Part 2
Working in the Territories and its effects on soldiers

Introduction

‘A child arrives, you tell him “Listen, I’ll let you pass now, but do me a favour and go home”, and five minutes later he’s back. Then you tell him, “Listen here, you said you’d go, now get lost”, and two months later, I think it’s enough, you don’t need a year, a month is enough, a week is enough for you to get fed up with this child and with all these people, you are on eight-hour guard duty, and you are so tired, and so bummed, and so burnt out and you don’t give a fuck about any of this shit, and then a person comes, and you don’t care if he’s old, if he’s a man, a woman, an adult, a kid, you don’t give a damn what species, race, or colour he is, he arrives and you tell him “La, rub ‘al beit” [No, go home]. You tell him “Turn around and go home”. “I’m not interested in any excuses; I’m not interested in anything. You want to buy vegetables? What do I care about your vegetables? There’s a curfew. Period. You don’t move. Your house is in the other direction? I don’t care, find another way, you can’t pass from here”’. (BS Hebron)

The Israeli soldier quoted above describes a process he went through while serving in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT). With time, he got more and more impatient with the Palestinians who came through the checkpoint where he worked, which resulted in an indifference towards their pleas and, eventually, him shouting at them. Several elements that contributed to this process are mentioned: long hours of work at the checkpoint, fatigue, feeling burnt out and frustration. I propose that we analyse the processes this soldier went through by looking at three different dimensions within the soldiers’ experience: the emotional, the physical and the cognitive. Within the emotional dimension, this soldier is ‘bummed and burnt out’, within the physical dimension tired and within the cognitive dimension we can see the blurring of categories around him; the soldier does not see the person in front of him as a clear individual ‘I don’t care if he’s old, if he’s a man, a woman…’. All the categories used for identifying a person are blurred, a clear form of moral disengagement as defined by Bandura (1999), whose theory I will discuss later on.
When taken together, these processes can lead to moral numbing which will be discussed in Chapter 5. Looking at the moral dimension of the soldier’s experience, we could say this soldier ‘doesn’t care anymore’; his ability to make morally just decisions has been altered, making him indifferent.

In this second part of the study, I will firstly discuss the central arenas in which Israeli soldiers perform their work in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. As I believe the physical surroundings of soldiers have a profound effect on the way they feel and thus act, I will first of all try to understand ‘physically’ what soldiers go through while working in the OPT. In order to do this, I will focus on the characteristics of the spatial surroundings of the soldiers and their physical circumstances.

These spatial surroundings are, first of all, the checkpoints where many Israeli combat soldiers spend months, if not years, of their service. Apart from the checkpoints, arrests and the so called ‘straw widows’ are also important arenas within which Israeli soldiers carry out their work. 28 Here the actual spaces where the soldiers act are the houses of Palestinians that they enter in order to arrest a suspect, carry out a house-search or in order to occupy as a temporary military post.

These arenas could be framed as regions which Goffman describes as venues for human performances (1959: 106) and which can be ‘any place that is bounded to some degree by barriers of perception’ (ibid: 106). Goffman speaks about performances as ‘all the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observers’ (ibid.). The front-region, then, is the part of a performance where an audience is present and where one comes into contact with others. The actors within this performance then make use of their personal front to convey a message and communicate with the audience. This personal front includes individual aspects like ‘insignia of office or rank; clothing; sex; racial characteristics … posture; speech patterns; facial expressions; bodily gestures; and the like’ (ibid.).

Goffman, furthermore, speaks of a back-region where the performers can stop their performance and use a freer communication amongst themselves (ibid: 128). These two fronts do not necessarily have a physical boundary and can occur almost simultaneously. A soldier can, for

28 This term for a house that has been abandoned by its inhabitants, and that is used by the military for strategic reasons, presumably comes from the term ‘grass widow’: ‘The grass widow is a wife whose husband is away often or for a prolonged period. The origin of this expression comes from the unmarried mother of the 16th century. A child created out of wedlock was assumed to have resulted from a couple’s adventures on a bed of grass and not the proper marital bed, hence, grass widow. This can be compared with the German strohwitwe or straw widow’. From http://www.tribuneindia.com/2004/20040417/windows/roots.htm as accessed on 17-12-2007.
example, speak in a strict, unemotional manner to a Palestinian at a checkpoint while making jokes with his friends at the same time.

For our use here, I would like to add a moral aspect to Goffman’s ‘region’ in order to emphasize the moral behaviour and decision-making of the actors (soldiers in this case) within this setting. I am, then, talking about ‘moral regions’ within which soldiers act, with or without an audience. Going back and forth between the front (vis-à-vis Palestinians and other actors not connected to the military) and back region (being amongst comrades) within their work is, as will become clear shortly, very important for the message the soldiers convey and the way they deal with Palestinians on a daily basis.

Such moral regions do not only host emotions, moral behaviour and decision-making but also profoundly influence them. Human beings can move within multiple moral regions; the moral region of a soldier in the field, for example, is different from his neighbourhood back home where he spends time while he is on leave and during the weekends. The term ‘moral region’ includes all actors present, the physical characteristics of the space (natural or not) and the sensorial experiences within it such as the cold, the heat and sounds, for example, and hence is a good tool for analysing Israeli soldiers’ experiences.

All different arenas or moral regions have a different logic and a different effect on the soldiers who are working within them. In Chapter 4 I will go on to look at the emotional, physical and cognitive implications that the experiences within these different arenas have on the soldiers. Understanding these implications, and the moral numbing they lead to, is needed if we want to understand processes of moral decision-making and the way soldiers deal with the moral dilemmas they face within a-symmetrical conflict. It is, then, crucial to gain insights into the emotional dimension of the experience of soldiers in the field as they make these decisions and deliberations. This dimension consists of the emotions that lead and trigger their behaviour, such as anger, frustration and mental fatigue. Closely related to this is the physical experience of soldiers in the field. Furthermore, we will have to consider the cognitive understanding soldiers have of their surroundings – the way they categorize their reality. Finally, the effects of the experiences of soldiers on their moral decision-making will have to be examined in order to understand their behaviour and the decisions they make.

I will try to show here how the experiences within the different arenas Israeli soldiers work in and the implications of these experiences on the soldiers incorporate processes of numbing. When soldiers talk about work at the checkpoint or their work during arrests, the notion of attrition or *shkhika* is very central. The hardship at the checkpoint is both emotional and physical, the soldiers stress. Time and again concepts of boredom, frustration (emotional)
and fatigue (physical) arise as dominant issues in their discourse. Furthermore, during their work at the checkpoints, the soldiers are challenged through their sensation of the physical reality around them. We should, then, also study the way noise, smell, heat and cold surrounding the soldiers affect their attitudes and their behaviour.

I will use the concept of moral professionalism to clarify the moral behaviour of soldiers within their work (Verweij 2007). Moral professionalism can be defined as the ability to implement moral competence in professional practise (ibid.). This means being morally competent, which should lead the moral behaviour of an individual and steer this individual to make morally responsible decisions during his or her work.

Militaries want their soldiers to be morally professional, a trait that will help them when they are confronted with difficult moral dilemmas during their missions. R. Richardson, Verweij and D. Winslow have also called the moral condition of soldiers ‘moral fitness’, which indicates the degree of capability a soldier has to make morally just decisions, a skill, the authors say, a soldier can be trained in, just as physical fitness can be achieved by exercising (2004). In Chapter 5 the issue of moral professionalism will be discussed further.

A set of analytical tools will be used to illuminate and understand the emotional, physical and cognitive dimensions of the experiences of soldiers and their behaviour. The renewed focus of anthropologists on the senses and the body is of particular importance here. The body and the senses of smell, touch and hearing are more and more recognized as culturally significant.

**Analytical tools**

As mentioned before, in order to understand and analyse the different dimensions within the experience of Israeli soldiers in the OPT, I would like to use a conceptual framework that includes theories on the body, the senses and the emotions. These bodies of theory will then be used as tools in the analysis of the material at hand; they will help us understand the behaviour of soldiers without, however, receiving a central place in the theoretical framework of this work. Here I will elaborate on this conceptual framework, commencing with the place the senses have within anthropological research.

M. Herzfeld writes that ‘sensory perception is a cultural as well as a physical act; sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell are not only means of apprehending physical phenomena but are also avenues for the transmission of cultural values … it is also an integral part of social relations’ (2001: 240–41). D. Howes adds that an anthropology of the senses
‘is primarily concerned with how the patterning of sense experience varies from one culture to the next in accordance with the meaning and emphasis attached to each of the modalities of perception. It is also concerned with tracing the influence such variations have on forms of social organization, conceptions of self and cosmos, the regulation of the emotions and other domains of cultural expression’ (1991: 3).

Both call upon anthropologists to look beyond the dominance of sight in scholarly work on the senses. Furthermore, Herzfeld calls for the inclusion of all the senses such as sight, smell, touch, hearing and taste in any anthropological research: ‘all of anthropology can be recognized as necessarily shot through with alertness to the entire gamut of sensory semiosis’ (2001: 242).

In short, one could say that in order to understand any kind of social relation in depth or the way we think about ourselves and about others around us, we should take notice of the senses. I shall do this by including the sensorial experience of Israeli soldiers when working in the OPT in this research and looking at the way sight, smell, hearing and touch play a role in the way they perceive their surroundings and the way this influences their emotions and actions. Issues at hand are, for example, the noise, smell and dust of the checkpoints where soldiers stand for hours on end and the dirt, the heat and the cold and the sight of the suffering Palestinian population. Furthermore, work within the OPT, which usually takes place within an urban environment, involves impaired visibility and intense sounds (Ben-Ari 2008). All these issues involve the senses and point to the importance of these when trying to understand moral behaviour and decision-making.

Closely related to the senses is the body within anthropological research, for the senses are in fact ‘bodily modes of knowing’ (Howes 1991: 3). The body has gained in importance within the social sciences; anthropologists, in particular, have realized its importance and that of its external adornment in the form of tattoos, clothing etc. as cultural signifiers (see, for example, Lock 1993; Turner 1995; White 1992). The body, it has been recognized, is part of human social culture and influences it and is in turn influenced by it. The body and the modifications made to its surface (like clothing, adornment and make-up) make the social order within which we live clear. The surface of the body, furthermore, consists of ‘signs of the cultural boundary between the self or person and its social and natural object world’ (Turner 1995: 146).

The importance of seeing the body and its modifications as significant becomes very clear for the military case where stars, stripes and other decorations on the uniform represent who you are and where you fit within the military hierarchy. As Winslow wrote, ‘[i]n some parts of the world men scar cheeks to show their place in society. In the army they scar their shoulders in
order to show their rank and they mark their chests with the history of their accomplishments’ (Winslow 2003: 26). The uniform also emphasizes the difference between soldiers and civilians; it creates a boundary between different groups of people.

Body language is also of importance; the posturing of soldiers, the way soldiers stand, the way they show their guns, the way they gesture while at the checkpoint or within a Palestinian house, the way Palestinians stand in line, lower their eyes or fiercely look the soldiers in the eye. These are all issues concerning the body and of importance when trying to understand the way soldiers feel and behave within their moral regions.

Importantly, both the issue of the senses and of the body are closely related to power; to one dominant and one subordinate party facing one another. The senses and the layers that cover the body signify boundaries, otherness, difference and dominance. The military body is a very masculine one, for example, and it can be argued the Palestinian body, in its subordinate state, is feminized within the military context of the OPT (see Amireh 2003).

A third framework I would like to touch upon here is the scholarly work done on emotions. Within anthropology there seem to be two ways of thinking about emotion, one as it being bodily and thus solely biological (see, for example, Turner 1967) and the other as it being a social construct (see, for example, Rosaldo 1980; Lutz 1986). J. Leavitt proposes combining both views in a theory that sees emotions as ‘experiences that we recognize as involving both cultural meaning as bodily feeling. While they are subjectively felt and interpreted, it is socialized human beings -that is, thinking human bodies- who are feeling them in specific social contexts’ (1996: 531).

I tend to agree with the model Leavitt proposes. The emotions that I will discuss here are socially constructed and shared between the soldiers. Emotions are recognized and expressed because of the meaning they have for a group or culture, a meaning that is shared by its members.

S. Fineman has introduced the concept of emotions into studies on organizations and the working place, paving the way for a less psychological and a more social approach towards emotions (2000). The way employees feel about their work, co-workers and the way they talk about these feelings became part of studying an organization. This approach is important to keep in mind when speaking about soldiers as they live and work within closed organizational entities. A. Hochchild, who has written about the commercialization of human feelings, uses the interesting concept of emotional ‘front workers’ who, in line with Goffman’s ‘region’ concept, need to ‘keep face’ in public. This can be difficult emotional work for some workers and sometimes such behaviour has to be feigned (in Fineman 2000: 4).
This way of looking at emotions, as openly shown or as hidden from view and the emotional work to feign certain emotions, are concepts that are useful here. As part of the work of soldiers in the OPT there are many emotions involved and the way soldiers deal with them influences their behaviour greatly. Emotions expressed by soldiers and those that feature in the discourse of soldiers are often negative emotions of indifference, frustration, boredom and anger but also include feelings of solidarity, enthusiasm and excitement. To understand and take into account these emotions that affect the behaviour of soldiers, their role in the moral decision-making of soldiers and to look at the way soldiers deal with them, helps us to gain deeper understanding of the behaviour of Israeli soldiers in the OPT and the processes of numbing they go through.
Chapter 3
The Work arenas of the Israeli soldier: checkpoints, arrests and patrolling

In this chapter I will discuss several arenas in the Occupied Palestinian Territories within which Israeli soldiers work on a daily basis. These arenas can be physical, actual places like checkpoints, but they can also be activities such as arrests or patrolling that are not bound to a specific physical space.

I will then continue to discuss some central characteristics these arenas have in common with each other, even when they are experienced and materialized differently within each arena. These characteristics are, firstly, the distance and proximity of the soldiers to the Palestinians around them and, secondly, the issue of routine that comes up again and again in the experience of Israeli soldiers within each arena. Thirdly, the issue of power will be discussed. All these central characteristics are very influential for the behaviour of soldiers, as I will show, and represent an important factor in their moral decision-making.

Finally, the IDF’s Operation Defensive Shield, carried out in 2002, will be discussed as a case study. This operation took place as a reaction to a series of suicide bombings in Israel; almost all the major Palestinian cities were invaded by the Israeli military and it was an important formative experience for many of the Israeli soldiers who were involved in it. Precisely because of its extraordinary features outside of normality, it can help us grasp the routine Israeli soldiers experience in their daily work within the OPT and what happens when they break out of this.

Figure 1
Soldiers at work: checking Palestinians moving between one side of the Wall to the other (photo: EP)
Policing by soldiers: dirty work

‘This is hard work I feel like a guard dog, like the cubes of concrete that surround the checkpoint. They turned us into a front line bunch of fighters, and now we stand at the checkpoint like police and inspect identity cards. Where is the action that we were promised?’

(From ‘Checkpoint Syndrome’, excerpt of poem by Ron-Furer 2003)\textsuperscript{29}

Before I start to discuss the different arenas soldiers work in, one very central aspect of their work should be highlighted – the work Israeli soldiers perform in the OPT is not so much classical military work as it is policing work. The tasks of soldiers, as we shall see shortly, consist of guarding, carrying out arrests, manning checkpoints and searching people and cars. Most importantly, the intense contact with the civilian population is an aspect of the work that makes it profoundly different from the ‘classical’ military work of combat operations against hostile enemies. Actual combat, as we shall see further on, is only a small part of the activities for most Israeli combat soldiers.

V. Franke writes about a similar case that is of relevance here, that of Canadian soldiers who were sent out to perform peacekeeping duties. Although Israeli soldiers certainly are not involved in peacekeeping, they are involved in work that is completely different from the work they feel belongs to their identity as combat soldiers. Franke writes that ‘if … soldiers invoke cognitive frames (e.g. warrior) that are ill-suited for a particular assignment (e.g. peacekeeping) morale, motivation, and performance might suffer’ (1999: 4).\textsuperscript{30} L. Miller and C. Moskos made similar observations concerning American troops in Somalia who were sent on a ‘humanitarian mission’ but who identified with a ‘“warrior strategy” in which soldiers generalized the behaviour of the gunmen/rioters to all Somalis and treated the entire population as potential enemies’ (1995: 618).

As in the above examples, the constabulary activities Israeli soldiers have to carry out do not fit within the self-identity soldiers have of themselves as Israeli combat soldiers. Concerning

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\textsuperscript{29} Translated and published on \url{http://www.ifamericansknew.org/download/checkpoint_syndrome.pdf} as accessed on 18-06-2008. Ron-Furer’s work resulted from his own experiences as a soldier in the OPT and is written in the form of short poems: ‘By moving from realistic experiences to surrealistic hallucinations, the text introduces an alternative presentation of the horrible in accordance with the poetic of the extreme, where the borders between sanity and madness are often tested’ (Mendelson-Maoz 2005). Because the original work was unavailable and only the translated version could be used, there is a possibility that mistakes have been made in the presentation of the poem.

\textsuperscript{30} Article was retrieved online from \url{http://journals.hil.unb.ca/index.php/ICS/article/view/4359/5018} and page numbers used here are according to that version and may differ from the paper version.
the first Intifada which began in 1987, T. Liebes and S. Blum-Kulka wrote that ‘the situation is one in which Israeli soldiers are being called upon to employ means for the repression of civil violence that defy both the behavioural and the moral principles according to which the Israeli army is trained to defend itself against the armed forces of an enemy’ (1994: 45). This is still true for the situation in the Territories today. Israeli soldiers carry out tasks that are first and foremost policing tasks which do not fit within their understanding of what the ideal Israeli soldier should have to do to defend his country.

This constabulary work can, then, be termed ‘dirty work’, a term coined by E. Hughes to denote work that is contaminated by a moral, social or physical taint (1958). Work such as prostitution, garbage collection or work in funeral homes can be perceived by the workers themselves and by the public in general as ‘dirty’. Soldiering, and especially the kind of soldiering Israeli soldiers face in the OPT, also fits within this list as it is certainly morally tainted and is often seen as boring, hard, and uninteresting by the soldiers themselves. In the words of one soldier a distinction is made between work that is ‘sexy’ and work that is ‘not sexy’:

“We would call it “sexy” or “not sexy”. “Sexy” means quiet actions done under cover of night that are worked on a long time. You arrive, do your work and leave. “Not sexy” is what we did then in the Territories. We felt like labourers. We came, blew up a house and that’s it. We felt that they were giving us dirty jobs and a lot of frustration accumulated in the unit’ (quoted in NRG/Maariv 02-06-2005).31

B. Ashfort and G. Kreiner have analysed the ways in which such dirty work is normalized by the workers in order to be able to continue working without feeling too big a burden (2002). It seems that Israeli soldiers do not use such strategies and perceive their work as it really is. While often morally normalizing it (i.e. not perceiving their work as morally problematic), they speak about their work in terms of black or dirty work, boredom and routine, except for periods in which this routine is broken and work becomes ‘interesting’.

As such, ‘dirty work’ has its effect on the morale and on the motivation of soldiers to serve. As we have seen already, serving as a combat soldier and defending the state, as such, is an ideal for many young people in Israel and the reality of constabulary tasks can, therefore, be disappointing for them. This can enhance a lack of moral professionalism in soldiers and can, hence, negatively influence their behaviour vis-à-vis the Palestinian ‘other’.

3.1 Checkpoints: obstruction of passage

‘Human bodies are controlled by predetermined routes overloaded with railing, barbed wire, electronic fencing, boulders, stone and canvas walls, escalators and one way passages.’ (Zanger 2005: 42).

Checkpoints in the Occupied Palestinian Territories come in many different shapes and sizes. There are big, permanent checkpoints (that in recent years have been made to look like international border terminals) and there are smaller ones with a few soldiers manning the post, checking passing Palestinians randomly or blocking the road in case of a closure. There are also temporary or ‘flying’ checkpoints which can be set up on any road in the OPT to stop suspicious cars or to demonstrate the military presence in the area and deter potential attackers from carrying out attacks. In this case, only a few soldiers and a jeep are employed to block roads and check the traffic that comes through. E. Ben-Ari, M. Maymon, N. Gazit and R. Shatzberg even speak of five different forms of checkpoints: the ‘encirclement checkpoints’, ‘flying checkpoints’, ‘closure checkpoints’, ‘back-to-back checkpoints’ and finally the gates along the security barrier (2004). At the time of writing there were approximately sixty-three permanent checkpoints manned by Israeli soldiers in the OPT not including the forty checkpoints along the Green Line.32 In addition, there were approximately eighty-nine flying or temporary checkpoints a week.

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32 The Green Line refers to the 1949 armistice line and separates Israel from the OPT. The wall that is being built between both territories coincides with this line in a few places but more often then not reaches deep into Palestinian lands.
in the West Bank and some 537 physical obstructions that blocked off roads and paths leading into villages and cities.33

Checkpoints, or are they…

Technically, checkpoints are, as the name has it, points for checking things; people and goods are examined by soldiers to check that no explosives are being carried from one side of the checkpoint to the other. Furthermore, identity cards are checked to make sure that no unwanted person passes through. From the point of view of the Israeli military, checkpoints are necessary in the fight against terrorism because they prevent militants or terrorists from moving within the Territories and especially from exiting them into Israel. However, a recent report by twelve retired generals from the IDF that was sent to Minister of Defence Ehud Barak claims that dismantling the checkpoints in the Territories would actually serve Israel's security better.34 They claim that the severe restrictions the checkpoints pose for the Palestinian population only increase hatred thus heightening the chances of more terrorist activity. Many checkpoints were set up with a specific purpose but lost their original role many years ago. One member of the team of generals is quoted by a UN news source as saying: ‘I founded the Qalandia checkpoint years ago as a flying security checkpoint for a specific reason … to prevent a specific attack we had intelligence on … that checkpoint hasn’t been removed years later’.35

Most Palestinians have to pass checkpoints daily to get to work, to school, to visit family members, to go shopping or to see a doctor. Rules on who is allowed to pass, and who is not, change from day to day and depend on orders from either the higher echelons of the military or from lower commanders in the field. To travel through different areas within the OPT, Palestinians need a permit. These permits are distributed by the DCO (District Coordination Office) of the IDF.

R. Hammami describes the web of checkpoints in the OPT as representing: ‘[a]s 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 our relationship of inequality with Israel, and a profound reminder of our status as stateless people’ (2006: 4). Through Hammami’s words the far-reaching implications of the checkpoint on the life of the Palestinian population become all the more clear.

33 Data B’Tselem www.b’tselem.org as accessed on 12-12-2008
Likewise, B. Doumani reminds us in her description of the situation around the city of Nablus, that the name checkpoint is actually a misleading one:

‘the military points in Hawara and Bayt eba are more like permanent border crossings than temporary roadblocks. At both crossings, large areas have been levelled to make way for complex security procedures that control the flow of traffic: pedestrian and car lanes, fortified bunkers, guard towers bristling with heavy machineguns and shrouded with camouflage netting, fences and barriers’ (2004: 37).

In the following quotation, Nir, a commander from the Nahal Brigade and a kibbutz member, explains the work at a checkpoint during a curfew and a closure:

‘If there was a closure or curfew, it’s hard [the work at the checkpoint]. You prevent everyone from getting out … when there is a curfew they don’t get out of their houses [the Palestinians], with a closure they don’t get out of the village, they have to stay in their village. There is no passing between the villages, from Hebron there is no passing to Halhul, and from Halhul to … these passages are closed, Bethlehem

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36 All names are pseudonyms in order to protect the privacy of the informants.
37 A kibbutz is an agricultural settlement, usually based on socialist ideals brought to Israel from the former Soviet Union with Jewish immigrants in the 1940s.
38 The Nahal Brigade is a brigade within which soldiers can combine agricultural or social work with their military service. Many of its members (especially from Brigade 50) are from Kibbutzim or Moshavim.
and to … Ramallah and all that, there is no traffic between the villages. You have the permanent checkpoints and you stand there and just … there is a closure, there is no passing. You prevent exit. You let through the Red Cross and aid organizations and humanitarian cases of course, after a thorough check and if a woman is giving birth in the ambulance you check if she really is giving birth, and you check if it’s not something else, then you release it.’ (14)

A checkpoint could be seen as an ‘in between’ space, a ‘border space’ separating two entities, two countries or two people. A point of passage that lets you pass from one space to an other or, as A. Zanger describes it, ‘the checkpoint functions as the regulator of control and rule: the mechanism of surveillance and control operates by spatial, ideological, and linguistic means, which include a ritual of such repetitive acts as identification, obedience, reward and punishment’ (2005: 38).

In the OPT the checkpoint is indeed not just a passing point. It is a mechanism separating two unequal entities and it is a point of obstruction where one group is dominant and in total control over the other, subordinate, group. The checkpoint in the OPT is not an ‘in between’ space that does not really belong to this or that side; it is an Israeli ‘micro-space’ either within the larger Palestinian space or along the border between Israeli and Palestinian lands. The checkpoints Israeli soldiers man often separate one Palestinian area from another and do not, as is often believed, solely separate Palestinian from Israeli territory. Palestinian cities are separated from the villages around them and from other cities in their vicinity. Travelling between cities within the OPT has become a difficult if not impossible endeavour for most Palestinians. Hammami gives the view from the Palestinian side when she writes: ‘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’ (2006: 24). As the soldier mentions in the quotation above, sometimes when orders for a closure are given whole villages or cities are isolated from the outside world. These facts make the checkpoints in the OPT more points of friction than points of passage (Ben-Ari et al. 2004).

An ethnography of the checkpoint arena
To get ‘a feel’ for this important arena that Israeli soldiers work in, I will present a short ethnography of the Qalandia checkpoint next to the Palestinian city of Ramallah, close to Jerusalem. In recent years this checkpoint has changed from being a busy, noisy, open-air checkpoint to being a full-blown terminal with benches for the waiting crowds, sophisticated
security measures, cameras, turnstiles and even a parking area. On the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs the following explanation for this change is given:

‘[n]ew checkpoint facilities have been opened to enable speedy and efficient security checks in a minimum of time. This is intended to ease the lives of Palestinian residents who aren’t involved in bringing terrorism to Israel. … The improved crossings have been erected both at places which did and did not previously have checkpoints, and were placed after examining where it would be possible to preserve and even improve the lives of the Palestinians using them’. 39

However, as this explanation is geared towards the international community, it is most likely an effort to improve the image of the IDF in that community’s eyes. While it may be that these terminals improve the speed of the flow of people going through at times, it is more likely that these changes were made to create more permanent structures and ‘facts on the ground’, making it possible for the Israeli military to have tighter control over the Palestinian population. (See also, in regard to this, the comment about Qalandia checkpoint by the above quoted general).

When visiting Qalandia in the spring of 2006, after the reconstruction of the checkpoint, men, women and children were still standing in long lines and waiting for the soldiers to let them through so that they could carry on with their day. Besides its new look, a new concept was implemented regarding the proximity of soldiers and Palestinians – a complete physical separation between both was created.

At the old checkpoint, soldiers would stand outside under a tin roof behind piles of sandbags which served as a security measure. In this setup, the soldiers were in direct contact with the passing Palestinians, checking their bodies, bags, IDs and other possessions manually. At the new checkpoint, soldiers sit behind bullet-proof glass, speak only through megaphones and manage the stream of passing Palestinians from a distance. When IDs or permits have to be shown, they are put in a metal drawer that is pulled inwards by the soldiers for inspection. The Palestinian ‘passengers’ put their bags through the X-ray machines and walk through a metal detector just like at any border crossing at an air, land or sea ‘port’ between two countries.

To get to the Qalandia checkpoint from Ramallah or from Jerusalem, people have to walk through mud and debris. The (in)famous wall or, as the official Israeli state discourse has it, the

security barrier, has been built right next to the checkpoint, making the checkpoint the main entry point to Jerusalem from Ramallah. The parking spaces beside the new terminal are unused as no one can reach the checkpoint by car. Taxis take their passengers to a point some 200 metres from the entrance, from where one has to walk to the terminal. After passing, one can find taxis on the other side, again after walking about 200 metres. To enter and exit the checkpoint, one has to pass through metal turnstiles, which makes it very hard to carry large objects such as suitcases and children’s strollers as these do not fit through. For this reason children are carried in their mother’s arms through most checkpoints in the OPT.

Figure 4

Figure 5
Qalandia checkpoint, new style (photos: EP)

When arriving at Qalandia on that spring day in April, the checkpoint seemed to have been abandoned by the soldiers. The doors were closed and a few dozen Palestinians were stuck between two one-way passages and could not get out. One daring youth climbed over the metal turnstile and squeezed through a small space to get to the other side and out of the checkpoint.
After a closer look, however, it became clear that behind the dark glass a few soldiers were actually present and these, after the pleading of some Israelis, opened the door so people could get out. The reason for the temporary closure of the checkpoint was unclear and could not be explained by the soldiers behind the bullet-proof glass either because they did not have a clear answer or because of the difficulty of communicating with them through the glass.

After going through the checkpoint to the Palestinian side, which was fairly easy as the pedestrians moving in this direction were hardly checked, the way back to the Israeli side commenced. This turned out to be much more difficult. Again, the passage was blocked and no one could go through. Men and women stood in different lines, pushing one another. Women with crying children in their arms did their best to go through as fast as possible, receiving help from others who were standing in line. The crowds were harshly ordered around by the soldiers via megaphones. The soldiers did not, however, come outside of their isolated cabin and their faces remained anonymous. Only after about twenty minutes was the passage opened; one by one people could walk through the metal turnstile and through the different checking mechanisms (such as the metal detector and the X-ray machine) towards the other side.

During another visit in February, the rain turned the whole area around the checkpoint into a muddy pool. It was cold in the terminal, people were shouting, children were crying, there was pushing and shoving and faces were angry with frustration. The waiting area smelled of damp clothes and crowds.

The bullet-proof glass behind which the Israeli soldiers sit and work at this checkpoint protects them, perhaps unintentionally, from direct confrontation with these hardships, from

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40 A group of young people connected to the Dutch NGO ‘A Different Jewish Voice’ was being shown around the checkpoint by members of the Coalition of Women for Peace; the latter talked to the soldiers.
seeing the crowds, from feeling the cold and from hearing the shouts of frustration. This
checkpoint is, however, one of the exceptions. Most of the smaller checkpoints that Israeli
soldiers man give them no protection from sensing ‘the other’, feeling the heat or the cold,
smelling the crowds and hearing the complaints and the pleas. Both situations (the one where
soldiers and Palestinians are separated and the one where a close encounter takes place between
both parties) influence the soldiers’ behaviour in their own way as we shall see further on.

3.2 Arrests and ‘straw widows’: entering the private Palestinian domain

The second main arena of Israeli soldiers’ work that I would like to discuss here is the one within
which soldiers enter the most private Palestinian domain – the private houses of Palestinian
citizens. Private houses are entered to carry out arrests and in order to occupy these houses for a
longer period of time as temporary military posts.

Figure 7
Soldiers with an arrestee in a Palestinian house or building (photo: courtesy of Breaking the Silence)

Arrests

‘[T]hese people never knew what hit them. We busted in when they were sleeping. Scared the
living shit out of them. Half a dozen little kids, a woman in traditional black Arabic clothing, and
the target individual, all sleeping on the ground in the outdoor part of the house. The kids were
screaming in fear and crying and so was the lady’ (Buzzell 2005: 239). ⁴¹

⁴¹ In his book My War: Killing Time in Iraq, American soldier Colby Buzzell (2005) tells about his experiences as a
serviceman in Iraq.
After intelligence information is received about a wanted individual, one or more teams of soldiers are sent off to carry out the arrest. There are different ways of carrying out an arrest but in general arrests take place at night and begin with a knock on the door. When the family opens the door, the women and children are separated out from the men and from amongst the men the suspect is identified. The suspect is then taken to the General Security Service (Shabak) for questioning.

Arrest operations are either planned weeks in advance by elite combat units or are organized on the spur of the moment when there is a ‘ticking bomb’ involved, i.e. information on a terror attack that is going to be carried out in the very near future. Arrests, furthermore, involve different units, all with their own specialties. Some units give security back up around the house of the wanted individual while others enter the house to carry out the actual arrest.

Doron, a member of a kibbutz in central Israel who served as a squad commander in a paratroopers unit, performed many night arrests which became a completely routine experience for him. He relates the way arrests were organized:

‘It is like, in the evening the information arrives, what is going to happen that evening. Then the company commander chooses to what platoon to give the assignment, and it goes following the seniority of the platoon commander if they’re there a long time, then the platoon commander divides the crews, everyone with his own mission, there are those that secure the house, those that go in the house, some that do searches, some that don’t. And then usually you go to an Israeli settlement, next to the city, you go make a model, you get photos of the house and all.’ (23)

‘Usually it’s really routine, from the moment you get in the house, little contact as possible with the family, you take the family, there is a person that is responsible for it, you put everyone in the bedroom or the living room, you don’t let them see what you are doing in the house, you tell them to sit still, they also know it very well, like us, the Arabs, they know if they sit still nothing happens, the mother always starts to cry over her child, “leave him alone” and all, till it ends and then we leave them.’ (23)

42 While there probably have been arrests of women, the great majority of arrest operations concern men. During my interviews I did not come across any arrests of women.

43 By ‘Israeli settlement’ Doron means one of the Jewish settlements within the OPT.

44 Within Israel the term ‘Arab’ is usually used for Palestinians who are Israeli citizens and who live inside the ‘Green Line’ while the term ‘Palestinian’ is used for the inhabitants of the OPT in an attempt to create the appearance of two different nations. Appreciating the way people actually identify themselves, Rabinowitz has used the term ‘Palestinian citizens of Israel’ (2002).
As we shall see later, this routine can generate a sense of complacency that can contribute to processes of moral numbing.

‘Straw widows’

Besides going into Palestinian houses for very short periods of time to arrest a suspect, Israeli soldiers also occupy Palestinian houses, which then become ‘straw widows’, for strategic purposes. For days, weeks or months on end, a military unit can stay within such a house which is, under these circumstances, (partly) converted into a military post. The Palestinian family living in the house is usually moved to one floor or even one room in the house, depending on the space available, and is guarded at all times by a soldier. The family’s movement within the house and outside of it is severely restricted by the presence of Israeli soldiers in their home. Again, Doron relates his experience of such operations:

‘Then you stay there, there are soldiers, there is a shift, that is in charge of the family, they don’t look out to the street, for 24 hours, 3 hours you look out for the family, 3 hours you look out, you sleep. The family stays in a closed room, until you leave. You give them water, someone that has to go to the toilet, you go with them, he gets in the toilet, you take him back, they are imprisoned until you leave.’ (Q: ‘Isn’t there a chance they will get the information [about the Israeli soldiers being in their house] to others?’) ‘That’s the thing, you leave them, you lock them, you take their telephones, mobile phones, you close the windows, usually you take them to a room without windows, they are isolated, like that’ (23)

Yariv, another kibbutz member who served in the elite unit of the Nahal Brigade, comes from what he calls a leftist home and is critical of the activities of the Israeli military in the OPT.\(^{45}\) When speaking about his experiences in ‘straw widows’ he relates some negative emotions:

‘but you have a thing that is called “straw widow” in the military, that’s to be in an Arab house for a few days, that was horrible, I remember it was…’ (Q: ‘What happens exactly?’) ‘You get inside the house; you move the whole family to a room of their own.’ (Q: ‘Do they know in advance that you are coming?’) ‘No, they don’t

\(^{45}\) When soldiers specifically state their political orientation in connection to the way they act and make decisions, this orientation is mentioned. This type of information was volunteered and in no way solicited.
know in advance. You get into the house, their house has an advantage for us like a
good observation point, and the family goes into one room, someone watches the
family, their house is like …but you don’t touch their things.’ (25)

Other soldiers related the following about the way ‘straw widows’ were carried out:

‘You would go in and the family would already know what to do, there wasn’t any
need to tell them to get into the room. They would already point out to us where to
go and where the soldiers sat the previous time.’ (BS 58-59, translation EG)

‘In short, you get inside the house, the family stays in the house, they are centralized
in one room, you scan to see that there are no other people hiding in the house and
after that you settle in, sharpshooters and all. And then you have to open corners to
look out so you destroy a few more houses in the surroundings, or especially
greenhouses. The family during this time, like you probably know, is locked in the
room, is stuck in the room with a guard, again I assume that we do it in a more
…[humane] way, we let them go down to prepare food. In this instance we were in
the house 24 hours non-stop.” (BS 70-71, translation EG)

![Figure 8](image)

‘Straw widow’ in Hebron (photo: EP)

Entering the private domain

Central to the activity of arrests or the occupation of a Palestinian house for a longer period of
time is the very act of the military entering a private Palestinian home. In the case of a ‘straw
widow’, this home is even converted into a military post. The physical closeness to the private lives of Palestinians and the sensory experience of seeing, hearing, feeling and smelling are of importance here. The soldiers enter a different, sometimes hostile, but also very personal space.

Figure 9
‘Straw widow’ in Hebron (photo: EP)

The contrast between military bodies and the private houses they enter becomes clear when we look at pictures taken by Israeli soldiers. Soldiers everywhere take pictures of the places they have been to and of the things they have seen and done. These can be innocent images of landscapes or smiling comrades. However, as photos of prisoners taken by American and British soldiers in Iraq have shown us, they can also be horrifying. Israeli soldiers like to take pictures of themselves during their military service, especially in the present day with its digital photography. They photograph their activities, including those within the private homes of Palestinians. These pictures can give us some insights into the encounter between the military and the private domain for operations involving arrest or occupation (‘straw widows’). We can, for example, see soldiers in full combat dress (including boots) on soft, homely couches, sitting in a family’s living room.

Even if they are careful, the soldiers will eventually inevitably disturb the house, opening closets and drawers, moving furniture and touching the personal belongings of the family. In many instances, the personal belongings of the Palestinian families are even used by the soldiers, for example mattresses and carpets to sleep on during longer stays. Soldiers are also known to have used TV sets at times, as the following quote from a soldier interviewed by Breaking the Silence shows:

‘We were in the middle of a house-searching operation in the refugee camp, when we entered one of the houses, evacuated the family into one room, according to
procedure, and searched the house. By the way – as we entered, the family was watching the soccer world-cup finals and left the TV on. We were tempted and sat to watch the game. Gradually, everybody joined, the whole unit, crowded in front of the TV – including the platoon’s vice-commander – and watched the game. Meanwhile the family waited in the room we put them into earlier.’ (BS maltreatment)

Figure 10
Soldiers watching football in a Palestinian house (photo: courtesy of Breaking the Silence)

Another ex-soldier told the same organization about being in the house of a Palestinian family in the Palestinian city of Hebron:

‘So conceptually this was a really crazy thing, you’re in somebody’s house, and you climb the stairs of a building, everything is littered with shit, cartridges and glass on the stairs, so you can hear if anyone is approaching. It’s simply a house covered in camouflage netting so people can’t see what you’re doing inside. You simply find yourself in a Palestinian neighbourhood, in some family’s home, and it’s totally surreal, because there you are, sitting in the living room, listening for people coming to attack you. That’s it. And through the window you can watch people walking in the street by their home, and the Jewish cemetery is just a few steps away …this was one of the strangest things I’ve ever seen. There was also food left behind, there was a TV, we weren’t allowed to turn it on, this would be too much, this would be considered “bad occupation”, using their electricity…’ (BS Hebron)
This soldier is especially reflective and uses sarcasm when he speaks about the actions of the soldiers and the limits the IDF has given them (occupying a whole house but not being allowed to use the electricity). It becomes clear that using a house as a ‘straw widow’ is not without dilemmas for the soldiers.

If we can imagine the atmosphere in a Palestinian house during an arrest or a search we can probably feel the fear and frustration of the residents; this situation is often combined with the sight of poverty. Add to this the tension and fear of the soldiers who are never sure what will happen next, or a complacent attitude as seen in the case of the football-watching unit, and we have what could be described as a very unnatural and painful situation. This description of just such a ‘straw widow’ operation in the eyes of a Palestinian writer is telling:

‘The residents of each apartment building are rounded up at gunpoint and stuffed into a single room on the ground floor. The scene is disconcerting: men in their pyjamas ill at ease in someone else’s home; children crying, whining, or peeing in their pants; women trying to be useful but hardly able even to make their way across the jam-packed room; awkward lines for a single bathroom; furtive eyes on the door locked from the outset and guarded by Israeli soldiers; a young girl crying quietly in a corner; general panic if anyone tries to look out the window’ (Doumani 2004: 42–3).
The soldier is, in reality, a military body entering the ultimate personal space of a family home. Sensory experiences are important here; they intensify and concretize the surroundings of the soldiers. They also mark the differences between the soldiers as Israeli citizens and the Palestinian civilians who live in such different circumstances, for example through the sight and smell of a house and its inhabitants.

However, for many soldiers the situation is not as unnatural or abnormal as one might expect. As Ro’i, a former squad commander, relates with reference to his experiences during ‘straw widows’:

‘After a while you forget it’s a house where someone lives, it becomes your outpost. When you stand guard at the window … there isn’t furniture in the house; they get everything out to a side room. So, it’s not a home anymore.’ (18)

Interestingly, Ro’i describes here how the personal space of the home is militarized and depersonalized by the entrance of the soldiers and by the taking out of all the furniture. It seems to make the stay of the soldiers inside the houses easier when they can think of the space as military and not as private.

(Q: ‘Would you feel uncomfortable when entering a Palestinian house?’) ‘No, it was very normal for me. Very much normal to get into a house of a wanted man, I didn’t give it any thought. But with time, you start seeing how they live, the way they lead their lives, it’s in the dumps. Simply horrible. You start to be indifferent, just like with the attrition [shkhika] of the operation, you get into a house, there are like twenty people in a house of 1.5 rooms, the kitchen, for a month no one has done the dishes, and everyone sleeps on the floor, and its disgusting, smelly, every time it disgusts you anew, but you don’t pay attention to it too much, you see it, you take it in, it pops up in your head, it doesn’t hurt the operation, you go on as usual.’ (23)

Doron, who was cited before and who emphasized his leftist, political orientation, relates time and again of how this orientation influenced his behaviour towards Palestinians. Here he tells of how he sees the suffering of the Palestinians from up close every time he enters their
homes. However, as he is tied up in the operation, he does not let himself be influenced by their hardships: ‘you see it, you take it in ... it doesn’t hurt the operation’. The situation around him is normalized and he doesn’t pay attention to it after a while. Entering a private Palestinian house becomes a ‘normal’ activity. He does something similar to what American soldier Hartley did in Iraq: ‘I decided to check my politeness at the door and search for the weapons that these guys were trying to kill us with, like I was fucking supposed to. I still feel bad...’ (Hartley 2006: 99).

Some soldiers, however, stated that they felt somewhat uncomfortable with their presence in this private space. Shmuel, a kibbutz member who was to his surprise drafted to the Givati Brigade where being from a socialist kibbutz background is an exception, tells of how he would feel when entering a Palestinian house:

‘Listen it’s not nice, a lot of times, that is to say, I felt like that, not many people felt like that, but I felt that it’s not nice [lo na’im] you go into the house of simple people that didn’t do anything.’ (19)

However, as Shmuel mentions here, not many soldiers felt the same and as we can make out from the other examples for most of the others the personal space of a home had been completely militarized and turned into their work arena. Hence their work within it was normalized as ‘just’ military work.

3.3 Patrolling
A third work arena that Israeli soldiers act within is not so much a place as an activity: the patrols soldiers carry out. These patrols can be carried out on foot but are mostly done with military vehicles. Roads around Jewish settlements and Palestinian cities or villages are patrolled and soldiers frequently enter Palestinian cities to patrol the streets.

Patrols, from the point of view of the military, are carried out for security purposes; Jewish settlements within the OPT are secured by patrolling the roads around them – suspicious people are apprehended and curfews within cities are upheld by patrolling the streets. Another important reason for these patrols, especially those undertaken within cities, is described by soldiers as ‘showing presence’. In this way the Israeli military shows the militants that are hiding that it is present and that it is ready for action if needed. ‘Showing presence’ represents the basic rationale of many activities of the IDF within the OPT; temporary checkpoints and ‘blank’ shooting at walls are, for example, also seen as activities aimed at the confirmation of the presence and power of the IDF.
A staff sergeant tells the story of a nightly patrol he carried out in the city of Nablus:

‘There were operations titled “Looking for Trouble”. What does “Looking for Trouble” mean? It means going on a patrol, touring the Kasbah,\(^{46}\) hope someone will shoot at us, and that we get into combat. “Looking For Trouble” is the name the guys gave it … Night patrol in the Kasbah in Nablus. Usually the reason for those patrols was to try to get into some combat, and to show our presence.’(BS fire opening)

Another important characteristic of patrolling is that you never really know what will happen and who you will meet during your rounds. This uncertainty combined with being vulnerable, especially when patrolling on foot, can make soldiers insecure and this in turn can influence their behaviour.

However, soldiers on patrols are also much freer in their movements than, for example, when they are working at a checkpoint. Often patrolling can be boring and soldiers will try to find things to do to pass the time, such as randomly searching people they do not need to search. Patrolling is, thus, another one of the soldiers’ activities that places them in circumstances that can have a negative influence on their behaviour.

### 3.4 Physical closeness and distance

If we want to understand the experiences of soldiers within the arenas discussed, the checkpoints, arrests, the occupation of ‘straw widows’ and patrols, we should consider the physical proximity of the soldiers to ‘the other’, the Palestinians the soldiers meet on a daily basis at the checkpoints, in the cities or villages and in the Palestinian homes they enter. As we shall see, the degree of distance or proximity between both parties can have a profound effect on the moral behaviour of soldiers and on their decision-making.

In terms of theory, Vetlesen and Bauman disagree on the way physical distance or proximity affects the behaviour of perpetrators towards their victims. Vetlesen (2005) believes that proximity between people does not make it more difficult to hurt a person. He distinguishes between physical proximity and the sense of feeling close to someone. Thus, when you know a person, it is harder to hurt him (or her) no matter what the physical distance between you is. Physical proximity/distance is, then, not enough to explain immoral behaviour or the avoidance of it; it is also important to look at the way we perceive this person and at our relationship with

\(^{46}\) Kasbah originally comes from the term for Islamic city or fortress (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kasbah) accessed 04-01-2008; often the centre of an Arab city in the OPT is called the Kasbah.
them. In Bauman’s work (1989), Vetlesen argues, the notion of proximity is not explained and thus remains vague. Bauman does not take the psychic notion of proximity into account and draws a direct relation between spatial proximity and moral behaviour (in accordance with the famous experiments done by Milgram in 1974). Bauman, who like Vetlesen mostly focuses on the Holocaust, ignores, in Vetlesen’s view, the ideological zest with which the Nazi’s worked to exterminate the Jews of Europe. Vetlesen concludes that ‘proximity interacts with a number of factors; it does not by itself bring about, let alone account for, moral conduct or the lack of it’ (2005: 27) thus adding an emotional charge to the notion of proximity.

![Image](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

**Figure 12**

A boy feeding pigeons being observed and photographed through a sniper’s rifle scope, Hebron (photo: courtesy of Breaking the silence)

In his influential work *On Killing*, D. Grossman writes extensively about the relationship between ways of killing an enemy and the emotional and physical distance from him or her. He contends that the greater the distance we find between ourselves and the enemy, the easier it is to kill him or her. However, he also discusses the issue of emotional distance in his work and writes that ‘there is a constant danger on the battlefield that, in periods of extended close combat, the combatants will get to know and acknowledge one another as individuals and subsequently may refuse to kill each other’ (1995: 158). Thus, getting to know and especially beginning to care about the other inevitably alters the way a soldier sees the enemy and the way he will treat him or her. In the case of Israeli soldiers this factor is maybe even stronger as they do not have combatants in front of them but mostly civilians. Seeing these people as ‘individuals’ with feelings can make it harder for the soldier to carry out work that essentially suppresses them.
I, thus, agree here with Vetlesen’s ideas and with Grossman’s work and hence try to keep the notion of ‘othering’ (Spivak 1985; Besteman 1996; Baumann and Gingrich 2006) in mind when looking at the effect of spatial distance between Israeli soldiers and Palestinian civilians. The concept of ‘othering’ can be used when analysing the way different groups relate to each other negatively and especially the ways one group can ‘other’ another group in order to establish itself and distance itself from this ‘other’. The way the soldiers feel towards the ‘other’ and the degree they feel closeness or distance to them should, then, be taken into account when looking at the issue of proximity and moral behaviour.

Checkpoints
The effects of the checkpoints and the architectural organisation of the checkpoints on the soldier who works within them are complex because different kinds of checkpoints have different effects on soldiers and because the same physical circumstances of a checkpoint can have different and even conflicting effects on different soldiers.

From initial observations it seems that the IDF has been making an effort to physically distance its soldiers from the Palestinians at the major checkpoints. Thick bullet-proof glass ensures that the encounter between Palestinians and soldiers becomes a sterile meeting without eye contact, without direct communication through language and even without smell. The soldiers at the checkpoints are shielded off from the people they control and their sensory experience is diminished. These IDF measures are taken for security considerations, as soldiers are less likely to be attacked when standing behind glass.

The additional consequence of these security measures, however, is that the Palestinians around the soldiers become more abstract, impersonalized and are seen within a ‘blurred view’ (Grossman 1988) as a mass of ‘Arabs’ or ‘Palestinians’ or as categories such as ‘the old man’ or ‘the pregnant woman’ (Ben-Ari et al. 2004). Seen from a Palestinian perspective, a soldier becomes ‘the bare face of the occupation and it becomes embodied in a person, a soldier who has immense power over your immediate destiny’ (Hammami 2006: 24). They are reduced to ‘the occupier’; the one with enormous power over the Palestinians.

The distance between soldiers and Palestinians can potentially make a soldier more indifferent to the person or ‘category’ he has in front of him. Following this view, then, which was also discussed by Grossman (1995), by distancing the soldiers physically from the Palestinian population the IDF makes it, perhaps unintentionally, easier for them to continue carrying out their work in the Palestinian Territories, that work being the controlling of other people.
This separation can, then, result in a greater degree of indifference towards ‘the other’. The more distance between the soldiers and the Palestinians, the more their suffering or pleas become distant and the smaller the space will become that Palestinians inhabit in the moral universe of the soldiers.47 Here, again, we should keep in mind the feelings of soldiers towards Palestinians which are usually negative since Palestinians are seen as a hostile group or at least as an ‘other’.

However, this is only one of the effects that distancing the soldiers from the passing Palestinians can have. Another effect can be that the distance of the soldiers from the sounds, the pleas and negotiations with the Palestinians (but also from the heat or the cold) can give them more space to behave in an empathetic way towards the people passing the checkpoint. This can happen because they are less likely to be influenced by factors such as the cold, the heat, frustration and fear, factors that, as we shall see shortly, can have a profound effect on the behaviour of soldiers. Both effects can happen simultaneously and depend, amongst other things, on the soldiers in question, the way they feel towards the Palestinians and on the exact circumstances of their specific work arena.

As stated before, most checkpoints are (still) open and the soldiers are in direct contact with the Palestinians. This proximity also has its own particular effects on soldiers’ attitudes towards the latter. Just as the lack of sensory experiences (distance through glass, for example) can result in apathy, long hours at the checkpoint with hundreds of pleas and thus an overdose of sensory experiences can also cause indifference, as we shall see in the next chapter.

Arrests

During arrests, a different mechanism of separation comes into play. Whereas the distance at the checkpoint is managed through architectural measures, during arrests this method of distancing is not possible. The desired distance between soldiers and Palestinians, for security or other reasons, is more difficult to establish in these situations. During arrests, the contact with the Palestinians in the house the soldiers enter is real and direct and the dynamics of such situations are, therefore, profoundly different from those at the checkpoint.

In the conversations with soldiers, however, it becomes clear that it is important for them, and possibly for the military as a whole, to have as little contact with the Palestinian inhabitants as possible while in their houses. During arrests, these efforts are directed at avoiding confrontations and avoiding seeing the families of suspects or speaking to them in general. The

47 A moral universe or a moral scope is an imagined space within which moral actors move and interact and as such is distinct from the above mentioned ‘moral region’. People who are considered to belong to the moral universe find themselves within the ‘boundary in which moral values, rules, and consideration of fairness apply’ (Opotow 1990: 1).
operation should go as ‘smoothly’ as possible which means, amongst other things, that no friction should arise between the soldiers and the inhabitants of the houses they enter.

Adam, a deputy company commander, is very much aware of the effect he, as a soldier within a private house, can have and emphasizes the efforts soldiers take to make an arrest go as smoothly as possible:

‘A group of soldiers get into the house, and we try to do it as peaceful as possible. The best thing is if the man, when I knock on the door of the house, flees outside and the soldiers on the other side get him. Then he also shows himself and it goes smooth. And also his children, his mother I wouldn’t have to face them. Usually you go into the house and frighten everybody with your gun, you don’t frighten them God forbid with shooting or God forbid with pointing guns, but just by having the guns it’s enough. You find him in the house, I will hold him until outside, then it’s out of my hands, I won’t God forbid question him, that is not my job and I don’t, didn’t know how to do that.’ (1) (Emphasis added)

Adam makes very clear that he will do whatever he can in order not to confront the families living in the houses he enters. The perfect scenario he speaks of, when he doesn’t even have to enter the house to get the suspect out, again shows the wish to engage as little as possible with the Palestinian residents. Nir, a commander in the Nahal Brigade, also emphasizes this effort when he talks about arrest missions he carried out as a squad commander:

‘With arrests, you get info that is very “fluid”, it would happen at night, we would get a briefing about the house, where it is, etc, we would get a crew together, how exactly, how to walk there, do a scan of the house and all. We would be a securing force; we would get as little as possible in contact with the Palestinians, to do it as quiet as possible, not to break anything, that they won’t accuse us later that we destroyed things. We would never touch, that’s it. We take the guy out of the house, tie him up and call the Shabak,48 check the ID, that’s their work. We would search the house for weapons, and things you can find.’ (Q: ‘And what about the family?’) ‘Usually we try to separate, we separate the children and the wife in one place and take the person, the husband and separate him from them first of all, with the minimum of humiliation and contact, if it’s possible just put them in one of the

48 General Security Service.
rooms in the house, also not to do it in the street, not in a protesting way, quiet, we came with a specific mission and that is what we have to do.’(14) (Emphasis added)

Great efforts are made to avoid communication with the Palestinians in order to avoid any kind of personal contact. Almost no conversations are conducted between soldiers and Palestinians, and certainly none on a personal level.

In the rare cases in which this does happen, the soldier sometimes engages in such conversations in a conscious effort to fight his own indifference. Golan is a person who, when conscripted within the IDF, had great trust in the system; he was proud of his uniform and believed in the job he had to carry out. He served as an officer in the artillery corps. However, he became disillusioned with time by the misconduct and the disrespectful behaviour of his superiors. During his service he would make a conscious effort to make personal contact with the Palestinians he arrested:

‘When I was sitting with the terrorist, it was very important for me to have some kind of contact, maybe from naivety, I was determined to stay a human being and not become a machine of hate and fear.’(7)

However, Golan was an exception and his efforts were very personal. The discourse used here by Golan in which he emphasizes his own humanity and the importance of staying human himself, will be discussed in Chapter 6 where moral strategies will be examined.

The efforts made to have as little personal contact with the Palestinian ‘other’ as possible can, then, have several reasons. One of these is that speaking to the family members of a house being entered could cause extra friction and could possibly ‘mess up’ a smooth operation. On another level, this distance can serve as a guard against sympathizing with the ‘other’, who one is controlling. Such sympathy could lead to dilemmas that a soldier would prefer to avoid.

‘Straw widows’
Within ‘straw widows’ the contact with Palestinians is either more complicated, if the family that lives in the house stays put, or ‘easier’, when the family members are evicted altogether and the soldiers do not have to deal with them at all. Nir talks about a ‘straw widow’ his unit occupied for a month and the peculiar relationship that was established with the family that was staying in the house:
‘Sometimes we would stay a whole night then a family would make coffee, however absurd it may sound, a family where we lived in the second floor of their house for a month, after 2 weeks they would come up at 16:00 to drink coffee. They would bring coffee and baklava. You don’t come to hurt them. They also understand you.’ (14)

The following quote is from a commander who told Breaking the Silence about the difficulties he had when carrying out a ‘straw widow’. He emphasizes that the closeness to the family in the house (to see them, to see and smell the food they were preparing, to see exactly how they were living) was too much for him to bear and made him distance himself from them. Carrying out his work as he was supposed to was, apparently, only possible for him by creating this distance.

‘That was one of the most difficult things I did, from a personal perspective, because when you are a commander you are always a bit lonely and suddenly you sit in a straw widow and one of the posts was to guard the family, I just couldn’t look them in the eyes during the whole operation, it was very hard for me. They cook, you see what they eat, which is pitiful, you are confronted with all these things that you are not supposed to be confronted with. All the time the operation is nightly arrests, you are not confronted with the daily routine of the life of the family, you aren’t confronted with the poverty. It was really difficult for me to sit in the room. I told some soldier I want you to be here, I can’t be here anymore. I didn’t explain to him why. I couldn’t look them in the eyes, to see their looks or to see them sleep or not sleep, the fear.’ (BS 45, translation EG)

In the following quote it again becomes clear that soldiers maintain a certain degree of distance. Nir once more talks about one of the ‘straw widows’ he occupied:

‘If you come and spend the night with a family, then you won’t take them out of the house, we would be in the living room, they in the bedroom, someone is at the entrance guarding, so they don’t have … we are in the living room and there is no contact or passing. Whether they want it or not, it’s not nice, true, there are people in your house, do whatever you want but you won’t get into this area. They would know it; they knew soldiers would live with them. They can’t do anything about it because we would be there anyway.’ (14)
Nir clearly acknowledges the hardship experienced by the Palestinian inhabitants of the houses he occupies – ‘it’s not nice … there are people in your house’. However, in his way of thinking, he does not have a choice but to do his job. This idea takes precedence over his discomfort with the situation concerning the family. The rationale and logic soldiers use to justify their actions will be discussed in the next part of this work.

**Patrols**

Patrolling is one activity where the Israeli soldier does not necessarily engage in a lot of contact with the Palestinian population face to face. The presence of military vehicles on the roads around and within Palestinian villages and cities does, however, have an effect on the relationship between soldiers and the Palestinian civilians.

![Figure 13](image)

**Figure 13**  
**View from within a military vehicle, Hebron (photo: courtesy of Breaking the Silence)**

Palestinians are likely to perceive soldiers patrolling with military vehicles as ‘the army’ or ‘the soldiers’ because they are barely visible as individuals. These men are merely shadows within heavily armed vehicles, vehicles which they do not get out for security reasons. Many military vehicles incorporate security measures such as bars across the windows, this further reducing the visibility of the people within them.

Just as the soldiers are reduced to mere figures within vehicles, the distance between them and the Palestinians also strengthens the depersonalization of the Palestinians in the eyes of the soldiers, a subject that has been discussed above. This distance can have the same effect as that
discussed before in guarding against the soldier getting too involved. From a jeep it is easier to see a ‘category’ (‘a young man’ or ‘an old farmer’) than to see actual individual persons that you can relate to.

3.5 Routine

One of the most important characteristics of the work in all of the arenas discussed above is the sense of routine soldiers get into once they have experienced the operations a few times. Even during arrests, where more dynamics are at play and more tension is felt, soldiers feel they are working a routine. This routine, however, takes shape differently in each arena. Here I will look at the different arenas and the place routine has within them.

Checkpoints

The long hours and the limited periods of rest in between shifts make work at the checkpoint very hard in the experience of most of the soldiers; some units do the same work with the same hours (for example, four or eight hours work and then four or eight hours rest) for months on end. These are usually the regular combat units, not the special units that extensively train for an operation, go in to the OPT, carry out their tasks and get out of the OPT again.

Regular combat soldiers from the infantry, for example, can find themselves for months on end working at the same checkpoint. The routine at the checkpoint is one of boredom, monotonous views (the same trees, the same rocks), monotonous work (checking IDs, asking the same questions over and over again, getting the same answers) and the same set daily program (eight hours at the checkpoint, two hours training, six hours rest, for example). This staff sergeant conveys this well:

‘And the routine: eight/eight. That non-realistic legend of eight hours at the checkpoint and eight hours resting - in reality this is nine hours at the post and five resting. That’s how it is. And you have briefings and you have that … A soldier begins to wear out. He gets to the checkpoint and loses his patience.’ (BS 1001)

Although different in its objectives, the long hours at the checkpoints can be perhaps compared to the hours spent by soldiers on guard-duty. Guard-duty can be done at a base, an outpost or a settlement amongst other places. Yoel, a squad commander, describes the routine of soldiers on guard-duty and sympathizes with the hardship they undergo:
'It wears you out; you can’t deal with such a thing. Can you imagine that you are at this place for a year and that all you do is to get up in the morning, get up to guard, 8 hours, get down, do the dishes and tasks, etc, sleep for 4 hours, and go up for 8. Every 18 days you have 3 days you can rest, and you want to do as much as possible so you don’t sleep and then you go back. …You can’t deal with it, they aren’t robots.’ (20)

Arrests
Even though activities to do with arrests involve more ‘action’ than the monotonous work at the checkpoint, a routine sets in just the same.

‘To tell the truth, most are pretty much complacent it’s also because of the attrition [šbbika], if you do an arrest every night for two years, the same things, sometimes 2 or 3 times a night the same thing, there is no time for models [extensive preparation], there is no time, the moment you put your head on the pillow… Go, there is someone ready, tomorrow he’ll do an attack so you have to go and get him. So there is this “šbbika”, and complacency, that people get into, but I remember myself every time I went into those refugee camps you become completely alert, its not fear, it’s that you know there are armed people, you get into their house, their area, you know you’re in a less advanced position, even though you are the military, if something happens …there is this tension, but with time people get complacent.’ (Q: ‘Does it become routine?’) ‘It’s completely a routine.’ (23)

Doron, who is quoted here and who served in a unit that specialized in arrest operations, conveys how carrying out two or three arrests every night became routine for the soldiers. They performed their duty, carried out the operation as they should do and stayed alert at all times. However, the activities are the same every time and complacency sets in, especially after one has been carrying out such operations for a while. This routine, as we shall see later, contributes to a numbing process that soldiers undergo.

When there is no action, other ways to pass the time are sought after. Soldiers, as is often emphasized by their commanders, will be interested in any topic that is not connected to their work at the checkpoint. If there are no special operations to break their routine, they will try to pass the time by talking about any topic that 18 to 21-year-old young men would talk about: girls, music, movies, but also questions like ‘When are we going home?’ and ‘How long till the end of
the shift?' Eviatar, a former company commander in the artillery brigade, immediately admitted that his soldiers loved to talk about anything that was not their job:

‘For sure, what mostly interests them is what is not happening at the checkpoint. They want to know what happened yesterday in the other company, what did his girlfriend say to him, who is the new girl he is going out with etc. etc. That interests them much more. That can also be a reason that they have less attention for the situation with the civilians. It interests them when lunch is coming, why the next shift is late, in short everything that is not connected to the checkpoint interests them.’ (5)

Morale and ‘real action’

As already mentioned when the concept of ‘dirty work’ was discussed, soldiers tend to wait for ‘real action’ to break away from the routine of their everyday activities. Ron-Furer gives a good example of this in his poetic memoirs of his service in the OPT:

‘We were on a patrol duty. We got a signal over the radio: “a suspicious figure in segment 512”. We turned the jeep around and drove there at full speed. We are usually quite stressed because at noon there is not much going on. But a suspicious figure walking about like that in daylight - we knew that it meant there would be some action’ (from ‘Checkpoint Syndrome’, Ron-Furer).49

In Winslow’s work on Canadian soldiers in Somalia, similar emotions were detected. One of her informants said: ‘a peace-making mission in Somalia finally offered an opportunity for some gung-ho members of the CAR to prove themselves in battle’50 (Winslow 1997: 24). Soldiers thus seem to wait for action in order to show ‘what they can do’ as combat soldiers. Without it, their morale can drop and disillusionment sets in, as was noted by Miller and Moskos amongst American troops (1995).

‘The “action” is what happens in between, you go to do a checkpoint and suddenly they shoot on you from a house in Jenin. Then you shoot back, and you chase him and you don’t have time to call anyone so only those who are there … you go back wasted but the soldiers are in ecstasy [temf] they talk about it and they are happy something happened. There is cohesion [gibush] of a few soldiers, they never trained

50 Canadian Airborne Regiment.
together for it,\textsuperscript{51} but did it the whole day. It sounds weird now, but then it was a feeling, I don’t know…” (9)

In this quote, Asaf, a 	extit{kibbutz} member and former squad commander from the Golani Brigade, makes a clear connection between ‘action’, the breaking of routine and feelings of cohesion within a military unit or, as in the example he gives, between a few soldiers not familiar with each other (see Ben-Shalom et al. 2005 for more on ‘swift trust’ and ad hoc operating units).

The monotony of the work and the routine are also related to the question of morale; soldiers feel that their job is not a heroic one and do not feel really connected to their mission within the OPT, something touched upon before when the issues of policing tasks and dirty work were discussed. Breaking the routine, then, is something many soldiers seem to wait for; when a bomb is found at a checkpoint, everyone becomes alert again and morale is high. When a unit gets to be part of special, high profile operations, this is reason for enthusiasm. As I said before, many soldiers feel that the moment they get to experience ‘real’ action, as opposed to policing tasks, such as standing at checkpoints and patrolling the streets, they are finally doing what they were trained for. Soldiers, especially the younger ones, seem to be keen for ‘real’ combat.

Looking at the way Israeli youth is educated and how it is brought up in a way that idealizes combat service, this may come as no surprise. There is a strong dissonance between the way soldiers and young Israelis in general are socialized to become combatants and the reality of their military service. Omer, at the time of the interview just released from military service, had served in an elite paratrooper unit. He vividly remembered the emotions of the soldiers when going into the Territories at the beginning of their service and the change in attitude after becoming more experienced soldiers:

‘When you’re in the “training track” [\textit{maslul}] and they tell you to do an operation in the Territories, you are really happy, you are done with training, you want to really see, to do something with all these trainings. But after you are a fighter, after the track and everything you want to …you learned so much, you want to do something with that already. So in the beginning you are a bit happy, that you finally go on an operation, you are excited and all, that’s the way it is in the beginning, a bit of fear,

\textsuperscript{51} 	extit{Gibush} means cohesion. In this context we can use Ben-Ari’s definition in which the end product of \textit{gibush} ‘are motivated individuals who want to be together and a tightly knit military unit characterized by egalitarianism, solidarity, and strong boundaries and therefore capable of successfully carrying out missions’ (Ben-Ari 1998: 99).
which is good fear, because in that way you take care of yourself and you don’t get into a routine and start to take it easy [lizrok bakho].’ (16)

Doron, the paratrooper commander quoted before, had just received a call-up for reserve duty in the second Lebanon war (2006) when he was interviewed. He compared the attitude of people around him at the time of the interview and the feelings he and his comrades had during Operation Defensive Shield in 2002. Some people were just waiting for the action, for real combat.

‘It’s like the people now [war Lebanon August 2006], there is activity, a war, and even in Lebanon, this is where we were drafted for, for this we are here, it was more or less the same there, people were like, not just go out to arrest a boy who knows a boy whoknows a boy who threw a stone on someone. We are there, inside, there are armed people, which come out… [speaking about Operation Defensive Shield in 2002].’ (23)

Zadok, who served as a commander in the Nahal Brigade, recognized these feelings of enthusiasm as well when there was a sudden call-up for an operation that broke the routine of the soldiers:

‘At the moment there is a call up [bakpatsa] within half an hour everyone is in their equipment ... within half an hour, everyone is excited, crazy. So yes, that’s the way it goes in the operation, then after the operation it stays like a week or two, then you get back to the routine, till the next time that everyone jumps. It happens when there is a specific operation that is a bit different than the routine, when there is an arrest you see all the platoon commanders fight over who will get the operation. It breaks the routine of the guys, they wait for it, this is what they are looking for.’ (26)

Thus, routine is an important concept in the experience of soldiers in the OPT. When it is broken, soldiers’ morale is heightened and they seem to be more motivated to perform their military duties. Later, we shall see how the issue of routine contributes to the process of numbing soldiers go through. Even though every arena has its own dynamics, and thus its own routine, processes of numbing seem to set in everywhere. As Eviatar says above, the lack of interest in
their work can also decrease the attention of soldiers towards the civilians that cross the checkpoint and affect the way they treat them.

### 3.6 Relations of power

Before giving an example of a very important routine-breaking experience during the ‘Al-Aqsa Intifada’, I want to discuss the important issue of power within the experiences of soldiers and in their relations with the Palestinian ‘other’.

‘I was ashamed of myself the day I realized that I simply enjoy the feeling of power. I don’t believe in it: I think this is not the way to do anything to anyone, surely not to someone who has done nothing to you, but you can’t help but enjoy it. People do what you tell them. You know it’s because you carry a weapon. Knowing that if you didn’t have it, and if your fellow soldiers weren’t beside you, they would jump on you, beat the shit out of you, and stab you to death - you begin to enjoy it. Not merely enjoy it, you need it. And then, when someone suddenly says “No” to you, what do you mean no? Where do you draw the chutzpah from, to say no to me? Forget for a moment that I actually think that all those Jews are mad, and I actually want peace and believe we should leave the Territories, how dare you say no to me? I am the Law! I am the Law here! And then you sort of begin to understand that it makes you feel good. I remember a very specific situation: I was at a checkpoint, a temporary one, a so called strangulation checkpoint, it was a very small checkpoint, very intimate, four soldiers, no commanding officer, no protection worthy of the name, a true moonlighting job, blocking the entrance to a village. From one side a line of cars wanting to get out, and from the other side a line of cars wanting to pass, a huge line, and suddenly you have a mighty force at the tip of your fingers, as if playing a computer game. I stand there like this, pointing at someone, gesturing to you to do this or that, and you do this or that, the car starts, moves toward me, halts beside me. The next car follows, you signal, it stops. You start playing with them, like a computer game. You come here, you go there, like this. You barely move, you make them obey the tip of your finger. It’s a mighty feeling. It’s something you don’t experience elsewhere. You know it’s because you have a weapon, you know it’s because you are a soldier, you know all this, but it’s addictive. When I realized this … I checked in with myself to see what had happened to me. That’s it. And it was a big

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52 Referring to the Jewish settlers in Hebron, who are known to be very rightist and hard-liners in their politics.
bubble that burst. I thought I was immune, that is, how can someone like me, a thinking, articulate, ethical, moral man - things I can attest to about myself without needing anyone else to validate for me. I thought of myself as such. Suddenly, I notice that I’m getting addicted to controlling people.’ (BS Hebron)

This testimony, given by a former combatant to the organization Breaking the Silence, tells us about soldiers and the power that is bestowed upon them by the military, but also about how a soldier perceives this power and acts upon it. This soldier admits to the addictive features power has and he begins, contrary to all the expectations he has of himself, to enjoy the power he has over other people. He enjoys the ability to have people do whatever he wants them to do. And, when they do not comply, he gets angry because his power is being questioned. He is controlling people and thrives on this situation. However, this is not the only form of power that exists within the context of the work Israeli soldiers perform in the OPT.

The actions and the dynamics of the work of Israeli soldiers relating to the Palestinian population cannot, then, be understood without examining the concept of power on multiple levels. The notion of power stands at the very root of the relationship between soldiers and Palestinians and of their function as soldiers in general. Different dimensions of the role power plays in the life and work of Israeli soldiers are the feeling of power soldiers have while performing their tasks, the actual power that is bestowed on them by the military and the perception of the power that they have. But power also comes in more subtle, implicit forms such as the power of a mere gaze, of bodily behaviour and even of dress.

Looking at the literature within the social sciences on power, the two main approaches that emerge are a systemic or structural approach that looks at power relations through ‘division of labour, the legislative system and other structural features of society’ (Eriksen 2001: 158) and an agent-centred approach that focuses on making others do what you want them to do, people then having power over others (ibid.). I will discuss both approaches briefly.

M. Foucault is one of the most renowned thinkers on the issue of power, especially power in the form of discipline. He believed power could be found in the structure of our lives and societies but also in everyday language (Erikson 2001: 159), thus advancing a structural approach to power. He, furthermore, believed that consent of an actor ‘can be manufactured through intricate controlling mechanisms that produce norms, constitute interests, and shape behaviour’ (Gordon 2002: 125). Power, then, often lies in everyday mechanisms that make this power a natural and normal part of our lives.
These ideas come back in his much used panoptical idea. In his work on prisons, Foucault shows how the mere visibility of inmates would make them submissive and make them behave properly (1995) [1978]. The power the prison guards had over them was not direct, just implied by the possibility of being able to see the prisoners at any time. This is, then, a disciplinary gaze, which is the source of power as opposed to the use of force. From Foucault’s ideas we come to understand that people internalize and even embody the power of an authority, making it something natural. In his ideas on docile bodies this becomes especially clear. Such docile bodies are produced, for example, in the military: ‘the soldier has become something that can be made: out of a formless clay, an inapt body, the marching required can be constructed; posture is gradually corrected; a calculated constraint runs slowly through each part of the body, mastering it, making it pliable’ (Foucault 1995: 135).

In this same line of thought concerning ideas of structural power, T. Asad speaks of authoritative discourses within society as opposed to just looking at so called shared discourses and meanings (1979). We should look, he proposes, at whose discourse we are listening to and where these come from. Asad writes that what he often misses within anthropological research is the question ‘of whether there are not specific political economic conditions which make certain rhetorical forms objectively possible and authoritative’ (1979: 616) and he, thus, calls for a more thorough examining of the relations of power within which such discourses become authoritative. The danger of his approach is, however, that everything is reduced to power relations and no account is taken of the influence of culture on discourse and on power relations themselves (Tennekes 1990: 107–8).

Sociologist N. Elias sees power as a structural characteristic of relationships between people as well and his work focuses mostly on the unequal power balances that exist within all relationships (Tennekes 1990: 94–95). Such power relations change constantly and we should therefore speak of the relative competitive strength of the players and always try to understand people’s ideas from an analysis of the system these ideas are constructed within (ibid.). In his view, then, people with little power still have the ability to make changes or to influence those with the most power in hand; all players are interdependent.

An even more agency-centred approach to power is found in the influential work of M. Weber. His approach to power is agent-based as he sees power as ‘the ability to enforce one’s own will on others’ behaviour’ (cited in Eriksen 2001: 158) even against the other’s will. He talks about people having ‘dominance’ or Herrschaft over others. This dominance means having a legitimate authority over other people in an institutionalized form, as in relationships between students and teachers, employer and employee and the state and its citizens. Weber differentiates
between three different legitimate types of dominance; traditional dominance, which is rooted in belief, charismatic dominance (such as that of a prophet) and, finally, legal dominance, including, for example, the legitimate use of power and violence by the state. The latter type he views as the rational basis of power in modern society, for which bureaucracy is a prime example (Slattery 2003: 27).

Within this research, as mentioned before, power relations can be analysed at different levels and, thus, different theoretical approaches are applicable. First of all, we could say there is a great amount of direct power being wielded between individuals or groups: between soldiers and their commanders and especially between soldiers and Palestinians. Here a more agency-centred approach would be fitting even though the power of soldiers is often not seen as legitimate by the Palestinians as Weber would have it. The soldiers’ power results from actual force or the threat of force and is hence much less abstract than within the structural or agent-centred approach. Besides force, the way the soldiers dress, their weapons and their body language are also sources of power.

What we are talking about here is, thus, a very direct form of power which is embodied in soldiers’ behaviour, weapons and dress but also in the space within which they operate, especially the checkpoint. Its form and its sole purpose are very clearly embedded within unequal power relations. As I shall show shortly, the concrete form of power soldiers have over Palestinian civilians can lead to very dangerous and explosive situations.

Secondly, there is a high degree of structural power within an institution such as the military. The soldiers are under constant pressure to perform and to avoid punishment by their superiors. Foucault’s concept of the disciplinary gaze is, then, very useful in this context, together with his ideas about the docile body. Soldiers’ minds and bodies are disciplined within the military to think and act in a certain way by means of the structural elements incorporated in their socialization as soldiers.

This form of power is always present in the background of this research. However, often a more concrete form of power is being referred to. This power comes from the monopoly of violence the military has and its concrete dominance over the Palestinian civilian population.

Power and responsibility
Young soldiers in the IDF are given a great amount of power. They control the Palestinian civilian population in the OPT and as the following quotes will show, this power is easily abused. Power for soldiers in the OPT springs from the responsibility that is given to them, especially at the checkpoints. Very young soldiers become checkpoint commanders which means they are the
ones to decide who can go through and who cannot, who has to be checked and who does not. With this responsibility, a strong feeling of power emerges. When a Palestinian, for example, does not listen to a soldier or starts an argument, this responsibility is questioned and the chances of such an encounter becoming violent (either verbally or physically) are relatively high. The feeling of dominance and power becomes so internalized that when it is questioned, a soldier can often react harshly.

Power and its addictive features numb the moral insights of soldiers. A person can get addicted to a sense of power and almightiness and can easily lose his ability to make morally just decisions. Guy, an officer who served with the paratroopers, talks about how he experienced this feeling of power:

‘God, I can do everything. It’s terrible, I told you I really, really tried for it not to happen, I was really … this power, and soldiers feel it. You can’t use, it’s possible to use it, yes when I get into an arrest operation lets say, in a house with someone, I have to show myself as powerful, I have to show this power with the weapon.’ (29)

Liron realizes that the power of soldiers is related to the responsibility they are given. As he was a sniper, he gives the following example to illustrate this point:

‘They give a lot of power to young officers. People of 22-23 get a lot of power. To the level of sitting with a sniper on the spot and telling him to shoot at everyone who is picking up a stone, they’re telling the sniper who is a 19-year-old kid that is looking through the rifle sight and can also see a child of 10-12 years old. He has the option to shoot…That power they’re giving you is very blurred, very unclear.’ (12)

Liron also maintains that the power such a young person gets is very ‘blurred’ and can, thus, be very confusing. The following quotes all point to the feeling of almightiness that soldiers get, the degree of power over other people and the way this power can be easily abused:

‘There is a lot of tension, a lot of tension, they know that, however sad it is to say, they know that I’m in charge of their lives, that I decide who gets money and who doesn’t get money, who … gets to work or not. A lot of soldiers play with that, they like the power they have in their hands, the Arabs act very fake at the checkpoint, they know that you are sort of the king here, and it’s very problematic.’ (23)
'It is, in a way, a very good feeling because you can do whatever you want, you’re the master of your actions, tell them what to do and they'll do it because they're afraid. And here enters the discretion and maturity of the soldiers which is not always to be found... a lot of disasters happen here, because the moment you give an 18-year-old such power he can do horrible things, he may do ... normal ... things, I can’t say good things ... In principle, you shouldn’t let people pass. People will beg you because you have a weapon, people know that you are actually their gateway to a certain place, and they have to convince you, if they want to get there.’ (BS Hebron)

‘The crazy thing is that you stand there, an IDF soldier, okay? You've got a machine gun and it's loaded and the safety catch is off. [Talking to Palestinian] So what? Are you an idiot? How dare you not listen to me? I can shoot you at any given moment. I can split your head open with the butt of my gun and chances are my commander will give me a pat on the back and say: “That's showing them. Finally you got it right”. Where do you get the nerve? How come you don't understand? How come you don't see the total control I have over you? Like, it's crazy! I'm just a kid. I was born yesterday. I derive my power from my uniform and my machine gun; it's what gives me the right to decide everything. And I do what I'm told to. That's the power I have and I use it. I can be the most enlightened and considerate person in the world but when I say: “mamnu` tajawul, rub `al beit” [there’s a curfew, go home] there is a period and four exclamation marks at the end of that sentence. It's non-negotiable. I don't care if I'm 18 or 17 or 21. I'm a soldier. I've got a gun and I'm from the IDF. I've got orders, and they better follow them. They'd better follow the orders I give them. I give the orders here. In fact, they're civilians unrelated to me, and I'm giving them orders all the time ... and they'll follow them whether they like it or not. And if they don't like it, if they make trouble, then I'll force them to follow them. Why? Good question. A very good question. I really don't know... just because. Because it's shit. That's what it is.’ (BS Hebron)

Responsibility, then, comes with a great deal of concrete power for which many soldiers are not ready, either because of their age or because of their lack of experience with respect to the function they perform. In the quotes above one can sense a realization of the problematic side of having this power. However, this realization usually only surfaces after soldiers have finished
their regular military service and after they have had some time to reflect on their activities as soldiers. While on duty, the feeling of controlling and having power over people seems to override emotions of empathy towards other persons or the global understanding by soldiers of what their activities really encompass.

![Figure 14](image)

**Figure 14**
Soldier having himself photographed in a Palestinian taxi (photo: courtesy of Breaking the Silence)

**Discipline**

‘Discipline … is a type of power … comprising a whole set of instruments, techniques, procedures, levels of application, targets: it is a “physics” or an “anatomy” of power, a technology’ (Foucault 1995: 215). As such, discipline is a very important ‘technology’ used by the military in order to establish its own power and authority. On a different level, it is used to express the power soldiers have and to re-establish this when it is questioned. Soldiers use mechanisms of discipline when they feel Palestinians need to be ‘taught a lesson’ because they do not listen, to make them see ‘who is in charge’.

In line with Foucault’s work, I would like to touch upon the subject of punishment and education by soldiers as a means of ‘reinforcing or reorganizing their internal mechanism of power’ (Foucault 1995: 215). As mentioned before, Israeli soldiers have a lot of responsibility and decision-making power at the checkpoint. When their power or authority is questioned, for example by a Palestinian who ‘talks back’ or refuses to do as he is told by the soldiers, one method employed is that of ‘corrective punishment’. Against official military orders, but often with the knowledge of commanders in the field, soldiers, for example, can keep Palestinians
waiting at the checkpoint for a few hours ‘to dry up’. Or they can take the keys of their cars and make them walk home for a few kilometres. Reasons given for such activities are ‘to show who is in charge’ and ‘to teach them a lesson’; in other words to re-establish one’s power through discipline. Palestinians, to use Foucault once more, are made docile.

Adam, the deputy company commander from the combat engineers, recalls the power that was given to the junior commanders under his own command:

‘For example I find fifteen people set aside at the checkpoint. But I know there were only seven names on the list. It’s discipline by the Squad Commander. The Squad Commander is the king of the checkpoint… It doesn’t interest me if you stop explosives, it interests me that no one dares to try and take explosives. He makes other decisions. Sometimes it’s an Arab that called him a name, the soldier, and I understand him a 100 percent … but he will leave him two hours extra to “teach him” [educate him] and that’s the problem of the checkpoints. The simplest soldier is an educator.’(1)

In the following two quotes further understanding of such behaviour from soldiers at checkpoints can be found:

‘It can be that other people would take the 2 people that were making problems, put them aside, blindfold them, put handcuffs, and put them in the sun, so they’ll learn. No wonder there are people that do that … Why? Because you haven’t been home for 2 weeks, you do 8-8 at the checkpoint, you are hot, you are thirsty; it’s the easiest.’ (11)

‘if they start shouting, you stop them on purpose [dawka]. And you’ll make the check longer. They live it daily so they know the rules. Shut your mouth and it will be OK. Cooperate.’ (13)

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53 ‘Dry up’ or *yibush* is the detaining of Palestinians at a checkpoint for several hours, usually without any reason other than as ‘punishment’.
Within the discourse of soldiers, the theme of ‘educating’ can be observed. A clear effort is made (which can be detected in the quotations above) to establish one’s power through methods that will teach the Palestinians something in such a way that they will not repeat their mistake. Ben-Ari et al. have rightly argued that similarities can be found between the way recruits are educated and disciplined in basic training and the way these recruits, in turn, use these mechanisms on the Palestinian civilians they face (2004).

3.7 Breaking the routine: Operation Defensive Shield, a case study

Operation Defensive Shield (ODS) was an operation carried out by the IDF in the West Bank as a reaction to a series of suicide attacks within Israel, the last one of these being the attack on the Park Hotel in the coastal city of Netanya on the eve of Passover in March 2002. At the beginning of April 2002, the IDF invaded all the large Palestinian cities except for Hebron and Jericho in order to uncover and destroy the infrastructure of Palestinian terrorist activity. For the period of the fighting, six large Palestinian cities were placed under curfew. The fighting in the refugee camp of Jenin became (in)famous due to the heavy fighting and because of the subsequent visit of UN officials who were highly critical of the conduct of the Israeli military, stating that there had been an excessive use of violence. Besides the battle in Jenin, the siege of Yasser Arafat’s compound was also one of the big events of the operation.

Many of the informants interviewed for this study served as conscript soldiers in this operation and it proved a formative experience for them. Here I would like to explore the routine of the work of Israeli soldiers from a somewhat different viewpoint. As noted before, sudden
activities and unexpected operations break up the routine of soldiers. During Operation Defensive Shield, Israeli soldiers suddenly found themselves, in many instances for the first time, in actual situations of combat, of life-threatening danger and of exchanging fire with enemy troops. This operation, thus, threw soldiers out of their routine into an extraordinary experience that stayed with them for a long time.

From the soldiers’ stories, a sense of heightened motivation to participate in this military operation became clear. After the routine at the checkpoints, routine arrests and patrolling, suddenly there was a feeling of ‘the real work’, a sense of mission. The soldiers (finally) felt they were doing the work for which they were conscripted; they were defending their state, defending their families. This contrast with the concepts I explored before is informative, as it gives us some insights into the way the Israeli soldier views his activities as a combat soldier: what he is doing and what he should be doing.

A few examples will be given here of soldiers participating in ODS and of the feelings that came with this. The naval captain quoted below, interviewed by Breaking the Silence, talks about his first combat experience on his boat during the operation and his impatience to commence shooting:

‘I wanted to shoot, wanted to carry out the shooting from a boat that hadn’t engaged in combat for a long time or killed a saboteur, and this represented a real opportunity. All of us [on the boat] felt very excited. Night after night boats returned from nightly duty without firing a single shot, and now we had such an opportunity. Our feeling was imbued by the aura of “Defensive Shield”, the [suicide] attacks preceding it and the tension. No wonder I wanted to shoot.’ (BS fire opening)

Yossi had very vivid memories of ODS and most of the interview revolved around the stories of his experiences during this operation. He took part in the battle of Jenin as a young commander and lost comrades there. This experience of taking responsibility for his soldiers in real combat was immensely formative for him as a soldier, but also as a person in general. Coming from a leftist house in a kibbutz, he was determined to keep his head cool and not get carried away by a rage for revenge as many other soldiers did. He was very critical about the conduct of his fellow soldiers during this operation:\textsuperscript{54}

\textsuperscript{54} After the many suicide attacks by Palestinian terror organizations in Israel, many of the soldiers who participated in ODS felt they needed to take revenge, to avenge the Israeli victims of the attacks.
‘there were people, especially with the chain of bombings, it started with Hotel Park, I don’t remember, there was this week of another 4-5 bombings, that’s it, the IDF now has to take everything down. It’s something that you felt. People said come on lets go in, we have to and all that, I didn’t feel it, I got orders and I did it as good as possible, I didn’t let myself … I said okay there were bombings, the IDF has to respond, I’m in the IDF, I need to respond, without connection to whether it is legitimate or not. It would take away my self-respect if I thought “he went and blew himself up so now I have to get in and kill everyone” and there were people that those were their opinions. To me it didn’t happen. I took myself … really to make the distinction, if you get into a house inside the refugee camp, after people were killed, and you do get into a house, to treat with respect, and to give water, and if there is a little girl to help them, to isolate them but to be in touch with them, and it could be that his brother is the one that is shooting at me from the front, but there is nothing you can do, you have to make this distinction, I did it, but not everyone made that distinction. There was horrible treatment [of Palestinians]. Really humiliating. In speech, in hitting, to get in there, boom, really like I need to pee, if there is no toilet, do it in the room, really nothing, erasing, like they are invisible, like there is no one there. No respectful treatment … Also … that’s why I say, I don’t judge people because also with the atmosphere that was in Israel, with all the bombings…’ (17)

Haggai, who served in the Golani Brigade as a squad commander, remembers the attitude of the soldiers around him as well and emphasizes the emotions that they experienced during ODS:

‘You have 18-year-old guys and you teach them to fight and you push them and they walk around with all those bullets and don’t use them and suddenly they can. They teach him to shoot on all kinds of “tools” he only saw in movies, and now he has the opportunity and I also hate them, as it happens I also hate them because I see them exploding on my friends every day on television. So why not … of course there is a why not, you don’t think too much, you are 18-19 you are sure you are an adult.’ (9)

The experience of most Israeli soldiers during big operations like Operation Defensive Shield could be seen as unusual ‘breaks’ within their otherwise monotonous and routine work.
These experiences, stressful as they may be, seem to give soldiers an opportunity to live out their combat ideal. It furthermore strengthens the claim that the routine activities of Israeli soldiers in the OPT of controlling another population cause a degree of demoralization accompanied by attrition in the form of frustration, fatigue and the like, which in turn result in physical and mental numbing. Even when in action and in situations of stress and combat, a certain amount of numbing of the senses sets in that, as we shall see later on, can make soldiers behave in immoral ways and which blurs the moral understanding of their surroundings.

3.8 Conclusion

If we want to understand how soldiers deal with moral dilemmas and the moral issues around them, we have to gain insights into the way soldiers are affected by their spatial surroundings and how this in the end influences their moral behaviour. In this chapter the ‘scene’ was set for this work and the most central working arenas (or moral regions) of Israeli soldiers in the OPT were discussed: checkpoints, arrests, ‘straw widows’ and patrolling. The checkpoints, static places where soldiers were often in direct contact with the Palestinians, the arrests and ‘straw widows’, during which they actually entered the private Palestinian domain, and the patrolling of the Palestinian streets all have their own characteristics, but all exhibit a certain work routine for the soldiers. The concepts of physical closeness, routine and power were all shown to be very central notions in the work of Israeli soldiers and these were therefore also discussed in this chapter. In the next chapter the effects of the daily work soldiers carry out within the arenas that were discussed here will be examined on three different levels: the emotional, the physical and the cognitive.