it. The official Palestinian authorities cannot do this, because their criminalization is part of what the checkpoint geography represents. Thus throughout the occupied territories it has been informal networks that have stepped in to fill the breach – either of informal sector workers or of local communities. At checkpoints everywhere this happens at first spontaneously and in piecemeal ways, then over time what I have called “checkpoint workers” build more sophisticated ways of organizing themselves to create order for the larger populace.²⁸ At Qalandiya this was an immense challenge because the magnitude of chaos was so much greater due to the sheer scale of the



population needing to cross and thus the diversity of needs that had to be addressed. It was as if overnight you have to create an urban infrastructure for a constantly changing socio-scape of more than 20,000 people. Though of similar scale, it is a much more complicated project than what confronts aid agencies in a “humanitarian crisis”, because here you must create an infrastructure to actually sustain a population’s mobility at the very site in which a powerful system has been imposed in order to block it. Thus this immense project must be done subversively because if it is done in direct confrontation – it will simply be defeated.

Everywhere, the first chaos a checkpoint creates is in public transport systems. The backbone of Palestinian public transport is ten-seater predominantly owner-operated vans that are licensed to work a prescribed route under a local taxi office. When routes are cut, the logic of standardized destinations and who can ply them completely breaks down. At Qalandiya, overnight vans could no longer cross and continue their old routes – to more than thirty destinations on either side of the checkpoint thus creating a choke point where drivers were forced to drop passengers and leave them to seek a way to finish their journey on the other side. Soon the roads on either side were clogged in the chaos of transit vans and cars unable to go forward and unable to turn. Then the disorder worsens as transit vans from all over the area move in to try and help commuters finish their journey from this sudden point of blockage. While anger and frustration reigns for all, for transport drivers their very livelihoods become threatened. Thus, a few months into the imposition of the checkpoint, in an attempt to restore order so as to guarantee their livelihoods, informal networks from the refugee camp and among transport workers

stepped in to organize what had now become a major transport hub – or in fact to create dual hubs – to deal with each side of the checkpoint.

The next group who stepped in were porters. Either because vehicles couldn't cross, or it took too long waiting to cross by vehicle, porters with three wheeled wooden carts came to move everything from travellers luggage, to commercial goods and even the entire mail of the Ramallah post office across the checkpoint.

And simultaneous with these first two groups mobile vendors entered onto the scene. The first were those who made canteens for the other checkpoint workers, kebab and coffee sellers for drivers and porters. And then other opportunities were spied and new niches created. In the summer: water, sunglasses, sunhats and ice-cream for pedestrians, in the winter umbrellas, woolen hats and hot drinks. And soon enough you had hundreds of vendors plying an infinite variety of goods at what was affectionately called – the “Qalandiya Duty Free”.

These were the occupational networks that moved in, but the surrounding communities, either collectively or individually also played their role. The camp community played host – to hundreds of released prisoners dumped at the checkpoint by the military in the middle of the night miles away from their homes. From its ranks came doctors and first aid workers to treat the sick and injured. Every forty days of Ramadan, camp youth distributed water and dates to commuters stuck in line during the breaking of the fast. And the community even provided a final resting place in their cemetery – for a young woman whose family couldn't get her body back home to Tulkare-m because the checkpoint was sealed shut. The owner of one of the quarries, continually donated gravel and the services of his bulldozer to keep creating a stand for the 300 odd transit vans that needed a stand. And the al-Ram community twice received hundreds of commuters into their homes when they became stuck on that side of the checkpoint under a sudden curfew.

But how was order created from chaos? I've mentioned who arrived, but not exactly how or what they did. If we take just one small part of the organizing needs of the checkpoint – public transport on it's northern side – we might get a sense of what is involved. Walid, in his forty's from the Camp, was a main transport organizer for five years on the Ramallah side of the checkpoint. Like many of the checkpoint workers, he had spent years working in construction in Israel before the checkpoints put him out of work so he began to operate a secondhand unlicensed van. He describes what happened when the checkpoint was made at Qalandiya:

In the beginning it was a mess, drivers would come, there was no turn, no where to stand, the strong one would eat the weak one. So in the Camp we decided that we should organize it, we made a subcommittee and decided to make a stand, you know for the vans and to try organize the situation of turns. In the beginning it was all voluntary, each day a group of guys from the camp would come down and try and organize. But it didn't work – drivers didn't get to know them or build a relationship because it was different guys from day to day. And there were problems happening everyday, you know

people fighting for turns— you needed to enforce things. So we said, we have to make a permanent group – nine guys – and they’ll take ten shekels a day from the drivers to use the stand and for the other services – the money was equivalent of half a load of people. We’d pay some to the organizers and the rest we donate to the committee. We got the political organizations in the camp to come down and speak to the drivers, to give us some legitimacy. Abu Wagih the owner of the quarry donated gravel and we fixed up a stand on the empty land about 20 meters from where the soldiers stand. And we made a system, each location together, each one by turn, one of them breaks the rules, jumps his turn and we punish him – he can’t come for a day, he gets in a fight – that’s it, he misses a day two days or he harasses the girls passing we send him off for a week. But it didn’t last – the soldiers kept running us out, the soldiers would come by and start shouting over the microphone and say that’s it all of you move out or we’ll shoot – and it’s a disaster – you can’t move all at once – two three hundred vans, and they’re firing tear gas into the windows, breaking windows. We kept going back and it kept happening until we said, enough. And found a place 60 meters away from them.

Again, the quarry owner gave them the materials, and they made the next stand despite the army from time to time shooting at the tires of Abu Wagih’s caterpillar. Then after another stand-off they were finally kicked out again and were forced even further away (150 meters from the checkpoint). By the third time, they learnt to build a rubble mound at one end – to provide cover from the soldiers’ shooting. But the next stage took even more tenacity – when the checkpoint was closed completely to West Bank identity card holders and people were forced to smuggle themselves through the quarry that then became dubbed “Tora Bora”:

When people had to smuggle through the quarry we moved down there and made a stand that was like a trench – so that it would provide cover for people – it was big enough for a hundred vans. We couldn’t get people all the way to the other side because of the terrain, but we could get them half way and pick those up who came through and run them back. You know they (the soldiers) were always firing randomly down there to stop people from crossing through the quarry. During that period we organizers were working like military duty. Soldiers always came down on hunting trips, on the lookout to stop people – and were always shooting randomly, lots of people got hurt down there – two people died. We had to do lookouts, one person posted on this hill, another one there, the one there calls the one here and says, okay – go it’s clear. We worked like ambulance workers too, carried the sick on our backs, from the ambulance coming from Ramallah over to the other side – that was the worst period when no one could cross the checkpoint, not even an ant could.

In all from the beginning of the checkpoint's imposition until the creation of the Qalandiya "terminal" in early 2006, Walid and the other organizers made a total of seven different stands within the area of the checkpoint. Each time was done in defiance of the army and always involved intense periods of cat and mouse, punctuated by short periods of relative stability. They also created two alternate routes (the quarry and Rafaat) that the army was unable to completely seal, until the Wall was built. And then for a long period, they became absolutely homeless within the space of the checkpoint – when the building of the new industrial terminal crossing took all of the remaining land where it would be possible to make a stand. Only during that period, did the transport on the Ramallah side fall again into chaos – because organization was outflanked by the absence of space. On the Jerusalem side of the checkpoint, you have a parallel history. There too drivers and organizers over a period of four years engaged in daily battle of will and stealth against the relentless pressure of the military and the ever-dwindling possibility of securing the substance for their work and its organization at the checkpoint – space itself.

In other cases, survival has meant making difficult compromises. Where the drivers and their organizers survived through ongoing defiance of the military, the porters' survival at Qalandiya ultimately became dependent on compliance with them. The porters who arrived at Qalandiya from the outset were confronted with a set of organizational circumstances in some ways more difficult than the drivers. Some of them had been porters in the vegetable market in the refugee camp, or at al-Ram, still others arrived after working at other checkpoints that had subsequently had been closed or overrun with too much competition. At one point at Qalandiya their numbers reached 35 – many of them kids from the camp coming to work after school. Because there's little capital investment involved – anyone could get into the business, and since they don't need space – regulating themselves and creating a system of "fairness" can't be done through a parking stand as with the vans. Too many disconnected and competing networks came in – and the camp community was not willing to stop the infinite number of its children trying to make some extra cash from it. It was an unsustainable moral economy: Abu Ammar, one of the older porters describes the situation:

There was no turn or nothing, only problems, a car would come and everyone would have to jump and whoever got those bags first, and whoever was clever was clever, it was no good. The kids with carts kept ruining us – they'd work for nothing. And so the prices were no good – the customer didn't like what you asked there were always another three, four who would give him a better price.

But in the case of the porters, unlike the drivers, crises created by the army created the opportunity to gain a greater measure of control.

When they closed the checkpoint for that period – when no one could cross and everyone started to go through the quarry, we went down there. But it was hard, rubble, hills not anyone could do it – the kids couldn't do it and some of the others decided to stop. Some, a few of us stayed working there and then they opened the checkpoint and we tried to go back. We went back to the checkpoint but the soldiers sent us away, they said no porters allowed, you know – security and all of that empty talk. They wanted to take our livelihood away and what do we have – nothing. So some of us, the married ones with kids we decided to go and talk to them – there was a soldier called Captain Ofer, an old man, speaks some Arabic. So me and the guys we got ourselves together about ten or twelve of us and we said we want to sit with you, one of the guys speaks really good Hebrew so we let him do the talking. So Captain Ofer says, okay come day after tomorrow at 8:00 am – you know how they are – they even give birth at an appointed time. So we went and he said okay what do you want? So we say, listen we used to work here, we are all married guys with children, each one of us has a family to look after, we need our work back. So Ofer goes on about security and how a kid at another checkpoint, they'd found guns or something in his cart. So we said we're all older, married we have responsibilities and the people need a solution. So he says okay married with children, but I'll only take five of you. We were twelve – two were unmarried so he turns them away. And we say but we're still ten and he gets stubborn and says no, only five – and then he picks out two, the one who spoke the good Hebrew and another one he'd remembered from before and he tells them to stand on the side. So he goes one by one – how many kids do you have, the first one says four, the next one says four, I say 7 – I could see what was happening, at the time I had four kids, but it was like the lotto, your going to live by the number. I decided he wouldn't check it in my identity card and even if he did – I'd say I had my parents and brother living with me – I worked in Israel most of my life so I know a little. So he tells me to stand with the others.

Over time, the porters were able to negotiate their numbers up to nine with the Captain. However, the price to keep working in this case, was that the porters inevitably became beholden to the army for continuing to work – they had to pass security checks (which one of them didn't pass because of a brother in prison), they had to number their carts so the soldiers could differentiate them, they had to keep a good relation even with “problematic” soldiers. At least, they could keep working and they made even more money because they now constituted a monopoly on porting. Worse still was they got a reputation for being collaborators with the military and for a while were relatively shunned by the other workers at the checkpoint. But to compensate for this situation, to buy some moral capital in the community, without jeopardizing their pact with the military they found a compromise – which was to subcontract the longer distance hauling to others up to the actual crossover point where

only they could pass. In this way, another six porting jobs were created for men who couldn't join "the army imposed union".

Checkpoints are also a magnets for peddlers. Shopkeepers from communities who could no longer sustain them; villagers selling seasonal fruits from back home; out of work young men trying their luck with some goods on assignment from a merchant or simply starting a stand from scratch with whatever small capital, idea and skill they have. Checkpoint environments are de-regulated; there are no municipal vending laws and no fees to pay for stands as in organized market areas in the cities. At the same time, there are literally thousands of potential customers – those stuck idly in cars, those walking in or out of the crossing, or waiting for transport to fill up on either side. There is also an all day group of customers – the checkpoint workers themselves. At its checkpoint worker apogee, you could eat three meals at Qalandiya – sesame bread or sweet pastry in the morning with your tea and coffee. Sizzling kebab at lunch – but no falafel since its possible for a cook to run from soldiers with a charcoal grill but too dangerous with a pot of boiling oil. For dinner, it was better to go home – unless you like grilled liver and stuffed spleen. And snacking was possible all day. At one point waiting in the hellish pedestrian line to cross – it struck me that almost everyone was chomping on roasted peanuts as if they were at the cinema – the whole area where the soldiers stood was enveloped by the smell of three nut roasters steaming away at the entrance.

The major problem for peddlers is akin to the drivers – space. A meter, a few feet in a strategic place (that commuters have to walk through, or at a drivers stand) is what fundamentally determines viability. Beyond that is whether vendors can satisfy existing consumer needs or create new ones. But wherever you stand there are risks, benefits and losses. The best side for business according to most peddlers is the exit, or Jerusalem side, based on the psychology of crossing; as one peddler put it, "who wants to buy when they're about to face hell (the soldiers), but once you pass you want to celebrate". The Jerusalem side became so popular – that on the big commute days (Saturday and Thursdays) you'd have up to 200 peddlers operating during good weather. But although Qalandiya is a military zone, the army would call in the Jerusalem municipal police to clear out the stands, making lightning raids, confiscating goods and imposing fines. Thus, on the Jerusalem side peddlers learnt to keep their goods on stands that could be hauled off in a moment. On the Ramallah side, it was always safer because the Jerusalem municipality couldn't be bothered to cross the checkpoint, but it was also less business. But on the plus side there was space for a full-scale exposition on open tables.

Peddlers do not need collective systems at the checkpoint like the porters and van drivers; although on the Ramallah side – longstanding relationships built over a few years of peddling there developed into long term forms of cooperation – saving each others stand space everyday, collectively evicting a "trouble maker", and collectively defying the army trying to move them out. But peddlers, though perhaps not contributing to the "organization" of the checkpoint contributed something as important – an atmosphere of normality. In the midst of barbed wire, concrete blocks



and guns stood a perfume stand, lingerie flailing in the wind, books to look at, shoes to try on, the smell of coffee, a pile of green almonds, and strawberries, Tupperware, toys and plastic bouquets – all of the sights and smells of a lively urban market, a public space full of the happy diversion of popular consumerism and the social interaction that goes with it. Whenever interviewing commuters about what made them laugh at Qalandiya – it was almost always the same answer – the craziness of the peddlers. The process by which informal workers stepped in and “organized” the checkpoint is best described by Asef Bayat’s concept of the “quite encroachment of the ordinary”, a term he used to describe how the urban poor were able to slowly take over and remake areas of Tehran to meet their needs.²⁹ This process was not through collective direct action but through everyday tactics of survival that were mostly individual, spontaneous and without clear leadership or ideology. But when protracted and taken together they created a kind of molecular change to urban space despite the overwhelming power of the state. “By initiating gradual molecular change, the poor in the long run progressively modify the pre-existing composition of forces and hence become the matrix of new changes.” At Qalandiya there was an ideological framework sustaining individual and collective actions – national survival. But what primarily motivated checkpoint workers was necessity – the quest for dignity in the face of the destruction of their regular livelihoods. Thus through daily tactics of survival they crept into the spaces of opportunity that existed between the whims and violence of the military and the various needs of the community. They could not overthrow the checkpoint but they could “poach” it back from being a space of pure brutality and



oppression to one in which their own dispossession could be redressed while creating a means to sustain the entire community.

The strategies and experiences of commuters is another part of the picture – but one too large to be addressed here beyond some basic comments. At checkpoints commuters and informal sector workers are united by the need to survive and mutually depend on each other to do so; workers make livings from providing the means for commuters to keep going; and commuters by continuing to cross create jobs for the workers. But while workers can create systems to help commuters cross – the experience of crossing itself is beyond organization because of its innate arbitrariness and potential for violence. Who can or cannot cross, “the mood of the soldiers”, an eruption of violence around or in front of you, the inability to predict anything, including the time it will take. As such commuters when facing the checkpoint ultimately face it in a situation of extreme powerlessness, as individuals without the possibility of a collective strategy.

What people bring to this situation then are individual psychological strategies. Some of these have become part of collective popular discourse, and others remain as discrete individual strategies that vary according to character, as well as gender, age and status. In terms of popular discourse, although people cross by necessity in order to go to work, school, or simply continue with their lives, they imbue this act of survival with a sense of agency and defiance. “The checkpoint is not going to defeat me”, the checkpoint is not going to stop me from reaching my work”, “I refuse to let the checkpoint control my life” – these are the constant statements people make about

crossing. This individual reaction has generalized to become the rallying cry of this intifada – *al hayat lazim tastamir* – life must go on. There is a collective understanding that the checkpoints are there to stop life, to destroy livelihoods and education and ultimately defeat the will of a nation. Thus, simply continuing to cross them becomes encoded not as an individual experience of victimization but as part of a collective act of defiance and ultimately national resistance.

Where the much more individualized psychological strategies come in is at the moment of actual interaction with soldiers – at the identity card check. This is the extremely charged moment when as a single individual you are confronted with the bare face of the occupation and it becomes embodied in a person, a soldier who has immense power over your immediate destiny. It is here, in this moment of interaction between pure power and powerlessness that we see individual subjectivity at play in attempting to recode the dynamics and meaning of the interaction and take back some sense of control and its correlate – dignity.

“I never take out my I.D. card – I always make them ask for it” or “I take my I.D. card out before they have a chance to ask for it”. These two opposite micro-strategies to each person means the same thing – they have set the dynamic of the unfolding of the procedure, thus taking “control” of it away from the soldier. Similarly, we have different strategies in terms of verbal interaction with the soldiers; “I never get into a conversation with them – if they’re asking about anything other than my I.D. card, anything above what their supposed to be interested in– I shrug or tell them it’s not their business.” And again, you get its opposite, “I always take the opportunity to argue with them, tell them what they’re doing is inhumane – I don’t want them for a moment to feel that what they’re doing is right or normal”. But these particular micro-strategies of agency, are one’s that only people with a certain symbolic capital can undertake – all of them with Jerusalem identity cards, who in principle (though not always in fact) can always cross. And in terms of the obviously assertive strategies, it is mostly older professional women (and some men) who can risk them.

Those who don’t have the right papers don’t have this luxury – people whose only way to cross is to negotiate with the soldier, because they don’t fit the current rule requirements. In these cases the strategy cannot be anger, or reticence, or coldness because you have to elicit pity, or empathy, or credulity, or you have to simply wear them down by not giving up. And in the process of bargaining you must to exert the maximum amount of self-control – not to lose your temper, not to react in anger at being subject to a situation which is the essence of humiliation. When people in these circumstances describe what they do, they tend to re-code the humiliation of the encounter as a consummate act of bargaining – the skill of outsmarting the soldier. “The occupation forces us all to be liars”, is how one person described it. Meaning that since the point of the checkpoint is to make all normal human activities illegal – one has to invent extraordinary stories in order to convince a soldier to let you through.

In general, men, especially young men are less capable of negotiating than women – as evinced by the case of the young man in my opening description. On the one hand, they start from a position of being the most vilified of all Palestinians by Israel,

thus the distance they must close in terms of convincing soldiers to let them pass is the greatest. At the same time, their masculine selves are often at odds with the patient, subservient dispositions necessary to close the gap. One of the worst experiences standing in line, one that everyone mentions because it is so ubiquitous, is of the young man refusing to move and being beaten. But what is also extraordinary is how often the young men hit back. Women are the most skilled at bargaining their way through, or patiently wearing soldiers down. On the one hand their gender identity is a form of symbolic capital they can exploit (especially as mothers and grandmothers) but also because living in a patriarchal society – everyday female agency is very much about patience and tactical bargaining in order to get around male power.

Ask any soldier what he is doing at Qalandiya and you are likely to get one of two answers: “I’m just doing my job” or “I’m protecting the state of Israel”. The second reason reflects the logic of any security regime, be it protecting a wealthy neighbourhood from crime, a border from infiltrators and drug smugglers, or a nation from suicide bombers. It doesn’t ask why – why do people steal, infiltrate or bomb but naturalizes them as part of human existence and generalizes them onto the population they are trying to police. It inevitably turns who you police, the whole population, into a spectre of criminality – people who cannot act like you, feel like you or have the same needs and longings. If we return to Qalandiya, what we see in the military’s reaction to the van drivers, the peddlers and even the porters – is the active criminalization of their basic livelihoods. In terms of the commuters who were “breaking the rules” by smuggling through the quarry, we are talking about students and teachers trying to get to school, father’s trying to make a living and probably in some cases, young men simply wanting to see the wider world. People are forced to “misbehave” to get around arbitrary and unjust systems and then the fact of their misbehavior becomes the justification for the system itself.

Postscript:

In early 2006, Qalandiya checkpoint was reborn as the Qalandiya “Terminal crossing”, one of eleven high tech crossings Israel has constructed at various points across the West Bank Separation Wall. The “Terminal”, which from the outside looks as innocuous as an aircraft hangar and bearing signs with uplifting ditties in Arabic like, “Our Hope Together” is touted as more humane and efficient by Israeli government and military propagandists in contrast to its dusty ad hoc predecessors. Inside it is a showcase of every conceivable form of Israeli high and low security technology exported around the world including; magnetic spindle gates, high speed x-ray machines, and biometric scanning devices. Now crossing involves navigating through a warren of cage like pens, between turnstiles that automatically shut or open by remote control, all to the disembodied din of soldiers screeching through a pa system. Multiple public and private security personnel run the “Terminal” including the usual suspects such as the Israeli military police and border guards, but also private security

firms and the Israel Airports Authority. Dozing soldiers now “process” you while gazing at computer screens sitting in booths behind bullet-proof glass – and what communication is possible takes place through remote speaker systems. Indeed, if the “Terminal” has been more humane for anyone, it has been for the soldiers manning it.

The configuration of the “Terminal” as well as the re-routing of traffic in relation to the Wall, all brought to an end the huge informal infrastructure that had developed to deal with the old checkpoint system. Peddlers cannot get near their once lucrative positions on the Jerusalem exit side from the checkpoint; the narrow cages and turnstiles inside the terminal are barely wide enough for a human body – let alone a porter cart. And with the rerouting of West Bank traffic through the Jaba Road, and Israel’s re-imposition of old East Jerusalem bus companies on Palestinian public transport in and out of the city, even the main transport stands have returned to their natural homes in Ramallah and Jerusalem.

And despite the overwhelming power of the new system, people continue to find ways to get through and around it.

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Endnotes

- 1 Rema Hammami teaches Anthropology at Birzeit University; this essay is a modified version of a lecture presented to the Prince Claus Chair in Holland in 2005. The author would like to thank, Salim Tamari for his editing in-put and members of the Qalandiya research team that included: Hussein Mughmas, Lina Meari, Ma’an Samara and Hiba al Aa’jez.
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