



Discussion

The insecurity of security

Jef Huysmans

Hello, I'm Dr **Jef Huysmans** and this is the Open University Open Politics podcast on The Insecurity of Security.

Irus Braverman

The checkpoints were a place where Palestinians would come through. This is where Israel monitors the Palestinian people now, going back and forth.

Hanna Barag

There were supposed to be something that would give Israel more security and people had this idea that if they check everyone and give them permits and make it difficult to get in to Israel they would prevent terrorist acts.

Liza Pulman

(reading) A very elderly lady and her spouse show us their special permit, received only for this Friday, enabling them to go to pray at the Mosque. This is what they are forced to do every week. Sometimes they are issued their permit, sometimes not. A matter of luck, she says.

Jef Huysmas

The checkpoints and walls that control movement of Palestinians between Israel and the West Bank is seen as a security measure. Its stated purpose is to prevent terrorists from entering Israeli cities. This podcast explores the effects on the daily life of people and how checkpoints are made into sites of contesting security policies.

One of the groups protesting against the security measures is Machsom Watch. They are a group of Israeli women who have been monitoring the checkpoints along the border since 2001. Dr **Irus Braverman**, Associate professor at University of Buffalo Law School was an activist with the group.

Irus Braverman

People seem to think that checkpoints are just a new thing, it's part of the wall, it's just part of that administration which is not really true. The organisation Machsom Watch, which means, Machsom means checkpoint... started a lot before the construction of the wall because there were checkpoints then as well. Interestingly, they were kind of points of blockage in a way, rather than points of passage. When the construction of the wall came to be, then the checkpoints became the only way to actually get through the wall.

They've become really important sites. So you, you can watch a street that used to be lively and now there is a wall and people have to go all the way round sometimes kilometres away from their home and from their schools to get to the other side of the street basically.

So the work of the Machsom Watch women, being there and witnessing, the whole relationship between the Palestinian and the soldier shifts, now the soldiers are watched too.

Jef Huysmans

Checkpoints have become part of everyday life with various repercussions for people passing through them. **Hanna Barag**, based in Jerusalem, is part of Machsom Watch.

Hanna Barag At the height of our activity we went to 40 checkpoints twice a day and we monitored it, everything we saw we just monitored it. Usually the checkpoint opens at 4 o'clock in the morning and by 7 most people have crossed and they go and they I would say in an unpleasant way, there is a lot of uncertainty of how long will it take to pass these checkpoints, and therefore people come very early and there is a lot of pushing and shoving going on and the soldiers that are there speak Hebrew and the people who pass speak Arabic and there is a lot of misunderstanding and there is a lot of anger in this whole procedure.

Liza Pulman

(reading)

Friday - a day of rest and prayer for Palestinians. The first sensation welcoming us at the 'terminal' is the pungent stench of urine that hovers around the people waiting in line. The floor is filthy and littered, the toilets in shocking condition. On Friday - no workers, hence, no cleaners.

Palestinians await passage in two lines. We join one of the waiting lines and experience being caged between the dense metal bars. Claustrophobia and humiliation combined.

Irus Braverman

Some people have to go through this every day, several times a day going back and forth, so they would come through on their way to work, on their way to the fields, on their way to the other side of the village because checkpoints were everywhere they weren't just on the border, there were hundreds of various types of checkpoints.

Jef Husymans

With the decision to build the wall in 2002, the checkpoints became linked to a more formalised and visible border. As a result there has been a change in the way the checkpoints operate.

Irus Braverman

The administration of the checkpoints has changed so that now it's become very difficult for Palestinians to move across that big boundary that has, that's represented by the wall, but in most places it still isn't a wall, it's just a very massive administration, so there is a whole bureaucracy behind them, a bureaucracy of occupation I call it. There is all these kind of computerised systems that check the Palestinians, there's all these different types of permits that they need to get, it's much more difficult to cross and now less and less there is direct contact with the Israeli soldiers, they stand in line, the queues are formed by kind of more physical things that don't involve human interaction. Now it's mostly kind of turnstiles and fences and mostly kind of physical instruments that replace the human interaction that used to be there.

Hanna Barag

The soldiers sit in booths, they have no physical connection with the Palestinians, they don't even talk to them face to face, they talk through a loudspeaker. That's how it's done today, in a sterile way. And the whole procedure is terrible.

Jef Huysmans

The change in administration has also meant a change in the way Machsom Watch carry out their work.

Irus Braverman

So the new terminals dehumanised the whole process, and in the same way it has also affected the women in Machsom Watch, so they can't really ... it's not really so much, the direct physical gaze that was so strong and powerful, this kind of, witnessing by being there, one foot away from the soldier, looking him in the eye, there's not that much, that much kind of direct physical contact any more.

The relationship has also been institutionalised and formalised, now it's a lot more... the Machsom Watch women going, going, meeting with the Commander, speaking about the situation, maybe monitoring a little bit but not for hours and hours. So Machsom Watch is not really just at the checkpoint, the physical checkpoint, the physical terminal itself because now that the administration has expanded to include so many other aspects of Palestinian life and so many other spaces then necessarily the work of Machsom Watch has also expanded to be those spaces as well. and this is something that is interesting, in a way Machsom Watch women have become part of this administration. So while this is a very positive effect in the short term perhaps, 'we're now part of this administration and we're even legitimatising it', we're making it seem more humane.

Jef Huysmans

This is what complicates the politics of insecurity: how do Machsom Watch reconcile both aspects of their work – the act of monitoring and the humanitarian assistance – the one protesting the checkpoints, the other making them more human and therefore more acceptable?

Hanna Barag

I combine both by not sleeping at night because I tear my hair out for that.. with that question. It's a very serious question. When we go and say build a roof over the checkpoint we're actually saying to the authorities, not in so many words, but the underlying of it is - listen people you have a right to do all this, but do it in a more humane way. This does not go together with us being a political organisation saying hey, this is wrong! We are opposed to it. And it is a very deep conflict and each and every one of us is dealing with this problem on a daily basis. It's impossible. There is no way that you can stand there and do nothing about it. It's just inhumane. Once you do it, you are committed to it. Once you are committed to it, you need to deal with it. And it's not easy.

Jef Huysmans

The effect of walls and checkpoints remains ambiguous: they are meant to increase security but they also reinforce insecurity.

Irus Braverman

For many years, even before the actual physical wall has been built, there's more and more of a mental wall between Palestinians mainly in the occupied territories, and Israeli Jews... they don't go to the same schools, they don't stand in the same buses, they don't attend... or go to the cinema with us so, so basically there's this kind of separation that, cultural separation that is not necessarily formal, that has been occurring through the years, and now with the construction of the wall has, has become a lot more formalised. Now it's even more difficult for Israelis and Palestinians to get know each other. This obviously, furthers the alienation.

Jef Huysmans

Checkpoints and walls are instruments for managing insecurity but they are also sites of political contest and sites where insecurity pervades everyday life in a stark way. As Machsom Watch demonstrates security measures are not a technical or administrative solution to the problem but contribute to it.

Irus Braverman

In a way, a wall might be a real solution in the short term ... because it does stop people from moving to one side. It monitors them a lot more strictly. But in the long run, real security will not come from that because, because the fear builds up. Fear, the alienation, the violence, and one day it'll probably just burst.

Jef Huysmans

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