At Checkpoints: Visual Regimes of Border Crossings in Mexico and Palestine

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The notion of borders, and of border crossings, is primarily visual. Intrinsic to national formations, geo-cultural spaces such as borders and checkpoints are also embedded in the history and identity of groups inhabiting specific territories.

Violent encounters of migrants with US officials and Palestinians with the Israeli military constitute an ordinary occurrence of warfare, even in times of “peace.” Examining testimonies documenting these experiences, I will focus on how people negotiate the affective dimension of these experiences in the Mexico-US border and the Israeli checkpoints. This comparative approach would allow us to interrogate the application of colonial models at the small scale of certain localities.

The paper will incorporate a close reading of photographs that circulate arbitrarily in popular culture. The aim is to highlight the juncture at which the disciplining of bodies in regulated spaces cannot be separated from the images that capture and reproduce these experiences of subjection.

The paper will argue that in these militarized regions, the gap between the material and the representational, that is, between the military and visual regimes, is overwhelmingly diminished by asymmetrical relations of power, a condition that aims to normalize these violent encounters as parts of daily life.