

# Governmentalizing Palestinian futures: uncertainty, anticipation, possibility

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## Abstract (200 words)

This article explores a particular futural logic prevalent in Israel's practices of governing Palestinian life in the West Bank: the governmentalizing of possibility through anticipation and uncertainty. We draw on long-term fieldwork focused on different West Bank contexts – checkpoints, farm land access and house demolitions – where governing functions via prospective futures that call people to anticipate and become attuned to lived uncertainty. Empirically, the article demonstrates the ways that Israel's governmental techniques instrumentalize threatening and ominous possibilities to manage the conduct of Palestinians by means of military orders, permit restrictions and bureaucratic processing. Conceptually, the article theorizes the governmentalization of futures as dynamic on two distinguishable planes – the everyday and the existential – that shape Palestinians' anticipation and attunement as they relate to multiple and crucial domains of life: dwelling, livelihood, reproduction and mobility. The argument is thus made that futures are governmentalized where subjects are situated in conditions of uncertainty in which they anticipate the threatening possibilities ahead – namely, the unpleasant eventuality that 'could happen'. Anticipation in this arrangement, we further argue, can progress Israel's settler colonial project in Palestine.

**Keywords:** Palestine, West Bank, future, governmentality, anticipation, uncertainty, possibility

In this article we document and examine Israel's practices of governing in Palestine that mobilize uncertainty as a mode of governmentalizing future prospects and possibilities. We refer specifically to a proliferation of governmental techniques that instrumentalize threatening possibilities to manage the conduct, imagination and attunement of the Palestinian population in the West Bank, examples of which include: military orders, permit restrictions and bureaucratic processing that each call forth a prospect – denied mobility, house demolition, displacement, dispossession, and so on – whose eventual occurrence can be somewhat inconsequential to its effect. Less abstractly: these practices of governing and the conditions they create threaten the *futures* of Palestinians and prompt anticipatory conducts in ways that progress Israel's settler colonial project in Palestine. Our attention here therefore falls on such practices as they are effective in a modal future tense: nothing *has necessarily happened*, nor is there a certainty that something *will happen*, it is rather the case that an unpleasant eventuality *could happen* – residency *could be* denied, a travel or employment permit *may be* revoked, the right to movement *might be* refused, *et cetera*. In this temporal ordering, practices of governing cannot be said to set in motion a material event, rather they operate by evoking possible futures that are anticipated and attuned to in multiple and often indirect ways. We thus argue that power functions in the cases we describe by creating conditions in which

prospective futures call people to anticipate, act, react – to become attuned to lived uncertainty. For instance, a pending demolition order can render homes “unhomely” spaces, engender political exhaustion and even a desire to seek a future outside of indigenous lands; threatened access to farmlands, in turn, can damage livelihoods and prompt younger generations to move out of precarious spaces. We discuss these and other examples below to demonstrate the ways that uncertainty is mobilized through practices of governing and the everyday and profound effects on Palestinians’ lives.

The research presented here draws on participatory, ethnographic and interview materials from our ongoing examinations of three settings: checkpoints and permits to cross (eg. Griffiths & Repo 2020a; 2020b); everyday life in communities threatened by expanding settlements (eg. Joronen 2017b); and house demolitions (eg. Joronen and Griffiths 2019a). From this diversity of contexts and people subjected to different governmental processes, our objective is to examine a consistent logic of Israel’s governing of the population of Palestine in the West Bank (and partly in East Jerusalem) to do with, as one interviewee on the subject of document checking put it succinctly, “it’s not about *what happens*” but “about what *potentially* could happen” and “how you change your own behaviour according to that”. Theoretically, the article reads this dynamic to develop work on futurity and governing in geography (e.g. Amoore 2013; Anderson 2010; Anderson et al. 2019; Joronen and Griffiths 2019a; 2019b) and cognate disciplines (e.g. Aradau and Van Munster 2007; 2012; Bryant and Knight 2019; Diprose et al. 2008; Hage 2009; Pappé 2020; Sa’di-Ibraheem 2020) by turning attention from the more prominent contexts of terrorism, pandemics and climate change to markedly less visible sites of administration offices, legal documents and municipal governance to ask the crucial questions: what is the relationship between governing, possibility and uncertainty in Palestine? How do people living in conditions of uncertainty anticipate possible futures? Attending to these questions is of paramount importance for the fact that Palestinians living under occupation are subject to Israeli governmental processes for even the minutiae of everyday life: visiting family, cultivating land, grazing livestock, internal and international travel, house maintenance, medical treatment – the list is almost endless. The responses to these questions, as we will show, hinge on the production of uncertain conditions within which so many of the people we have encountered during fieldwork begin to anticipate, even to the extent of becoming attuned to the constant future uncertainty. The argument is thus made of governmentalized futures, where subjects are situated in conditions of uncertainty in which they anticipate the threatening possibilities ahead. This leads to further questions to do with futurity, prominently: what does an analysis of the governmentalization of Palestinian futures disclose of the settler-colonial state?

The empirical and conceptual work of the article thus furthers scholarship on geographies of the future in two key areas. While existing research has drawn focus on the ways that states render futures imaginable and manageable (e.g. Adey and Anderson 2012; Anderson and Adey 2011) to justify hyper-securitization (Shapiro and Bird-David 2017), counter-terrorism and pre-emptive militarism (Hannah 2006; Massumi 2007), here we demonstrate how the futures embedded into practices of governing operate not primarily as a state-centred cycle of threat and (pre-emptive) response but rather as a process of governmentalization, where subjects become attuned to uncertain living conditions, and the threatening possibilities they animate. With such governmentalization of futures we thus refer to the ‘generally predictive orientation’ of the ‘art of governing’ insofar as it functions by producing conditions and prospects that shape anticipation, attunement and action (see Aradau and Blanke 2017). A first key contribution, then, is to examine people’s anticipation in the context of, though not easily reducible to (e.g. Anderson et al. 2019; Barker 2020; Griffiths 2017; Joronen and Griffiths 2019a), uncertainties that are induced by the state’s political trajectories and apparatuses of governing. A second contribution to debates on futurity is made by attending to the breadth of anticipation where actions, decisions and intentions may appear only tangentially related to a specific mechanism of governing but that take place nonetheless within a delineated ‘possible field of action’ (Foucault 2000, 341), and in a way that is ‘broadly consistent with particular objectives’ of governmental techniques (Rose 2000, 323; see also Joronen 2016). Our emphasis on conditions in which anticipation emerges as diversely manifested rather than as a result of a more coercive or direct expression of power is key in this respect. An example (that we discuss below) serves to illustrate: a young man whose house is threatened with demolition decides against having children. Here, anticipatory decisions and actions are not confined merely to anticipation of homelessness; they spill into seemingly remote domains of domestic life, livelihood and reproduction. The issue of uncertainty in these terms is not merely grounded on the violence of neoliberal rationale (Plasse-Couture 2013) nor related to security and mobility measures alone (Weizman 2007), but, as we argue, an existential one – an attunement that disperses into various realms of living (cf. Azoulay & Ohpir 2009; Zureik et al. 2011).

The discussion is organized into two main sections. In the first we present a succinct but rich survey of cases from long-term fieldwork focused on checkpoints, rural communities threatened by settlement expansion and house demolition in Palestine. The cases are illustrative of the ways that Israel’s practices of governing in these settings connect to uncertainty and anticipation by conditioning possibility. In the second section we explicate the ways that Israel’s practices of governing induce uncertainty among Palestinians, and precipitate anticipatory actions and attunements to constantly accumulating uncertainties. We conceptualize this as dynamic on

two distinguishable planes – the everyday and the existential – as we build towards an account of the mobilization of uncertainty in the governmentalization of future prospects and possibilities, and the connections to anticipation and the issue of Israel’s settler colonial project. The article concludes by emphasising the importance of attending to the relations between governing and futures, and suggests further areas of inquiry in Palestine and beyond.

## **1. Inducing uncertain conditions in Palestine**

In this section we present a survey of examples from fieldwork conducted by both authors (sometimes together, most often separately) over the past years on three main themes of long-standing interest: 1) women’s experiences of checkpoints; 2) vulnerable rural communities threatened by Israel’s settlement expansion; and 3) daily life in demolition-affected areas. While uncertainty has generally not been the central focus of our research designs, people have continually foregrounded their dealings with Israel’s ubiquitous military presence and vast bureaucratic infrastructure in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, and the various rulings, restrictions and orders that issue forth. As we show in each area of focus, people are entangled in practices of governing that induce uncertain future prospects that become sources of anticipation, anxiety and worry, and which in this regard operate by governmentalizing futures. We begin by focusing on checkpoints before moving onto cases of restricted access to agricultural land and the issue of house demolition.

A key theme to emerge from fieldwork in the Bethlehem Governorate on security infrastructure and families<sup>i</sup> is the issue of both obtaining and using permits to travel through checkpoints. While many men in the area use the large Checkpoint 300 daily to reach Jerusalem and Israel with an employer-sponsored permit (see Griffiths and Repo 2018; Rijke and Minca 2018), for many women (and other Palestinians without long-term permits) crossing means negotiating a somewhat laborious bureaucratic process (Griffiths and Repo 2020a). A permit is obtained via a completed form, a face-to-face interview at the Governorate District Coordination Office (DCO) and endurance of (seemingly purposefully) slow processing by hostile security personnel. Visits to Etzion DCO<sup>ii</sup> near Bethlehem are described variously and consistently as “chaotic”, “disorganized”, “hostile” and “an awful hassle”. One woman described a visit thus: “it was very crowded ... I was waiting from 8am until 2pm when I got my turn [then] I had to wait another two hours until I got in to get the permit ... at 4pm”. Though on this occasion a permit was issued, she added “it was a very harsh day ... and by the end of it I was totally exhausted”. On many other occasions applicants are not successful and no reason is given for denial of a permit by the DCO Commander’s office, nor is there recourse to appeal. As was explained during a

follow-up interview with an activist in Beit Sahour, near Bethlehem: “it’s so random, you never know what they decide ... and that’s the point”.

A second decision on admissibility to Jerusalem is made in the checkpoint itself where, even as people enter with a seemingly already-legitimated reason for travel (i.e. as a permit-holder), passage is frequently denied for no or spurious reason. One of the more stressful cases was recalled by a woman in Al-Walaja: “one time [when] I was pregnant it was really, really difficult for us. Half of us went through, and the other half was stuck in the crowd ... my permit was [disregarded] and I was stuck too ... because of the soldiers. They didn’t care about the crowd and they didn’t help, they don’t care about women ... or *anything else*”. The reference to “anything else” here is quite literal as checkpoint staff act with impunity and the ensuing uncertainty, since the decision to travel is not taken lightly, is significant for the fact that visits are often essential (i.e. for medical appointments, funerals or long-awaited family occasions (see Weizman 2007)). Another interviewee in the same village made this point when she spoke of her daughter who was refused passage for no discernible reason: “she was distraught because she missed a doctor’s appointment ... they are in [complete] control of us”. Arbitrary decisions thus constitute a significant function of Israel’s practices of governing im/mobility: the possibility of denied entry renders permits weak guarantors of safe passage. In this sense, as Yael Berda (2017, 45) has convincingly demonstrated, Israel’s permits are at best ‘fluid’ or ‘unstable’ documents that produce ‘consistent *anxiety and uncertainty* for all Palestinians in the West Bank’ (emphasis added).

The political substance of such ‘anxiety and uncertainty’ is realized in the decisions that most of those interviewed during fieldwork took to avoid travel through Checkpoint 300, and therefore to Jerusalem. Illustrative examples of the reasoning behind these decisions include: “I swore not to go back [to Etzion DCO] and be *tormented* again – I don’t want a permit”; “because of *fear* and for me not being able to bare these situations [identity checks], I have stopped applying for a permit”. From this perspective, the permit system and network of checkpoints take on a different function than that of closure (see e.g. Hass 2002); they become a deterrent whose “tormenting” and “fear[-inducing]” qualities are enough for a decision to self-regulate mobility. There is evidence, too, that other decisions are made on a similar basis, where the ever-present possibility of (further) closure sets the tone for significant life decisions, such as for one woman whose reflection on checkpoints and mobility restrictions extended to the topic of reproduction: “there are many thoughts that come into our minds for having babies, wondering if the situation will be safe on a financial and security basis ... it’s even too much now to have two or three babies. This is not enough for the Palestinian family”. This particular interview closed with the ominous words: “I sometimes think the situation now is even very good in comparison to *what’s coming*”.

In this sense, “chaos”, “disorganization”, “hostility” et cetera are dynamic in the invocation of “what’s coming” both in the short- and long-term: they open up uncertainties around given possibilities (enter *or not*, permit granted *or not*) and constitute attunements that are connected to uncertainties around an ominous future, or even futurelessness. In the first place, worries and fears precipitate a care for one’s well-being, and this is enough to keep people in place. In the second place, uncertainty becomes a base disposition towards ever more worsening futures. Here anticipatory decisions are extended to seemingly secondary domains (i.e.: secondary from the ostensible target of governing) – livelihood, gender and even reproduction – where the very continuation of life is at stake.

This was also evident in the second area of focus based on research with Palestinian farmers at numerous sites surrounded by the Gush Etzion settlement block, in Bethlehem governorate.<sup>iii</sup> Farmers in the strangulated villages in this area (specifically in Nahhalin, Al-Walaja and Beit Sakariya herein) have spoken about everyday uncertainties as they relate to arbitrary permits to enter their lands, particularly those located near the expanding settlements and their unofficial ‘border zones’ accompanied by several informal and often less noticeable forms of appropriation and bordering (see Joronen 2017a; 2019; 2020). For farmers in these villages, uncertainty around accessibility is evident especially when they would one day be allowed to enter their lands, while on the next they would be denied access. As one farmer put it: “every day they come up with new rules. One day we are allowed to work in our lands, but not the next day, even the same officer is giving these orders”, adding: “this kind of uncertainty is constant here” and thereby further indicating an arbitrariness and opaqueness to the “rules” by which access is governed. Alongside restricted access, farmers’ livelihood in several villages is further threatened by Israel’s refusal to grant building permits for farming structures – e.g. water wells, green houses, stores – on lands now designated West Bank Area C, where the Israeli Civil Administration (ICA) decides on the administrative matters.<sup>iv</sup> As a result, as one farmer explained, “we cannot even use things such as green houses or tractors, or water sources we need for irrigation”, which makes it hard, he continued, to make farming altogether a sustainable or profitable activity. The future is particularly uncertain for those farmers who also reside in these parts of Area C and hence cannot obtain permits to expand their existing premises, nor to build new ones for their growing families. In fact, this denial of permits, whether related to the construction of houses, digging wells or installing rainwater containers, has been a systematic solution of Israel to impede Palestinian livelihood and the quality of life in rural Area C communities (see BADIL 2019; Joronen 2020; OCHA 2014).

Livelihood at these sites is thus severely constricted by Israel’s practices of governing. Going about work and regular life activities is, at all turns, subject to the possibility of granted or

denied permission: *can I access my lands (today)? Can I work today?* These quite simple formulations, however, form the basis of many other contingent uncertainties, such as *will the harvest be sufficient, safe, or even possible?* or *can family life endure in these conditions?* In this way, uncertainties accumulate, rendering daunting prospects for people living in this situation. One farmer made clear during fieldwork that: “I love living here ... but it is an everyday challenge, particularly as we cannot build more, or add extra room to our houses”, explaining that his family’s two-room house had already become crowded by a growing family. His rhetorical question towards the end of a conversation is loaded with uncertainty and anticipation: “if we cannot have room for a natural growth [...] how are my children and their families supposed to live in here?”. On the same topic – one that has emerged frequently during the fieldwork – another farmer in the same village expressed similar concerns: “I hope to remain here, but I am worried about all the bad developments that have taken place recently, particularly how the Trump plans are going to affect us”,<sup>v</sup> thus explicating the ways that wider geopolitical prospects add to, or intensify, uncertainty and anxiety about possible futures in the village. Once more, in this case possibilities centre on and extend beyond questions of accessibility to lands or permits for construction; the very existence of a future is at stake. Uncertainties engender and instate broader attunements to what could become existential threats to livelihoods and the ability to dwell in a place.

Such attunement to the existential threats and the absence of a future was articulated in multiple ways. A farmer from Beit Sakariya, for example, expressed a constant worry for him (and for so many other Palestinians living and working on threatened land): “it is difficult here, but we are the landowners here. If we abandon the land, it becomes state land”. The reference is to the way that the ICA and Israel’s judiciary have reinterpreted Ottoman-era land laws to the strategic ends of dispossession and annexation (Bhandar 2018; Joronen 2017a; Kedar et al. 2018). The farmer spoke further: “but it is also hard to cope with the existing situation particularly if the next generation cannot live in the village or work on lands”, making a final and significant point: “the new generation is simply moving away ... [because] building here would only mean you get your house demolished”. The farmers see this threat as particularly worrying in a context where “there is also a change in the way of living with the new generation” who do not necessarily dream of living in an old and small rural house located in a strangulated and hard-to-reach (due to restrictions posed to mobility by Israel) village that is constantly under the threat of violence and confiscation. Younger people might thus leave of their own volition (as part of a wider shift to urban living) but as the anticipatory worries of a farmer show, they do so in such cases with very little to persuade them otherwise: the possible life paths in a strangulated West Bank village are notably narrowed. In this way, governmental uncertainties start to accumulate and pose possible futures that appear overwhelming or insuperable. Uncertainty makes the futures of farmers seem ever-more shattered,

intolerable, impossible – even future/less – thus foreshadowing questions of generational lineage in livelihood and dwelling.

The third context is based on both authors' ongoing research (undertaken both together and separately) into the issue of house demolitions in the West Bank and East Jerusalem at sites in the Hebron, Bethlehem and Jerusalem Governorates. Israel uses demolitions, especially in vulnerable parts of Area C, as a tactic of land grabbing, (collective) punishment and intimidation that furthers plans for annexation, new zonings and the building of settlements and related infrastructure (see e.g. Delso 2018; Graham 2004). In many of the “unrecognized”<sup>vi</sup> Bedouin villages in the South Hebron Hills, for instance, proximity to an Israeli settlement puts all structures (homes, community ovens, communal tents) at risk (see e.g. Joronen and Griffiths 2019a; 2019b), while re-zoning practices and the denial of Israeli-issued building permits are often the pretext for demolition orders at other fieldwork sites around Bethlehem and Jerusalem (see e.g. Joronen 2019).

At these sites, the prospect of demolition, as might be expected, produces a great deal of uncertainty among residents, often with the effect of presenting a quite severe disruption of everyday life (e.g. Meade 2011; Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2009; 2015, 87-115). As one young woman interviewee near Bethlehem explained (referring also to an ongoing legal challenge): “the case was never concluded, so the demolition may or may not come since the court has not made a decision yet”. This prospect (that *may or may not* come), it was further explained, has imposed a period of anxious waiting and has “affected everything ... the idea that they could come to demolish my house makes me so anxious. Today I sleep in my room but tomorrow I don't know?”. Significantly, a large number of demolition orders in East Jerusalem and the West Bank are left pending for long periods – often several years, even decades – before a house is razed, leading to a proliferation and exacerbation of uncertainty that is described lucidly in Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian's (2015) research as a way of “unhoming the home” even before demolition. Uncertainty is governmentalized very effectively in this dynamic: the demolition order presents the unpleasant eventuality whose awfulness, even without any material demolition having taken place, lingers as an everyday worry that is anticipated by the subjects of governing. This is evident in a wide range of responses on the issue of living with the threat of demolition where large numbers of people report, for instance, “poor sleep and constant stress and anxiety” (interviewee, Hebron Governorate); “living in a place of constant harassment” (interviewee, Bethlehem Governorate); and/or “fear about the future” (multiple interviewees at each site).

There are also more specific and personal stories of anguish such as the following, recounted by a woman during a focus group close to Bethlehem:

I have a daughter in the fourth grade who is so fearful of the Israeli army, no matter how much I try to support. When the Israelis demolished the houses [recently, nearby], she didn't have good sleep for a week – and she had nightmares. We spoke a lot and she managed to calm down. But then one day, the Israeli army was by the mosque while they were coming back in the bus, and for some reason the bus driver decided to drop off the kids next to the army. My daughter's paranoia returned and got worse, and for a while she got involuntary urination ... as for now she gets even afraid to leave the house.

There are few words of commentary to accompany this, save to say that for entire families, including the youngest members, the production of uncertainty can have serious psychological, physiological and social effects. What might also be noted is the indication that living in proximity to threat is enough to be caught within the dispersal of uncertainty. This notion is supported by numerous descriptions by neighbours of demolished or demolition-ordered houses who, in the words of one man in Al-Walaja, “constantly fear that they will come [to them next]”, such that “their sleep is poor in anticipation of losing their home that could happen at any moment”. The picture that builds here is that uncertainties diffuse, not only through those whose houses are razed, nor through those whose houses are issued with still pending orders, but also through friends, family, onlookers, people living in the same area.

Uncertainty in this regard spreads and accumulates, and thus becomes a modality, where the world itself unfolds as threatening, as something whose familiarity and prevalence might disappear at any moment. At this point, uncertainty becomes an existential worry, one that affects numerous life choices not directly related to the practices of governing. A young woman in Bethlehem, for instance, spoke of her wish to continue studies: “I wish to obtain higher degrees but what if I return to find a demolished home? ... I cannot go”; and a similarly aged man from a Bedouin village near Hebron expressed a similar desire to pursue opportunities: “I had the chance to work in Nablus [in the northern part of the West Bank] for good pay but I cannot go because what happens if they [the IDF bulldozers] come?”. For both of these young people, possible futures loom and threaten, making their presents the uncertain conditions in which they anticipate the worst: *I cannot leave home to study/work because it is possible that my family home will be demolished*. A final example, from a group discussion with young adults dwelling in communities in the South Hebron Hills, takes this relationship between governing, possibility, uncertainty and anticipation to its foreboding *telos*: one person exclaimed “a decent life isn't possible, all dreams are taken” and another expanded poignantly: “if your home is *threatened* or *destroyed*, why have children? Why have a family?”.

Across the three areas of focus, different practices of governing ensure that threatening and ominous possibilities constantly loom in the futures of Palestinians. The uncertainty that ensues connects to broader attunements which open up everyday life in profound ways and

anticipation of the worst. Induced uncertainties are, in other words, mobilized: they accumulate and coalesce, so that Palestinian life is faced with threatening prospects that are confronted, embodied, anticipated and encountered in numerous ways. Further, Palestinians, under conditions of uncertainty, do not only react to the threats and prospects so engendered, but also anticipate them through a range of conducts, from the everyday (e.g. commuting, labouring) to life-course (e.g. education, career, reproduction, livelihood, dwelling), that reflect the broader attunement to a constant presence of uncertain and ominous futures. In the following section we draw out the logic of power that is relatable across the examples to explicate further the mobilization of possible futures and uncertainty in Israel's practices of governing in Palestine.

## **2. Settler colonial future prospects: from everyday threats to ominous attunement**

In this section we develop key ways that the futures evoked by Israel's practices of governing produce uncertainty among the population of Palestine and set in motion different ways of anticipating. We conceptualize this as dynamic at two interconnected planes: one, at the level of everyday threats and prospects, where uncertainties are related to certain articulated possibilities (on accessibility, permits, construction, etc.); and two, at the level of existential threat of the future itself, which expands uncertainty through more attuned anticipations of the progression of Israel's settler colonial project. Conceptualizing uncertainty at these two planes enables a better understanding of how everyday questions (of accessibility or permits for construction and travel) prefigure longer-term possibilities to do with the existence of a future itself. At this level, as we explicate in this section, the question then becomes one of a broader existential attunement to uncertainty, something manifested in issues related to future livelihood, reproduction and/or the ability to dwell in a place.

As a first observation, a commonality to each context described above is that Palestinians are caught within practices of governing that present a multitude of uncertainties. It is not known, for instance, if or when a permit will be granted, nor whether it will be honoured by security and military staff. People might be able to access their lands but with no surety if that will be the case the next day; even on consecutive days the same soldier/police/security personnel can issue different decisions. Others live in homes or areas that are threatened with demolition but are given no indication of when (or if) their home will be demolished, and are thus constantly attuned to the prospect of demolition. It is true that regulations are difficult to ascertain and that they can retain only limited (and never guaranteed) validity – such that unpredictability contributes to the efficacy of governmentalizing uncertainty (e.g. Biehl 2015; Shenhav and Berda 2009) – but it is an important corrective to note that the governing decisions documented above are not purely random, nor are they therefore entirely unpredictable within an unlimited range of possibilities.

The unknown (or unknowable) element of Israel's practices of governing instead operates here by inducing uncertainties on (relatable) *possibilities*, for instance: *will the soldier allow safe passage today, or not?* Possibilities in this register thus remain unpredictable, imaginable and rooted in the everyday as something that one can anticipate and be prepared for in daily life. What is significant in this regard is the ways that the presence of uncertainty does not denote the creation of chaotic conditions as a means of governing where, for instance, control is effected primarily by situating subjects in positions of 'imperfect knowledge about *facta* and a sense of highly unpredictable *future*' (Biehl 2015, 60, original emphasis; see also Huss 2019; Kotef and Amir 2011). Instead, in the measured possibilities of governing decisions, uncertainty is governmentalized around possibilities that can be readily imagined – as threats that can be anticipated and acted on.

At the level of everyday prospects, therefore, possibilities structure the future not *initially* as an infinite field of unknowable uncertainty as such, but as an uncertainty that is delimited by vivid but ominous possibilities. Certain possibilities, in other words, create uncertain prospects through their possible emergence and variation, and precisely as such they frame and give shape to a future uncertainty as threatening. This "shape" (of possibility) can be formed through the impending possibility of a threat, but it can also take the form of unsure access, or it can simply operate through opaque rationalizations, but in all instances, it creates plausible and undesirable future prospects that position Palestinians in spaces of uncertainty. From this temporal perspective, a central problematic of academic analyses of Israel's governing practices takes on a renewed significance: the 'effective inefficiency' (Berda 2017, 35) and 'calibrated chaos' (Petee 2017, 19) that contribute to a 'constant state of uncertainty' (Hammami 2015, 5) or 'lived sense of pressure' (Sa'di-Ibraheem 2020, 342), as some of these scholars and others (e.g. Handel 2011, 268-269; Tawil-Souri 2011, 11-12) importantly point out, is by no means a failure or unintended excess of power. Uncertainty is rather the means (*not failure*) of governing and forms the basis of its efficacy as a governmentalizing (*not coercive*) mode of 'arranging things so that this or that end may be achieved through a certain number of means' (Foucault 2007, 99). Such governmentalization, or 'governing-as-arranging' as Thomas Lemke (2015, 11) has attentively explicated, is not orientated towards acting directly, instead 'it operates on the field of *possibilities* in which the behaviours of active subjects is able to inscribe itself' (Foucault 2000, 340-341, emphasis added). The 'art of government', as Lemke (2015, 11) further explicates, thus 'consists in the 'conduct of conduct'', or in Foucault's (2000, 341) terms, in curating 'the possible field of action of others' (see also Legg 2016).

The governmentalization of the future thus emerges through a 'field of possibilities' constituted by unpleasant eventualities that *could happen*: access to a work place *could* be denied, a travel or employment permit *may be* revoked, the right to movement *might be* refused and so forth.

Unlike potentiality, possibility thus gives shape to uncertainty. Though both name a relation to future, as Brian Massumi (2002, 9) emphasises, potentiality is immanent to things as their indeterminate (future) variation, possibility in turn naming a certain variation implicit to what a certain thing can be (see also Bryant and Knight 2010). Possibility hence is not separated from potentiality, but fundamentally related to it: it names potentiality's unfolding. In other words, possibility names those imaginable and relatable options that come out of the unprescribed potential to be and not to be. Possibility is, from this perspective, immanent to the field of relations in which it happens; it names a delineated field of future prospects that are circumscribed by the prevalent field of power – future prospects that Palestinians can imagine, relate to and, crucially, anticipate. Accordingly, when *situated* within this 'arranged' field, subjects conduct themselves in a positioned, conditioned and anticipatory manner – and in ways that choices are made in relation to prevalent horizons of threatening possibilities. Conduct and governing coalesce in this governmental layout of possibilities: the 'art of governing' is a field of power, where those subjected to governing act from positions that work towards, to re-use Foucault's phrase, 'this or that end'. In such a field, control and action merge into a process of governmentality where those targeted by power position themselves within the midst of tangible but uncertain possibilities. The "torment", "fear", "worry" and so forth are hence future-orientated attunements of this field of possibilities, and they foment doubt around the sustainability of one's livelihood, the security of one's home, and they predicate decisions to remain in place, "voluntarily" forsaking the dwelling, livelihood and mobility that are at the centre of Palestinians' daily struggle.

The *second plane* of commonality across the cases is a simultaneous sense of uncertainty that might be said to reside in a broader – yet contiguous – future. In the background, as the conditions described so far become increasingly intolerable, further uncertainties arise around existentially profound prospects: *will this livelihood be possible for future generations? Can my children grow up in this place? Should I have family in these living conditions?* At this scale, the practices of governing remain at arm's length, yet integral to governing Palestinians' lives. As the access permits, checkpoint and demolition orders constantly disrupt everyday life, they simultaneously gesture towards something all the more foreboding, something immanent to the conditions of the present while never explicitly articulated as the precise *rationale* or *end* of governing practices. Uncertainty takes on a different tone here, it is no longer delimited by the narrow unpredictability (of this and that possibility) we describe above but is emergent from the existential attunement to *darkening futures*, even futurelessness, that comes to the fore as an intolerability of *current conditions*. The future emerges here as a powerful element of settler colonial elimination that governmentalizes Palestinians' subsequent life choices.

To give substance to this claim, it is first important to perceive a shift in relations between futurity and governing. In the imposition of arbitrary or unpredictable decision-making and the ‘fluidity’ of documentation, we suggest there is a marked departure from a ‘steering and regulating’ mode of governing (see Rose 2000, 324), with its underlying logics of calculation and probability, towards a logic of obscuring and foreboding futures via a laying out of prospects that seem altogether ominous. Entanglement therein is modified: from the calculated forms of regulation that elicit deliberation and negotiation between *this or that* possibility to the uncertain futures that engender guesswork, imagination and fear of a less-knowable and broader range of possibilities. This register of possibility as a tool of governing is perhaps most clearly articulated by Louise Amoore (2013, 10) who writes that ‘possibility does not govern by the deductive proving or disproving of scientific and statistical data but by the *inductive incorporation of suspicion, imagination, and pre-emption*’ [emphasis added]. It is instrumental, then, that Palestinians are subject to arbitrary or opaque practices that intervene in all aspects of life. It means that possibility expands to unknowable horizons, that a sense of certainty about one’s (future) living conditions can never be realized. The power of possibility in this sense, is thus drawn from the subjects of governing reading the gestures of the present and attempting to trace out a trajectory and one’s place within (or without) it.

This is where uncertainty realizes its broader force in terms of Israel’s governmentalization of Palestinian subjects. Life becomes constantly attuned to a general sense of uncertainty, which prompts threats to wider life decisions and anticipatory action. Uncertainty of the present horizon, in other words, amplifies the terrible-ness of the possibility to-come. This possibility to come is no longer reducible to one particular possibility (e.g. to enter *or not*) but broadens and deepens to an existential attunement around the pervasive uncertainty of the future. Uncertainty in this rendering resembles what Derrida (2003, 97) terms ‘traumatism’, at least to the extent that the present is always ‘produced by the *future*, by the *to come*, by the threat of the worst *to come*.’ In other words, ominous uncertainty intensifies the threats of the world so that it functions as a futural attunement, a world-shaking mood of revealing and as such bears resemblance to what Heidegger calls ‘anxiety’ in *Being and Time*. Uncertainty for many of the cases above, like anxiety for Heidegger, is not related to this or that thing alone, but to the world as such (Heidegger 1996; see also Joronen forthcoming) – and yet, ominous uncertainty remains different by its way of opening up the world, not to new possibilities, but as (and contra Heidegger) an ever-more threatening, uncertain, and worrying world-to-come. The everyday restrictions and doubts documented above thus operate as a ‘terrible sign of what might or perhaps will take place’, and which, as Derrida aptly writes, ‘will be *worse than anything that has ever taken place*’ (Derrida 2003, 97, original emphasis). From this perspective, the cases take on renewed significance and reveal how the effects of

governmentalizing the future are not delimited to the everyday but function simultaneously – and deleteriously – as *gestures towards* the existentially threatened futures in which Palestinian life is not merely a continuing struggle but a life approaching an ominous, intolerable and even impossible ‘to-come’.

It is at this point where Israel’s settler colonial project begins to move towards the foreground. As documented above, where ominous futures loom, anticipatory actions, decisions and intentions emerge: some Palestinians avoid Jerusalem; fewer Palestinians are born; and others abandon their ancestral land and the ways of living tied to it. The signs of dispossession and elimination are thus clearly detectable and we therefore are able to build an answer to the third question we articulate in the article’s opening – *what does an analysis of the governmentalization of futures disclose of the settler-colonial state?* There are three inter-connected sites of contestation relevant to a response: 1) the widely discussed “demographic war” (Faitelson 2009; Pappé 2006) in Palestine-Israel; 2) a reinvigorated move to annex part or all of the West Bank (OHCHR 2020) and; 3) the ongoing “Judaization” of Jerusalem (Arafah 2016; Yiftachel 1999).

On the first issue of demography, there are cases above where Palestinians see cause to question in their current living conditions the prudence or feasibility of reproduction. While there are many factors in a downward trend in reproduction rates among Palestinians – e.g. women’s education (Khawaja et al. 2006) and greater access to contraception (Memmi 2013)<sup>vii</sup> – it should not be forgotten that reproductive decisions are also rooted in political conditions, especially in areas subject to high levels of military violence, restrictions and colonization, such as Palestine (see Pell 2017). If, for instance, a demolition order is never merely the destruction of material premises but also an assault on the familial and social sphere (see e.g. Harker 2009), then it also sets reproductive choices in the context of an ominous future, thereby indicating uncertainty’s potential utility in the settler’s demographic objectives. The second and connected issue of territory emerges where people come to perceive conditions as intolerable (in terms of livelihood, but also anxiety and fear), even to the point of considering leaving, such that we find in cases of families living in sites strangled by the settlements of Gush Etzion. To be sure, there are other factors at play – e.g. a wider move by Palestinian youth towards urban life – but uncertainty is undoubtedly connected to intentions or desires to vacate land, thus fulfilling Zionist fantasies of and designs on a *terra nullius* (see e.g. Said 1980: 106-114; Zureik 2016: 73-75). For each Palestinian who worries and anticipates possible abandonment, expulsion or dispossession, uncertainty works towards the settler colonial end of territorial dispossession and elimination of the livelihood of native communities by significantly lowering their quality of life. Thirdly, and finally, while these demographic and territorial contestations are fought most intensely in and around Jerusalem, the city’s importance is broader for its great symbolic value for Palestinian collective identity (see e.g.

Abed and Samman 2018, 2; Khalidi 1997, 13-14). Israel's multiple strategies for building a singularly Jewish-Israeli space rest on denying Palestinians' 'right to the city' (see e.g. Alkhalili et al. 2014) and effecting 'the irrelevance, removal, and erasure of [all] Palestinians' (Makdisi 2010, 532). For each Palestinian excluded from the city, or equally, ones for whom the "tormenting" permit and crossing processes act as an effective deterrent, Jerusalem edges, slowly but definitely, towards the Zionist vision of an 'eternal undivided capital' of Israel (see e.g. Said 1995).

### 3. Conclusions

In this article we have shown how prospects, possibilities and uncertainties are mobilized in Israel's governing of the occupied West Bank. While it is true that the future remains *always*-uncertain, and thus open to potential, it is simultaneously true that uncertainty and possibility can become conditions of governing – elements that, when brought into relations of power, become ways of making ominous prospects part of everyday life (as present-futures). To the first question we pose at the opening of the article, on the relations between governing, possibility and uncertainty in the occupied West Bank, the response presented here thus tracks the connections between the production of uncertainties via everyday prospects (*will the soldier allow safe passage today, or not?*), which draw the future to the present through accumulative gestures towards anticipating and becoming attuned to a foreboding future of ever-worsening conditions. As we have documented, Palestinians in different contexts are subject to a governmental logic whose efficacy issues from acting on a future modal tense: *what might happen*. Life in such conditions is marked by uncertainty with a sense that worse (even *the worst*) is to come. It is not too far a reach to describe people's living conditions documented here as – if not *already* intolerable – *becoming* intolerable; life is thus inflected by worry, anticipation, fear – and negative expectations around the future.

To the second question posed, on how people living in conditions of uncertainty anticipate possible futures, the answer is ranging. Often, governmentalization operates through tangible possibilities related to specific matters of access, permits, mobility and so on, yet where the future is most ominous, everyday life is lived through a more profound sense of uncertainty – one that puts even the continuation of life at stake. Here an existential attunement to an uncertain future (or even future-*lessness*) emerges – one where the future itself is put into question. Foreboding uncertainties spill into all domains of life, creating self-regulating decisions around life-course (e.g. education, career) and everyday activities (e.g. commuting, labouring), while further intervening in cycles of social, cultural and biological reproduction, and activities of livelihood and dwelling. Ultimately, as we further show, the governmentalizing of futures leads to the crucial issues of territory and demography with potentially world-nullifying consequences. From here, connections

can be made – without losing a fidelity to the pronounced particularity of the context of Palestine-Israel – to wider geographies of uncertainty and governing where, for instance, governments elevate uncertainties among both, already-precarious populations (e.g. Auyero 2012; Biehl 2015; Griffiths and Joronen 2019) and general publics (e.g. Anderson and Adey 2012) alike. The common thread running through such geographies is ‘the uncertainties that accompany neoliberal ways of governing economy and life’ (Anderson et al. 2019, 257) which, taken with the present discussion, indicates a further challenge to excavate the relations between neoliberal rationale (or political economy in general) and settler colonialism without reducing the latter to the former (e.g. Plasse-Couture 2013).

The work of the article has therefore been to extract a particular logic of governing that, we argue, operates by producing the conditions in which ominous possibilities position subjects to anticipate, decide, imagine and (re)act – to become attuned to certain prospects of uncertain life. As we have further demonstrated, such governmentalisation installs an abiding sense of uncertainty, which calls forth anticipations and darkening expectations around, to put it in the starkest terms, the continuation of life. Governmentalization in this respect works by making governing effective on a level that is not solely grounded in the (various) acts of power or powerful actors but is also rooted in – and dependent on – channelling the feelings, (re)actions, and anticipations of those situated within fields of power to desired directions (Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2009).

As is explored in existing research, Palestinians’ encounters with power do not pass without contestation and negotiation (see Griffiths 2017; Hammami 2015; 2019; Joronen 2017a; Joronen and Griffiths 2019a, Kotef and Amir 2011; Richter-Devroe 2018); yet, a focus on governmentalization enables an understanding of how power can work through an ‘art of governing’ that operates not only via practices of colonisation, control and violent subordination but through gestures, imaginations, anticipations and self-regulations – that is, by positioning life in uncertain and ominous futures. The incremental progression of settler colonial elimination is thus (partially) achieved, not only through the direct violence of settlers, settling and the structural aims of settler colonial state (e.g. Wolfe 2006), nor by processes of bureaucratic recognition and externalization (e.g. Schmidt 2018; Shenhav and Berda 2009), but via a subtle setting of conditions of elimination in which anticipation serves an ultimate objective of indigenous absence on the land.

Furthermore, and finally, a focus on the governmentalization of futures enables one more way of understanding less spectacular, often slowly accumulating and mundane events of violence and dispossession in Palestine (See Ghantous, 2020; Hammami, 2015; 2016; Peteet, 2017; Joronen 2017b; 2020). Our focus here is keenly trained on extracting a logic of governing and how Israel’s

territorial and demographic control over Palestine functions at interconnected levels, this works as a complement to inquiry into the ways in which such forms of power are encountered, re-made and contested (see Velednitsky et al. 2020). As Rhys Machold (2018, 95) has insightfully cautioned, ‘we must avoid tacitly reifying the supposed genius at the heart of nation-building projects’ because ‘otherwise we risk ceding an undue level of coherence and omnipotence to colonial enterprises, silencing the voices that help us find *fissures and contradictions* within them’ [emphasis added] (see also Joronen and Rose 2020; Shenhav and Berda 2009). This point is reinforced by two axioms: practices of governing are inherently vulnerable, and subjects of governing endure, negotiate and resist (Joronen 2019). The fissures, contradictions, vulnerabilities and negotiations of power are yet to be considered against the connections made here between governmentalization and future: how are alternative futures envisioned and enacted by Palestinians? What forms of preparation or pre-emption emerge from anticipation? Asking such questions effects a key ontological and political reversal: the *creativity* of governing a *vulnerable* population is opened out to consider the *vulnerability* of governing and the *creativity* of the governed (see Joronen and Griffiths 2019a; Joronen and Rose 2020). This is more than a discursive twist, if the research here identifies a future-orientated form of governing, then further inquiry might focus on future-orientated forms of endurance, negotiation, refusal and so forth that unfold in the conditions of uncertainty.

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<sup>i</sup> This work is based on the Griffiths's collaborative fieldwork in checkpoints at Bethlehem Governorate (see Griffiths and Repo 2018; 2020a; 2020b).

<sup>ii</sup> The Etzion DCO is an office subject to sustained attention from the Israeli women's human rights organization Machsomwatch whose regular reports provide accounts of seemingly deliberate slowness and specific cases of arbitrary administrative decisions, and intimidation from its various personnel. See <https://machsomwatch.org/en/taxonomy/term/891>

<sup>iii</sup> The work here is based on Joronen's research on everyday resistance and forms of violence confronted in villages affected by expanding settlements, settler and military violence and other occupation infrastructures and bureaucracies (see Joronen 2017a; 2017b; 2019; 2020).

<sup>iv</sup> After the second Oslo Agreement (1995), the West Bank was divided into Areas A, B and C. The Palestinian Authority is responsible for security and administration over the mostly urban Area A (roughly 18% of the West Bank), administration over the Area B (~22%), while Area C (~60%) is governed by the Israeli Civil Administration and is characterized by illegal Israeli settlements and vulnerable Palestinian spaces marked by land grabbing, demolitions, forced displacements and several forms of settler and military violence.

<sup>v</sup> The interview was conducted in May 2019, after the Trump Administration's decision to move the US embassy to Jerusalem (in 2018) but before Trump's colonization plan was revealed in 2020 (White House 2020; for more see Ghanem 2020; Pappé 2020).

<sup>vi</sup> "Unrecognized" is a bureaucratic status conferred by COGAT that excludes a community from basic utilities provision and prohibits Palestinian construction while facilitating the expansion of Israeli settlements (see Human Rights Watch 2008; Yiftachel 2009).

<sup>vii</sup> The World Bank (2020) reports the fertility rate of Palestine (births per woman in Gaza and the West Bank) as 3.6 (down from 6.7 in the early 1990s); the latest figures published by Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics records the fertility rate of the Jewish population of the West Bank (i.e. in Israel's illegal settlement population) at 4.89 (CBS 2020; see also Khawaja et al. 2009).