

Negotiating Boundaries, Narrating Checkpoints: The Case of Machsom Watch

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The Israeli–Palestinian conflict has been the focus of much attention in the scholarly, policy, and activist communities. Although interpretations of the conflict vary, most discussions mix a variety of approaches, and some basic frameworks of analysis include: ‘clash of civilizations’ between the more ‘Western’ Israeli Jews and ‘Eastern’/‘Islamic’ Palestinian Arabs;¹ social–psychological issues, including different cultural communication styles;² competing land claims to the territory between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea;³ and political movements seeking both self-determination and international recognition.⁴ As one can surmise from the list of ‘final status’ issues—including borders, refugees, settlements, and Jerusalem—that were postponed repeatedly during the years of the Oslo Peace Process (and which were not on the list of issues to discuss at the November 2007 Middle East conference in Annapolis hosted by the United States), issues of territory and identity are intertwined in the political processes that create

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¹ See, for example, Samuel Huntington, ‘The clash of civilizations?’, *Foreign Affairs*, 72(3) (1993), pp. 22–49.

² See, for example, Raymond Cohen, *Negotiating across Cultures* (Washington, DC: US Institute of Peace Press, 1997); and Ahmad H. Sa’di, ‘Modernization as an explanatory discourse of Zionist–Palestinian relations,’ *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 24 (1997), pp. 25–48.

³ See, for example, Dan Rabinowitz, *Overlooking Nazareth: The Ethnography of Exclusion in Galilee* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Yehezkel Lein, *Land Grab: Israel’s Settlement Policy in the West Bank* (Jerusalem: B’Tselem, 2002); and Eyal Weizman, *Hollow Land: Israel’s Architecture of Occupation* (London: Verso, 2007).

⁴ See, for example, Ilan Pappé, *A History of Modern Palestine: One Land, Two Peoples* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Rashid Khalidi, *The Iron Cage: The Story of the Palestinian Struggle for Statehood* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006); and Joseph A. Massad, ‘History on the line: Joseph Massad and Benny Morris discuss the Middle East,’ in: Joseph A. Massad (Ed.) *The Persistence of the Palestine Question* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 154–165. The placing of these authors in these different categories is only an approximation; many of them could be put in several different categories due to the overlap and complex interplay of the different categories of analysis.

and sustain (and hopefully someday, resolve) the Israeli–Palestinian conflict.⁵ This article focuses particularly on the ways in which socio-political and ethical boundaries have been negotiated, contested and legitimized within Israeli society since the outbreak of the al-Aqsa *intifada* in late 2000 by analyzing the actions and narratives of the Israeli women’s group Machsom Watch. Specifically, this paper uses the theoretical framework of ‘territoriality’ to explain the policies and practices of the Israeli occupation as well as the strategies that Machsom Watch activists use in response.⁶

Machsom (the Israeli term for ‘checkpoint’) Watch was founded in 2001 by three women with the intent of observing and documenting what was happening at the Israeli checkpoints.⁷ At first it consisted of those women and their activist friends and was focused on a few of the checkpoints around Jerusalem. Today the organization, run entirely by volunteers, has twice-daily shifts at all of the major checkpoints from the south to the north of the West Bank. Women are assigned to weekly shifts, usually in groups of three or four, and they go and stand watch at a particular checkpoint in order to observe, document (and intervene if necessary) what occurs in terms of passage or obstruction of people, human rights abuses, changing patterns of interaction and army procedure. After each shift, the women write up a report that is made available on the Machsom Watch website in both Hebrew and English. There is great diversity among the women who volunteer with Machsom Watch, and the groups in different parts of Israel vary in their approach to their shifts, their work, and the political situation. While many in the Jerusalem group engage in more political activities, including non-violent actions organized by other groups, other members of Machsom Watch focus on the human rights and humanitarian dimensions of the checkpoints.⁸ Before discussing the strategies, tactics and ‘internal’ tensions of the group, this article will first contextualize members’ activism by outlining the geopolitical landscape with which it negotiates.

Territoriality: Bounding Israel/Palestine

There is no question that *boundaries* are a contentious issue in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict; not only does Israel lack official state boundaries but the issue was one of several

⁵ Baruch Kimmerling (Ed.), *The Israeli State and Society: Boundaries and Frontiers*. SUNY Series in Israeli Studies (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989); Meron Benvenisti, *Sacred Landscape: The Buried History of the Holy Land since 1948* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); and Oren Yiftachel, ‘Centralized power and divided space: “fractured regions” in the Israeli “ethnocracy,”’ *GeoJournal*, 53 (2001), pp. 283–293.

⁶ Information on Machsom Watch comes primarily from discussions with activists while accompanying shifts in 2004–05 during a period of research partially funded by the Palestinian American Research Center (PARC). Where noted, I also draw on publications and reports available on their website as well as recent works discussing the practices of the organization.

⁷ For more about the founding of Machsom Watch and its practices, as well as its operating principles and group dynamics, see Yehudit Kirstein Keshet, *Checkpoint Watch: Testimonies from Occupied Palestine* (London: Zed Books, 2005), which was written by one of its co-founders.

⁸ Although Machsom Watch was started by a small group of political activists, as the group has grown (over 500 members as of 2005), it has attracted more ‘mainstream’ women who participate for reasons based more on humanitarian or human rights grounds. This tension will be discussed briefly later in this article. For a more extended discussion see Keshet, *Checkpoint Watch*; and Maia Carter Hallward, ‘Building space for peace: challenging the boundaries of Israel/Palestine,’ PhD dissertation, American University (2006).

consistently put off for 'final status' negotiations during the Oslo years. Within the Israeli–Palestinian conflict the issue of boundaries is complicated by the interplay between geographic, political, and social identities: while the internationally recognized boundary of Israel is the 'Green Line' resulting from the 1949 armistice (also called the pre-1967 border), settlement policies that have resulted in Israeli Jews populating the West Bank⁹ and the continued presence of Palestinians in Israel proper (used to signify the internationally recognized pre-1967 boundaries) mean that Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs live on both sides of the line. This division is complicated by the fact that Palestinians west of the Green Line hold Israeli citizenship, while those living in the West Bank do not and those who live between the Green Line and the route of the separation barrier¹⁰ must apply for and receive permits from the Israeli military bureaucracy simply to live in their own homes. In contrast, those Israeli Jews living in West Bank settlements have full Israeli citizenship with access to the same (if not better) infrastructure as those living in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, or other Israeli cities west of the Green Line. A dual system of roads, a checkpoint regime, a dual legal system, and a number of other bureaucratic policies and procedures create and enforce the separation between Israeli Jews and Palestinians (as well as between Palestinian communities) on both sides of the Green Line.¹¹

Robert David Sack's theory of territoriality is particularly useful in analyzing the issue of boundaries and the activism of Machsom Watch because it focuses on the drawing and communicating of boundaries as well as power relationships defining who and what can cross boundaries when.¹² In the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, checkpoints have become the ultimate symbols of territoriality in action: in regulating movement, they create boundaries separating 'Israelis' and 'Palestinians' (as well as Palestinians from Palestinians) and create de facto boundaries between 'Israel' and 'Palestine.' In the course of their

⁹ In this article I will focus on the West Bank and not the Gaza Strip for several reasons. (1) I was unable to obtain a permit to access Gaza during my field work and Machsom Watchers similarly cannot access Gaza, so the work of Machsom Watch and my own observations are limited geographically to the West Bank. (2) Settlers were evacuated from Gaza in 2005, although Israel remains in control of all entrance and exit points, as well as the airspace. (3) The West Bank and Gaza have different histories and socio-cultural-political dynamics which far exceed the space of this article; the West Bank (Judea and Samaria in Israeli official discourse) is much more important in the eyes of religious Jews and seen as integral to the Jewish state as it contains many of the religiously significant cities of Jewish history and tradition, i.e., Hebron (Hebron), Shechem (Nablus), and Beth Lahem (Bethlehem).

¹⁰ I use the term 'separation barrier' for the series of concrete walls, fences, ditches, roads, surveillance equipment, towers, and sand traps that are also called the 'security fence' or the 'annexation wall.' See Andreas Mueller, *A Wall on the Green Line?* (Jerusalem: Alternative Information Center, 2004), p. 87; PASSIA, *Settlements and the Wall: Preempting the Two-state Solution* (Jerusalem: Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs, 2004), p. 16; and Yehezkel Lein & Alon Cohen-Lifshitz, *Under the Guise of Security: Routing the Separation Barrier to Enable the Expansion of Israeli Settlements in West Bank* (Jerusalem: B'Tselem and BIMKOM, 2005), p. 89.

¹¹ See Oren Yiftachel, 'The internal frontier: territorial control and ethnic relations in Israel,' in: Oren Yiftachel & Avinoam Meir (Eds) *Ethnic Frontiers and Peripheries* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1998), pp. 39–68; Jeff Halper, *Obstacles to Peace: A Re-framing of the Israeli–Palestinian Conflict* (Bethlehem: PalMap of GSE, 2004); Majid Al-Haj, 'Whither the Green Line? Trends in the orientation of the Palestinians in Israel and the Territories,' *Israel Affairs*, 11 (2005), pp. 183–206; Keshet, *Checkpoint Watch*; and Virginia Tilley, *The One-state Solution: A Breakthrough for Peace in the Israeli–Palestinian Deadlock* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005).

¹² Robert David Sack, *Human Territoriality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

activism, members of Machsom Watch challenge not only these boundaries of geography and ‘official’ identity but they also contest boundaries of (Jewish) morality by re-framing discourses involving ‘security’ and the lessons of the Holocaust. As noted by political geographer Gearoid O’Tuathail:

[t]he struggle over geography is also a conflict between competing images and imaginings, a contest of power and resistance that involves not only struggles to represent the materiality of physical geographic objects and boundaries but also the equally powerful and, in a different manner, the equally material force of discursive borders between an idealized Self and a demonized Other, between ‘us’ and ‘them.’¹³

Consequently, it is important to look at the interaction of ‘spatializing’ discourses (‘sets of socio-cultural resources used by people in the construction of meaning about their world and their activities’)¹⁴ and identity constructions in strategies used by Israeli policy makers, soldiers, and Machsom Watchers when legitimizing their positions and activities. In the Israeli–Palestinian conflict this involves the extent to which boundaries such as the ‘Green Line’ and the route of the separation barrier are treated as legitimate.

Territoriality has a tendency to ‘neutralize’ the relationship between identity and geographic boundaries by classifying according to *area* rather than *type*.¹⁵ This means that all who live within a specific area are classified accordingly, regardless of felt identification or other personal characteristics (such as language, culture, etc.). The Oslo Accords, for example, divided the West Bank into areas A, B, or C, with different degrees of Palestinian and Israeli control vis-à-vis civil and security administration. Palestinian movement between areas is regulated according to the identity card—each of which is identified with a particular geographic location—they carry, regardless of family, personal, or work-related considerations.¹⁶ Likewise, discussions of Jewish settlements are often framed in ‘neutral’ planning language, pointing to the areas assigned to the settlement (which often far exceed the existing built-up area) rather than noting type-related characteristics, such as location on the West Bank, or Jewish-only population in the midst of a Palestinian Arab population, etc.¹⁷ Territoriality is ultimately about power and is embedded in social relations; an ‘area’ becomes a ‘territory’ only once its boundaries have been established, and territoriality only comes into play when an actor (individual or group) controls access and enforces those restrictions with action. Boundaries must be maintained constantly, and do not exist a priori in space or time.

¹³ Gearoid O’Tuathail, *Critical Geopolitics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), pp. 14–15.

¹⁴ See further Gearoid O’Tuathail & John Agnew, ‘Geopolitics and discourse: practical geopolitical reasoning in American foreign policy,’ in: Gearoid O’Tuathail, Simon Dalby & Paul Routledge (Eds) *The Geopolitics Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 79–80.

¹⁵ Sack, *Human Territoriality*.

¹⁶ Author interview with Baha Bakri, Public Relations spokesperson, Palestinian Central Elections Commission, Ramallah, 23 November 2004; and B’Tselem, *Restrictions on Movement: Checkpoints and Forbidden Roads* (Jerusalem: B’Tselem, 2007), available at <http://www.btselem.org/english/Freedom_of_Movement/Checkpoints_and_Forbidden_Roads.asp> (accessed 7 May 2007).

¹⁷ See Yehezkel Lein, *Land Grab*; Hagit Ofra & Dror Etkes, ‘*And Thou Shalt Spread ...*’: *Construction and Development of Settlements beyond the Official Limits of Jurisdiction* (Jerusalem: Peace Now Settlement Watch, 2007), p. 31; and Eyal Weizman, *Hollow Land*.

Instead, they are applied in various degrees to different people and at different times, and can be as simple as work regulations that keep employees in certain places at certain times of day.¹⁸

Sack outlines 10 territorial ‘tendencies’ useful for examining policies and practices that impact social, political and geographic boundaries;¹⁹ several are particularly relevant for analyzing Machsom Watch activism. The *displacing* tendency shifts attention from the relationship between the controller and the controlled to the territory itself, by appealing to the laws relevant to that particular territory and ignoring the role of the controller (in this case the Israeli government and the settlement enterprise²⁰) in establishing those laws and defining the scope of their applicability. This is connected to another tendency, the focus on the *impersonal* relationships that result from classifying by area rather than type. In the case of Israel/Palestine, for example, those living in ‘Area A’ fall under a different set of laws than do those living in ‘Area C’ or those living within the boundaries of Israeli settlements. Jewish settlers living in the West Bank carry Israeli citizenship, have infrastructure that connects to pre-1967 Israel, and are under the jurisdiction of Israeli civil courts. Palestinians living in the West Bank fall under a complex mixture of Ottoman, Jordanian, and Palestinian law, emergency orders dating to the British mandate, and are under the jurisdiction of Israeli military courts. Which laws have precedence in which instances is complicated further by the different degrees of Palestinian autonomy in Areas A, B, and C (which were defined by Oslo but ultimately determined by Israeli military presence).²¹ The relationship between Palestinians and settlers is thus defined by membership categories dependent on living within a specific territory rather than being of a particular type of person, which can result in policies not appearing ‘racial’ provided one ignores the mechanism’s controlling ability to live in the settlements or change one’s legal place of residence.

Another example of the *impersonal* tendency (as well as that of *emptiable space*) is the system of restricted roads in the West Bank, which facilitate movement of settlers between their homes and their workplaces in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem without having to encounter Palestinians.²² The impact of these roads on Palestinian life and livelihood is not ‘seen.’ For example, the ‘sterile’ buffer zone created for the bypass roads requires destroying Palestinian houses that happen to exist within 50–75 meters of either side of the road; justification of the destruction is given in area-related language (location vis-à-vis the road), which impersonalizes (and hides) the human suffering induced by destroying a family home. For those driving on the new roads, the surrounding landscape is ‘empty’ of

¹⁸ Sack, *Human Territoriality*, p. 26; and Oren Yiftachel & Avinoam Meir, ‘Frontiers, peripheries, and ethnic relations in Israel: an introduction,’ in: Oren Yiftachel & Avinoam Meir (Eds) *Ethnic Frontiers and Peripheries: Landscapes of Development and Inequality in Israel* (Boulder, CO: Westview), pp. 1–16.

¹⁹ Sack, *Human Territoriality*, pp. 30–34.

²⁰ Space does not allow a full discussion of the cooperation between the Israeli government and the settlement enterprise and the history of land zoning, etc. For an extended discussion of this process see Weizman, *Hollow Land*; and Idith Zertal & Akiva Eldar, *Lords of the Land; The Settlers and the State of Israel, 1967–2007* (New York: Nation Books, 2007).

²¹ See Tilley, *One-state Solution*; Weizman, *Hollow Land*, p. 121; and author interview with Limor Yehuda, Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI), Jerusalem, 4 April 2005.

²² B’Tselem, *Forbidden Roads: Israel’s Discriminatory Road Regime in the West Bank* (Jerusalem: B’Tselem—Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, 2004); PASSIA, *Settlements and the Wall*; and Tilley, *One-state Solution*.

inhabitants, as evidence of their existence was removed in the construction process.²³ For Palestinians, however, restricted roads are highly personal; they dissect the West Bank and prevent them from accessing neighboring villages or sometimes even their own land (it is illegal for Palestinians to cross some roads even as they connect Israeli settlers directly to Tel Aviv and Jerusalem).

The primary focus of Machsom Watch—the checkpoints—is a classic symbol of territoriality. Checkpoints serve as gatekeepers; they delimit a boundary and soldiers staffing them enforce regulations regarding who can cross. The numerous checkpoints—47 permanent checkpoints within the West Bank in addition to 33 ‘last inspection points’ between Israel and the West Bank and hundreds of “flying” checkpoints²⁴—impede movement of Palestinians within the West Bank and can prevent Israelis from entering.²⁵ The vast majority of checkpoints are located deep within the West Bank (including many of the ‘last inspection points’); consequently, they primarily affect Palestinians trying to conduct their daily lives.²⁶ However, checkpoints also make Israeli–Palestinian interaction extremely difficult: Israeli law forbids Israeli citizens from entering areas under nominal Palestinian control (the major cities of Ramallah, Nablus, Bethlehem, and Hebron which were classified as Areas ‘A’ under the Oslo Accords), and it is extremely difficult for Palestinians to obtain permission to travel to Jerusalem or areas within 1948 Israel. Such restrictions amplify tendencies to stereotype the ‘Other’ as ‘Enemy’ and further solidify place (area)-based boundaries of identity.²⁷ Official language used to justify the checkpoints often reflects the *displacing* tendency of territoriality, as it shifts focus away from the location of the checkpoints (which are within the West Bank rather than along any ‘international’ border), as well as the relationship between the controllers and the controlled (it focuses on the regulation of who can cross and not on who has the power to make that classification).

In the course of their work, members of Machsom Watch (consciously or not) challenge these and other territorial tendencies, as will be discussed more in the sections that follow. In the process of ‘record[ing] and report[ing] the results of our observations to the widest possible audience, from the decision-making level to that of the general public,’²⁸ Watchers seek to stake claims deemed as legitimate by their audience(s). The terms used

²³ Nina Mayorek, ‘Let’s go see the West Bank,’ ‘Jerusalem Women Speak’ tour, Washington, DC, April 2005; and B’Tselem, *Restrictions on Movement*.

²⁴ OCHA Weekly Briefing Notes (13–19 October): Update for oPt (East Jerusalem: United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2004), available at <www.ochaopt.org> (accessed October 2007); and B’Tselem, *Restrictions on Movement*.

²⁵ Israeli law prohibits Israeli citizens from entering Area ‘A,’ which is nominally under Palestinian civil and security control. Israeli settlers living in the West Bank are not stopped at checkpoints and generally are granted free access; all settlements were deemed Area ‘C’ under the Oslo Accords, with full Israeli civil and military control.

²⁶ Machsom Watch, *A Counterinterview: Checkpoints 2004* (Jerusalem: Machsom Watch, 2005), B’Tselem, *Restrictions on Movement*.

²⁷ Elia Awwad, ‘Perceiving the “Other” in the Al-Aqsa intifada,’ *Palestine–Israel Journal of Politics, Economics, and Culture*, VIII (2001), p. 97; and Ilfat Maoz, Shoshana Steinberg, Dan Bar-On & Mueen Fakhereldeem, ‘The dialogue between the “self” and the “other”’: a process analysis of Palestinian–Jewish encounters in Israel,’ *Human Relations*, 55 (2002), pp. 931–962.

²⁸ Machsom Watch, ‘About us,’ available on the organizational website, <machsomwatch.org/eng/aboutUsEng.asp?link=aboutUsEng&lang=eng> (accessed 6 October 2007).

by Machsom Watch members (whom I will refer to as ‘Watchers’) have the additional effect of narrating what it means to be Jewish, Israeli, Palestinian, and/or a moral human being. Through the interplay of language and location, activism and articulation, Machsom Watch is involved in a complex negotiation over the boundaries (geographic, political, social and moral) of Israeli identity.

Countering Territorialization: Machsom Watch Activism

By default, the work of Machsom Watch challenges political, social, and geographic boundaries because they are monitoring the boundary regulators. Checkpoints represent territoriality in action: their presence communicates and delimits a boundary, and soldiers²⁹ control access across that particular point. Machsom Watch members can affect flow across the boundary by documenting soldiers’ actions and intervening when necessary ‘to ensure that the human and civil rights of Palestinians in the Occupied Territories are protected.’³⁰ Watchers have also challenged boundaries by their presence at checkpoints deep inside the West Bank, where most Israelis fear to go; they show Palestinians the face of Israelis who are neither soldiers nor settlers, who work to end the occupation and thereby challenge certain stereotypes. Soldiers react differently to the Watchers’ challenge depending on the day, the circumstances, and the individuals involved. At times, this controlling force keeps Machsom Watch women on the ‘Israeli’ side of the checkpoint (although the Watchers often go to both sides, staying within a sometimes unspoken, sometimes dictated radius of the checkpoint infrastructure) and it usually regulates Palestinian passage across the checkpoint, although at some checkpoints people freely bypass the barrier a few hundred meters away in plain view of the soldiers. Many of the checkpoints monitored by the Machsom Watch women are within the West Bank, and so there is no clear ‘Israeli’ or ‘Palestinian’ side. Instead, these checkpoints separate Palestinian villages or serve to encircle major cities like Nablus so that it is difficult either to enter or leave; they also may demarcate a shift between Area ‘A’ and ‘B’ or ‘B’ and ‘C.’ At these checkpoints, in particular, Watchers challenge geographic and moral boundaries of ‘Israel’ and the ‘Israelis.’

Displacing

The very basic function of Machsom Watch counteracts the territorial tendency of *displacing*; by observing, they very purposefully shift attention back to the relationship between the controller and the controlled and away from the purportedly neutral regulation over who is permitted to cross (those with permits). Rather than allowing soldiers to ‘hide . . . behind anonymous orders . . . [and] discharge their orders, while responsibility for doing so is removed from them,’³¹ Machsom Watch members sometimes ‘remind the

²⁹ For simplicity’s sake I use the term ‘soldier’ even though some checkpoints are staffed by members of the Border Police and others by soldiers in the Israeli Defense/Occupation Forces (IDF or IOF, depending on one’s frame of reference).

³⁰ Machsom Watch, ‘About us.’

³¹ Anat Zanger, ‘Blind space: road block movies in the contemporary Israeli film,’ *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies*, 24 (2005), p. 45.

soldiers of their civic life inside Israel' and hence their own accountability.³² Watchers go to the checkpoints armed with their list of contacts in the government, military coordinating offices, media, and civil society and their knowledge of human rights. Simply informing the soldiers that they are being observed can remind them of their agency and accountability in choosing how to implement 'orders.' The focus of the observations is not to pass judgment on individual soldiers, but rather to document and expose the function of the checkpoints as mechanisms of control and oppression rather than security. Although at times the practice of Machsom Watch observations involved noting if something 'bad' happened or if the soldiers were 'not good,' as one Watcher informed one of her colleagues on a shift I accompanied, 'we're not here to evaluate if the soldiers are "good" or not but to record and document the conditions.'³³

Many of my informants noted that what they saw and what they raised awareness about were not necessarily sensational human rights violations, although those happened from time to time and they did what they could to avert them. Rather, they sought to reveal the creeping consolidation of Israeli occupation and control through twice-daily documented observations of the same places over a period of years. Machsom Watch women worked for the removal of the checkpoints, particularly those within Palestinian territory, because most of the checkpoints were not on the 1949 borders of Israel as recognized by the United Nations, but rather many kilometers inside the West Bank. Machsom Watch, in partnership with other organizations, has documented the controlling dynamics of the checkpoint regime, and its devastating impact on the Palestinian society and economy, including the 'theft of freedom to control your own life in its most intimate and minute details.'³⁴ Through their ongoing observation and regular presence, Watchers learn facts about the checkpoints as well as countless mechanisms of Israeli control over Palestinian society. For example, on a shift in Abu Dis, a Palestinian town on the eastern edge of Jerusalem, Watchers pointed out the way in which the Israeli authorities have used their power to shift the relationship of controller/controlled onto Palestinian families living in areas abutting the planned route of the separation barrier (which, in this location, is a concrete wall over 8 meters high). While the main road that used to link Jerusalem to Jericho via Abu Dis is completely blocked off by the wall, the rest of the route was still to be finalized, and consequently not yet built. In its place, a series of short walls, gates, and fences served as a 'temporary' barrier, to prevent (somewhat unsuccessfully) Abu Dis residents from passing through the houses and apartment buildings immediately along the access road. The women let me know that the gates were the responsibility of the Palestinians living in the houses behind (from our perspective on the 'Jerusalem' side, although both sides were actually Abu Dis) them. The Israeli authorities had promised the owners that their houses would be on the 'Jerusalem' side of the wall if they played territorial agent and regulated passage across their property, preventing people from the 'Palestinian' side from crossing until the wall was completed.³⁵ Although it might look as

³² Dorit Naaman, 'The silenced outcry: a feminist perspective from the Israeli checkpoints in Palestine,' *NWSA Journal* 18 (2006), p. 172.

³³ Author interview with Dalia (name changed by author to protect privacy), Huwarra checkpoint and environs, 25 May 2005.

³⁴ Keshet, *Checkpoint Watch*, p. 16.

³⁵ Author interview with Lauren, Naomi and Amy (names have been changed), Jerusalem-Abu Dis, 30 November 2004.

if Palestinians were simply taking owner's prerogative in putting up fences, the fences were actually signs of Israeli control over the future (and present) life and livelihood of those same Palestinians. The Palestinians were forced to police their own people at their own expense or else suffer the consequences of also being walled off from Jerusalem.

One of the strategies that Machsom Watch uses to counteract the *displacing* tendency is to conduct (and to disseminate, via their listserv, website, and speaking tours) investigations of the bureaucratic procedures it takes to acquire a permit,³⁶ for example, or the controlling impact of seemingly neutral policies or measures taken to 'ease ... the restrictions imposed on innocent members of the population.'³⁷ Such reports focus specifically on the *controlling* nature of Israeli policies and procedures that are otherwise hidden to the casual observer. For example, a report co-authored with Physicians for Human Rights-Israel notes:

In contrast to the open violence, the occupying forces also engage in *hidden violence*. There is bureaucratic violence, which the film attached to this report attempts to uncover. The waiting for the permit which may or may not come, the lack of information as to whether the hatch will close before I have submitted my application for a permit, will they return me the documents supporting my application for a permit?—all these leave the DCL [District Coordination Liaison] and the soldiers staffing it in a position of *total control*, whose authority only gets stronger the more arbitrary it is. In the queue at the DCL—as opposed to that at the checkpoints—there is no Palestinian society, there are only individuals begging for a permit. As such, they are *easy to control*.³⁸

Just as this report documents the ways in which the DCL offices control the Palestinian population, another report uncovers the restrictive impact of an Israeli regulation (issued November 2003) allegedly designed to 'facilitate the passage of Palestinian civilians who may desire to attend ... [Ramadan prayers].'³⁹ However, in the course of their research and observation at the District Coordinating Offices (DCOs)⁴⁰ the Watchers 'found plentiful evidence that the new regulation in fact did not serve to enable Palestinians to reach the Temple Mount to pray, but to prevent them from doing so.'⁴¹ The Watchers note that 'as the proclamations that restrictions will be lifted multiply, so do new restrictions on

³⁶ Hadas Ziv, *The Bureaucracy of the Occupation: The District Civil Liaison Offices* (Jerusalem: Machsom Watch and Physicians for Human Rights, n.d.), available at <http://www.phr.org.il/phr/files/articlefile_1108316859979.pdf> (accessed October 2007).

³⁷ Tsili Goldenberg, *Systematic Abuse by Administrative Means: A Matter of Policy? A Report on the Operational Practices of the Civil Administration in Occupied Palestinian Territories* (Jerusalem: Machsom Watch, n.d.), n.p., available at <<http://www.machsomwatch.org/docs/civilAdministration.asp?link=summaries&lang=eng>> (accessed October 2007).

³⁸ Ziv, *Bureaucracy of the Occupation*, p. 50; emphasis added.

³⁹ IDF Spokesperson, quoted in Goldenberg, *Systematic Abuse*.

⁴⁰ The eight DCOs in the West Bank are part of the Civil Administration, which is under the Ministry of Defense and has the task of overseeing civilian life in the West Bank. The DCO offices are often difficult to access because of their location off restricted roads (which means Palestinians need a permit to apply for one), and the operating hours are often inconvenient. For more discussion of the DCO policies and operating practices, see Ziv, *Bureaucracy of the Occupation*; Goldenberg, *Systematic Abuse*.

⁴¹ Goldenberg, *Systematic Abuse*.

travel, worship’ and that the net impact of the Ramadan regulation was to require that a limited subset of ‘qualified’ Palestinians (men 45 years and older and women 35 years and older who have families) obtain an additional permit.⁴² The net result was that only 5000 permits were issued to a population of approximately 3 million (i.e., 0.2 percent). In addition, in the course of their research, the Watchers learned that because of the location of some of the DCO offices, Palestinians are caught in a Catch-22 situation because they need a permit to go to the office where they can apply for the permit they need.⁴³

In addition to writing reports and speaking to the public, Machsom Watch members use their own positional power as citizens of the controlling power—most Watchers are middle class, educated, and well connected⁴⁴—to intervene and shift the dynamics of the relationship to a more ‘humane’ form of control. By assisting Palestinians in the placing of their claims, obtaining permits, and facilitating passage through the checkpoint by their presence and intervention in cases of severe human rights abuses, Machsom Watch women help Palestinians make claims on Israeli officials in the DCOs and use their own knowledge of the Hebrew language and connections with Israelis in power to move the permit process along. Such action is not without internal dilemmas for the women, as many shared their struggle with the tension between the long-term goal of ending the occupation and removing ‘internal’ checkpoints and the need for short-term strategies to cope with current realities. The women’s work at the checkpoints has resulted in some ‘improvements’ such as metal sheltering roofs at some checkpoints and ‘humanitarian lanes’ which come and go at most of the major checkpoints. While the women speak of these changes as proof of their impact, most noted these ‘successes’ with regret, as they further institutionalize and concretize (often literally) the checkpoints. Furthermore, the women noted that in many ways the military establishment needs them to give a humanitarian ‘seal of approval’ to their work, a mission which many of the women with whom I spoke found distasteful.⁴⁵ While Machsom Watch has succeeded in raising the profile of the checkpoints and the fact that many of them are *not* on the border between ‘Israel’ and ‘Palestine,’ they have not prevented the building of large, expensive, permanent ‘terminals’ in Bethlehem and Qalandia that further hamper Palestinian social, religious and economic activity. The section that follows focuses on the ways in which Watchers *personalize* the checkpoint regime, after which we will turn to the narrative strategies that Watchers use to legitimize their perspective on ‘security’ and the ethical duties of Israeli Jews.

‘Personalizing’ the Impersonal: Providing a Human Face to the Checkpoints

Often the Watchers counteracted the *displacing* tendency through sharing stories and personal experiences that *personalize* an otherwise *impersonal* policy or regulation designed to improve the ‘security’ of Israel. In the process, Machsom Watch members re-inserted the Palestinians into the ‘empty’ or otherwise ‘off-limits’ landscape. Machsom

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Keshet, *Checkpoint Watch*.

⁴⁵ Author interview with Rachel, Nora and Anat (names have been changed), Beit Iba/Sarra, 12 February 2005. For more discussion, see Keshet, *Checkpoint Watch*.

Watch used their shifts as opportunities for documenting the daily territorial tendencies exercised at checkpoints and for collecting stories from their encounters with Palestinians, to be shared later. In the process of these encounters, Israelis and Palestinians often create social ties that then affect boundaries of lived identity and geography. The following reflection, shared by a Watcher in a public speaking engagement, demonstrates this linkage between the controlling aspects of the checkpoint as well as a personal story to make Palestinians' experiences at the checkpoint come alive:

Just imagine the amount of time you are wasting over the last four years. Even if you are crossing [the checkpoint] and people [soldiers] are polite, just try to calculate how much time is being wasted. People are late to their job if they are lucky enough to have one. People cannot really study, work or live because every inch of their autonomy is being controlled by someone else ... I can decide when I eat, when I study, when I work. I can decide who comes in [to my apartment], where I go, how I do it ... those things that are very trivial to us are not trivial at all to 2 million people.⁴⁶

Often the personalizing stories accompanied actions that challenged and re-configured assumed identities. For instance, on an evening shift to Qalandia (the main checkpoint between Ramallah and Jerusalem), the women I accompanied went even farther 'over the line' than most, venturing far down a road toward the Qalandia refugee camp and quarry on the Palestinian side of the checkpoint even as dusk fell. While walking and observing, the women counteracted the territorial tendency of *impersonal* by recounting 'personal' stories of Palestinians affected by Israeli bureaucratic procedures. The women noted that while on the surface the permit system was very civil ('impersonal'), upon closer examination it was not, since 500,000 Palestinians could not get permits due to lack of security clearance and were never told the reason. Machsom Watch investigation discovered that the reasons for this blacklisting include having a relative who was shot or was trying to cross a checkpoint without a permit. They told stories of individuals they had met, and about workers who go early in the morning (some as early as 3 or 4 a.m.), hoping for the best, that they will be allowed back through the checkpoint in the evening (many checkpoints are unidirectional, so that you are only checked going in one direction), since checkpoints now separate them from their place of employment. At times they are not allowed back in, however; families, workplaces and schools have been separated from each other, paralyzing daily life. As one Machsom Watcher remarked, this 'forces [Palestinians] to transgress' as they must commit a crime (illegally crossing a checkpoint) in order to live and feed their family. By telling me (and other Israeli citizens through their reports and presentations) such stories, the Machsom Watch women seek to counteract the 'impersonal' tendency of the permit system. Many of the stories that Watchers shared had to do with the challenges faced by Palestinian families from different geographic areas, such as a husband from Gaza or from one of the Arab cities inside Israel (like Lod) and a wife from the West Bank. Rather than simply talking about how one was 'illegally' living in the West Bank, the stories shared the complexities of daily living arrangements when families could not obtain permits to be together after years of so doing. A regulation that

⁴⁶ Michal Sagi, Presentation on Machsom Watch, Daila Center, West Jerusalem, 25 January 2005.

otherwise seems impersonal—keeping out those without the proper permit—becomes a husband who cannot be with his family for the Muslim ‘*eid* and who hardly ever gets to see his children because he happens to be from Gaza and his wife from Bethlehem.⁴⁷

Another way Machsom Watch women ‘personalized’ the checkpoint regime was through raising awareness about the diversity of Palestinian society. As one woman noted, ‘we need to see Palestinians in all of their differences just as we have so many differences in Israeli society . . . Society is a mix of types of people.’⁴⁸ Through their reports, their conversations, and their regular observations, the women collected stories of the ‘mix of people’ constituting the Palestinian society as a way of working to humanize not only the Palestinian ‘other’ but also to connect personal stories documenting the impact of ‘impersonal’ policies of occupation. A photo exhibit that has traveled around Israel (and is housed online at their website as well) and a documentary film showing the very personal experience of Palestinians in the checkpoint ‘routine’ (complete with crying baby, crowded line, glaring sun, etc.) seek to personalize the checkpoints to an Israeli public accustomed to security checks at the entrance to malls, grocery stores, universities, etc. Watchers try to share images of the checkpoint to show that even when gross human rights violations do not occur, the checkpoint regime violates human rights through its prevention of university students from reaching their university, of keeping pregnant women from the medical assistance they need, keeping family members from visiting sick relatives who happen to live in another city or town.⁴⁹ While they combat the *impersonal* tendency in the Israeli public sphere, Machsom Watch members also provide a *personal* face of non-military Israelis to the Palestinians passing through the checkpoints. Although before the Oslo Accords in particular there was much more interaction (albeit often unequal) between Israelis and Palestinians due to the large number of Palestinian workers in the Israeli economy, since the second *intifada* in particular such interaction has virtually ceased. On almost every shift I observed, parents passing through the checkpoint would bring their small children over to meet the Israeli women, telling their children that these, too, were Israelis and that not all were like the heavily armed soldiers and settlers.

Machsom Watch *personalizing* strategies are intimately connected with active discursive bounding practices that yoke together matters of geographic, political, social, and moral identities. These boundaries are contested, constantly negotiated, and heavily debated among the members of Machsom Watch as well as between Watchers and other members of Israeli society—including the soldiers whom they observe.⁵⁰ Discussions among Watchers as to the appropriate relationship with the soldiers (i.e., whether it was okay to bring them cookies, whether it was proper to ‘volunteer’ to sit in the checkpoint along with the soldiers as some civilians do) further complicated the boundary between

⁴⁷ Author interview with Eilat and Maya (names have been changed), Qalandia and a-Ram, 14 December 2004.

⁴⁸ Author interview with Dalia.

⁴⁹ As one Israeli journalist says: ‘the routine of the checkpoints, which robs from Palestinians hundreds of thousands of hours of life and energy every day, completely evades the Israeli media. This loss of time is a much more effective weapon than any artillery shell in draining the Palestinian people, until they agree to the solution of an enclave-state.’ Amira Hass, ‘Candy at the checkpoint,’ *Haaretz*, 6 September 2007, available at <<http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/901373.html>> (accessed October 2007).

⁵⁰ Keshet, *Checkpoint Watch*; Naaman, ‘Silenced outcry’; and Tamar Duke-Cohen, *The Questions We Must Ask*, National Public Radio transcript (Weekend Edition, Sunday 30 September 2007), available at <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=147984672007> (accessed 7 October 2007).

morality, identity, and activism.⁵¹ Many of the Watchers served in the army or have sons and daughters who have (or had) and therefore the soldiers are not the ‘Other’ any more than the Palestinians are, while at the same time, in this particular context of Observer/Observed, they *are*.

Bounding ‘Self’ and ‘Other’: Questions of (Jewish) Morality, Identity and Security

Much of each shift at the checkpoint involves waiting and watching. It is only occasionally when a major human rights violation occurs (such as the widely publicized case of the Palestinian forced to play the violin at the checkpoint)⁵² and much of the time women talk with each other, share news, and process what they observed. On the shifts I accompanied, often the women would narrate the checkpoint ‘routine’ while also speaking to Palestinians crossing through the checkpoint or being detained at the side in order to learn about conditions inside the checkpoint and reasons they were pulled aside. Conversations like these show territoriality in action because they reveal which categories of people are allowed access across the boundary (the checkpoint) and which categories are not; at the same time they serve as boundary-negotiating processes that create separate identity categories. For example, on shifts at Huwarra, we spoke with a number of different ‘categories’ of Palestinians being detained by soldiers in the concrete holding cell, each with a different reason for being detained. One was a Bedouin Arab (an Israeli citizen) from the Negev who was held as he left Nablus since he had an Israeli ID and had been there ‘illegally.’⁵³ Another was a woman, with a Jerusalem ID and three children under the age of 6 (whom she was trying to keep calm and still in the dusty, dirty ‘cell’ that was not even closed off from the surrounding area), who was detained for over an hour on the way back to Jerusalem after visiting her mother.⁵⁴ For both of these individuals, they were detained on their way *out* of Nablus, even though technically what had been ‘illegal’ was their *entrance* into Nablus due to ‘security’ concerns for Israeli citizens.

Although Bedouins and Palestinian Jerusalemites are routinely excluded from the boundaries of Israeli identity (Bedouin villages who are citizens of Israel are routinely discriminated against and their homes demolished, while East Jerusalemites are ‘permanent residents’ rather than citizens), at this particular instance these individuals are included in the boundaries of Israeli identity—but only *after* the alleged threat to their security has passed. Instead, these individuals become ‘security threats’ because they emerged from the Palestinian city safely. A third example of this complex identity/geography/security boundary involved a Palestinian driver for the Red Crescent, who was prevented from driving back into Nablus after his day at work because his car did not have the proper permit. After much checking with the DCO and the soldier on duty, the women confirmed that it was not possible to get a permit for a small car (which is what he was driving) and that there was not even a process for getting one. Although the man had a permit and had his papers all in order—not to mention the fact that he was returning to

⁵¹ Author interview with Eilat and Maya (names have been changed).

⁵² This incident had a high profile in the Israeli and international media, largely because of the resonance of the event for Jews who experienced similar humiliation under the Nazi regime prior to and during World War II.

⁵³ Author observation, 25 May 2005, Huwarra checkpoint.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

Nablus and not entering Israel—he was not allowed back home for the evening. Eventually the man drove around to the Western checkpoint of Nablus, Beit Iba, and crossed there.⁵⁵ As one Machsom Watch member asked rhetorically:

how is the fact that this [Palestinian] woman is not allowed home to her family providing me with security? How is lots of Palestinians crowded together between one Palestinian area and another providing me with security? How is not allowing people to go from their village of Huwarra to Nablus, two Palestinian areas, giving me security?⁵⁶

At the same time, however, Machsom Watch members were consciously aware of the actual security threats faced by Israel. Their challenge, however, was to negotiate the boundary between what checkpoints were ‘legitimate’ security protection and which were not. For the most part, Watchers agreed that arguments could be made for checkpoints along the Green Line, as states have a legitimate right to police their own borders; the problem, however, is negotiating where exactly Israel’s borders lie, as the government has never stated them officially. The challenge of negotiating these boundaries on the micro level, however, could be seen when driving to and from the permanent checkpoints and encountering a ‘flying’ checkpoint set up by a few soldiers for anywhere from a few minutes to several hours or a roadblock. Often on such occasions we saw lines of Palestinians walking from roadblock to roadblock, switching cars each time, while settlers zipped along the highway without being stopped at all. The women of Machsom Watch often expressed mixed feelings when faced with the roadblocks. On the one hand, they were annoyed by the inconvenience and the hassle of stopping and waiting, and often documented the ‘flying’ checkpoints, earth mounds and other obstacles obstructing Palestinian movement. On the other hand, some of the women noted that they could not be too upset because they could not know the purpose of the checkpoint and maybe there was a tip on a bomb threat and so the checkpoint was actually protecting them. Often, the women would take advantage of their privileged Israeli status to zip around the long line of Palestinian cars at the Tapuach/Zatara junction, even while remarking that this really was not fair and against the spirit of their documentation and observing activity. Laughing, one woman joked about ‘how easy it is to be corrupted.’⁵⁷

Although on occasion the Machsom Watch women took advantage of their status as Israelis to bypass obstacles (like roadblocks) faced by Palestinians, they also traversed boundaries and crossed lines upheld rigidly by most Israelis. For example, on almost every shift in which I participated, the women walked around on both sides of the checkpoints (their organizational badge gave them clearance to remain within eyesight on the ‘Palestinian’ side); wandered through Palestinian neighborhoods abutting the separation barrier, settlements or checkpoints; bought food and other items from Palestinian vendors, and a few women even rode in Palestinian public transportation on Palestinian roads. While this may seem somewhat trivial, it is significant in light of my experience with other Israeli groups and the extreme nervousness of even Israeli activists about riding in

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Sagi, Presentation at Daila.

⁵⁷ Rachel, Nora and Anat (names have been changed), 12 February 2005.

a green-plated 'Palestinian' car. At times, however, this transportation was more convenient for the Israeli women, as they could (like the Palestinians) pass over (literally) the checkpoints without waiting in their cars and be driven to the next checkpoint without having then to worry about parking their vehicle somewhere as they did their shift. Not all women carried out their shifts this way, but some did. Such actions on the part of Machsom Watch women transcended 'official' geopolitical boundaries and led to the drawing of boundaries with those others (Palestinians) also climbing over the barrier or riding in the *servees*.⁵⁸

Negotiating Morality and Memory

Although it is perhaps most obvious that Machsom Watch challenges geopolitical boundaries by questioning the role of checkpoints deep in the West Bank and seeking their removal, they also challenge the boundaries of Jewish morality and identity through their appeals to international law and the Holocaust. In crafting their arguments against the checkpoints, Machsom Watch members often appeal to their own memories of or experiences with the Holocaust as well as international law. This is in direct contradiction with mainstream Israeli discourse, which tends to focus on Israeli law and only selectively uses international law.⁵⁹ While appealing to international law and human rights, Machsom Watch reports and testimonies regularly link these concepts back to events occurring within Israeli society. For example, they point to the increase in domestic abuse and economic injustice within Israel:

When human rights are not honoured they are worn down. Violating one right brings in its wake a series of other violations and ultimately leads to the revoking of all rights. The gross violations of the Palestinians' rights are destroying options for their dignified human existence. On the Israeli side, we are witnessing the unending erosion of the honouring of those rights.⁶⁰

Women noted that not only do long hours standing at the checkpoints demoralize Israeli soldiers, but also that the occupation siphons off money that could go toward Israel's increasing poor population, thereby directly contradicting Jewish ethical duties of caring for the poor and weak. As one member of Machsom Watch stated to a public audience:

The occupation is inflicting terrible suffering on 3.8 million Palestinians. But at the same time it is destroying Israel from within, draining most of its resources and endangering its future as a truly democratic country. Presently tens of thousands of

⁵⁸ Palestinian shared taxi.

⁵⁹ On more than one occasion I witnessed debates between Israelis and Palestinians in particular over the applicability of international law to issues in Jerusalem, but also of the relevance of international law in general. Officially Israel claims the Fourth Geneva Convention is not applicable to the Occupied Territories, for example, and generally is highly distrusting of the United Nations, which it sees as highly biased against Israel. Interviews with Israelis in a wide range of civil society organizations also regularly attested to mainstream Israeli distrust of 'human rights' discourses. This is in part due to the 'peace with security' versus 'peace with justice' distinction between Israeli and Palestinian negotiating aims.

⁶⁰ Machsom Watch, *Machsom Watch Summary—February 2005* (Jerusalem: Machsom Watch, 2005), available at <<http://archive.machsomwatch.org/docs/monthlyReports/February2005Eng.asp?link=summaries&lang=eng>> (accessed October 2007).

Israeli children depend on the soup kitchen while enormous amounts of money are spent for maintaining the occupation.⁶¹

While several individuals within the organization analyze the situation in this way, generally speaking, the bulk of MACHSOM Watch activity aims at raising awareness about and combating human rights and other abuses occurring at the checkpoints. It is also widely perceived within Israel as an ‘extremist’ organization,⁶² or one that values Palestinian individual rights over Israel’s need for security. For many Israelis, military checkpoints and policies of closure are designed to counter terrorist activity and as such are seen as ‘morally and ethically justified,’ even in the case of a pregnant woman ‘claiming she is trying to reach a hospital.’⁶³ MACHSOM Watchers counter that, in fact, checkpoints are not about security at all because ‘at most checkpoints Palestinians do not regularly undergo either bodily or belongings search, but are allowed through if they have the proper permits.’⁶⁴ By de-linking the checkpoints from security—through testimonies that *personalize* the checkpoints and demonstrate their controlling rather than security-based practices—MACHSOM Watch strives to legitimize an alternative framing of Israeli (Jewish) morality by re-linking morality to Jewish concern for human rights, justice and respect for the memory of the Holocaust.

In contrast to some on the political right who deploy Holocaust terminology to justify offensive actions against Palestinians (i.e., calling former Palestinian president Yasser Arafat ‘Hitler’), members of MACHSOM Watch—some of whom are Holocaust survivors—often use the Holocaust as means to explain why they protest the checkpoints. As a founding member of MACHSOM Watch explains, ‘[f]or many of us, the sight of the endless lines of civilians, standing at gunpoint, exposed to the vagaries of weather, climate and soldiers’ whims, reminds us of other scenes in other places in our own not-too-distant past.’⁶⁵ Some of the women I interviewed saw the checkpoints and separation barriers as reminiscent of the walls used to ghettoize Jews, and reflected on the lessons of the Holocaust when explaining why they participated in the organization. One woman stated that she had this ‘vague sense that something was going on near me that was not nice’ because of bad reports she heard about what was happening in the ‘Territories’ and wanted to see what was happening for herself. ‘I kept thinking of the village beside Auschwitz and those people who did not do anything and whether they knew or not . . . it seems like they *did* know what was going on.’⁶⁶ Another shared a story of how she was detained for ‘disturbing public order’ when she stopped and asked why a bunch of Palestinian men were detained, leaning against a van with their arms in the air. After she recounted her traumatic experience in detail, another woman in the car remarked that ‘all of those people who talk about the Holocaust and how the Germans and the Poles did not do anything to stop it are those who are the first to drive by and not do anything.’⁶⁷

⁶¹ Mayorek, ‘Let’s go to the West Bank.’

⁶² Jonathan Cook, ‘Watching the checkpoints: daily indignities and humiliations,’ *Counterpunch*, 23 February 2007, available at <<http://www.counterpunch.org/cook02232007.html>> (accessed 10 October 2007).

⁶³ Asa Kasher & Amos Yadlin, ‘Assassination and preventive killing,’ *SAIS Review* 25 (2005), pp. 47, 55; and Duke-Cohen, *The Questions We Must Ask*.

⁶⁴ Keshet, *Checkpoint Watch*; and Naaman, ‘Silenced outcry,’ p. 170.

⁶⁵ Keshet, *Checkpoint Watch*, p. 6.

⁶⁶ Author interview with Anat (name has been changed), Jerusalem, 12 February 2005.

⁶⁷ Author interview with Rachel and Nora (names have been changed), Beit Iba, 12 February 2005.

Using the Holocaust in explaining their activism is a highly political act that challenges boundaries of Israeli identity and morality. To quote a Machsom Watch founder:

The politicization of the Holocaust as a constituting factor in Israeli national identity, and in justifying any and all action as necessary defensive measures, is contested by Watchers' activism ... Remembering the silence of the majority during the Nazi/fascist period impels many of us to speak out, now, while there is still time. The thought of Jews as perpetrators of evil is highly charged for Israelis, and any analogy with the Nazi period in particular is tantamount to sacrilege.⁶⁸

In this and other respects, Machsom Watch activism is fundamentally a challenge not only to the military occupation of the Palestinian Territories but also more fundamentally to Jewish Israeli identity and the narratives yoking the community together. Although space does not allow more extensive discussion here, other boundary/identity/morality negotiations I observed, particularly between Machsom Watch members and settlers, demonstrate this contest, as do other reports and analyses of Machsom Watch activity.⁶⁹

Conclusion

Although Machsom Watch is often seen—even by the families of its members—as an organization concerned primarily with the ‘rights of individual Palestinians’ and not with ‘the Israeli need for security,’⁷⁰ when analyzed through the theoretical lens of territoriality, one sees the broader moral, social, and political implications of the women’s actions.⁷¹ Rather than focusing on *individuals*, Machsom Watch activity highlights *collective* boundaries in its documentation of which categories of people are allowed to pass boundaries demarcated and enforced by Israeli soldiers. In identifying these boundaries—in terms of who is given what permits, which permits are or are not allowed across on a given day or location as well as where they are located (i.e., ‘flying’ and permanent checkpoints and roadblocks inside the West Bank, near settlements, at strategic junctions)—Machsom Watch observers trace out geographic, social and political boundaries of identity. Furthermore, in legitimizing their activism and in arguing against the checkpoints, Machsom Watch members further negotiate and contest boundaries of what it means to be Israeli, Palestinian, and a moral human being. For example, Machsom Watch members question why Palestinians carrying Jerusalem identity cards cannot enter the Palestinian city of Nablus to visit their mothers, or why it is illegal for a Palestinian

⁶⁸ Keshet, *Checkpoint Watch*, p. 42.

⁶⁹ In particular, this is demonstrated by events I observed in Hebron, where Machsom Watch women were sometimes denied entry into the Kiryat Arba settlement for not being Jewish enough or where categories of identity were applied selectively by soldiers and ‘civilians’ (Machsom Watch members as well as settlers—who, because they are usually armed, have ambiguous status) alike. For more discussion, see Keshet, *Checkpoint Watch*; Naaman, ‘Silenced outcry’; Cook, ‘Watching the checkpoints’; and Hass, ‘Candy at the checkpoint.’

⁷⁰ Duke-Cohen, *The Questions We Must Ask*.

⁷¹ I use ‘women’ rather than ‘organization’ intentionally, as there is no centralized hierarchy or official platform for the organization beyond the basic principles listed on its website (www.machsomwatch.org). Consequently, the ‘organization’ is comprised of the individual actions, decisions, and interpretations of the several hundred women—with a wide range of political perspectives—who go to the checkpoints on a regular basis.

relief worker to re-enter the Palestinian city he was allowed to drive out of that morning, or why Palestinian students with Jordanian passports (who are prevented from applying for a Palestinian ID card by the Israeli authorities despite living in a West Bank village) suddenly are not allowed into Nablus to attend university on one day even though on other previous days they were allowed to do so.

In the course of challenging such identity boundaries, Machsom Watch women counteract the *displacing* and *impersonal* tendencies of territoriality that hide the relationship between the controller and controlled by shifting attention to 'neutral' laws and regulations that obscure their human impact. Machsom Watch members explicitly challenge the official portrayal of checkpoints in the Israeli media as aimed at security and concerned with humanitarian issues. In 2007, for instance, Machsom Watch investigated conditions at the Reihan checkpoint where Palestinians were being held in small unventilated rooms and where one man fainted. According to the Israeli Defense Ministry, however, the military 'will continue to provide adequate service and continue to make improvements, as we have done thus far.'⁷² In part due to their desire to challenge the Israeli military's self-portrayal as 'the most moral army in the world,' many Watchers expressed some doubt as to whether they were having their desired aim, or whether they were simply providing another form of legitimation for the army by letting it point to their presence as observers as a sign of its transparency and democracy.⁷³

As one Watcher said, 'conditions in this checkpoint [Huwarra] have gotten better, no question, but that's not the point.' When pressed further, she clarified that 'the point' was to end the occupation, to re-order relationships, power structures, and the distribution of resources and not simply to make the checkpoints more humane (although she did not see harm in making the situation better in the meantime).⁷⁴ Many women expressed their remorse at the army's use of the term 'humanitarian lane' for the concrete lane designated for women, children and elderly that is separate from the men's line. They appealed to alternative definitions of morality, noting that there is nothing humanitarian about making humans stand in line in the cold and rain for hours to get from home to work, and in the process they counteracted territorial tendencies by highlighting the relationship of control and personal experience of the situation. Machsom Watch members also regretted that young soldiers were given so much power and control and left to their own devices in remote checkpoints, saying it was fair neither to the young soldiers nor the Palestinians, again using personal examples and stories about individual soldiers and Palestinians and noting the dynamics of control. Yet members of Machsom Watch negotiate the boundaries of identity, security and morality with each other as well as with the broader Israeli public. Some Watchers' focus *is* to improve the human rights record of the army, by raising awareness of the abuses that can occur at the checkpoints, and using their status as well-connected Israeli citizens to work the system by speaking with Knesset members, army commanders and other officials. This group of women often speaks of their

⁷² Ali Waked, 'Machsom Watch: roadblock operating "Dungeon,"' *Yediot Aharonot* (Tel Aviv), 4 September 2007, available at <<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3445895,00.html>> (accessed 10 October 2007).

⁷³ See also Keshet, *Checkpoint Watch*; and Naaman, 'Silenced outcry.'

⁷⁴ Author interview with Dalia (name has been changed).

awareness-raising and human rights-related work as a way of improving the situation at the checkpoint and thereby reducing the tension, hostility and potential for violence—yet another bounding of ‘security.’

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