

Labor Across Militarized Borders: A Comparative Analysis of Israel's "Security Wall" and the U.S./Mexico Border.

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Settler colonial states rely on militarized borders in order to police the boundaries of legal and illegal membership. Implicit in the militarized border is an informal illegal migration of bodies for labor. Rather than an unintended consequence of national borders, the informal labor market is constitutive of the borderlands. In order to understand the relationship of national borders to informal "illegal" labor migration, this paper focuses on the conjuncture of two militarized borders: Israel's "security wall" and the U.S./Mexico border.

Drawing on investigative journalism conducted for the Public Broadcasting Service's FRONTLINE/World, the paper offers a comparative reading of informal labor migration in the Palestinian village of Wadi Fukin and labor migration across the U.S./Mexico border. The farmers of Wadi Fukin, who were recently cut off from the markets in Bethlehem by a new permanent checkpoint, now find work by illegally crossing the border into nearby Israel settlements. What looks like an unintended consequence has instead become a strategy for Israel to find a new pool of bodies desperate to perform the labor needed to build the settlements that make up the heart of their settler colonial state. Meanwhile, across the globe, U.S. politicians work to increase the militarization of the country's border that feeds the racist fears of the American public, complicit in the knowledge that without enough illegal bodies the economy of America's settler colonial state would collapse.

At stake in making this comparison is the ability to make visible the forgotten settler colonial presence at the U.S./Mexico borderlands and the exploitative labor consequences implicit in both the planning and long term goals of Israeli's security wall. Indeed, the comparison shows a conjuncture that helps me better understand settler colonial labor practices.