Materiality of Resistance: Israel’s Apartheid Wall in an Age of Globalization

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“Existence is resistance,” says a Palestinian translator at the Balata refugee camp near Nablus. “Education and restoration,” he adds, take priority in his life over everything else.¹ For this young Palestinian, education is the surest means of resisting the totalistic “overcoding of social life” that accompanies the occupation.² Arguably the most potent emblem of the occupation in recent years is the “wall of racial separation” (jidar al-fasl al-‘unsuri)—called in Hebrew the “separation fence” (Geder HaHafrada)—that is rapidly enclosing the West Bank on itself. A Palestinian retiree from Abu Dis, a town that borders on Jerusalem and is located on the wrong side of the wall, states in concrete terms this overcoding of social life that the wall has inaugurated. “It’s so depressing that I can’t stay at home anymore,” he says, while standing under the wall’s shadow. “Even deep in [reading] a book, I can’t forget about it. [The wall] changed everything, even the quality of the light.”³

As René Backmann notes, the question of what to call the wall, as with so many other taxonomies used to describe the occupation, is deeply embedded in the politics of linguistic representation: “According to official Israeli documents and the military, it is a ‘security barrier.’ To the Palestinians, it’s an ‘annexation wall.’ Israeli organizations who oppose its construction call it a ‘separation barrier.’”⁴ Meanwhile, Arabic-language commentaries call it alternately a wall of “apartheid” (al-‘unsuri), “annexation” (al-‘ammi), and “separation” (al-‘aazil).⁵ Rather than attempting to homogenize these densely loaded semantic calibrations into a single seamless whole, this essay looks beyond the impossibility of representing suffering and resistance by turning to the material artifacts that mediate their expression. That which cannot be represented is nonetheless know-
able through the images it generates. Rather than representing resistance, I engage with its materiality through the apartheid wall, currently the penultimate symbol of occupation.

The imagery that follows was gathered from 2011 to 2012 from the section of the 760-kilometer wall that cuts through Bethlehem, a West Bank town close to Jerusalem. As occupied towns go, Bethlehem has historically been one of the world’s most hospitable spaces. The city is enriched and even sustained by tourism, which made up at least 60 percent of its economy before the wall. But, in a regime dominated by the apartheid wall, those very qualities that in normal times would prove a boon to a tourist-driven economy are a burden and a source of economic strain.

Intended to be 830 kilometers on its completion, the wall will divide over three hundred thousand Palestinians from their land and prevent the free movement of millions more. This process of division is already well under way in Bethlehem and neighboring Beit Jala, two of the most urbanized areas of the West Bank and two of the first to suffer the effects of the wall. The material substance of the wall varies according to the territories it intersects. In some places, it is a series of electric fences, and in others a configuration of wires and cameras topped by a watchtower, which is, however, only rarely staffed by a guard. For most of its length, the wall is a tall concrete slab fronted by wires and surveillance mechanisms aimed at preventing anyone from touching it. The wall in Bethlehem affords something of an exception to this pattern, in that large swathes of gray cement are left unprotected by barbed wire, making it easier to approach and to turn into a work of art.

Many have noted that at least 85 percent of the wall cuts directly into Palestinian territory, thereby calling into question the rationale provided by the Israeli state that the wall is necessary to protect Israel’s borders. By virtue of its overreaching architecture, as well as by the wide semantic range that is employed to describe as well as to engage with the wall, this structure offers several valuable lessons in the politics of scale and location. As an international symbol of occupation, the wall circulates through aestheticized international circuits of political activism. As a material and symbolic intrusion into Palestinians’ everyday lives, the wall is also intimately entailed in the experience of occupation. Bisecting houses and backyards, dividing families from each other, and radically restricting Palestinians’ freedom of movement, the wall ends by cutting through the self as powerfully as it bisects Palestinian land. This radical bisection, of self/other, Israel/Palestine, and freedom/occupation that the wall brings about as well as enforces, is one that this essay seeks both to explore and to dismantle.

The first-time viewer of the apartheid wall will naturally wonder why it is necessary to bisect Palestinian territory with concrete. Far from
promoting peace, the most palpable effect of the wall, which runs through rather than around the West Bank, is to separate Palestinians from Palestinians. As Avinoam Shalem notes, far from guaranteeing safety, the wall segregates by protecting those outside “through a total blockade of the one located inside.” Inasmuch as it remakes the world through representation, the wall’s primary function is to intimidate. It answers to the regime of representation Heidegger identified in pre–World War II Germany as the “world picture.” In his 1938 lecture, Heidegger discerned an intimate relation between the rise of the “world picture” (Weltbild) and the concomitant rise of the “world view” (Weltanschauung) as an analytic through which technological modernity comes to power. Half a century later, Timothy Mitchell temporally extended Heidegger’s analogy to mark the world under the sign of colonialism, whereby the East had to be invented in order for the West to make sense. Just as the events of 1938 laid the foundations for one of the most massive genocides in world history, Gilbert Achcar reminds us that “the ’state of Jews’ owes its creation to the Holocaust.” It should not therefore occasion surprise that the epistemic and political consequences of the Heideggerian world-as-world picture resonate in Israel’s apartheid wall, and particularly in an age of globalization.

Resistance as Capital

The multifarious and multilingual graffiti on Palestine’s segregation wall are often seen to unilaterally express resistance. The language of much of the wall’s graffiti is English, a linguistic medium that presupposes an audience residing outside the Occupied Territories. When not written in English, protest is rendered in other languages of Europe and the Americas: Spanish, French, Italian. Unlike the graffiti of the first intifada, Arabic rarely punctuates this literature of resistance. Even though a great deal of scholarly and political literature dealing with the wall is in Arabic, where Arabic occurs in the wall’s surface, its function is largely decorative.

What is the audience for the graffiti, and how does that constituency impact its form and content? Figure 1 displays arms raised and hands clenched in search of “freedom,” the word etched in the bottom right-hand corner. A young boy squats at the frame’s bottom, seemingly oblivious to the spectacle stirring behind him. These representations linking existence to resistance are clearly intended for an audience far away from the scene of the conflict. The boy is merely background; or, rather, the picture is background for his imagination, while the world he confronts is entirely obscured from the viewer. Also note how the slogan on this wall “quotes”—prophetically, perhaps, since we cannot know which came first—the words of the young Palestinian translator from the Balata refugee camp.
Another mural repeats the mantra voiced in figure 1 (“To exist is to resist”), while supplementing it with clenched fists and a Spanish slogan: “Viva Palestina Libre/Abajo el Muro Fascista (Live Free Palestine/Down with the Fascist Wall).” These slogans are decorated with a flower and the palm of a hand in red, hollowed out in the middle. Is it a bullet wound or simply a hole? Regardless of which reading is chosen, the two tableaux are in dialogue with each other, offering a message to the world that is as grounded in a universalist ontology of freedom as much or even more than in Palestinian suffering.

Together with adopting international languages such as English and Spanish, many insignia transplant allusions to European history onto Palestinian territory. Turning to Germany as the ever-present comparative foil for Palestine, figure 2 alludes to John F. Kennedy’s 1963 visit to West Berlin to offer US solidarity with the free world in the face of the Communist threat. During this visit, Kennedy famously defined the city on the western side of the Berlin Wall as an outpost of freedom facing a Communist border zone. “All free men, wherever they may live, are citizens of Berlin,” Kennedy declared, “and therefore as a free man I am proud to declare ‘Ich bin ein Berliner.’” As numerous commentators have noted, the parallels between the two walls are prescient. The author of the most important journalistic account of the Palestinian apartheid wall states that he was moved to write his book because he believed that “what the entire world saw fall down yesterday in Berlin could be a solution tomorrow in

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Figure 1. Wall in Palestine Flickr Collective, To Exist Is to Resist. Creative Commons
Jerusalem.” On the ground in Abu Dis, a German volunteer who had come to help the Palestinians also referred to his personal memory of the events in Berlin when he noted that the newer structure “broke ground on the night of August 13, 2002, forty-one years to the day after the sealing of the first perpend [layer] of the Berlin Wall.”

Analyzing the inscription of Kennedy’s words by the Israeli multimedia artist Joy van Erven on a portion of the wall that encircles one of the few houses left on the Palestinian side, Gerhard Wolf argues that it “compares the Israeli government with that of the GDR and declares the West Bank as a new West Berlin.” By recalling America’s most beloved president, the “Ich bin ein Berliner” inscription appeals to “the American government to recognize its responsibility for Palestine.” Shalem by contrast reads the allusion to Kennedy’s speech as “a visual manifestation of the machinations of politics . . . stand[ing] in front of us like Agnus Dei [Lamb of God], a sufferer, a manifestation for agony and pain.” In either reading, the disjuncture between the global audience evoked through the historical allusions and (still largely unrendered) Palestinian suffering and resistance is as striking as the image with which it is associated. Must suffering always evade representation?

In another figure, Abu Dis is equated with the Warsaw ghetto. Both this message and the “Ich bin ein Berliner” inscription are more obviously rooted in German than in Palestinian pasts. While such graffiti attest to the interconnectedness of a world in the age of the world picture, they also call into question the tendency to incorporate the insignia into a homogenous narrative of local resistance. Collectively, these images show how European history is redeemed and avenged on Palestinian territory, often without the knowledge, consent, or participation of local actors.
While the majority of graffiti on Bethlehem’s wall is anonymous, there are exceptions, the best known of which is the UK-based graffiti artist Banksy, whose reputation was already well established when he arrived in Palestine in 2002 to paint the wall. Banksy’s distinctive style has aroused considerable controversy among the local Palestinian population. By contrast, the international reaction has been more uniformly positive. As Shalem noted in 2007, partly through the murals of Banksy and his cohorts, Bethlehem was transformed into a new tourist destination: “Every day, Palestinian minibuses of organized tour companies bring small groups of tourists to specific parts of the wall on which international graffiti artists left their mark.” By 2011, touristic interest in the graffiti on the wall seems to have faded. The tours Shalem describes are no longer in evidence, and the “Ich bin ein Berliner” inscription has disappeared. The attention span of the international community has in this instance proven characteristically brief, while the long-term political effect of the international activist community’s rendering up of the segregation wall as a global canvas has yet to be ascertained.

When Banksy painted murals on the wall during a tour of the West Bank, he encountered negative reactions from local Palestinians who were displeased by his aestheticization of their suffering. “We don’t want beautiful,” complained one man. “We hate this wall. Go home.” Banksy’s self-implicating voyeurism calls to mind graphic artist Joe Sacco’s deft representation of his ambivalent position as a journalist in pursuit of stories that will bolster his narration of Palestinian suffering. Banksy’s representations are provocations that are as likely to disturb local Palestinians through their trivialization of the wall and thereby of Palestinian suffering as to awaken the political sensibilities of his Western audience. To the artist’s credit, Banksy occasionally foregrounds in his art the ethical ambiguities intrinsic to his aestheticization of the wall and does not sentimentalize his politically comprised intervention. However, the fact that the artist registers these ambiguities does not relieve the viewer of the imperative to confront the political limitations of such forms of artistic expression. “Because they are more removed from the daily struggles that the West Bank Wall imposes,” Talia H. Moscovitz suggests of the palimpsests transposed onto this global canvas, artists outside Palestine are more prone to treat the wall as “a metaphor and symbol of disconnection and oppressive politics” than those forced to live with the wall—and with the occupation—on a daily basis.

The globalization of representation is of course nothing new in the age of the world picture. Reflecting on the European travelers who entered the Orient during the mid-nineteenth century, Mitchell noted that they came from places where “ordinary people were beginning to live as tourists or anthropologists, addressing an object-world as the endless representa-
tion of some further meaning or reality, and experiencing personhood as
the playing of a cultural stage part or the implementation of a plan.”
At this late juncture in the history of the world as exhibition, one also finds
that normative representations of what is recognized and represented as
resistance in occupied Palestine cater to tourists and spectators from afar.
With respect to the related context of NGO discourses about Palestine,
Laleh Khalili outlines a trend that parallels the circuits of communication
that I have discerned in the graffiti on the apartheid wall. According to
Khalili, the “universalization of the trauma drama in the human rights and
humanitarian discourse [concerning contemporary Palestine lives] focuses
on victims of injustice in such a way that suffering and tragedy are made
immanent to their being, sometimes to the exclusion of their political struggle for
justice.” While suffering and tragedy are explicitly foregrounded in con-
temporary NGO discourse, they evade representation in the apartheid wall.
However, in both cases, audience is key: a global public overdetermines
the content, form, and substance of what is recognized as representable.

If we wish to take seriously Khalili’s critique of the “universalization
of the trauma drama” with respect to postintifada Palestine, how should
the wall’s predominantly Anglophone graffiti inform our attempts to make
sense of Palestinian suffering and resistance? Is there any way of exiting the
hermeneutic circle that dictates that even our critiques of representations
are necessarily directed outward, intrinsically metadiscursive, and there-
fore unable to adequately engage with the facts on the ground? Reflecting
on the almost exclusively Arabic-language graffiti of the first intifada
(1987–1993), anthropologist Julie Peteet noted how, on the rare occasions
when graffiti was inscribed on Palestinian walls in English rather than
Arabic, it was deployed to speak to the West. In keeping with its intended
audience, the frequency of English-language graffiti increased with the
arrival of foreign delegations. “In press accounts of the intifada,” recol-
lected Peteet, “the accompanying photo often contained a graffiti-covered
wall.” The visually skewed media accounts that this graffiti stimulated
enabled Palestinian narratives to circulate in the “global information
network and media.” By encoding themselves as globalized testimonies,
Palestinian graffiti, Peteet argues, “took their place among other forms of
resistance” and came to constitute “a voice for those who felt voiceless in
the international arena.” Such graffiti also anticipated the postintifada
West Bank wall as a global canvas.

Due to the complications of language choice and the historical allu-
sions described above, the graffiti adorning the segregation wall today
cannot be rendered so transparently in terms of a lexicon of resistance.
One cannot claim, as Jeffrey Sluka has of the political murals in the Catho-
lic districts of Northern Ireland, that “arising from powerlessness, the
murals represent a form of informal political power in their own right” by
countering “the image of stability and acceptance generated by the ‘normal’ appearance” of Belfast’s urban landscape. Nor can it be stated, as Laleh Khalili claims more generally of the Palestinian verbal narratives of ṣumād (steadfastness), that the graffiti on the apartheid wall wholeheartedly personifies the “infrapolitics of the dispossessed.” Narratives of dispossession are inscribed on the wall, but these visual renderings are heavily interpolated by the perceived expectations of a globalized public sphere.

That, on Sluka’s reading, Belfast’s murals have “evolved into the well-developed form of political power that they represent today” suggests a major difference between the political painting on the walls of Belfast and the graffiti of Bethlehem’s wall: Bethlehem’s canvas has been superimposed against the will of local inhabitants. As if in response to the coercive imposition of a massively politicized structure, the images on the wall pursue different representative strategies. They evoke domesticity and daily life while often—if not always—avoiding the paraphernalia of conflict. They work through metaphors and historical allusions—above all to both pre- and post-World War II Germany—while avoiding incendiary calls to arms. The graffiti on the apartheid wall too are the graffiti of resistance, but the resistance they narrate is mediated by a constellation of audience expectations more globally implicated than that which informs other graffiti elsewhere in the world.

At the same time, this representational difference, which is fundamentally a difference in reception, attests to the many transformations undergone by the Palestinian resistance, together with its objects and subjects, since the first intifada. As has been shown, the apartheid wall’s graffiti consists largely of anarchist slogans, deliberately ironic depictions of domestic bliss, and learned allusions to the speeches of John F. Kennedy. For the most part, it would seem to include everything other than what one might expect to find on Palestinian territory: the local voices of resistance. Instead of resisting in the stereotyped sense, Palestinians are often most concerned with simply getting by. For this reason, Bethlehem’s ingenious local entrepreneurs have turned to the wall as a space for posting advertisements. With the outbreak of the second intifada in 2001 and the subsequent stranglehold that followed on Bethlehem’s economy, local resident Joseph Hazboun shut the doors of his restaurant, which he imaginatively called Bahamas Seafood Restaurant, thereby himself evoking the global circulation of meanings that is Bethlehem’s forte. As his restaurant directly fronted the wall at one of its highest points, Hazboun temporarily lost his entire customer base. Unable to keep his restaurant afloat financially, he shut its doors and relocated to the United States. Hazboun returned to Bethlehem in 2008. As he explains in a brief narrative posted directly onto the wall facing his restaurant, Hazboun decided to make the most out of a bad situation and painted his restaurant’s menu over the blank
concrete surface. Hazboun’s entrepreneurship has extended to using the wall as a screen to project the World Cup games for the viewing pleasure of his customers. After posting the Bahamas Seafood Restaurant’s menu to the wall, Hazboun rebaptized the southern extension of his restaurant as the “Wall Lounge.” He used this newly conceived space to showcase vistas of the barrier, fulfilling the principle that the death of a natural view encourages its artificial recreation, whether as an act of resistance or through sheer necessity. Hazboun’s initiatives inspired other local business owners, such as Claire Anastas, a local craftswoman and gift shop owner, to do the same. Other businesses, such as the Palestine Souvenir Shop, Karawan Restaurant, and Bethlehem Hotel, soon followed suit.

Complementing local endeavors to use the wall to stimulate rather than to destroy their businesses, the wall is replete with commercial slogans that draw on the tropology of American capitalism. Highlighting the fabricated nature of the wall, visiting graffiti artists have added slogans such as Made in America and Made in Korea beneath their designs. Another commercial slogan concealing a deeper message is an oversized prize ribbon painted by the Brooklyn-based artists’ collaborative Faile. The ribbon is emblazoned with the inscription With Love and Care: Nothing Lasts Forever, formed to shape a heart. The message suggests that, as a foreign imposition, the wall is destined to fall. Such artifacts underscore the paradoxical death wish driving most art on this wall. Such murals, which are political in intent if not always in execution, fulfill their mission most thoroughly when they help to bring about their destruction.

Abstraction and Allegory

By contrast with the proliferation of the insignia of resistance in English and other European languages, only in rare instances are Arabic-language graffiti inscribed on Bethlehem’s apartheid wall. This linguistic shift from the Arabic graffiti of the first intifada to the English graffiti of the post-intifada apartheid wall attests to the reconfiguration of the demographics of the graffiti artist and of the graffiti’s intended audience. Beyond the obvious linguistic shift, the representations of resistance diverge in other ways as well. Whereas English-language graffiti is configured as a didactic discourse, bent on improving international relations, the Arabic-language graffiti that adorn the segregation wall adopt the representational strategy of allegory. Mired in the immanence of unmediated experience, they suggest no concrete solution, and promulgate no message of hope. Not unlike the Arabic graffiti of past centuries, including the fascinating specimens collected in the Book of Strangers (Kitāb adab al-ghurabā’) attributed to the prolific litterateur Abū al-Faraj al-Isfahānī (d. 967), contemporary Arabic-language graffiti is less concerned with
making sensational claims and more interested in representing everyday life. Among the many mediations through which Palestinian suffering is represented, allegory, the representational mode best suited for injustices that cannot be rendered transparently, plays a prominent role.

The year 2005, three years after the beginning of the wall’s construction, saw the first major exhibit of art about the wall. Comprised of the work of artists from Ramallah, Tel Aviv, and New York, the exhibit called itself “Three Cities against the Wall” (Thalāth mudun ǧidda al-jīdār). Echoing the contrasts adduced here between globalized Anglophone graffiti and localized graffiti in Arabic, one of the exhibit’s organizers remarked on the different emphases evident in the contributions of Palestinian as compared to American artists. The contributions of the American artists were as a rule “straightforward” and laden with “clear statements against the wall” to the extent that “several pieces appeared to be demonstrating the artist’s duty to convince the viewer that the wall really exists.” “Seen through Middle Eastern eyes,” these didactic artifacts appeared “almost banal.” By contrast, Palestinian artists avoided representing the wall as such: “most of their works were abstract and expressionist . . . and expressed Palestinian culture [rather than making] a direct political statement.” If history repeats itself as tragedy for tourists who come to gaze on the apartheid wall, it repeats itself as satire, farce, and allegory for the local Palestinian population.

Those who simultaneously occupy internal and external cognitive spaces, for example, Palestinian-American artists, are most skillful at blending the invasive textures of military rule with the everyday aspects of the occupation. In an essay prefacing her creative work in connection with the wall, Palestinian-American artist Dānā ʿArīqāt recalls observing a mother waiting at a checkpoint in Jericho as she cuddled her infant to her chest. Turning away from the political illusions fostered by George W. Bush’s ill-fated “road map for peace,” ʿArīqāt writes, “at a time when the Road Map [khaɾīṭeh al-salām] is being redefined by walls, barriers, and destruction, the human body and mind is made to adapt to the various borders crossing through it.” The interface between a global political consciousness and Palestinian everyday life is here focalized by the artist’s eye.

Decades before the construction of the wall began, a Palestinian cartoonist created a figure who would later come to epitomize its meaning. Assassinated in London in 1987 due to the controversy stirred by his art, Nājī al-ʿAlī is most famous for creating the cartoon character Handhala, a boy whose name references a bitter gourd with deep roots. Never allowed to age by his creator, Handhala remained an icon of the author’s childhood self. Handhala is frozen in time at the age of ten, the same age when his creator was forcibly relocated to a refugee camp in Lebanon. Handhala’s hands are “always clasped behind his back,” Nājī al-ʿAlī
explains, “as a sign of rejection at a time when solutions are presented to us the American way.”

“Omnipresent in the camps during the intifada, drawn by students in their notebooks, spray-painted on walls and worn as necklaces or carried as key chains,” Handhala is repeatedly mobilized as a symbol of resistance in Arabic graffiti. Echoing Peteet’s observations regarding the paraphernalia of resistance during the first intifada, Laleh Khalili notes that Handhala joined “the keffiyeh, photographs of archetypal martyrs, [and] the forbidden colors of the flag worn in defiance” as one of the “everyday acts of resistance whose accumulation shaped the contours of the Intifada alongside more visible acts of collective mobilization such as demonstrations or strikes.” More recently, the Egyptian artist Fawzia Reda turned to Handhala for her contribution to the “Three Cities against the Wall” exhibition. Commenting on her own art, Reda reflected on the significance of Naji al-‘Ali’s brainchild, Handhala, who stood “as a quiet witness to the suffering and dignity of the Palestinian people.” For Reda, Handhala reflects “the persistence of a political conscience” by giving “the Wall and the figure, both, binding value and consequence.”

Handhala is represented twice on the section of the Bethlehem wall that begins with Hazboun’s Bahamas Seafood Restaurant and ends on the edge of Bethlehem’s city limits. (One of the most heavily polluted stretches of the wall and beset with barbed wire, the section also offers one of the richest canvases in all of Bethlehem.) The first carries an English caption that ironically compares the gentle Handhala with a militant army: “Naji al-‘Ali brigade 2010.” The second even more striking image (figure 3)

![Figure 3. Matthew DeMaio, Handala and the Statue of Liberty, Bethlehem Wall.](image)

Courtesy of the photographer
consists of a postmodern Pietà, featuring Handhala as Jesus and Mary as a pale-green Statue of Liberty, an obvious symbol of a foreclosed American dream. The Statue of Liberty embraces her suffering son, who wears a crown of thorns. Handhala’s back as always faces the viewer. While these images are globally implicated through their Christian and American symbolism, they nonetheless succeed in powerfully evoking the Palestinian experience of occupation.

Inscribing Silence, Resisting Translation

The contrast adduced so far has been primarily between English graffiti that, while radiating a simulacrum of transparency, is overdetermined by its many layers of reception, and Arabic graffiti that, while enmeshed in the language of allegory, intimately renders the experience of Palestinian suffering. This distinction, which exists in the form of a continuum rather than as an absolute opposition, generates a paradox: graffiti in English tend to be more overtly politicized than graffiti in Arabic, which utilizes the arts of indirection. It is as though the intifada has become tired of itself, weary of mobilization, and skeptical of the very possibility of change. Meanwhile, Palestine’s international supporters have taken to addressing constituencies far removed from the theaters of Palestinian suffering for the sake of building transnational solidarity.

Reflecting bleakly on the aestheticization of Palestinian suffering enacted by foreign artists who incorporate the wall into their art, Roneh Eidelman observes that the wall can only be “attractive for artists who do not have to live with its results.” When they aestheticize the wall that cuts through their daily lives, Palestinian artists do not fetishize it in the way that foreigners do, because, according to Eidelman, “the reality of the wall can only be sexy for artists not affected.”41 Even though the distinctions between participant/observer and insider/outsider often dissolve when the art on the wall is absorbed and recontextualized in unpredictable ways by Palestinian observers, the aesthetics of international activism was frequently contrasted to the aesthetics of everyday life in my conversations with local Palestinians. “You are one of the lucky ones,” a resident from the neighboring village of Beit Jala said to me one day toward the end of my Bethlehem sojourn in 2012, “you can come and go as you please, observing how we live, and then leave. You see the wall, but you do not have to live with it every day.”

The politically oriented Arabic graffiti of the first intifada existed in the same relation to the Palestinian walls examined by Peteet as global English today does to the apartheid wall that bisects Palestinian land, bearing the unmistakable imprint of a foreign occupying power. Whereas Palestinian-built walls inspired Arabic graffiti during the first intifada,
Israeli-built barriers are more likely today to evoke only silence in Palestinians or, alternately, exasperation. The vast majority of canvases that cover the apartheid wall are the work of foreign artists and activists from outside Palestine, who address their slogans to an international arena wherein Palestine figures as only one theater among many global injustices. Thus has representation—the rendering up of the world as a picture of itself—complicated the ascription of agency within the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. As Heidegger already predicted in his diagnosis of Germany on the brink of the Shoah, representation in the age of the world picture follows the circuits of global capital. The form if not the substance of images is controlled by the state that provides the media for their inscription. Writing in the mid-1990s and spurred by the example of Northern Ireland, Peteet forecasted the intifada’s success. It appeared at the time to her that fate had decreed the intifada’s eventual victory. By contrast, the graffiti of the postintifada apartheid wall, erected in the wake of the intifada’s defeat, is fraught with silence and allegory, as it mutely bears witness to what exceeds representation. This is not to say that the graffiti of resistance have vanished any more than have the political movements that underwrote political mobilization, but merely that these art forms have gone underground, to spaces where English is not spoken and where local idioms resist translation. Taking translation as a general paradigm for the representation of suffering, the inscriptions on Palestine’s apartheid wall suggest that resistance is that which evades representation. To rephrase this point in terms put forth by Bruno Latour—and also to explain the hold of the unrepresentable on our imaginations—“whatever resists is real.” Latour’s apothegm is kindred in spirit to the “existence is resistance” mantra that resonates in so many Palestinian spaces as well as in many Palestinian imaginations (the translator in the Balata refugee camp being a case in point).

Theorists of translation have long studied how the rendering of foreign texts deepens our epistemic and ethical capacities. At its most effective, writes Antoine Berman, translation “makes fecund what is one’s own through the mediation of the foreign.” Via the route of alienation, translation offers a trip back into oneself under the sign of a foreign tongue. Berman also notes that all cultures resist translation when they grapple with the exigencies of communication. When studying the idioms of resistance in Palestine, it is important to attend to the untranslated, the untranslatable, and to everything that resists translation. Resistance to translation is in fact the surest indicator of a perspective that needs to be heard. Although the many idioms of the graffiti on the apartheid wall originate in different ways and for different reasons, one of their collateral effects is to assimilate Palestinian resistance into global English. Inevitably, failures in translations proliferate. Allusions to the Warsaw Ghetto and the Berlin
wall are mistranslations in many respects, and their relevance to everyday aspects of the Israeli occupation is at best opaque for many Palestinians.

When it comes to the apartheid wall, to translate is all too often to be coopted by a global English that conditions political as well as linguistic possibilities. When symbols of local oppression are rendered in this universalist idiom, they tend to be homogenized under an international message that often fails to connect with local realities. For the residents of Bethlehem, the wall is more than a political symbol; it is first and foremost an obstacle to daily life, and even to survival. A resident of Abu Dis recalls how the wall limits Palestinians’ access to emergency medical care, which inevitably results in the loss of lives. “Before the wall,” she states, “whenever we had a serious case, we called an ambulance, and fifteen minutes later at worst the patient was at Makassed or at Augusta Victoria, the two big Palestinian hospitals in East Jerusalem. Today, these two hospitals are on the other side of the wall. Inaccessible.”

Back at the Balata refugee camp, Faisal—the same young man who affirmed that “existence is resistance”—explains that “if a woman is having a baby, she has to obtain a pass to go to a hospital outside the camp. Same if someone is mortally ill.” With the construction of the apartheid wall, the situation in the refugee camp extends to the entire West Bank, cutting off even residents of Abu Dis, Bethlehem, and Beit Jala, who, due to their proximity to Jerusalem, had, prior to the construction of the wall, enjoyed the envy of other, more remotely located Palestinians, because of their access to basic medical care. Such brutal realities are not registered on the wall’s global canvas. When, unlike the European graffiti artists and activists who address a global Anglophone audience, Palestinian artists face in their engagements with the wall the daily consequences of the occupation, their observations are allegorical and opaque by comparison and are therefore less attractive to the international media. This may help to explain why the graffiti of Palestinian resistance has been inventoried less frequently than that of foreign artists such as Banksy.

If the Palestinians are not already terrorists, so the logic driving the construction of the wall and of other “defensive” measures seems to run, they have to be invented as terrorists. As the head of Shin Bet (Israel’s security agency) explained by way of justifying the construction of the wall, “we could no longer combat terrorism with patrols and ambushes. [We] needed to think about the number of illegal Palestinian workers who were coming into Israel from the West Bank, even through closed-off areas. Ninety-nine percent of them were coming only to work, but one percent could be terrorists.” That ephemeral 1 percent of the Palestinian population who are regarded by the Israeli administration as terrorists serves as a direct justification for building an apartheid wall on Palestinian territory.

Another figure ironizes the Israeli administration’s cognitive need to
construct the Palestinians as terrorists in order to legitimate their architectural ambitions. This is a recreation of a photograph of the Palestinian political activist Leila Khaled, who became famous for hijacking an airplane in 1969 while a member of the Palestinian Liberation Army. The original photograph was taken by the American photographer Eddie Adams in the 1970s.

As Gerhard Wolf deftly notes, Leila’s image and the inscription that accompanies it localizes the universal icon of a famous American photograph. Tellingly, the gun that Leila carried in the photograph is cropped off in this recreation, while the epicenter of violence is focalized near the armed Israeli soldiers who surround the wall. The ambiguity of this recreation is discomforting in that, while Leila, staring squarely at the viewer, rejects the terrorist label, she does not dispel the mystery surrounding her personality. While affirming the inadequacy of dominant representations, Leila gives no clear instructions concerning how she should be represented. As was shown to be the case earlier, the Palestinian graffiti of the postintifada resistance is most at home in the language of allegory, and allegory is opaque with respect to its own representation. Edward Said famously began his *Orientalism* (1978) by citing from Marx’s *Eighteenth Brumaire* (1852): “They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented.” Slightly turning Marx’s formulation on its head, we might say that, when it comes to the apartheid wall, “They cannot be represented; so they refuse representation.”
Before it can become a political statement, the wall is an obstacle, a barrier, a threat to medical health, an eyesore, a drag on the Palestinian economy, and a narrower of passageways. One of the more concrete expressions of the wall’s work on the ground is afforded by the changing habitations of Bethlehem’s feline population. Whereas before the wall was built, cats roamed the city freely at the darkest hours, insensible of the dangers of late-night drivers, now they proceed with caution everywhere they go. The roads intersected by the wall are half as wide as they used to be, and there is less room for cars to maneuver away from black cats poised unexpectedly in the middle of the road.

I said farewell to the wall—a goodbye few Palestinians have the option of offering—on an early Sunday morning in the summer of 2012 when the town was asleep. When I reached the narrowest portion near the Anastas gift shop, which brought me to a stretch of the road so constructed that few cars could pass through with ease, I nearly stumbled over one of the wall’s unseen casualties: an aged black cat who had not yet adjusted to, and perhaps had not even cognized, this latest development in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Evidently, the old cat had strode proudly onto the pavement in the middle of the night, oblivious to the new precautions mandated by the postintifada age. By the time the driver realized that an animal was standing in front of him on the road, frozen in the car’s headlights, it was too late. There was no place to swerve. The wall had blocked off all extra space in the formerly capacious street. There the cat lay, on an early Sunday dawn, her glistening black fur merging with the asphalt, and stained with dried blood. I do not know if the driver left the cat’s body on the road because he had been careless—perhaps he didn’t even notice what he killed—or because his heart was too full of grief over the changes that had reduced his homeland to collateral damage in Israel’s war on terror.

Heidegger diagnosed technological modernity’s world-as-picture in a society that was preparing to annihilate large portions of its population. His arguments have yet to be fully understood, let alone unpacked with respect to Palestine. It may be that representation before modernity possessed the capacity to intervene in and to alter reality even in the absence of modern technology, but it is clear that the globalization of representation entails new political forms and new ways of managing populations. It is also clear that the world Heidegger foretold over half a century ago, and for which he was in certain respects the architect, is being realized in the West Bank and Gaza, where Palestinians are being made to suffer for Europe’s genocide of the Jewish people.

Notwithstanding the need for a deep history of the politics of representation, the analysis offered by Khalili and others as well as my own encounter with the apartheid wall demonstrate that suffering is nowhere as globally implicated or heavily interpolated into the global public sphere...
as it is in Palestine today. The internationalization of Palestine is attested on multiple fronts, in citations from the speeches of Kennedy, parodies of American capitalism, and in the photographs by the Belgian photographer Karl Deckers, which cover the easternmost portion of the wall. These photographs of children from around the world accompanied by statements in their native languages aim to promote the artist’s belief that his pictures demonstrate the “unity, resemblance and the richness of diversity.”

Deckers could not have selected a more globally visible space on which to showcase his art. The internationalization of the Israel-Palestine conflict is deeply etched into the spaces that are made available for the representation of Palestinian suffering and resistance. These forms of globalization tempt the uninformed to conflate touristic commentary with lifetimes of suffering and displacement and to merge the minor discomforts encountered by transnational activists with Palestinians’ uprooted lives. Minimally, the graffiti on the apartheid walls shows us that contemporary technologies of representation have forever altered the nature of global resistance, in Palestine, as elsewhere around the world.

At most stages in its journey through the occupied territories, the wall is more in the nature of a fence. This security barrier enters the fingerprints of whoever touches it into a vast archive of biometric data maintained by the Israeli state. This technological function places the wall within the same military-intelligence apparatus as the machines posted at each checkpoint on the Israel-Palestine border, where all Palestinians are required to place their hands before being allowed to pass into Israeli territories, in order to ensure that the machine can correlate it with the information on their IDs. This requirement is not extended to persons of other nationalities, including Americans, which gave me the opportunity to observe lengthy exchanges between Israeli Defense Force soldiers and Palestinian civilians who had to place their hands in the machine many times before they yielded a satisfactory image of their fingerprints.

With the apartheid wall now serving as a global canvas on which passersby of all backgrounds inscribe their impressions, and with these impressions now symbolizing “Palestine resistance” to an international audience, one wonders what will become of the spaces between the walls, the spaces uncontrolled by the advanced technology of the colonial state. If, as John Collins puts it, we inhabit a “globe that is becoming Palestinized,” even as Palestine is becoming globalized, one hopes that the cooptation of the Palestinian narrative by international constituencies does not end by silencing voices that evade representation. Were that to happen, it is not only the Palestinians who would suffer; the history of Europe too would be short-circuited, inasmuch as European history continues to be played out in the politics of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, which are in turn shaped by Europe’s collective guilt surrounding the Shoah. Opaque to the global
imagination, the spaces between the walls, beneath the cracks, and on the other side of the border resist representation even when they refuse to comment on or otherwise allegorize occupation. Rather than critiquing the globalization of Palestine and of activism on behalf of the Palestinians, I have sought here to suggest that we would do well to attend to representations that resist representation, so as to prevent technological modernity from silencing our consciences.

Notes

I would like to extend my gratitude to Joshua Javier Guzmán, Tariq Jazeel, Nadia Abu El-Haj, and the other editors of Social Text for their excellent work on this essay, as well as to the photographers who furnished illustrations. Many thanks also to Beth, Kate, and Brenda Gould for reading earlier drafts of this work.


11. The vast majority of literature on the wall is inclined to regard all markings on it on the Palestinian side as evidence for “resistance.” See, for example, Zia Krohn and Joyce Lagerweij, eds., *Concrete Messages: Street Art on the Israeli-Palestinian Separation Barrier* (Arsta, Sweden: Dokument Press, 2010), and William Parry, *Against the Wall: The Art of Resistance in Palestine* (London: Pluto Press, 2010). Such works devote inadequate attention to the fact that the majority of their source material was produced by outside artists. As I argue here, the majority of graffiti on the wall cannot be read as an unmediated expression of Palestinian resistance.


13. For scholarly literature written about the wall in Arabic, see note 5 above.


17. Ibid., 171.

18. For a detailed overview of Banksy’s murals on the apartheid wall, see Parry’s revealingly titled *Against the Wall: The Art of Resistance in Palestine*.


30. The impact of the wall on Anastas’s business and her attempts to surmount these difficulties may be read at “The House with Seven Walls,” *Palestine Monitor*, www.uruknet.de/?p=44863 (accessed 18 December 2013).

31. See the recent translation of this work by Patricia Crone and Shmuel Moreh under the title *The Book of Strangers: Mediaeval Arabic Graffiti on the Theme of Nostalgia* (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2000). Because the author of the text states that he was a young man on the year of Abū al-Faraj’s death, the editors regard the attribution to Abū al-Faraj as mistaken and note that the author “was a stranger, and so he will remain” (8).

32. See the exhibit catalog, *Three Cities against the Wall—Thalāth mudun didda al-jidār* (New York: Voxpop Publishing, 2005). For the most thorough discussion of Palestinian abstract art to date, see Kamal Boullata, *Palestinian Art: From 1850 to the Present* (London: Saqi, 2009). Although this work is concerned with art that precedes the wall, it offers many fascinating precedents for the work discussed here.


40. Fawzia Reda, quoted in “Artists,” in *Three Cities against the Wall*, 75


48. Shalem, Wolf, and Maayan, *Facing the Wall*, 184. Another section of the wall, close to Hazboun’s restaurant, depicts Khaled with a gun, as in the original photograph.
49. This programmatic denial of being a terrorist attributed to Leila Khaled bears interesting comparison with a similar slogan on a shirt worn by the Chechen insurgent Shamil Basayev (1965–2006), whose life was similarly shrouded in mystery, prior to his assassination by the Russian military. For an analysis of the latter, see Rebecca Gould, “Jim Crow in the Soviet Union,” *Callaloo: A Journal of African Diaspora Arts and Letters* 36, no. 1 (2013): 133.


53. As of late 2011, it was also common practice for Israeli soldiers to demand that Palestinians remove their shoes when passing through the metal detectors at checkpoints. Characteristically, this requirement was only arbitrarily enforced; the only discernible logic to its timing had to do with Jewish and Muslim holidays. Also characteristically, this requirement was not extended to foreigners. The officially mandated treatment of Palestinians at checkpoints was therefore openly and explicitly racist, with non-Palestinians held to different standards.
