'At Least I've Done Something!'

Living with Integrity: Ethical Engagements in Israel/Palestine

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Valerie Giesen, 15.4.2014 London

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Abstract

This paper analyses the ethical practice of the Israeli women's group Machsom Watch which protests the 1967 Occupation of Palestine at the military checkpoints in the West Bank. Members are acutely aware of their inability to destabilise the Occupation and are highly critical of their implication therein. Nevertheless, many have worked with the group for years. I contend that their political activity is integral to their evaluation of their lives as virtuous subjects. With reference to their high moral standards and determination to live with integrity, I argue that political protest is conceived as an opportunity to bring conduct in line with an abstract conception of virtue. However, at the checkpoints action inevitably leads to political and moral contradictions. In order to make sense of members' return to the sites that compromise their moral integrity, I suggest treating checkpoint shifts as an ethical technique which renews the desire to 'do something' about the occupation as Machsom Watchers acquire a visceral awareness of the gap between their moral standards and the reality of the Occupation. Understood thus, the impossibility of virtuous action in the context of the Occupation sustains members' commitment urge to doing all they can, namely returning to the checkpoints. The role of ethical practice in sustaining ostensibly political practice underscores that 'ethics' and 'politics' are intimately intertwined.

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0. Introduction

> 'As you know, the army and all the system are for the settlers and the soldiers and all this. So, trying to be violent in our situation as we are now is helpless, is senseless. We cannot do anything. We can just *watch* and tell them: "We are against you. What you are doing, you are not doing in my name. And if you think you defend me, it's not *true*! Because of your activity you risk *me* – and my future." But we cannot do much and, in fact, we do not make any, any change.'[1]

I met Hagar, an energetic woman in her 60s, over coffee in a Jerusalemite suburb. Throughout our conversation about Machsom Watch (MW), a group of Israeli women who protest Israel's 1967 Occupation of Palestine at the military checkpoints (*machsomim*), Hagar dismisses my questions about the group's positive impact. In some ways, she says, the group is even contributing to the smooth administration of the checkpoints. When I ask why she volunteers with the group every week, she is adamant that she must continue: 'No, no. I want to spread out the word! I want to tell the whole world: "Look! It's a crime! And it's happening every day, every day, every day." Unfortunately, nobody wants to hear it. But we still go.'[2] Like Hagar, all my interviewees were disabused of the hope to destabilise the Occupation. Nonetheless, Machsom Watchers (MWers) can be found at most permanent checkpoints in the West Bank on a daily basis, as they have since 2001.[3] Their continued activity raises the question of why activists continue their work when it fails to weaken the sources of injustice and may even implicate them in maintaining the status quo.

I begin by introducing the tensions and limitations inherent in MW's work. My concern is not with the normative coherence or political efficacy of their practice but with how they evaluate and work on their actions and, ultimately, their lives in a situation that poses profound moral and political challenges. I argue that members' commitment to their work despite its limitations arises from an ethical preoccupation with 'how to live'. Treating ethics as the concern with, and work on, the self (after Foucault, 1994), I distinguish between the moral ideals to which MWers aspire and the discursive and bodily techniques through which they fashion themselves as ethical subjects. Faced with the material impossibility of dismantling the checkpoints and the moral impossibility of inaction, checkpoint shifts are techniques for living ethically; yet as the dilemmas

[1] Hagar, interviewed by author, 20.8.2013, West Jerusalem.
[2] ditto
[3] An online archive of detailed reports attests to this (Machsom Watch, 2014).

posed by the Occupation cannot satisfactorily be resolved, these techniques inevitably engender moral contradictions. Thus, continuing work at the checkpoints is at once the most and the least members can do. In this way MWers are unlike the subjects of Foucauldian analyses of ethical self-fashioning, who feel it is possible to attain an ideal mode of life by internalising authoritative norms using requisite techniques (Hirschkind, 2001; Mahmood, 2005). Prior analyses of ethical self-formation in contexts where virtuous action is rendered impossible posit that ethical practice continues despite this 'impossibility' (Feldman, 2000; Givoni, 2011a). Contrary to this, I place MWers' recognition that virtuous action at the checkpoints is impossible centre stage and argue that this experience renews the desire to 'do something' and members' refusal to establish 'normal' lives in the context of the occupation. This makes their practice remarkably resilient in a perilous situation. Their experience demonstrates the political dimension of ethical practice which has contributed to sustaining MW for over 13 years as its relevance to members is fairly independent of the political setbacks experienced. My analysis of MW thus highlights the intertwining of ethical and political practice and – by extension – the relevance of investigating the formation of ethical subjects that constitute the conditions of possibility for certain political projects.

Although this paper focusses on the concerns of Israeli activists, I hold that – empirically and politically – Israel cannot be understood separately from Palestine. My focus on Jewish Israeli activists' attempts to live with integrity does not aim to elide this interwovenness. Instead, it arises from the conviction that the conditions of possibility of Israeli anti-occupation projects may point to cracks within the fabric of the occupying power and thus constitute a valuable enquiry from the perspective of Israel's and Palestine's enmeshment.

1. Methodology and Research Ethics

This paper is based on 15 semi-structured interviews with long-term members of MW conducted in Israel between 2012 and 2013 in English and German as well as my observations during three checkpoint shifts.[4] I conducted semi-structured interviews, because I was interested in activists' personal commitment to their practice, rather than the checkpoints as particular places themselves. My concern was not to collect representative data in order to generalise across the group, but to develop conceptual categories that speak to members' experience and trace the internal tensions of their work. Therefore, I interviewed members from both ends of the group's ideological spectrum. In 2012, I contacted the group via its website and met two members in person. Subsequently, I was referred to other members in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem by interviewees. I chose to focus on these for lack of time and funding to build links to the northern (Haifa) and southern (Beersheba) branches. Furthermore, Tel Aviv and Jerusalem branches are regarded as exemplary for the ideological extremes within the group. Due to my lack of Hebrew and my focus on individual members' experience I have not analysed internal documents or media representations of the group. Where necessary I complemented my interview material with academic work translated from Hebrew as well as accounts published by members themselves.

Interviews lasted between one and three hours. They took place in members' homes or nearby cafes that allowed for a relaxed atmosphere. With my interviewees' permission, I recorded interviews in order to let conversations flow naturally. Overall, my interlocutors were not particularly concerned with the reasons for my research or my political views and I did not impose my self-disclosure on them. Usually, I explained that I was working on a university project on Israeli initiatives against the Occupation after having spent time in a Palestinian refugee camp previously. In a few cases, members confronted me with their views on an acceptable settlement of the Israeli Occupation, demanding I position myself. At no point did I insist on contradicting interviewees' foundational beliefs as I feared risking the end of the conversation, even if this did not do justice to my political views and ran counter to my ideal of modelling interviews on a 'true dialogue' (Reinharz, 1992:33). I was acutely aware that many themes in our conversations were deeply personal and problematic to my interlocutors, and I did not pursue issues that interviewers were visibly reluctant to discuss. Certainly, my overall caution

[4] My interviewees have all been members of MW for 10 years or longer.

was also owed to the age difference between my interlocutors (most of whom were beyond 60) and myself.

My interview questions were complemented by interviewees' concerns over the course of my research. However, I pursued several themes throughout all interviews: Members' social background, their wider political commitments and views on modern-day Israel, their motivations for joining MW, as well as their views on appropriate modes of activity. Based on my original research question, I also explored how MWers framed and communicated their practice to the Israeli public as well as friends and family. Despite the benefits of 'reflexive' research in which the analysis of my interviews fed into the research design and data collection, this also posed challenges (Hammersly and Atkinson, 1995:205). It was only after my return from Israel/ Palestine that I decided to place MWers' intense self-critique and concomitant insistence on continuing their engagement at the centre of my enquiry.

Scholarly work on MW examines the (gendered) forms that members' practice takes at the checkpoints as well as their production of testimony. I complement this literature with a focus on individual members and ask why activists continue their work despite agreement on its ultimate futility. I approach this question by engaging Foucault's conception of the 'care of the self' (Foucault, 1994d) and ethnographic accounts of ethical self-formation (Mahmood, 2005; Hirschkind, 2001; Givoni, 2011a; Feldman, 2000). My analysis of MWers' ethical practice draws on a discursive analysis of the interviews conducted with MWers. In light of the productive role of MWers' inability to conform to their moral standards at the checkpoints, I extend previous analyses of ethical action in hostile terrains to argue that moral quandaries may in fact enable (political) action.

2. Compromised Action

MW has its origins in the early days of the Second Intifada when several Israeli women read about human rights abuses at the checkpoints in the West Bank (Kotef and Amir, 2007:974). The Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) has been using checkpoints to control Palestinians' movement in the West Bank since 1991 (Naaman, 2006:170). During the Oslo years, permanent checkpoints grew in number, and a permit system was introduced for Palestinians entering Israel (Naaman, 2006:170). Since the beginning of the Second Intifada in late September 2000, checkpoints also separate Palestinian towns (Keshet, 2006:15) and residents are required to apply to the Israeli Civil Administration[5] for mobility permits to cross them (Naaman, 2006:170). In light of the damage done to the Palestinian population and the checkpoints' use to create facts on the ground MW was founded in 2001 to protest the Occupation (Keshet, 2006:27), protect the human rights of Palestinians moving within the West Bank and report the Occupation's effects at home and abroad (Keshet, 2006:36). To this end, MWers are present at permanent checkpoints throughout the West Bank daily. After each shift, reports are published in Hebrew and English on MW's website. Although not explicitly stated in the group's mandate, MWers' founders hoped that their testimony would serve in war crimes tribunals or for the formation of a collective memory in the future (Keshet, 2006:36). At its peak between 2005 and 2009, MW included more than 400 women (Amir, unpublished:3) and currently, the group has about 300 members.[6]

2.1. External Constraints

Throughout its existence MW has attained a degree of visibility in the Israeli public.[7] However, despite its impressive growth, the group has not been able to reach a wider audience and become a serious political force. In our conversations, many MWers expressed frustration that their reports have little impact on public opinion in Israel and that it has proven impossible to direct sustained media attention to the day-to-day reality of the checkpoints. Moreover, MWers who attempt to engage the Israeli press are caught between refusing the terms of public debate in order to insist on the end of the 1967 Occupation and working within its limits in order to be

[5] The Civil Administration is the Israeli body responsible for civil and security issues in the West Bank in liaison with the IDF. It has full administrative authority over the Palestinian population in Areas 'C'.
[6] Ruth, interviewed by author, 20.8.2013, West Jerusalem.
[7] For instance, in 2004, a Palestinian man was photographed by a member of MW when he was ordered to play his violin at a checkpoint by IDF soldiers to prove that he was not carrying explosives in it. The image called forth associations of the Holocaust when Jews were ordered to play music in concentration camps and MW gained great public attention from the incident (Ginsburg, 2009).

'heard' by the centres of power (Clarke, 2002:120). Most MWers come from the dominant stratum of Israeli Society. The vast majority are Ashkenazi and most are university-educated and financially independent (Mansbach, 2012:54). Their ideological commitments extend from the centre of the Israeli political spectrum to its left fringes. Initially, an image of 'mothers that care' dominated reporting on MW's work (Mansbach, 2012:56). As the group's political aims became clearer, this benevolent gendered portrayal was tempered (Mansbach, 2012:56). Now, representations of MW as a 'radical' leftist group range from that of 'crazy' old women to sexualised 'Arabs' whores' who have left the national fold (Kotef and Amir, 2007:990; Deutsch-Nadir, 2005:62). These hostile reactions can be explained in part by the challenge MW poses to the IDF's authority over Israeli national security discourse which continues to marginalise women's and civilians' voices (Deutsch-Nadir, 2005:43). MWers question the rationale of the checkpoint regime which, they insist, does not increase Israelis' security within the Green Line, but systematically harms the Palestinian population (Deutsch-Nadir, 2005:43). However, as women and civilians MWers' political voice on matters of national security is particularly precarious (Kotef, 2011:556).

2.2. Gendered Exclusions

MW was established as an all-women's group based on several considerations. Throughout Israel's history, the construction of masculinity has been closely related to the military (Sasson-Levy, 2003:323). The militaristic valorisation of masculinity extends far beyond the IDF itself, constituting a central organising principle of society (Kimmerling, 2003:199). Therefore, the group's founders felt that it would be difficult for men to engage non-confrontationally with the security forces (Keshet, 2006:35). They were also concerned that male members would relegate women to a secondary, supportive role and envisioned MW as a feminist project. MW's founders conceived of their presence in the military's realm as a challenge to gendered military authority and an opportunity for women to acquire expertise and a voice on matters of national security (Keshet, 2006:35-36). MWers' status as Jewish, Israeli citizens and their ability to confront and persuade soldiers in Hebrew is integral to their leverage at the checkpoints. Although they are able to use their knowledge about the checkpoints' administration vis-à-vis new recruits, members' authority is tenuous at best, and their concerns are often belittled as naïve. These exclusions are informed by the gendered nature of Israeli national security discourse. Without fail, my interlocutors offered stories about young soldiers insisting 'old women' did not understand

that their work was essential to Israel's security. Lilith, the daughter of a founding member of the Haganah[8], recalled a young soldier's indignation at her protest.

> "Who are you to understand such matters? This is a matter that the army knows, not old women. Because I am here you can sleep quietly in Tel Aviv." And then, Lilith said, one day the said checkpoint was simply removed by the IDF. 'So I thought – this soldier – what does he think? He was so convinced that because of being there Israel is safe, and all of a sudden the checkpoint doesn't exist.'[9]

Some members consciously mobilise their gendered position to persuade soldiers to be more lenient towards Palestinians. However, when their presence is perceived as a challenge to the IDF's masculine authority over security issues, MWers' ability to influence individual decisions is undermined by the gendered structure it mobilises. Dorit, a former architect, points out the contradictory effects of members' 'feminine' presence.

> 'Ok, so the soldiers. They resent us; they really didn't want us. Because we looked over their shoulder, we, you know, and we saw what they did and also because they wanted to show that they were in control and didn't need women to come and show them how to do things.'[10]

Similarly, a vocal group of members is concerned that the strategic use of femininity reinforces the gendered nature of Israeli debates on 'national security' with debilitating political effects for women's and civilians' voices.

2.3. The Architecture of the Occupation

In addition to the intrinsic political limitations of mobilising gendered subject positions for achieving minimal changes in soldiers' behaviour, members' scope of action has been compromised by changes in the spatial organisation of the IDF's permanent checkpoints since the early 2000s. Initially, checkpoints were makeshift barriers which barely separated military personnel from MWers, allowing members to observe soldiers' conduct and produce comprehensive reports. Today's 'terminals' organise the bodies passing through them in determinate channels, controlling movement via tight turnstiles. Glass windows and metal bars physically separate soldiers from Palestinians and MWers. This has affected members' ability to overlook and monitor soldiers' conduct towards Palestinians. On a different level, some members

[8] The Haganah was a loose organisation of local Jewish paramilitary groups in the British Mandate of Palestine from 1920 to 1948. It later formed the core of the nascent IDF.
[9] Lilith, interviewed by author, 14.8.2013, Tel Aviv.
[10] Dorit, interviewed by author, 8.8.2013, Tel Aviv.

struggle with a sense of speechlessness vis-à-vis the impersonal monstrosity of the terminals (Kotef and Amir, 2007:982). They recount shocking cases of overt violence from the group's early days and point out that today's increasingly bureaucratised, impersonal violence at the checkpoints does not attract the attention of the Israeli or international press.

2.4. Internal Divisions

Over time, MWers have grown increasingly aware of the constraints on their activity. As a result, the group has developed a complicated relationship to reform. MW is fully volunteer-run and organised non-hierarchically, giving members considerable freedom to navigate the emotional, practical and political challenges of protesting the checkpoint regime. In the absence of tangible political change, some members have come to assist Palestinians who are denied passage or harassed by military personnel during their shifts (Kotef and Amir, 2007:975). Others assist Palestinians who have been 'black-listed' by the IDF and cannot obtain work or travel permits to Israel, monitor the military courts in which West Bank Palestinians are prosecuted by the Israeli authorities, conduct tours to the West Bank for Israelis and lead women's groups in Palestinian villages (Amir, unpublished:3).

Individual members' ties to high-ranking military officials are emblematic of MW's ambivalent relationship to reforming the checkpoints' administration. MW is widely recognised as a 'human rights' group which places it in a problematic relationship with military strategy. The trend towards defining legitimate military violence in terms of reducing harm to the 'necessary evil' has opened militaries to the demands of human rights and humanitarian agents (Weizman, 2011:117). MWers' unhindered access to the checkpoints stems from the symbolic capital which the 'most humane army of the world' derives from permitting a human rights organisation to monitor its activities (Mansbach, 2012:55). Admittedly, the overall logic of the Israeli Occupation is not designed to reduce the harm done to the Palestinian population (Pfingst and Rosengarten, 2012). However, the IDF is at pains to demonstrate its efforts to minimise the use of force at the checkpoints (Kotef, 2011:553). It has even come to treat MWers as 'enabling critics' (Weizman, 2011:117) and individual members lobby high-ranking military officials for changes in the administration of the checkpoints. Ruth, a charismatic member of German descent in her 70s, advises the IDF on a regular basis. 'It's not always bad. The Occupation has learned a few little lessons', she told me. During this year's Ramadan, the IDF lowered the age limit for Palestinians allowed to travel to Jerusalem to pray.

> 'How do you think this happened? Shouting all year long! Every time I met anyone of these officers who have a say: I said to them, you need to lower – and I'm telling you, if I'm still alive next year another five years are going to go. *Five years* went!'[11]

Unsurprisingly, there has been a lively debate about appropriate modes of activity throughout MW's existence. My interlocutors readily identified their own position in the polarised debate which extends between 'political' and 'humanitarian' action. The former refers to protesting the Occupation of 1967 and reporting from the checkpoints. 'Protest' was identified as the presence of dissenting civilians of the occupying force in the realm of the Israeli military and problematising the effects of the Occupation on Palestinian life by creating a record of its everyday injustices. This position was distinguished from 'humanitarian' engagement. MWers' use of the term did not point to the provision of life-sustaining material support to the Palestinian population (Fassin, 2007; Fassin and Vasquez, 2005) but assisting individual Palestinians who are denied passage and effecting changes in the administration of the checkpoints to curb abuse. MWers who are supportive of 'humanitarian' engagement do not call MW's founding principles into question, but feel an additional obligation to use their privileged position as Israelis to help individuals where possible, even if this involves 'cooperating' with the IDF.

Considering the limitations of MW's work and the group's internal divisions it is extraordinary that the group has survived for 13 years. Despite the tensions inherent in its work, MW has undeniably contributed to politicising the impact of the checkpoints on Palestinian life which was barely acknowledged in Israel and abroad before the organisation gained momentum (Kotef and Amir, 2007:993). For instance, a parliamentary committee was established to monitor the IDF's checkpoints – avowedly in response to MW's activities (Keshet, 2006:47). Nevertheless, my interviewees agreed that their contribution towards delegitimising the checkpoint regime have been modest at best and that MW has become implicated in the smooth functioning of the Occupation.

[11] Ruth, interviewed by author, 20.8.2013, West Jerusalem.

3. Ethical Engagements

As my interviewees spelled out the political limitations of their work, I was struck by their insistence that they must nevertheless 'do something' about the Occupation. When I asked Lilith why she continues her activity with MW, she pointed out that she did not understand 'doing something' in terms of achieving visible change.

> 'The partisans in the World War II, they didn't contribute anything to fight Hitler, they were really a drop in the ocean. But still, everybody knows about them and thinks that it was very important, and they are proud of it and I feel that we are in a way, in the same position. We cannot change anything, but we cannot otherwise.'[12]

My interviewees' insistence on action in the face of the ongoing military Occupation arises from their concern with how to live and act in a politically and morally challenging situation. The dilemmas of their practice as MWers are not 'professional' matters which can be separated from the evaluation of their own lives. Irit, who immigrated to Israel from South Africa as a young woman, has stayed with MW despite personal doubts: 'Sometimes I sort of think to myself, really, is it worth it? But I think as somebody said: You wanna look at yourself in the morning, and it is important.'[13] My interviewees agreed that 'doing something' has a value in itself, even if circumstances prevent their action from achieving the desired results in the world. Meir has identified as an anti-Zionist for decades and has been active with a range of socialist and binational movements in Israel/Palestine throughout her life. She insists that it matters that she does not stand by as the Occupation unfolds though she is sceptical that change will come.

> 'In general, everything I am doing as a political person I am not doing it to see the change. I am doing it, because I think it must be done. And I don't care what will be with it.'[14]

3.1. Introducing Ethics

If to 'do something' is an answer (albeit an unsatisfactory one), the question it corresponds to is that of how one should live and act. MWers' reflection on the problem of how to live constitutes an ethical concern in the sense of Foucault's characterisation of late antiquity's 'care of the self' (Collier and Ong, 2005:8). This conception of ethics differs from the Kantian tradition, in which

[12] Lilith, interviewed by author, 14.8.2013, Tel Aviv.
[13] Irit, interviewed by author, 4.8.2013, West Jerusalem.
[14] Meir, interviewed by author, 3.9.2013, East Jerusalem.

ethics amounts to the subject's rational reflection on the 'correct' course of action (Mahmood, 2005:25). Foucault's conception of ethics does not adjudicate the principles which guide action, but amounts to the concern with how to regulate one's conduct according to normative principles (Foucault, 1994:89). The ethical care of the self brings together (mental) reflection and (bodily) action as practices implicated in the subject's self-formation (Foucault, 1994d:282). Foucault distinguishes the normative 'substance' of ethics which subjects work to internalise as inner principles of action from the 'techniques' brought to bear on oneself in order to attach the subject to a particular truth (Foucault, 1994a:99-101). Ethical techniques are regulated practices which go beyond mental attention to the self (Foucault, 1994a:94). Understood thus, ethics constitute 'an exercise of the self on the self' by which subjects work on themselves to attain to a 'certain mode of being' (Foucault, 1994d:282). According to Foucault, in late antiquity the internalisation of historically contingent authoritative norms (the 'substance of ethics') was not understood as limiting or 'disciplining' the subject (as Foucault's earlier work has often been taken to imply). Instead, subjects' work on themselves constitutes the precondition for particular modes of action and the exercise of freedom (Foucault, 1994d). The virtuous mode of life to which subjects aspire (the 'telos' of ethical action) cannot necessarily be attained once and for all (Foucault, 1994a:96). Instead, the care of the self is ongoing and amounts to a way of living in its own right in which subjects attend to their lives as an object of art (Foucault, 1994c:271).

3.2. Aspiring to Integrity

Foucault's conception of ethics as 'enabling' the subject to perform virtuous action has been taken up in analyses of sermon listening as a form of ethical self-discipline (Hirschkind, 2001:623) and the bodily acts through which participants of the Egyptian mosque movement fashion their desire and intellect (Mahmood, 2005:157). For Hirschkind's and Mahmood's subjects ethical self-formation is guided by an ideal of virtuous personhood anchored in the Islamic discursive tradition which they recognise as authoritative. Similarly, MWers problematise their lives and actions in relation to an ideal mode of being. My interviewees' ethical practice converges around the normative ideal of 'integrity' or the imperative to act upon one's values. Members' aspiration to live with integrity is based on a conception of one's self as formed in relation to norms and models of virtuous personhood. Thus, living with integrity requires ongoing work. Sarah, the daughter of an ardent anti-Zionist, has belonged to MW's left fringe since its early days. Sometimes she would be glad if she didn't have to go to the checkpoint.

> 'It has all been going on for so long. Sometimes I think, oh my, how much longer can I run my head into the wall? But if I don't go, then I feel that I am not being honest to myself. I cannot leave it. My conscience won't let me.'[15]

MWers' pursuit of integer action establishes an ethical relation to the self as it opens aspects of their lives to their scrutiny and intervention. My interviewees spoke about their desire to live with integrity as a matter of great personal importance. To them, the value of acting upon moral imperatives does not derive from external perceptions, but its function in attaching MWers to the moral norms to which they aspire. Amira, an artist in her 60s, emphasised that MW's work at the checkpoints is not valuable to her because it casts members as 'the old ladies helping' Palestinians. 'I don't like this attitude', she said. 'It's not, we are not important.' Instead, she emphasised: 'I do it for me.'[16] In line with the Foucauldian conception of ethics as the individual's work on the self outlined above, my interviewees felt that their pursuit of integer action was subject to their individual introspection and evaluation. In the context of disputed decisions within the group, the members in question often emphasised that, ultimately, they were responsible for evaluating the integrity of their actions and lives. Ruth's contacts to military officials have been criticised severely by some members, but she insisted:

> 'I look at myself and I look at my activity as a human need. I would like to be able to look in the mirror and say: I've done the best I could at a given moment, and I don't care under which flag I'm doing it. Machsom Watch, or this Watch or that Watch, it doesn't matter to me. I do it on my own. I don't ask anyone any longer. I'm doing what I think should be done, and I'm doing it my way.'[17]

3.3. Being Good at the Checkpoints

I cannot do justice to the intimacy and complexity of the moral considerations that orient MWers' pursuit of integrity. However, I draw out some emblematic themes of the 'substance' of their ethics to show how action is cast as an ethical problem in the context of the Occupation.

Members' emphasis on individual responsibility in the face of injustice functions much like a Foucauldian 'substance' of ethics as they evaluate their actions with reference to it. For members who grew up in the immediate aftermath of World War II, the legacy of the Holocaust constitutes a powerful normative point of reference from which they derive the moral imperative to speak up against violations of human life and dignity. Although my interlocutors insisted that

[15] Sarah, interviewed by author, 27.8.2013, West Jerusalem. Translation from German by author.
[16] Amira, interviewed by author, 12.8.2013, Beit Yehoshua.
[17] Ruth, interviewed by author, 20.8.2013, West Jerusalem.

individuals' actions are not overdetermined by social and political circumstance, many pointed to the personal challenges of aligning their behaviour with their moral commitment in practice. For instance, some have lost friends who found their insistence on confronting oneself with the injustices of the Occupation uncomfortable.

Another normative precept which orients to MWers' aspiration to integrity is the commitment to alleviate human suffering. This is part of a wider configuration of secular ethics (Redfield 2005), in which human life is considered sacred (Asad, 2013). The dominant moral value of alleviating human suffering manifests most visibly in the activities of professional humanitarian bodies whose legitimacy derives from the ways in which the protection of human life becomes self-authorising in a state of crisis (Redfield, 2005:337). In contrast to professional humanitarian interventions, what is at stake in MW's work is not the protection of Palestinians' 'bare' physical life (Agamben, 1998), but the defence of human dignity and justice. Members' references to Palestinians' human rights highlight the normative import which the concept of a shared humanity has for them. In our conversations, they distinguished their insistence on the universal value of human life (Asad, 2013) from the Israeli media's dominant representations of Palestinians as a monolithic enemy (Mansbach, 2012:48). Interviewees' anecdotes of the daily violence at the checkpoints commingled with their disbelief at fellow Israelis' inability to respond with horror to cruelties done to Palestinians (Asad, 2013). Their concern with the vulnerability of Palestinian life constitutes a local reworking of humanitarian values that is specific to MWers' heightened awareness of their personal implication in the checkpoint regime as citizens of the occupying power.

A third theme which informs MWers' pursuit of integrity in the context of the Occupation is their relationship to the Israeli political collective. Their multilayered relationships to the Zionist project in Palestine cannot be reduced to 'Zionist' and 'anti-Zionist' positions. However, it is central to note that members relate their activity with MW to their visions for a political community that is different from that of current Israel. Without fail, my interlocutors expressed their estrangement from today's Israel, and many cast this as a matter of generational change. Like most MWers, my interviewees were in their 60s to 80s. Many had witnessed the early years of the Israeli state and grown up with strong Zionist commitments. Even those who remained invested in the Zionist project of a Jewish state in historic Palestine expressed their dismay at the lack of an idealistic and 'moral' vision for the Israeli collective. Irit was at pains to make clear to me that she continues to identify with the utopic vision of socialist Zionism: 'I want to make very

clear before we start, I am not one of these anti-Zionist Zionists.'[18] However, over time she has grown deeply disappointed by Israeli society's lack of self-scrutiny and its willingness to accept moral corruption as the 'price' for its pursuit of national security objectives. 'In Hebrew we say: This is not the child we dreamed of', she sighed.[19] Similarly, 87-year-old Lilith does not recognise the ideals of her youth in today's Israel.

> 'Building the country was the content of my life and my parents. We built everything; all our life was dedicated to building the country as a socialist country and all the good things about it. And nothing is left, it's destruction of all I hoped for. So I cannot see it and just say ok.'[20]

Whether as advocates of a 'respectful' Jewish state which grants civil and political rights to Palestinians or a binational democratic state, MWers expressed their disappointment over the apparent void around the question of 'how to live' in contemporary Israel. Thus, struggling to act upon their values does not have purely personal significance to MWers, but points towards alternative futures for the Israeli political collective. When a friend asked her why she 'only' helps Palestinians, Irit responded: 'What I'm doing for the Palestinians is for us.'[21]

Although most MWers belong to Israel's Ashkenazi hegemony, their ethical practice does not uphold its dominant norms or ideals of patriotic personhood. My interviewees experience their normative commitments as 'out of step' with dominant Israeli society. Similarly, the subjects of Mahmood's work feel that Islamic values have been marginalised in Egyptian public life and they struggle to uphold these despite the external difficulties that secular Egypt poses for them (Mahmood, 2005). Thus, ethical self-formation does not amount to the subject's internalisation of dominant norms but may be at work in the interstices of dominant national discourses. This points to the political import of ethical work on the self that is implicated in the reproduction of norms and constitution of particular political subjects.

3.4. The Perils of Checkpoint Shifts as Ethical Techniques

The emphasis on action in MWers' conception of virtue resonates with the central role Foucault ascribes to bodily practice for absorbing norms. I analyse MWers' checkpoint shifts as ethical techniques of the self drawing on Mahmood's insistence that the bodily form which obedience to moral codes takes must be central to ethical analysis as it endows the subject with particular

[18] Irit, interviewed by author, 4.8.2013, West Jerusalem.
[19] ditto
[20] Lilith, interviewed by author, 14.8.2013, Tel Aviv.
[21] Irit, interviewed by author, 4.8.2013, West Jerusalem.

capacities (Mahmood, 2005:27-29). Thus, the constitution of subjects through ethical practice is not a matter of complying with moral codes (Mahmood, 2005:28). What is at issue in the analysis of ethics is how norms come to cultivate subjects' capacities for particular forms of action through (bodily) practice (Mahmood, 2005:15).

Checkpoint shifts offer a limited space for MWers to enact the normative commitments I have outlined. Members conceive of their presence as women and civilians at the male-dominated, militarised checkpoints as an act of symbolic dissent from the current Israeli project. Similarly, my interviewees referred to their reports as an opportunity to speak out against the injustices witnessed at the checkpoints. Although many are pessimistic about their impact on Israeli public debate, they hold that the attempt to make the effects of the Occupation known has a normative value in itself. At the checkpoints, MWers also direct care to the perceived needs of Palestinians by supporting individuals in crossing the checkpoints and recognising injustices done (Mansbach, 2012:48). In doing so, members symbolically make a claim about the humanity of the enemy which has normative significance in light of the Israeli authorities' systematic disregard of Palestinian needs (Mansbach, 2012:50).

However, MWers' attempts to act with integrity at the checkpoints are always potentially contradictory from the perspective of their moral commitments as the insoluble internal debate over 'political' and 'humanitarian' action demonstrates. My interviewees tended to identify with either 'humanitarian' or 'political' modes of action, but inevitably encountered moral and political dilemmas in practice. These tensions resemble those experienced by professional humanitarian and human rights workers who find themselves torn between the moral demands to alleviate human suffering in the short-term and the recognition that long-term political change is necessary to eliminate its causes. For instance, ethnographic studies of professional humanitarianism have traced the tensions inherent to the humanitarian claim that 'to do something (however limited that something might be) is better than doing nothing in the face of war, suffering, and human misery' (Feldman 2007:694). Humanitarian workers have long recognised that this may implicate them in the forces that cause human suffering as their assistance is often dependent on cooperation with the powers that be (Givoni 2011a; Redfield 2005; Terry 2002). MW shares this uneasy relationship to the political force field and members are aware that their 'humanitarian' support of individual Palestinians in overcoming the Occupation bureaucracy implicates them in its smooth functioning. Just as humanitarian professionals worry that their work may prolong political crises (Redfield 2005), outspoken

proponents of 'humanitarian' action within MW are uncomfortable about the political consequences of their choices. Ruth is a staunch defender of doing what is possible.

> 'I have come to the conclusion, quite a long time ago, that I have to differentiate between what I believe, my political standing, and – the reality of everyday life. And since we cannot finish the Occupation, it is not in our hands, and we are maybe a drop in the sea, we are left with the realisation that we are actually bettering the Occupation. And eh, I'm aware of it, I can't say it doesn't bother me.'[22]

Professional human rights organisations oscillate between claims to moral authority which undergird their use of 'objective' research and occasional partisan interventions in the face of human tragedy (Hopgood, 2006). Similarly, 'political' MWers who advocate protesting the IDF's presence in the West Bank often experience the impulse to intervene in the face of human tragedy at the checkpoints. Despite their refusal to engage with the IDF themselves, some concede that 'helping' Palestinians constitutes a value in itself. Hagar, an ardent opponent of 'humanitarian' work, spoke at length about the 'political' deficiencies of 'checkpoint prostitutes' who cooperate with the IDF to obtain milder treatment for individuals. Then, referring to individual Germans' humane, though ultimately futile, gestures toward Jews during the Holocaust, she concluded.

> 'Anyway it's a difference. Just being human! To people that are so hopeless! And I cannot deny it! Although it's absolutely *against* my political view. So, you can be a prostitute, and you can be a checkpoint prostitute, much better!'[23]

Ultimately, neither 'political' nor 'humanitarian' action makes the moral and political dilemmas of the Occupation manageable for MWers, as Hagar struggled to make clear to me.

> 'What can you say? So, you can be a prostitute and you can be a checkpoint prostitute, much better! You understand? No, you don't! Because you never had to live under Occupation, you never had to *fight* against evil!'[24]

Checkpoint shifts continuously frustrate members' aspiration to virtuous action. This precarity distinguishes their experience from Mahmood's and Hirschkind's rendering of ethical self-formation as the gradual sedimentation of an authoritative 'model' of personhood into subjects' bodily and affective disposition through practice (Mahmood, 2005; Hirschkind, 2001). In this conceptualisation, subjects' techniques of ethical self-formation are morally and politically

[22] Ruth, interviewed by author, 20.8.2013, West Jerusalem.
[23] Hagar, interviewed by author, 20.8.2013, West Jerusalem.
[24] ditto

unproblematic. Individuals may struggle with them (Mahmood, 2005:29), but the form of ethical techniques does not put virtue at peril. By contrast, MWers' ethical technique (checkpoint shifts) does not cumulatively improve their capacity for virtuous conduct as they are unable to resolve the contradictory implications of the normative ideals underlying their ethical practice.

3.5. Learning the Occupation

If checkpoint shifts put MWers' aspirations to conform to their ideal of personhood at peril, why have my interviewees returned to the checkpoints for the past 10 years? In order to understand what enables them to continue their engagement as MWers, I turn to the ethical precarity of checkpoint shifts. Ethnographic investigations of ethical practice that engenders contradictions in politically charged situations conceptualise these – broadly – in two ways.

One approach is to cast the contradictions of ethical techniques as a potential external obstacle to achieving virtuous conduct. For instance, Feldman's work on a Quaker humanitarian relief project from 1948 to 1950 in Gaza foregrounds the emotional burdens of the dilemmas endemic to humanitarian work (Feldman, 2000:689). She argues that Quakers' care for Palestinians commingled with ethical care of the self as volunteers evaluated success in terms of whether their work enabled them to conform to the 'Quaker way' (Feldman, 2000:690). The moral contradictions arising from their ethical practice called into question 'how' Quakers performed their humanitarian service (Feldman, 2000:693). However, Feldman argues, volunteers sacrificed their aim to be 'fully Quaker' in order to continue their work for the sake of assisting Palestinians (Feldman, 2000:702). Here, the 'impossible situation' in which Quakers found themselves remains external to volunteers' selves and is not understood as constitutive for subjects' ability to carry out certain actions, such as relief work (Feldman, 2000:701).

A different approach to ethical practice in light of endemic moral dilemmas holds that subjects' efforts to overcome this precarity and recalibrate their actions in relation to it may become integral to the attainment of virtue. Just as MWers and Quakers, the subjects of Givoni's analysis – physicians working with Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) – operate in a situation that renders coherent ethical action impossible as physicians are torn between the urge to speak out against injustice and the need to secure support from the powers that be in order to continue their work. She argues that humanitarian organisations such as MSF have developed a new ethics in relation to the dilemmas inherent in their work. By problematising the ethical quandaries they face, physicians improve the moral efficacy of their actions (Givoni, 2011a:44) and fashion themselves

as 'more enlightened personae' (Givoni, 2011a:58). As MWers' insoluble debate indicates, members find it impossible to 'recalibrate' their actions at the checkpoints to minimise the contradictions of 'political' and 'humanitarian' action.

In order to make sense of MWers' sustained engagement, I suggest a different approach to 'impossible' ethical practice and place the perils of checkpoint shifts centre stage. I draw on Mahmood's insistence (following Foucault) that the 'precise embodied form' of ethical work on the self is essential to the constitution of particular subjects and their capacity for virtuous action (Mahmood, 2005:29). Instead of treating checkpoint shifts an external impediment to the pre-constituted subject's pursuit of virtuous action or the basis of a novel ethics, I argue that the precariousness of MWers' ethical practice does not leave them unchanged as subjects and thus contributes to sustaining their engagement. In the following, I argue that MWers' bodily presence at the checkpoints amounts to a form of learning that is constitutive of members' urge to return to the checkpoints.

My interviewees emphasised the importance of learning about the Occupation bureaucracy, and many consider themselves to be experts on aspects of it. Some members have published special reports that analyse aspects of the Occupation's administration in depth.[25] However, 'learning' the Occupation is not limited to understanding the legal and administrative logic underlying its management. As observers, MWers consciously confront themselves with the human effects of the Occupation over years as very few Israeli civilians ever do, and these experiences do not leave them unaffected. They are aware that the majority of the Israeli population has little interest in the damage done to Palestinians on a daily basis, although accurate information is available from a variety of human rights groups and news outlets. Anne converted to Judaism to come to Israel with her husband in the state's early years. Like many MWers, she is disturbed by fellow Israelis' disinterest.

> 'I'm going to use a very painful image, but, like I say, I can more and more understand it: 'Wir haben es nicht gewusst' – we did not know. People don't want to be confronted with all the terrible things that your government is doing. And I think that's also just what happened in a lot of cases in Germany.' [26]

In contrast to this, MWers emphasised that refusing to 'see' and confront oneself with the reality of the Occupation is a choice they find morally indefensible. For Sarah, exposing herself to the

[25] These include Halevi and Shlonsky, 2008 and Offek, 2011.
[26] Anne, interviewed by author, 9.9.2013, Ramat Hasharon.

checkpoints is a matter of personal integrity. 'If I don't go, I feel I am not being honest with myself. I must go; I have to see[27] it every time.'[28] Returning to look and see anew lies at the heart of the group's practice. MW's daily presence throughout the West Bank is grounded in the conviction that the 'reality' of the Occupation cannot be captured through a focus on extreme incidents as its violence pervades Palestinian life (Amir, unpublished:19). The very format of MW's practice is oriented towards capturing the endless variations on the common theme of the Occupation's damage to the Palestinian population and members usually report from the same checkpoints each week. Anne emphasises that it took time to learn to 'see' the daily events at the checkpoints. She tries to convey the 'outrageousness' of a 'normal' shift in her reports.

> 'The reporting and the seeing and the telling – it's always *how* you write your report, if you're critical and at least *helping* to show the world what is happening here. It's not accepting the situation of the occupation. If you say, "Well today there was no change, everything ran smoothly or as it should be" – it should not be! You know, that sort of thing. Trying to be more and more critical about how the things are being done.' [29]

Understood as a procedure performed on the self, checkpoint shifts constitute an ethical technique through which MWers internalise (albeit involuntarily) the tension between the daily violence they observe and their moral sensibilities. Their disbelief about the extent of this disconnect came out in anecdotes about recent instances of harassment at the checkpoints that were justified as matters of security by the IDF. Checkpoint shifts' emphasis on careful observation and reporting contributes to the formation of a heightened, visceral awareness of the Occupation's reality which affects MWers intimately. These experiences affect MWers beyond their rational control. Recounting a recent incident during a shift Ruth said:

> 'I've been doing this now for twelve years. You get; there comes a moment when you, ehmm.., you explode much quicker, because you've heard it a million times and you think.. The logical cruelty of the system gets at you. You don't stay oblivious to all this.'[30]

[27] In German, the word Sarah uses for 'seeing' (sich anschauen) is a reflexive verb and implies a motivated mode of looking and seeing 'for oneself'.
[28] Sarah, interviewed by author, 27.8.2013, West Jerusalem.
[29] Anne, interviewed by author, 9.9.2013, Ramat Hasharon.
[30] Ruth, interviewed by author, 20.8.2013, West Jerusalem.

3.6. The Most and the Least One Can Do

In the context of the Occupation, MWers' ethical practice amounts to a struggle against one's moral corruption rather than a path to self-improvement as the technique of MWers' self-formation, the checkpoint shifts, does not enable them to approximate their models of virtuous self-hood. However, the moral perils of MWers' ethical practice have a productive dimension which resonates with Foucault's conception of ethics as a daily work on the self. MWers conscious acts of 'seeing' and 'learning' the checkpoints repeatedly call into question the integrity of their lives as Israeli citizens and moral persons. Furthermore, at the checkpoints virtuous conduct becomes impossible, and MWers' actions inevitably have contradictory moral and political effects. As they remain elusive, MWers' moral values are cast into sharp relief to them. Similarly, Foucault places self-examination at the heart of ethical self-formation as the subject repeatedly uncovers the 'already said' (Foucault, 1994:273) by reviewing the errors it committed in contrast to what should have been done (Foucault, 1994b:237). Checkpoint shifts trigger introspection and forcefully remind MWers of the normative principles of action (Foucault, 1994b:323), precisely because these remain unattainable.

Checkpoint shifts are constitutive of MWers' refusal to accept the reality they witness as 'normal'. Thus, their 'success' as an ethical technique lies in MWers' realisation that returning to the checkpoints is both the most and the least they can do, in light of the dual impossibility of doing good and being good. This 'realisation' is not merely cognitive, but manifests as an inner urge drives MWers to act. Dorit described the sense of urgency that her experiences as a MWer instilled in her. For some time, she monitored a checkpoint where Palestinian workers crossed into Israel in the early hours of the morning. She used to leave her home in Tel Aviv at three in the morning in order to arrive at four when the gates open. At the checkpoint:

> 'The sights were really terrible, because you saw people like in *cages*, with wire all around and suddenly the gates opened and they *run* through as if they're being shot at to get to the other side. It was terrible, and they were fighting and climbing one on top of the other.'[31]

Despite her discomfort Dorit found herself returning to the checkpoint for months, until conditions improved. 'You get, committed to it somehow, it's really, how do you say eh.. like a drug, you get *addicted* to it, so I did it.'[32] Thus, members' bodily presence at the checkpoints does

[31] Dorit, interviewed by author, 8.8.2013, Tel Aviv.
[32] Dorit, interviewed by author, 8.8.2013, Tel Aviv.

not merely represent their moral commitments, but constitutes inward dispositions which enable particular action (Mahmood, 2005:28). Thus, treating checkpoint shifts as a form of work on the self makes intelligible why the political limitations and moral quandaries of members' practice do not undercut MWers' activity as checkpoint watchers. Ironically, the success of MWers' ethical 'technique' of self-formation stems from its inadequacy for helping MWers conform to their ideals of virtuous action at the checkpoints.

4. The Politics of Ethics

MWers do not struggle for integrity independently from the wider forces which undergird the Israeli Occupation of Palestine. Their conception of the political defies the opposition of governmental and military 'politics' and the micro-level of private life. My interlocutors themselves understood their 'personal' lives as inseparable from state politics. The Occupation, they argued, is not limited to the West Bank. Seemingly mundane incidents such as an aggressively accelerating car in the centre of Jerusalem or the announcement that the government would scrap child support elicited fierce reactions. MWers linked them to the violence of the Occupation that they insisted pervades everyday life in Israel.

Beyond the effects of the Occupation on Israeli society, MWers feel that the Occupation depends on political and social relations that extend throughout Israeli society. For instance, references to fellow Israelis' 'brainwashing' in kindergartens, schools and the army abounded. By implication, MWers' understand their day-to-day lives as Israeli citizens as intimately connected to the ongoing military Occupation and not, for that matter, 'normal'. Natanel's analysis of self-identifying 'leftist' Ashkenazi Israelis shows that it requires work to produce and sustain normalcy in Israel (Natanel, 2013:231) and she argues 'violence arises through the continuing presence of normalcy' (Natanel, 2013:229). It seems to me that my interlocutors would agree. However, they insist on refusing the normalcy of the Occupation's violence and their ethical labour at the checkpoints is premised on the conviction that it is impossible to live with integrity in today's Israel if one chooses 'not to know'.

Thus, even if their work has failed to effect 'macro-political' change, MWers hold that it has significance beyond their individual lives. To them, the 'political' includes modes of living, individually held values and actions. Thus, individual attempts to refuse the normalcy that overlays Israel's status as an occupying power make a difference and belong to the realm of 'politics'. MWers did not speak of the urge 'to do something' that is cultivated at the checkpoints as a matter of purely 'personal' significance, but in relation to the political future of Israel/Palestine. Tova came to Israel in 1967 and works as a psychotherapist today. On the way to a shift at Qalandia checkpoint at 4 in the morning, she described the sense of urgency that her

experiences at the checkpoints instill in her: 'I feel like I am standing alone and holding out my arms to hold back Israel from running into an abyss.'[33]

MWers' ethical practice troubles the liberal assumption that issues of morality and ethics are private and, thus, distinct from the political (Mahmood, 2005:32). I have argued that their ethical practice is oriented towards an array of values and discourses which are marginal, but no less public, in contemporary Israel. Through their ethical practice, MWers attach themselves to norms and discourses, implicating them in a wider 'power game' (Givoni, 2011a:61-62). As Mahmood points out, the definition of norms (and by extension upholding norms) constitutes a public act (Mahmood, 2005:32). Members' rejection of the Occupation's dominant framing as a necessary evil within Israeli society highlights that ethical practice may uphold values and forms of life which are marginalised at a particular historical moment.

Nevertheless, ethical practice is not a matter of 'choosing' which norms to live by and MWers' moral commitments do not arise from their pre-given internality. Rather, Foucault's conception of ethics is premised on the insistence that the subject does not exist prior to relations of power (Foucault, 1983). Based on this conception of power as productive, I have followed Foucault in approaching ethical practice as constitutive of the subject's ability to act in certain ways. MWers' bodily presence at the checkpoints affects them in ways which instil a desire to continue their activity as checkpoint watchers. Thus, the group's practice demonstrates that ethical self-formation may be constitutive of political subjects whose desires and dispositions do not conform to the dominant ideals of a given time and place. These registers of life are not captured in state-centric conceptions of politics which privilege attention to macro-change in the distribution of material and symbolic power (Mahmood, 2005:34). Any political project assumes a particular kind of subject (Mahmood, 2005:33). The analysis of MWers' ethical self-formation points to the multiplicity of political subjects to which ethical practice may give rise. Thus, ethical self-formation is not a 'private' matter, but constitutes the conditions of possibility for certain political projects.

[33] Tova, checkpoint shift with author, 25.8.2013, Qalandia checkpoint.

5. Concluding Remarks

I began with the question of how practice that is avowedly 'political' is sustained when activists are aware of their inefficacy and argued that MWers' ethical concern with working on themselves in order to live with integrity has been integral to their continued 'political' activity. I located MWers' practice within the complex force-field it inhabits by drawing on members' own awareness of the limitations of their work. Taking their admissions of the futility of their actions as a starting point, I treated their concern with how to act in a situation in which action has been rendered problematic as bound up with the ethical question of 'how to live'. In light of the moral contradictions of action at the checkpoints, it is near impossible for MWers to 'be good' according to their own senses of moral virtue. Moreover, I argued that the precariousness of this ethical technique distinguishes it from prior analyses of ethical self-fashioning as cumulative bodily learning which enables virtuous conduct and according to a normative model of personhood (Mahmood, 2005; Hirschkind, 2001). MWers' ethical work on themselves puts their pursuit of virtue at peril as there is no form of conduct that can be 'learned' to solve the tensions inherent in their practice at the checkpoints. In contrast to prior work on ethical practice in similarly 'impossible' situations, I placed the precarity of MWers' ethical practice at the heart of their formation as ethical subjects. Members' longstanding experience at the checkpoints sediments a visceral knowledge of the Occupation's daily reality into MWers' consciousness that unsettles their moral sense of self. Members return to the checkpoints over years and their efforts to 'see' the Occupation are constitutive of the urge to return and ultimately renew their struggle for virtuous action. Thus, the precarity of MWers' ethical practice has contributed to sustaining my interviewees' engagement at the checkpoints for over 10 years.

Drawing on Mahmood's insistence on the political dimensions of ethical self-formation, I considered the relationship between 'ethics' and 'politics' in an explicitly 'political' project. Members' 'personal' values and 'private' concerns are integral to sustaining their 'political' action. The group's practice underscores the political import of ethical self-formation, even when 'politics' appear to render virtuous action impossible, and troubles rigid distinctions between 'ethics' and 'politics'. This underscores the pertinence of qualitative research on political subjectivities that constitute the conditions of possibility for certain political projects.

MWers themselves understand politics as inseparable from the fabric of their everyday lives. They hold that the Occupation is sustained by social relations and practices extending well beyond the realm of 'formal' politics. As opposed to fellow Israelis who prefer not to 'see' or 'know', MWers' refusal to accept the Occupation as 'normalcy' constitutes a critique of the ethical and political horizon of possibilities in today's Israel. I have argued that this refusal is sustained by MWers' ethical work on themselves at the checkpoints, which is constitutive of the urge to 'do something'. Thus, members' ostensibly 'private' desire to live with integrity has significance beyond their personal lives – even if only as a potential for a distant future. From this perspective, MWers' ethical relationships to their selves are inseparable from the search for alternative political paths in Israel/Palestine.

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Primary Research

Interviews

24.7.2012 Interview with Ruth at her home in West Jerusalem.

12.2.2013 Interview with Amira at a café in Beit Yehoshua (near Tel Aviv).

4.8.2013 Interview with Irit at a café in West Jerusalem.

8.8.2013 Interview with Dorit at her home in Tel Aviv.

12.8.2013 Second interview with Amira at a café near Beit Yehoshua and at her home.

13.8.2013 Interview with Hannah at a café in Herzliya (near Tel Aviv).

14.8.2013 Interview with Lilith at her home in Tel Aviv.

20.8.2013 Second interview with Ruth at her home in West Jerusalem.

20.8.2013 Interview with Hagar at a café in West Jerusalem.

27.8.2013 Interview with Sarah at her home in West Jerusalem.

2.9.2013 Interview with Tova at a café in West Jerusalem.

3.9.2013 Interview with Nurya at her home in West Jerusalem.

3.9.2013 Interview with Meir at a café in East Jerusalem.

9.9.2013 Interview with Anne at her home in Ramat Hasharon (Near Tel Aviv).

10.9.2013 Interview with Daniela at her home in Tel Aviv.

Participant Observation

7.8.2013 Visit to checkpoints around the Jordan Valley with Amira and Daniela.

25.8.2013 Checkpoint shift at Qalandiya checkpoint with Tova.

11.9.2013 Shift at the District Command Office, OPT with Ella.