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Of bakeries and checkpoints: Stately affects in Amman and Baghdad

José Ciro Martínez
University of Cambridge, UK

Omar Sirri
University of Toronto, Canada

Abstract

This paper examines bakeries and checkpoints through their relationship to the state and connects considerations of affect with the burgeoning literature on infrastructure. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork in Amman and Baghdad, we centre routine encounters at these sites and argue that infrastructural engagements ignite energies, desires and sentiments that are deeply implicated in how the state plays out in everyday life. We zoom in on these ordinary affects and unpack the situated histories of rule in which they emerge. In Amman and Baghdad, stately affects work in and through infrastructure, doing so with regularity and intensity, and at specific times and places. The state effect transpires and thrives through these quotidian affective resonances, not just in the realm of ideas and imaginaries.

Keywords

State, infrastructure, affect, Amman, Baghdad, everyday life

Scenes and sites: The bakery and the checkpoint

The bakery: Amman, November 2015

Abu Zeina is always tired but usually upbeat. One night we meet for tea after he finishes his 12-hour shift at an upmarket café in the Swefieh district of West Amman. A father of three daughters, Abu Zeina rarely sees his children, departing for his early morning shift at a sandwich shop before they awake and returning home from the café after they go to bed.

Corresponding author:
José Ciro Martínez, Trinity College, University of Cambridge, Cambridge CB2 1TQ, UK.
Emails: jcm88@cam.ac.uk; josecirom@gmail.com

He often wished he could spend more time with them, relating how awful he felt for handing the children off to his parents for most of the afternoon, as his wife also works two jobs. But he takes solace in fulfilling what he describes as his two main responsibilities: "To make money and bring bread (*'Aml maṣārī wa jīb khubz*)."

After briefly catching up, we hop in a cab east towards downtown, from where we each take a shared taxi (*servīs*) to our respective neighbourhoods. That night, Abu Zeina asks the cab driver to stop at al-Shaltawi bakery. I follow him in. It is around midnight and the oven is working at full tilt, the heat inside a welcome respite from what is a chilly autumn evening. A few customers collect sweet biscuits (*ka'k*) that are usually dipped in tea, while others wallow outside over a cigarette. But most are in line for warm pita bread (*khubz 'arabī*). Subsidised heavily by the Jordanian government, this bread is the cornerstone of many working-class diets and, for families like Abu Zeina's, is crucial to getting by.

Al-Shaltawi is perfectly located on a small side street just off one of the thoroughfares that lead into Amman's historic city centre. Aided by convenient parking, customers can make hurried purchases without holding up traffic. Most times I passed this bakery it had a line of customers out the door. "Why do so many people stop here?" I ask Abu Zeina. "Because the bread is always fresh," he answers. "Most bakeries at this hour are closed, this one is perfect for those of us who live in East Amman but work late on the other side of the city." Struck by the uptick in his mood, I ask Abu Zeina to expound on his attachments to al-Shaltawi: "Some people buy bread to make a quick snack, most purchase it to take home to their families. Everyone knows they can afford it because it's cheap. At such a late hour, the smells, the sounds, the entire bakery brings joy." "Why joy?" I ask. Abu Zeina offers a wry smile. His reply speaks to both the importance of the bakery as infrastructure and its role in generating affective attachments to the state: "Because every day and everywhere the state lives off of the citizen. Here at the bakery, we [citizens] get to live off of the state."[1]

The checkpoint: Baghdad, February 2018

On a crisp February night, Daood and his friends were out in the Jazeera district in north Baghdad. There were maybe 9 or 10 of them in all, spread across four cars. Returning home from a café along the Tigris, they hit a police checkpoint. Daood was behind the wheel of his newish Volkswagen sedan, happily distracted by his two carmates. He had not clocked that the short line of cars ahead of him at the checkpoint had already advanced; he accelerated quickly to catch up. Moving too fast for his liking, the police officer hollered "*taftīsh*," and with a wave of his hand directed Daood to the secondary car search. "Why in such a hurry?" the officer came over to ask Daood. "I'm not in a hurry," Daood tersely replied. He opened his trunk and engine hood for the K-9 unit as the police officer checked his car registration and ID. "I asked the officer if this was all 'routine procedure,'" Daood told me. Offended by the question, the officer escalated the confrontation: "Call the commander! This guy is breaking the law!"

Taken to a security caravan at the side of the checkpoint, Daood was met by two plain-clothed officers. "I explained how I didn't do anything wrong. Then I heard the commander outside call for a police van to take me away. I wasn't scared though, I hadn't done anything." Sitting with us as Daood told this story was his friend Nabil, who scoffed at his friend's after-the-fact confidence. He had been in Daood's passenger seat that night at the checkpoint. Nabil knew ending up in the back of a police van would have been disastrous for Daood. The potential consequences were bleak, from heavy fines to time in prison. Daood continued: "20 minutes later, a different commander came and asked me who was to blame, me or the officer. I was careful when I answered. I said that he was just doing his

job, and I was in a hurry." Daood hoped his cautious retreat would allow everyone to save face. An intelligence officer also stationed at the checkpoint then entered the caravan. "He walked me out and insisted I settle this quickly, and that if I don't do so before the police van arrives, I'll leave in it." Daood was anxious. He came upon the original officer who stopped him; they again argued. Watching from the side-lines, the first commander who had been called more than an hour before grew irritated: "Enough! If there's nothing, then let him go."[2] The intelligence officer hurried Daood away: "I grabbed my papers and took off."

Fear at Baghdad's checkpoints operates through coercion and uncertainty. A sense that anything can happen while passing through them means, for most residents, that checkpoints exist "only to hurt the people" (*bas yuadhī an-nās*). At the same time, arbitrary checkpoints generate a desire for better, more reliable security infrastructures. Checkpoints give rise to different emotions and sensations – fear and anxiety, uncertainty and desire – that are critical to the construction of the state. "If the police officer had just done his job, it would have been fine," Daood insisted. "I just wish police officers at checkpoints were more educated. I wish they had better manners. Without manners, you have catastrophe."[3]

Reconsidering the state effect

These vignettes, from our respective fieldwork in Amman and Baghdad, suggest that the state is present at the bakery and the checkpoint. But what is the nature of this presence? We explore how routine interactions at these rarely-examined sites engender the state effect. In doing so, we emphasise their infrastructural and affective properties. Building on scholarship in geography and anthropology, this article brings together different case studies in neighbouring countries, Jordan and Iraq, to explore how the state is produced in the interstices of everyday life. We unpack not the practices of state officials or the techno-political interventions of an amorphous bureaucracy, but the varied emotions, enduring attachments and desires of citizens (Aretxaga, 2003: 395; Navaro, 2002; Reeves, 2011; Secor, 2007).

In his 1991 article, "The Limits of the State," Timothy Mitchell alerts us to the difficulties of identifying the state as a discrete set of actors and institutions – let alone as a singular unit of analysis. His intervention pierces the myth of the state/society boundary. Perhaps more critically, he suggests that the binary is grounded in a particular "conceptual-empirical distinction" (82) that leads to an acceptance of "the state" as an unquestioned axiom of political life. One way out of these stately constraints, Mitchell tells us, is to explore "how" this structuring process occurs by zooming in on mechanisms or practices of power. Doing so allows one to recognise "the power of the political arrangements that we call the state and at the same time account for their elusiveness" (94–95). Mitchell's intervention remains foundational. A broad swathe of scholars has built on its original insight, especially those focusing on narratives and imaginaries that contribute to the state effect (Aretxaga, 2000; Hansen and Stepputat, 2001; Gupta, 2012). Akhil Gupta's (2012) *Red Tape*, for example, examines rural people's relations with local-level officials, foregrounding how routine bureaucratic practices, "to the extent that they implicitly invoke a singular state, all help officials and citizens imagine such an entity" (56). We are sympathetic to such interventions yet depart from them, not so much because particular representations of the state are not critical to shedding light on how the state effect percolates into form; they are and do. We simply find such accounts to be incomplete as they overlook the affective charges that make the state possible.

Ann Laura Stoler's *Along the Archival Grain* (2009) questions why the state and sentiment are so rarely put in conversation. "How is it," she asks, "that states are commonly

viewed as institutional machines that squelch and counter passions, while nations are envisaged as culturally rich producers of them? Why does the pairing of state and sentiment seem like an oxymoron?" (70). While scholars of nationalism are giving increasing attention to such affective reverberations, unpacking the ways roads (Merriman and Jones, 2017), sporting events (Closs Stephens, 2016) and city-wide celebrations (Sumartojo, 2015) become entwined with national identities, here we contribute to giving the state its equal due.

In *The Make-Believe Space* (2012), Yael Navaro pursues "affect in unlikely sites" (31), exploring the bonds between her interlocutors and documents produced by the institutions of an unrecognised state, the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. By way of her ethnographic engagements, Navaro argues for an analytical approach that collapses interior human subjectivity and exterior environmental surroundings, "making them indistinguishable" (24). We echo her work in studying affect and subjectivity conjointly. Yet, Navaro's focus on administrative and bureaucratic practices leaves infrastructure unexamined as a site of affective entanglement between citizens and the state. No less everyday and no less "manmade" (31), we zoom in on infrastructure as a way of building on Navaro's work.

Routine engagements with infrastructure often lie in the background of people's consciousness. We know someone or something delivers water and electricity, bread and security. But how exactly people relate to such processes is rarely considered at length. Apparently insignificant, far from "where the action really is" (Elyachar, 2011: 83), we aim to foreground infrastructure by shedding light on these ostensibly "hidden spaces" that we find important to the state effect (Staehli et al., 2012: 641). The hidden here is not so much the infrastructural but rather the affective. One constellation of these entanglements involves the embodied labour of bureaucrats and state-makers, which we address in a forthcoming piece (see also Barnes, 2017). Here, we foreground not the material properties of infrastructure and the types of practices and movements they afford, but the ways they help engender affects that are implicated in how citizens relate to the state. Those of us interested in illuminating *how* the state continues to grasp our bodies and imaginaries would do well to consider "ordinary affects" (Gupta, 2019; Stewart, 2007). For it is in part through infrastructures' affective imbrications that both publics are created and the state effect spawned.

Stately affects

Bakeries and checkpoints are not obviously infrastructural. Yet, both play a crucial role in conditioning and administering life in Amman and Baghdad. These sites are socio-material assemblages that shape space, time and movement in these two cities. Larkin (2013) traces the evolution of the scholarship on infrastructures – from concerns with the "technopolitics" of science and technology (Bennett, 2010; Latour, 2007; Mitchell, 2002) to the more fine-grained, ethnographically-attuned work that unpacks how infrastructures are experienced and perceived by those who construct and live with them (see also Fredericks, 2018; Graham and McFarlane, 2014; Stamatopoulou-Robbins, 2019). Larkin's (2013) intervention is valuable in part because he provides an expansive definition of infrastructure, as "matter that enable the movement of other matter," which simply means that they are "things and also the relation between things. As things they are present to the senses, yet they are also displaced in the focus on the matter they move around" (329). The analytical power of infrastructure stems from the fact that these "things" are merely a material and spatial

starting point, fixtures that ultimately plug into a host of other sites, people and practices (330; Simone, 2004). Is the state amongst them?

By way of their phenomenal study of roads in Peru, Harvey and Knox (2015) tell us that infrastructure "does not manifest state presence in any straightforward way" and can just as easily represent or "conjure" state absence (39). Residents' feelings and attitudes towards infrastructure are informed by historical engagements and, in the case of one Peruvian road project, are closely linked to a "prior sense of abandonment and marginality" felt by local residents (Harvey and Knox, 2015). Staying with pavement, Reeves' (2017) work on roads suggests that social and material forces co-constitute and, in the process, bring about affective investments "stored" in infrastructure (716, citing Larkin, 2013). Such affects are implicated in what she calls infrastructure's "promissory quality: the prospect that the future might be more secure, more prosperous, or more peaceful than the present" (717). Reeves would likely concur with Larkin that while infrastructure is often assumed to represent alternative futures, with modernity as the guiding telos, the reality can often be far different. But her point is that the "simultaneity" (713) of infrastructure and affect illuminates precisely *how* people at once beckon alternative futures while inhabiting a far-less satisfying present.

Affect and infrastructure can similarly come together to engender national feelings and imaginaries. For Merriman and Jones (2017), infrastructure is a "processual thing" which is operative alongside circulatory affects that "are only partially apprehended by bodies" (601). Affects "flicker" intermittently, fuelled and provoked by sites, spaces and things (603). Building on these insights, we suggest that routine interactions and encounters with infrastructure trigger affective flickers – hope, promise, desire, fear, despair – which are deeply political in nature. Crucial here are infrastructure's aesthetic or sensuous qualities, what Larkin (2013) terms their "poetics." In a more recent contribution, Larkin (2018) suggests that infrastructural forms "impose sensory conditions of experience" that shape "cognitive and affective dispositions" (185). His intervention is compelling because he considers the ways "infrastructures are caught in relations of the state to its citizens," working to translate modes of rule so as to make them "affectively real and emotionally available" (185).

In this paper, we aim to push further Larkin's admittedly theoretical take on infrastructure and the state (178). We respond with ethnographic work from Amman and Baghdad in order to unpack how these relationships play out in everyday life. Larkin's interest lies in "anonymous infrastructural phenomena – switches, pipes, cables, roads, sewers, bridges, railways, servers…" (188). While intrigued by his empirical focus, we extend his insights to far-less anonymous infrastructures. It is not solely in moments of infrastructural breakdown that socio-material assemblages come to matter. Sometimes they work, other times they do not; yet, infrastructures and their conjoining parts never fail to grasp those moving and dwelling amongst them. The political import of bakeries and checkpoints lies not just in their material or technical properties but in how they are lived (Cowen, 2017; Graham and McFarlane, 2014; Simone, 2004; Von Schnitzler, 2013), and the ways they can routinely evoke a variety of emotions and affects amongst those experiencing them. We suggest affects that stem from and hover around infrastructures might be life-affirming registers of disorderly freedom that oppose and even subvert structures of power. But just as often these affects can work to order, regulate and discipline the bodies that feel and sense them – whether in line at a bakery in Amman or a checkpoint in Baghdad.

Putting such different places into conversation with each other may seem strange at first glance. But we see value in our "disjunctive comparison" (Lazar, 2012: 351) – contrasting

these two "unlike" sites against each other. Bakeries in Amman offer sustenance, nourishment and welfare for those who pass through them. Checkpoints in Baghdad, however, are first and foremost spaces of violence and coercion. These sites lay bare opposing faces of the state and illustrate modes of engagement citizens have with political authority in two very different cities and political contexts. Fieldwork conducted separately over a period of more than 15 months revealed to each of us the varied ways that the state is felt, experienced and discussed in Amman and Baghdad. When brought together, these different sites and affects contribute to how we understand the state in a manner we believe would not have been as evident in the study of either city or infrastructure on their own. It became clear in conversation that bakeries and checkpoints exert a "force" not easily captured by the materials that compose them or the logics of rule they seek to entrench (Amin, 2014). Far more is going on.

Infrastructural encounters

Cynics at the bakery

In 1974, the Jordanian government institutionalised a commitment to supporting the purchasing power of citizens. One of the primary ways it did so was to subsidise a wide array of foodstuffs, including pita bread (*khubz 'arabī*). By February 1992, and as part of its agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) three years earlier, the Jordanian government eliminated most of these consumer supports and price controls. But it did not remove the bread subsidy. On the two occasions when subsidy reform was attempted (1989, 1996), Jordanian citizens took to the streets in opposition. Ever since, political elites have consistently ignored the pleas of international financial institutions, cementing the government's commitment to providing citizens with discounted bread (Andoni and Schwedler, 1996; Martínez, 2017). In addition to the foodstuff's symbolic importance (Canaan, 1962; Martínez, 2018a), subsidised pita bread continues to represent a crucial hedge against inflation and volatile food markets for residents of the Hashemite Kingdom. Whereas vegetable prices, especially tomatoes, fluctuate considerably, the price of bread remains uniform at JD0.16 ($0.23) a kilogram.[4] Reliance on subsidised bread is most pronounced in Jordan's poorest villages, where average monthly food expenditures are dedicated almost entirely to cereals (World Food Programme, 2014). Yet, support for, and dependence upon, this welfare program is not limited to poor citizens. Discounted bread functions as an emergency relief program for Syrian refugees (Martínez, 2014). It also ensures the subsistence of migrant and salaried workers, reducing the labour costs of small and large businesses alike, all while allowing Jordan's middle class to maintain a certain quality of life. Broadly popular and consistently defended, the bread subsidy undergirds one of the most frequent engagements Jordanian citizens have with the state apparatus.

The bakeries that distribute subsidised bread hold pride of place in an array of neighbourhoods, transport hubs and spaces of commerce. They are a site of recurring encounters, chance meetings and, for many, a visible guarantee of subsistence and state presence. Yet, unlike roads and public schools, these outlets function as private property. They are owned and run by revenue-seeking proprietors who engage in profit-maximising strategies. Nevertheless, the distribution of subsidised bread in 94% of bakeries means they are treated far different from other retailers.[5] Citizens can complain about these bakeries' main product, and state officials can intervene in their bread production. They are run according to a set of laws considerably stricter than those regulating other food purveyors. Although they can sell sweets and fancier types of bread at whatever price they wish, the production and

sale of subsidised bread must follow dictates set by the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Supply (MOITS). This ministry intervenes in the entire subsidised bread supply chain. It regulates the production and purchase of this foodstuff to make each process predictable and uniform, a goal the Ministry, for the most part, achieves (see also Martínez, 2018b).

Abu Zeina's remark about "living from the state" was far from the only disparaging comment made by my interlocutors in Amman at the time. Beginning in 2013, persistent rumours signalled the government's impending intention to alter the bread subsidy. Just the previous year, a new wave of economic reforms following Jordan's agreement to a 36-month, $2.06bn IMF loan prompted changes to the other prominent and long-standing subsidy: fuel. Its subsequent price hike, which would have increased the cost of fuel for home furnaces and cooking by more than 30% just before the onset of winter, triggered a series of protests throughout the country (Abu-Rish, 2014: 307; Bustani, 2019). By late 2015, much of this unrest had died down; yet, citizens remained suspicious of the government's intentions. For several years, plans had been leaked to the press about the potential distribution of electronic smart cards with cash assistance to counteract the lifting of the bread subsidy. Only Jordanian citizens with valid identity cards would be given a monthly allowance to compensate for the difference between subsidised bread (0.16 JD per kilogramme) and its predicted free market price (0.38 JD per kilogramme). Prime Minister Abdullah Ensour was said to be reaching the end of his term and many wondered whether he was planning on implementing bread subsidy reform as a parting gift. Would the Prime Minister impose subsidy reform in a nod to the IMF's provisos? Did his possible desire for a cushy retirement ensure that he would implement the most painful austerity measures endorsed by the King? Could the futuristic "smart cards" actually be distributed to all those in need? What would happen to migrants, those living far from their families and refugees?

These questions were ubiquitous during fieldwork. Many people I spoke with depended on subsidised bread to feed their families, while countless small business owners relied on the subsidy to keep labour costs low, including the bakery owners themselves. But rather than threatening to mobilise, protest or revolt, scepticism and scoffing were the sentiments that most abounded amongst my interlocutors in Amman. "The politicians are too focused on filling their pockets to change the bread subsidy," Abu Zeina remarked one evening after purchasing bread at al-Shaltawi. "Can you imagine them actually being organised enough to send electronic cards to every citizen in the country? Many of us don't even have bank accounts." When I mentioned the feasibility studies I had heard being conducted at the Ministry, his satirical tone deepened. "The smart card (*Al-biṭāqa adh-dhakiyya*)?" he asked me mockingly, "More like the dumb card (*Ashbuhu biṭāqa ghabiyya*)." These observations, like those of so many citizens I interacted with at the time, were imbued with cynical remarks about the Jordanian state and those seen to steer it.

A month after my chat with Abu Zeina, I learned that the owners of al-Shaltawi had a knack for situating their bakeries on prime real estate. In December 2015, I came across another bread outlet with the same name and logo, established by the same group of brothers, situated amongst a strip of stores at an informal bus stop near the University of Jordan's hospital. On their morning commute into town, workers from north Amman would purchase baked goods for breakfast consumed later at their offices and shops. Doctors and nurses from the nearby hospital would buy savoury pastries (*m'ajanāt*) for a mid-morning bite. At night, students filled the bakery, grabbing bags of bread to complement a late snack. A host of construction projects were slowing traffic along the University Road during the weeks I observed the bakery. These projects regularly impacted the frequency of buses heading downtown, from where many, like myself, would continue their journeys home. Over soft drinks and cigarettes, several of the students bemoaned the

lackadaisical public transportation, a conversation surely fuelled by unreliable bus schedules and the recurring delays to their already-long commutes those evenings. At the bus stop, my own regrettably visceral frustrations were regularly mocked, albeit kindly. On more than one occasion someone would ask, commenting on my irritation at a delay: "*Istaghrabat?* (You're surprised?)," to which I would respond despondently, "*La ṭabī'iyy* (No, it's normal)." "*Fawq ṭabī'iyy* (Beyond normal)," someone would inevitably chuckle back. The deficiency of public infrastructures was obvious to all, a fact only exacerbated by a host of mega-projects that were themselves delayed or cancelled due to corruption or cost overruns.

But the bakery never failed; it could never disappoint. At the second al-Shaltawi, MOITS' success was on hand for all to see, feel and sometimes discuss. While waiting in line on several occasions, I asked those around me about the logistics of bread provision: "Where does the wheat come from? How do they make sure there is enough flour? Why is bread so cheap?" For Akram, the answers were unimportant: "None of that matters. The state makes sure there is enough because they know people depend on bread to survive. If you cannot eat, you might revolt." As some nodded in agreement, I asked why the same logic did not apply to other public services. Most laughed while a few nervously surveyed their companions. Akram responded with a lengthy explanation while a few listeners chimed in along the way. Together, they emphasized the corruption that permeated public institutions while referencing several high-profile scandals recently in the news. These students derided the derelict conditions in public schools and hospitals, which they claimed were driven by the self-interest of those in government, along with their allies in the private sector. All those present seemed certain that infrastructural failures were the result of those in power looting resources. But somehow, "The bakery is different," Abbas, another student, asserted. "We can take corruption, theft and disregard from the state, but they know they cannot touch our bread. Cake is just not as filling." Many of these students and their families depend upon subsidised bread to cut down costs and make life liveable. This dependence is complex, but the fact that so many relied upon the bakery means they could not fully disavow the entity seen to undergird its provision. When hungry, popular investment in the state was necessary.

Akram, Abbas and their fellow students were sceptical of the state's ability to intervene positively in their lives. Their comments would convey anger, frustration and exasperation. The students surmised that infrastructures were there to serve the rich and to further marketised modes of exchange. They conjectured that the Prime Minister's homilies sought, above all, to maintain the political status quo. The bakery was perplexing in this respect. In stark contrast to the failures and shortcomings of other public infrastructures, it was clear at al-Shaltawi that, when the state wished, it could provide and deliver. The consistency of subsidised bread provision made obvious that other infrastructural deficiencies were merely a matter of exertion and interest. The state apparatus provided the bread through which so many survived and thus it had to be navigated – "a material and tangible world had been organised around it" (Navaro, 2002: 171). Yet, crucial as well are the affects and sentiments that were generated by these relational configurations, and the ways they made the state palpable. "The state raises [the prices of] everything," Abbas affirmed while we purchased bread, "except the call to prayer (*Ad-dawla yarfa'a kul shī dhul yarf'a al-adhān*)." The political-economic rationales for the subsidy of bread and its reception at the bakery are relatively easy to surmise. More difficult to unpack, yet equally important, are the ways this infrastructural encounter is lived and reflected upon. Beyond its technical operations or distributive outcomes, the bakery generates affective charges that infuse the citizenry's engagements with the state apparatus.

In *Faces of the State*, Navaro (2002) identifies cynicism as a "central structure of feeling for the production and regeneration of the political in Turkey's public life" (5). As a device

employed by members of the public, she finds cynicism to be vital to keeping the state intact. Her informant, Saniye, mocks state officials and produces acerbic remarks about the state all the time. Yet, she continues to organise "her everyday activities *as if* the state were there to deliver justice, *as if* it were an institution, a person, something tangible, *as if* it were a wholesome entity" (171, italics in original). In Amman, cynicism may not be the primary or most prevalent structure of feeling amongst all citizens; yet, it persisted in the ridicule and incredulity I often heard voiced in conversations about the bakery and bread subsidy reform. Cynicism is important here not just because it enables certain permissible modes of critique, but because it allows citizens to come to terms with a world ordered by the state, without continuously questioning why it is that they submit to an abstraction. Abbas and his companions know Amman is governed unevenly and unequally. They do not need to be told that certain residents bear the brunt of infrastructures' open-endedness, subject as they are to mercurial political machinations, to suspensions and certainly to failures (Graham, 2010; Merriman, 2016). What their evaluations and criticisms demonstrate is that while bakeries inevitably emit and provoke embodied affects, their breakdown or failure is not necessary for people to qualify and contemplate them. These assessments are inevitably tied up with histories of provision, protest and repression, and the very different modes through which gender, class and labour are produced and reproduced. But crucially, they are as central to the infrastructural encounter as the joys and frustrations that occur when purchasing bread (Navaro, 2012, see also Laszczkowski and Reeves, 2015). The state effect transpires through bureaucratic practice, narration and coercive force. Yet, it is also rooted in historically modulated affects that occur within and through individual bodies. At the bakery, the habitually neglectful Jordanian state becomes "affectively real and emotionally available" (Larkin, 2018: 185), whether to be mocked, scorned or hesitatingly appreciated.

Amman is not cheap. Its citizens must constantly navigate an ever more unequal city in order to get by (Hourani, 2014; Schwedler, 2010). Some purchases are feasible, others less so. Still, the bakery is one of the few sites of consumption that the vast majority of citizens can always access. It allows them a moment of respite. Financial worries and concerns dissipate, if only momentarily. At 16 qirsh ($0.23) per kilogram, the bakery's main product is affordable for almost all. Yet, its very "success" engenders sarcasm and scorn. How can this infrastructure "work" when so many others do not? Like Navaro (2002), I wish to emphasise that cynicism does not prevent my interlocutors from trying to will for themselves and their families a better life, against "all odds and chances" (170; see also Allen, 2014; Daswani, 2020). But to ignore such cynical sentiments in the search for resisters and revolutionaries, for example, is to overlook the mundane practices and encounters through which the state permeates everyday life (Martínez and Eng, 2017; Painter, 2006; Steinmüller, 2016). Part of the analytic challenge is to think about infrastructures not just as technical apparatuses of rule but as the locus of complicated affective entanglements – as sources of disappointment, as objects of fury, as sites of mundane suspicion and sarcasm through which the state effect is reproduced. And it is here where I find the bakery to be crucial, not just because of the subsistence it provides but also because of the ways it foregrounds fears and fantasies, scepticism and distrust. The state is rarely, if ever, a disenchanted or distant apparatus of regulation and rule. More often, it is one of those "dark assemblages, which stir what is deepest within us" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 242). "The bakery never fails," Abu Zeina often reminded me when I wondered if al-Shaltawi would be open on one of our late commutes home. "The state can fail to provide electricity, clean hospitals and good schools, but the bakery, it cannot fail. Without it, what exactly are we supposed to eat?"

Fear and desire at the checkpoint

Nabil's eyeglasses are always broken. Once they were missing an arm. Another time one of the lenses was cracked. Still another time, only duct tape around the bridge held them together. After meeting him in October 2017, I quickly learned that these types of quirks, which he confidently wears, help comprise his personality. Tiny oddities like his spectacles do not define him; instead, core to Nabil is his insistence on providing perfectly logical explanations for such everyday imperfections. This trait is what drove Nabil to gently criticise Daood for his description of, and behaviour during, his confrontation that night at the checkpoint. Rather than simply blaming a disgruntled police officer, Nabil offered a more nuanced interpretation that rested on the recent history of Baghdad's checkpoints – a history that has disciplined residents into conforming with established security routines. Introduced with the US- and UK-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, an encompassing if variegated security infrastructure in Baghdad continues to shape residents' everyday affective engagements with the state. Urban checkpoints capture part of this story.

In Spring 2003, after occupying forces in Iraq began facing an armed resistance, US troops in Baghdad sought to maintain control of the city by deploying urban patrols and checkpoints across the capital. These checkpoints became infamous for how they would "shift," exhibiting varying levels of permanence, visibility and respect for Iraqi life (HRW, 2003: 4). Soldiers, purportedly fearful of attacks on their positions from suicide bombers and others, were killing civilians at checkpoints (Gregory, 2019; Jepson, 2010). The security situation deteriorated in the early years of the occupation, in 2004 and 2005, as US troops and newly-hired Iraqi forces manning urban checkpoints sustained increasing attacks (CNN, 2005). But the nature, function and perception of these checkpoints changed dramatically in 2006 and 2007. Baghdad's residents lived through what has been by turns referred to as a "civil war," "the sectarianism," "the situation" and "the events" (Allam, 2019; Shadid, 2009). Hundreds of dead bodies were turning up on Baghdad's streets each day, a total breakdown of state security – a misnomer, perhaps, in an occupied country. Sunni extremists in al-Qaeda often set up "fake checkpoints" in parts of the city to consolidate their control and capture or kill state security personnel and/or Shia residents (Tavernise, 2006). Parastatal armed actors, then known as Shia militias, had at the same time infiltrated Iraqi police units. It was common for such units to carry out "sweeps" of Sunni residents passing through police checkpoints (Moore, 2006); a name check of identity cards helped confirm sect, after which those determined to be Sunni would often be summarily rounded up and executed (Moore, 2006). During this period, checkpoints became not sites of security but spatial spectres of fear that dotted the city and haunted everything in their midst (Aretxaga, 2003: 406). Even in moments of solitude, a "culture of fear" penetrated mundane urban existence (Caldeira, 2000; Green, 1994): As one interlocutor recalled to me in June 2019, "I used to recite *al-fātiḥa* to myself when I approached a checkpoint in an area I didn't know well. I prayed it wasn't the wrong kind of checkpoint."[6]

As formerly mixed neighbourhoods of Baghdad were cleansed of their religious diversity through 2007, concurrent US efforts to regain control of these areas by way of "clear and secure" tactics resulted in a "gated communities" counterinsurgency strategy (Gregory, 2008). This biopolitical undertaking included closing off neighbourhoods street-by-street save for a single entrance and exit point (Damluji, 2010). These neighbourhood checkpoints ensured only actual residents could come and go. They also had the perverse effect of "accelerating" the ongoing ethnic cleansing in these areas (Khalili, 2013: 188). The US Army's sanctioned narrative of its time in Iraq suggests that a period of "normality" returned to Baghdad in 2008 and 2009 because of these "successful" military strategies and tactics (Rayburn and Sobchak,

2019: 404). But how checkpoints metastasised and functioned during the city's violent social transformation complicate this success story. Baghdad's urban checkpoints became both targets and facilitators of violence. Rather than the infrastructure that tamed exceptional insecurity and established normality, the history of these checkpoints emphasises just how misleading such a binary is. The persistence of such security architecture also illustrates its role in Baghdad's and Iraq's second turbulent decade this century.

The rise of Da'ish became the greatest threat to Iraqi state security institutions since 2003. Da'ish's capture, in 2014, of one-third of Iraq's territory partly reflected a growing disenchantment with sectarian governance and inadequate public services (Dodge, 2012). Guarding against the existential threat posed to Baghdad by Da'ish, the city's checkpoints, now entirely run by Iraqi security forces after the (temporary) US withdrawal in 2011, increased in number and intensified in nature. Police officers and soldiers resumed random car searches, checking people's identity cards and leaning into a common if infamous line of political-geographic questioning at checkpoints – "where are you going?," "where are you coming from?," "carrying any weapons?" – that is widely mocked by Baghdadi residents.[7] A relic from checkpoint practices between 2006 and 2008, during Baghdad's worst violence, this set of questions uses points of departure and arrival to determine travel intentions; in particular, residents going to and arriving from neighbourhoods of different sects must further justify their movements, lest they be involved in nefarious activity. Young men and/or displaced residents from western and northern provinces like Anbar and Salah al-Din, which had fallen to Da'ish, were often the targets of renewed reliance on these interrogations (Rubaii, 2019). This iteration of Baghdad's checkpoint infrastructure is part of a more than 15-year history through which Baghdadis encounter and perceive the Iraqi state. This history is also implicated in how citizens like Daood and Nabil feel and explain their engagements with Iraqi state security practices today.

"I definitely thought it was going to be worse." More than a year after the incident at the checkpoint, and over a cup of tea and six menthol-flavoured Kent cigarettes, Nabil began recalling what he felt when Daood entered the security caravan for questioning. He expected Daood would fall victim to both the mercurial dispositions of checkpoint personnel and their seemingly unclear chain of command: "The mood of the officers at checkpoints matters. They're just not happy about being there," noted Nabil, echoing common complaints about checkpoint operations. "Also, the different security institutions that are present don't coordinate. Federal police, intelligence, national security service, traffic cops – they all have people at the checkpoint, and you have to deal with each of them separately if you have a problem." While Baghdad Operations Command is the umbrella body that coordinates the city's security strategies, the institutional diversity on the ground complicates what Nabil calls the "small, everyday incidents" that can occur at checkpoints, such as arbitrary stops like Daood's. The capricious "moods" embodied by checkpoint personnel and how they influence security procedures suggests that affects are embedded in checkpoints and move through all those who come into contact with them (Bishara, 2015; Peteet, 2017; Tawil-Souri, 2011). The ubiquity of checkpoints seeks to ensure no body is spared.

"At checkpoints you would often be judged on appearance as you approached. We would be four young guys in the car, for example. The officer would say 'search' (*taftīsh*) for no reason whatsoever, just because we were young guys," said Nabil, a backhanded criticism of how checkpoint practices disproportionately target young, lower-class men and virtually never stop vehicles with women and girls in them. "But over time," he continued, emphasising the evolution of checkpoints, "this changed because frankly the soldiers and officers themselves became unconvinced of the procedures. They would tell me they had orders to intensify their routines, and they would follow them. But the thing is, they actually don't know what they're searching for, what they're looking out for." If security personnel

themselves are unconvinced of their own procedures, I asked Nabil, what is the point of the checkpoints? "Look, I know you need them during times of insecurity. But when there are permanent and roving checkpoints one after another, it's just illogical. It only causes traffic. You have soldiers in the streets and they're not doing anything," Nabil said exasperated (see also Gluck, 2017). "Just think about the numbers: Across probably 250 checkpoints in Baghdad today, there are at least 6,000 soldiers and police officers – and that's a low estimate. And you need to remember that 90% of these guys are in their jobs for the money, not for any commitment to security or the state." Notably and like Daood before him, Nabil does not expressly reject the need for checkpoints – a rejection I heard often among other Baghdadis. For now, he merely desires better ones.

Despite the history of fear and coercion at and by checkpoints, and the persistent failure of checkpoints at stemming spectacular violence while "only causing traffic," for Nabil, they remain necessary, even desirable (Pain and Smith, 2008). I see such desire as a relation of "cruel optimism," the kind that engenders a "life-organising status" which "can trump interfering with the damage it provokes" (Berlant, 2011: 227). For this desire for better checkpoints itself stems from damage, from brutal and traumatic violence lived and felt by Baghdad's residents in both the presence and absence of checkpoints. Begoña Aretxaga (2000) is right to suggest that "practices of violence and the structure of desire" (51) help "materialise" the state effect (51–52). But moving away from her focus on the "political imaginary" (53), Baghdad's checkpoints reveal how fear and desire can fuse into a coupled affectual mechanism producing and produced by the state effect.

Nabil's imprecise estimates of checkpoint and security personnel numbers can be forgiven, for his lived experiences are more integral to shaping his commentaries on the Iraqi state. As our conversation stretched into a second hour of almost three, Nabil began to insist on the inextricable ties fear and insecurity have with the political economy of state institutions. His criticism did not come as a clichéd lacerating of Iraq's notorious corruption practiced by a host of political elites. Nabil instead offered a more mundane reflection on the salaries of bureaucrats and state security personnel: "An ordinary bureaucrat with an engineering degree makes on average around 600,000 dinar per month (~$500). Ordinary police officers and soldiers, with the lowest rank and without a degree, make at least 1,300,000 dinar (~$1,090), and usually more. These guys take the job for the money, without actually understanding what their role in the state is. If they did understand, the situation would be better." Baghdad's checkpoints, in other words, help to reveal "the connections between fear and political economy" on the city's streets (Barker, 2009: 270). Elucidating these connections by way of accumulated knowledge and "metis" (Coronil, 2019: 391–396; Scott, 1998: 309–319), Nabil exposes the checkpoint as a far-more affectively consequential infrastructural site:

> What we're really talking about here is the politics of employment (*siyāssat at-tawdhīf*) in the state. In addition to powerful connections and who you know (*wāsṭa wa t'aruf*), you can now quite literally buy a job in the state. The price of a job in the education ministry, like teacher and other lower salary jobs, is about $5,000. But jobs with higher salaries, like the National Security Service (*amn al-waṭanī*), is about $15,000. And I know a guy who paid $10,000 for a job in the department that issues national identity cards. In his case, they even exempted him from certain employment rules. For example, the department's employees are not allowed to have tattoos. My friend has tattoos and was informed of this rule during his interview. After he finished the interview, he called his friend – the guy he paid to get him the job – and told him of the snag. His friend then called a senior official in the department who immediately directed the interviewer to exempt my friend from the tattoo rule. And that was it, he was hired.

More taken aback by the eye-popping prices for state jobs, I could not understand why Nabil found this seemingly minor detail about a "tattoo exemption" so important to the story, to his tracing of fear and insecurity to the political economy of the state: "Because the security crisis is directly linked to the employment crisis. Someone without any security clearance can work for the state simply by paying for a job." Crisis manifests not merely as exceptional violence and physical insecurity; for Nabil, it becomes embedded in the mundane precarity of everyday life, such as in seeking out jobs and livelihoods in a place with not enough.[8] In Baghdad, such "crisis ordinariness" (Berlant, 2011: 10) is at once woven into the state effect and its concomitant affects.

Checkpoints evoke affects with longevity. For Nabil, those affects do not come and go with the multitude of crises in Baghdad, because such crises are integral to conditioning life in the city. In their thoughtful invitation to consider the relationship between affect and the state, Laszczkowski and Reeves (2015) argue that "affects and emotions are crucial in structuring political fields, imaginaries, subjects, and objects" (3). While they suggest that feelings and sentiments mean playing with the "fleeting" and the inconstant, "this does not mean that they are not historically constituted" (8). Indeed, affects are almost always comprised of "historical layerings" through which political fields and subjects are shaped and transformed (Laszczkowski and Reeves, 2015). Nabil would agree. The checkpoint evokes in him firm affects not fleeting ones, which are embedded in and inseparable from years of governance crises he has endured.

Nabil closed our conversation with harrowing details of when he and his brother stumbled upon a kidnapping. In 2013, after following a stranger poking around close to their home, they quickly discovered a young man being held in a house a few doors down from theirs. One of the kidnappers, it turned out, was the official driver of the neighbourhood's police commander. He had been using his police car to move victims between "safe houses" until ransoms were paid; those taken were then either released or killed. The driver's state-issued vehicle was invaluable for transporting victims tied up in the trunk, as it assured *laissez passer* through Baghdad's network of checkpoints. While this kidnapped man was eventually freed and the driver arrested along with two others, the incident proved Nabil's broader point: "I was just telling you about the employment crisis, about those state jobs," he reminded me, characteristically insisting on the clarity of his logic. "You can see now how someone without a security clearance can come to work for the state. It's tied to paying for state jobs – the weak procedures for background checks are because of money."

In the week following the kidnapping, Nabil had been filled with anxiety. Each day, from 10 pm at night until 12 noon on the next, he would play watch guard from his bedroom window – the only one in the house that had a clear view of the street down below. He and his brother feared that others from the kidnapping ring, who they were sure still roamed free, would learn who was responsible for disrupting their lucrative business and might decide to pay their family a reprisal visit. Only when his brother came home from his part-time job to relieve him could an unemployed Nabil finally pass out. He looked exhausted just recalling those long nights from six years ago, when he feared the worst and just wished someone else could protect his family as he slept the night away.

Conclusion

Routine encounters at bakeries and checkpoints are central to the construction of the state effect. Our respective fieldwork in Amman and Baghdad grounds this claim in the infrastructural nature of these sites. More than the physical manifestation or "visibility" of these infrastructures (Star, 1999), what matters for us are the ways in which they are deeply

generative of affects crucial to the (re)production of the state. Whether they engender fear or cynicism, a craving for more benevolent modes of policing or for more effective modes of care (Jansen, 2014; Obeid, 2010), these sites are implicated in the ways the state, as "process" (Painter, 2006), plays itself out in everyday life. Considering bakeries and checkpoints as infrastructural demonstrates how the state persists not as a bounded entity or institution easily separable from society, but as a contingent effect that thrives through quotidian affective resonances. A fuller accounting of these embodied affects offers a way to grapple not with the fiction of the state but rather with how "commonsense" it has become (Aretxaga, 2000: 53).

Stately affects do not emerge ahistorically. We share with several others the concern that the insistently presentist accounts of embodiment found in many works on affect cannot fully capture the ways our interlocutors engaged with infrastructure, or political authority (Anderson, 2014; Rose et al., 2017; Tolia-Kelly, 2006). Fear and cynicism, the "success" expected from the bakery and the "failure" lamented at the checkpoint are intimately wrapped up with geometries of power and historical memories. Such evidence lends further credence to the claim that "multiple temporalities" are implicated in infrastructural lives and the subjectivities that they work to form (Gupta, 2018: 62). Moods, feelings and affective atmospheres may indeed be intermittent and unsteady, sometimes emerging spontaneously and circulating capriciously around and between different objects, materials and bodies. But affective entanglements must also be understood in the context of situated histories of rule. Joy expressed at the bakery should be understood in relation to latent, persistent dismay with the Jordanian state apparatus in other areas of provision and public services. Desire for better checkpoints in Baghdad transpires not only because of fear often felt while passing through them. Such yearnings are also triggered by oft-expressed desperation over urban disorder and precarity after more than a generation of war and sanctions, violence and instability.

Stately affects may feel any number of ways; we make no generalisable claims about experiential modes of reflexivity or bodily engagement. Rather, we urge analyses to be sensitive to those realms beyond rational calculation, attentive to the ways infrastructural engagements ignite energies, desires and sentiments that work to engender the state effect. In this respect, considering infrastructural encounters and their relationship to the state via affect opens up the possibility of a more nuanced account of statehood in the Middle East and beyond. Doing so allows us to become more attuned to the routine engagements citizens have with the socio-material assemblages that order their lives, and to the practices, affects and associations through which the state becomes real for all of us living in its midst.

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ORCID iD

José Ciro Martínez https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7960-4055

Notes

1. *'Ashan kul yawm wa fī kul makān ad-dawla t'ayīsh 'ala-l-muwaṭin. Hon fil makhbaz ihna n'ayīsh ala-d-dawla.*
2. *Kāfī 'ad! Idha māko shī khalī yaroh!*
3. Pseudonyms have been used for all interlocutors in this article.
4. For several months in 2010, a kilogram of tomatoes cost nearly JD2 ($2.82). In November 2015, the price was JD 0.65 ($.92). For more, see Schwedler and Sowalsky (2010).
5. At the time of my fieldwork, 6% of Jordan's bakeries did not distribute subsidised bread, preferring to focus on cake, sweets and non-subsidised varieties. With a few exceptions, these outlets where overwhelmingly located in the wealthy parts of Amman.
6. *Al-fātiḥa* is the "opening" surah or chapter of the Quran.
7. "*Wayn rāyaḥ*?" "*Min wayn jāy*?" "*Shāyal slāḥ*?"
8. The Iraqi government publicly maintains the national youth unemployment rate hovers around 20%. The IMF and World Bank are certain that number is at least double (Al-Jazeera, 2019). One interlocutor insisted to me, in May 2019, that Iraq's Ministry of Planning holds data showing the youth unemployment rate at more than 42%.

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José Ciro Martínez is a Junior Research Fellow in Politics at the Trinity College, University of Cambridge.

Omar Sirri is a PhD Candidate in Political Science at the University of Toronto. He is currently an Affiliated Scholar at the Issam Fares Institute at the American University of Beirut.