

This Wall Speaks: Graffiti and Transnational Networks in Palestine

Ashley Toenjes

Zionist colonization, even the most restricted, must either be terminated or carried out in defiance of the will of the native population. This colonization can, therefore, continue and develop only under the protection of a force independent of the local population – an iron wall which the native population cannot break through. This is, in toto, our policy towards the Arabs. To formulate it any other way would only be hypocrisy.

—Vladimir Jabotinsky, *The Iron Wall* (1923)

In 2002, the Israeli government began construction of an eight-meter-high concrete barrier which would come to surround and cut through much of the West Bank of Palestine. Though concrete was selected in favor of iron, nearly eighty years after writing, Vladimir Jabotinsky's crude blueprint for the colonization of Palestine was realized. Jabotinsky's ideas formed the basis of Revisionist Zionism, a brand of European Jewish nationalism that was most uncompromising in its views of how to treat with indigenous Palestinians, as well as how to confront the British, who controlled Palestine at the time of Jabotinsky's writing.¹ Jabotinsky and his followers believed that nothing short of literal separation between the colonists and indigenous Palestinians would be safe for Zionist colonists, and though Israeli strategies of occupation often created de facto separation of Palestinians and Israelis, the construction of the wall in 2002 was the first time the Israeli government enacted steps to literally separate Palestinians and Israelis en masse.

Through the following case study of the separation wall in Palestine, I argue that spaces in Palestine that attract international actors can be used by Palestinian actors to access transnational spaces and networks. Following Saskia Sassen's conceptualization of the global city, spaces become transnational when they are the hub of various transnational networks, and those networks are transnational because they move goods or ideas that cannot be quantified or mapped onto a foreign/domestic dichotomy.² This essay analyzes how graffiti is used as a tool by Palestinians and others to communicate messages from within Palestine to transnational audiences.

Palestine has been the hub of many transnational networks, some decades old and others centuries old. Historically, these networks included sites of commerce and pilgrimage, as well as those networks that gave rise to Zionist immigration in the late nineteenth century and, later, British and U.S. support for the Zionist project in Palestine. Variations of many of those networks grow and adapt in contemporary Palestine, and have grown to include those who support and oppose the occupation of Palestine. This paper focuses on how graffiti in Palestine attempts to link up with networks of Christian religious tourists and anti-occupation activists.

Through analyzing the content and location of graffiti on the separation wall near Bethlehem and Jerusalem, I argue that Palestinians and others tactically use the space and networks surrounding the apartheid wall to reach transnational communities. While there are instances of Palestinian voices being amplified in transnational space, graffiti analysis also presents the overwhelming (ab)use of the wall by international actors to project their own (already amplified) voices and perspectives into transnational space, setting the stage for transnational dialogue on the surface of the wall. The wall is transnationalized in other ways, including the circulation of images of the wall and its graffiti, often by transnational actors with access to communications technologies. Historical analyses of graffiti in Palestine reveal that Palestinians tactically used graffiti in the first intifada to create national linkages in the absence of national institutions such as state media or state education.³ The presence of such nationalist graffiti on the walls of refugee camps and other places that do not entertain tourists, contrasted with the overwhelming presence of outwardly-focused, transnational messages on the separation wall, point to the tactical use of space to divert it from its intended purpose of separation, and create new meanings and linkages which challenge the structures of the occupation. These messages become transnational in their creation of new external meanings and linkages that seek transnational support against the tyranny of a domestic occupation.

Graffiti and Context

The transnationalization of graffiti on the separation wall might be less significant if it happened incidentally, but a close analysis of graffiti in Palestine suggests that Palestinians and transnational activists are targeting transnational spaces through graffiti on the wall, and indeed are trying to engage the different networks that pass through the wall. These activists become transnational when they participate in transnational space, are part of

the many transnational networks that converge in Palestine, or participate in discourses of Palestinian liberation that are transnationalized. A historical contrast of the use of graffiti during the first Palestinian intifada (1986–1993) and the graffiti of the separation wall contextualizes Palestinian use of graffiti as a communicative tactic and the manipulation of language based on target audiences.

Studies on graffiti in different social and political contexts show that context matters in determining meanings of graffiti,⁴ and more importantly, so does access to power.⁵ Graffiti is often performed by marginalized groups who feel they have no other political recourse. In addition to political context, graffiti also derives its meaning from the medium, intentions of the artist, the intended audience, and ultimately how the recipient of the graffiti interprets the images and messages. Much of political graffiti's power lies in the ways it is able to reach and influence an external audience, and this is linked to the processes of graffiti production and circulation.

The first intifada occurred during a period of intense Israeli repression and censorship of Palestinian civil society. During the time leading up to and during the intifada, city-wide curfews were common, Palestinians were not allowed to have a printing press, and any expression of Palestinian national identity, such as the Palestinian flag or even its colors, was banned. Disobedience was severely punished through jailing and torture.⁶ Analyses of the graffiti of this time period show that the political messages of intifada-era graffiti acted as a way to circumvent the brutal censorship that the Israeli government imposed on Palestinians until the post-Oslo era. Without access to a national media, political assembly, or other elements of self-determination, graffiti was a way for Palestinians to transgress the censors and to express political messages, sometimes encouraging the continuance of the intifada and its tactics of civil disobedience, sometimes asserting the dominance of a particular political faction in an area, and still other times expressing Palestinian national identity.⁷ What is interesting about this graffiti is that it was nearly always in Palestinian Arabic, and the slogans were references to local (sometimes neighborhood-specific) events. Julie Peteet references the occasional use of English in the graffiti, stating that it was to target international delegations that Palestinian actors knew would be coming through the area.⁸ By targeting the international delegations in English, the language of the cosmopolitan, and by appealing to the transnational ideals of peace, hope, and justice, Palestinians were able to evade the censorship of occupation not just in the national arena, but also transnationally, a full decade before the separation wall was built.

The history of graffiti in occupied Palestine anticipates the claims this paper presents on the nature of contemporary graffiti on the separation wall. In short, those claims are that local Palestinian and transnational graffiti artists use the wall as a “global canvas” to communicate experiences of occupation to transnational audiences. The audiences are targeted by issue framing, and the messages and images circulate in a transnational arena through a combination of electronic media, published volumes of wall graffiti, and personal/tourist sharing of experiences. This process creates opportunities for Palestinians to circumvent the contemporary censorship of stunted economic development – a consequence of longstanding Israeli control of Palestinian border and movement of people, idea, and good – and participate in transnational spaces.

Issue Framing

Keck and Sikkink argue that issue framing is one of the most important aspects of transnational activism.⁹ Their approach is useful in identifying some processes that contribute to the development of transnational space around the separation wall. By “packaging” a cause or messages in a particular way, activists are able to reach expanded audiences and elicit favorable responses from those audiences.

Keck’s and Sikkink’s model states that international and transnational actors intercede on behalf of local issues in other countries by framing those issues in a way that will most appeal to their own national governments, which, in turn, are able to put pressure on the national governments where the local issues are based to change their policies. The case of Palestinian separation wall graffiti makes some departures from the model that Keck and Sikkink develop. Most obviously, it is not against their own state that Palestinians act, but an occupying power. In the case of Israel and Palestinians, Israel is not accountable to the Palestinian people or the international community to represent or provide for Palestinian demands, yet it exercises great power over Palestinians’ ability to do so for themselves. Though Palestinians have tried to challenge the power of the occupation in a number of ways, most notably during the first and second intifadas, they have turned toward transnational networks to try to find external powers that will help them challenge the occupation.

In the Palestinian case, there is also a complicated interplay between Palestinians and transnational activists. While Palestinians are in control of the messages they paint, it is not always clear who paints which messages. Further, it is generally the images from transnational activists that circulate in the West. Western artists collect images to publish online and in printed volumes and Western audiences are more likely to be engaged with the social media circulation of images from Western artists. Images filtered through the Western eye and Western experience are hegemonic in the circulation of separation wall graffiti in the West. In this process, activists also exert agency in how images are framed in transnational circulation. Some of the issues that derive from these imbalances are explored in greater detail below.

How local activists frame their cause has great impact on who will respond to it and how they will respond. For example, in the graffiti of the first intifada, issues were often framed in a national context. National framing was evident in the use of Palestinian Arabic as the language of expression, through the use of the colors of the Palestinian national flag, and through communications related to nationalist political parties such as Fatah and the nascent Hamas. The national framing largely caught the attention of those invested in the national struggle – it acted as an organizing tool and source of information for Palestinians, and it was read as a threat and act of insubordination by the Israeli occupying forces who tried to cover up the graffiti as quickly as it appeared.¹⁰ In analyzing the content of the graffiti on the separation wall, we can indicate different ways Palestinians frame their appeals to an international and transnational community, including language coding and content and location analyses.

The substantial use of English as the language of expression is one of the most telling

indicators that the intended audience of the graffiti is transnational. One study of graffiti on the wall near East Jerusalem reveals that two-thirds of the graffiti is in English. The second most common language is Hebrew, which is used about 14 percent of the time. Less than 4 percent of the graffiti surveyed was in Arabic.¹¹ The use of English, the language of both the cosmopolitan and one of Israel's greatest allies, is tactical and symbolic. Following de Certeau, tactics are calculated actions by the weak that invade the space and structures of the powerful.¹² By using English, Palestinian and transnational graffiti artists subvert the intended meanings of the space surrounding the wall and challenge the occupation in a targeted way. De Certeau argues that tactic is limited by its nature of being reactive to strategies of power, but when English language graffiti creates opportunities for the images and their messages to circulate transnationally and to link up with transnational activist networks that can apply pressure on their own governments and the Israeli government from the outside, the act of writing graffiti in English suggests a new mode of tactic, which is not merely reactive to power but also seeks to subvert it.¹³

Graffiti Locations

The occupation of Palestine, and the wall, as part of that occupation, are framed in different ways. For example, the wall itself is sometimes framed as a security device, other times as a physical border marker, and still others as a means of separation. As Keck and Sikkink's arguments on framing forecast, the different frames of the wall complement different political narratives in Palestine/Israel. For graffiti artists who wish to reach certain audiences, it is important that they choose frames that will have the biggest impact on the target audience. Not only do graffiti artists use English language graffiti, but they also frame the wall in terms that will resonate with transnational actors. Further, when transnational actors try to elicit support from their co-nationals or appeal to their governments, they may introduce their own frames that vary greatly from the frames of the original graffiti artists.

The location of the graffiti adds a final dimension to what I argue are tactical and intentional attempts at transnationalizing the messages and images on the separation wall. Location can be thought of in at least two contexts. The first is the choice of the separation wall, rather than other city walls or buildings, and the second is the choice of specific locations along the wall. The use of the wall as a canvas for transnational messages is important given that the wall has become synecdochal in many representations of the occupation. Street art and graffiti exist on other surfaces in Palestine, but it is the contrast in content that is revealing. For example, the art and graffiti I observed in refugee camps between 2009 and 2011 had more in common with the graffiti Peteet observed in first intifada-era Palestine than the graffiti on the present-day separation wall. Notably, Arabic was the dominant language of expression and images were imbued with local symbolism of which Palestinians not from the camp had only vague understandings. The difference between location and content of graffiti suggests to me that the wall, given its ubiquitous representation of occupation and its function as a tourist destination, is purposefully

selected as a place where outsiders will view, and potentially help disseminate, the messages and images found there.

Relatedly, the areas targeted along the wall also suggest a tactical use of location. Of the few studies of graffiti on the separation wall, the focus is on graffiti in either Bethlehem¹⁴ or Abu Dis, a neighborhood of Jerusalem.¹⁵ These important destinations, whose stretches of wall host not only large quantities of graffiti, but also some of the most popularized images, are important because they are most likely to be viewed and photographed by tourists. In addition to Bethlehem and Jerusalem's places as popular tourist destinations in Palestine, the strategies of the wall construction and its impact on these two cities and their inhabitants become synecdochal of the devastation the wall as a whole brings upon Palestinian communities. The choice of Palestinian and other graffiti artists to highlight and amplify the representational quality of these sections of the wall seems indicative of the new mode of tactic I suggest.

The content and electronic circulation of the graffiti and the national identities of the graffiti artists each contribute to ways that the graffiti itself becomes transnational. The following sections focus on two distinct processes that the graffiti content participates in. The first is how the graffiti creates dialogue with non-activist tourists in Palestine and the second is the interplay between content and its electronic circulation. In his systematic study of graffiti on Abu Dis, Hanauer identifies several categories of graffiti content that create or respond to transnational contexts, including statements of direct state support and appeals to human rights abuses. I would add themes of Western Christianity to that list. Different networks create different kinds of spaces around the wall. In the following analyses of images and image themes, I draw connections between the images and those networks, indicating relationships that may form in the dialogue between actors at the wall and the images and text on the wall.

Christian Themes

As a popular pilgrimage site for centuries, Palestine has a unique relationship with Christian tourists. Though there is overlap between pilgrims and activists, Christian tourism also creates a group of tourists who either do not have a context for contemporary political realities, or, who may, such as the case of many Christian Zionists, have a sympathetic view toward the strategies of Israeli occupation. Graffiti artists who want to reach out to these tourists would likely turn toward a common discourse, Christian theology and symbolism, to reach Christian religious tourists.

One prevalent image across the wall is that of a dove with an olive branch in its mouth, a reference to the Abrahamic story of the flood, central to Christian, as well as Jewish and Islamic, teachings. Further, the dove and the olive branch both carry strong representations of peace in Western Christian traditions. The dove and the olive branch are rarely depicted alone. Rather, they are often embedded in other images that fuse religious and political messages. In the few images I have found in which the dove appears alone, it is nonetheless embellished with political and religious symbolism. One case

is the silhouette of a dove, shaded in with a Palestinian flag which fades into an Israeli flag. This image from Abu Dis/Jerusalem presents an evocative statement of peaceful Palestinian-Israeli unity and co-existence.¹⁶ Another case, also near Jerusalem, depicts a dove, with its wings outstretched and nailed to the wall.¹⁷ This image at once suggests the wall as the death of peace in Palestine and likens that process to the crucifixion of Jesus. In numerous locations on the wall in Bethlehem, a dove and olive branch appear, where the dove wears a khaki combat vest and crosshairs are painted over its heart.¹⁸

More frequently, the dove and olive branch appear as one part of a bigger picture, sometimes integrated as a part of an explicit commentary on religion, and other times as an omen of peace. One Jerusalem example places the dove and olive branch among references to the Ten Commandments and Moses and the burning bush.¹⁹ By playing on themes shared between Jewish and Christian theology, artists are able to simultaneously respond to both Christian tourists and Jews inside and outside of Israel. In another mural near Bethlehem, a picture of the old city of Jerusalem prominently features the holy sites of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. From the center of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, which is to the far right of the picture, a ladder extends beyond the clouds, where a pair of hands reaches from the heavens to hold the ladder. A dove bearing an olive branch enters from the extreme left of the mural, signaling peace and an end to a Deluge-like catastrophe. The Dome of the Rock and the Wailing Wall are sandwiched between these expressions of Christian peace. Though one cannot miss the evangelical framing of this co-existent peace, the mural also features the likeness of the separation wall in the foreground, with the meters-high concrete planks knocked to the ground and many of them cracked and shattered.²⁰ The juxtaposition of stark, Christian imagery against the felled wall, the depiction of Christianity “saving” Jews and Muslims from themselves and each other, creates an explicit and motivating directive on how Christians ought to respond to the wall.

While the dove and olive branch appear to be the most recurrent Christian symbol in the graffiti surrounding Bethlehem and Jerusalem, crosses, Bible verses, and Christmas trees also appear, either on their own or, like the dove and olive branch, in embedded contexts. For example, a painting near Bethlehem shows a Christmas tree completely encircled by the wall.²¹ The presence of this category of images in and around Christian holy sites, and the relative lack of Christian-themed graffiti elsewhere on the wall, indicates ways that graffiti explicitly employs a genre of references likely to be familiar to those who pass through particular places in Palestine. I conclude this section by describing one more stretch of the wall in Bethlehem, near Rachel’s Tomb, an important site for each of the three largest Abrahamic faiths.

Rachel’s Tomb fell under the jurisdiction of the Palestinian Authority in the Oslo negotiations during the 1990s, but as routes for the wall were announced it was evident that Israel intended to illegally annex Rachel’s Tomb by placing it on the side of the wall inaccessible to most Palestinians. Before the site was completely severed from Palestinian autonomy, when tourists still accessed Rachel’s Tomb from the Bethlehem side of the wall, Bethlehem residents and others went to the wall with messages for the tourists. Just outside a souvenir shop, a section of the wall contains layers of colorful messages.

Whereas the Christian-themed graffiti discussed above is dispersed along the wall, the section in discussion contains several messages for a Christian audience. As tourists walk along the road to Rachel's Tomb and the souvenir shop, they see a large heart with a cross and 'Isa (Arabic for Jesus) written inside of the heart, "God is great" written inside of another heart, a large cross alongside the text "Jesus died," another heart alongside "Jesus," and, amidst a number of drawings that appear to be children playing, the text, "May I HAVE peace PLEASE."²² It is as though the ones who painted this section of the wall wanted the wall to be part of the pilgrimage. As the Christian tourists prepared themselves for their spiritual journey, the wall beseeched them to think of Jesus's love, but not without considering the realities of the wall. While many tourists are targeted in the wall's graffiti through religious messages, graffiti painters are also concerned with political considerations of the occupation and its allies. The following section explores some of these political themes.

Transnational Politics

Many activists come to Palestine to witness the occupation and to show their solidarity with Palestinians, and that solidarity is expressed in many ways. One important function that transnational activists fulfill is increasing awareness of the occupation, which is done, in part, through circulating images of the wall. In order to mobilize against the occupation of Palestine in their home countries, transnational activists frame the occupation in terms of its human rights abuses, and show how the occupation has a direct impact in the home country, particularly with regards to tax dollars. The growing popularity of campaigns calling for boycott, divestment, and sanctions (BDS) to be directed toward Israel is an important example of this process. Though EU countries are sometimes addressed, the majority of Internet and BDS campaigns target the role of the United States in providing financial support to Israel. Given Israel's consistent place as the top recipient of U.S. foreign aid, this approach should not be surprising. Relatedly, much of the graffiti on the wall targets this relationship between U.S. aid and the Israeli occupation. For transnational activists who want to mobilize support in their home countries, highlighting these images is one way they may draw attention to the nature of economic ties between the United States and Israel.

Hanauer describes the graffiti that responds to the relationship between the United States and Israel as "the Americanization of the Wall."²³ Though I disagree that the presence of this graffiti makes the wall "American" in the way that Hanauer's label suggests, his finding that over 25 percent of the graffiti in Abu Dis that makes a transnational reference refers to U.S. involvement is significant, and suggests an important sub-genre of graffiti to consider in this analysis.²⁴

In 2010, a large mural critical of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) was painted on the wall in Bethlehem. USAID has been the subject of Palestinian critique since it began doing work in the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 1994.²⁵ USAID is a source of confusion and contradiction for some Palestinians, who



Code switching, Bethlehem, 2009.



Transnational and “Made in the USA,” Bethlehem, 2009.

watch as the United States at once funds the Israeli occupation and is complicit with Israeli actions in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, while also funding development projects in Palestine that are often focused on alleviating problems caused by the occupation, rather than challenging the occupation directly. As Sara Roy indicates, development money spent on Palestinian development is not trusted because it comes from the same hand that funds Israeli arms acquisitions,²⁶ and which now funds and provides logistical support for the construction of the wall. The Bethlehem mural features the USAID logo and the text “Brought to you by USAID.” In less developed but no less direct graffiti, an all-caps “MADE IN USA” stamp is found in numerous locations on the wall in Bethlehem and is typically placed beneath another image or text.²⁷ Another image in Bethlehem featuring an American flag says, “AMERICA I WANT MY \$ BACK.” This image appears against other images on the wall of U.S. flags with stars of David or dollar signs in place of the fifty-stars as well frequent use of text such as “Paid for by U.S. taxes” or images of a weeping statue of liberty.

In another image, two sentences are written next to each other, one in English and the other in Arabic. The English reads, “US Stop supporting separation,” and the Arabic reads, “One day we will become

what we want” – a line from the beloved Palestinian poet Mahmud Darwish. The text appears to have been written at the same time and bears one signature, MK. This image represents a strong case of the code switching argument touched on in the historical analysis above. It suggests the tactical use of English to target one audience, while using Arabic to show solidarity and hope.

There are many ways Palestinians could frame their resistance to the wall, so the choice to name and shame U.S. complicity in the wall and Israeli occupation is significant. One of the most striking things about this choice is the fact that it calls to question U.S. actions rather than Israeli actions, and it is in this difference that we can observe tactical framing

and the creation of transnational space. Rather than focusing on their own victimization from the occupation or making appeals to their occupiers, Palestinians and transnational activists direct their graffiti toward a powerful country whose involvement and complicity in the occupation is evident from UN voting records to documentation of U.S. foreign aid to Israel to the tear gas canisters Israeli soldiers use as live ammunition bearing “Made in USA” logos. Palestinian graffiti is not only draws attention to the ways in which the Israeli occupation is transnationalized, but by connecting it to U.S. tax dollars, the graffiti also seems to be targeting the American people in an attempt to garner their support and action for the Palestinian cause.

Whose Transnational Wall?

The fact that the Bethlehem and Abu Dis/Jerusalem stretches of the wall are among the most visible to transnational actors makes those stretches the most likely to be graffitied by transnational activists. For this reason, it is simply impossible to know what is painted by local Palestinians and what is painted by transnational activists. The obvious exception to this is the work of well-known international artists such as Ron English or Banksy, whose works have been identified and catalogued by Western audiences. The process of focusing on Western artists’ art on the separation wall bares the painful familiarity of Orientalism, where the realities of the wall and its impact on Palestinian lives become not the focus, but the objectified backgrounds in the stories of named and important Western actors. In a project that emphasizes the importance of producing and circulating graffiti on the separation wall, it is necessary to pause and understand the power structures that are replicated in the act of graffitiing the wall.

The case of internationally recognized artists represents a somewhat obvious example of power imbalance, especially since their work is identifiable to the trained eye and their celebrity is part of what draws people to their work on the separation wall. But what about graffiti produced by activists without the credentials of a Banksy? There is much less knowledge about who produces the myriad slogans, stencil art, and statements of support that cover that wall, leading us to a delicate terrain of imperialism through expressions of solidarity.

Rebecca Gould raises a critique with regards to the production of graffiti on the wall, questioning the nameless transnational activists who graffiti the wall in solidarity with Palestinians. Whereas the wall is a lived experience for Palestinians, for activists it can never be more than a political symbol. And since activists can never understand or represent the realities of the wall denying Palestinians access to hospitals or their orchards, the motives of the graffiti artists should be questioned. Finally, since Palestinians are the ones who must live with the images on the wall, they ought to have more input over what those images are.²⁸ Gould’s concerns about the long-term effects of international activists use of the wall as a “global canvas” are rooted in a problem of representation.²⁹ Since it is Palestinians, and not the transnational activists, who live with the wall and its spatial consequences, Gould suggests it is insensitive for outsiders to try to “represent”

the occupation in graffitied snippets along the wall. Further, citing an anecdote from Banksy, where a Palestinian man chided the artist for trying to beautify the wall, Gould raises concerns about Palestinian agency in creating graffiti on the wall. Gould contrasts the graffiti of Bethlehem with the graffiti of Belfast, concluding that while the murals of Belfast, created by locals, are a form of political power, “Bethlehem’s canvas has been superimposed against the will of local inhabitants.”³⁰ Gould bases this conclusion on the anecdote from Banksy, as well as in the globalized themes found in the graffiti content. For example, Gould problematizes the use of World War II and Cold War Germany references, suggesting that the parallels weaken the language of resistance once found in Palestinian graffiti. In other words, Gould wants to maintain the particularity of the Palestinian case and the Palestinian language of resistance.

Gould is right to be concerned about the effects of international presence in Palestine. Palestinian academics are increasingly critical of the role of the international community in Palestine since the post-Oslo race to peace development. Islah Jad has termed this process the “NGO-ization” of Palestine, referring to the flood of international non-profit organizations trying to do peace work there, at the expense of authentic and locally informed Palestinian political organizing.³¹ Jad argues that the effect of these organizations has been a total cooptation of Palestinian civil society, and the Palestinian women’s movement in particular, which is now dictated by donor agendas abroad rather than based on the wants and needs of the Palestinians the organizations purport to represent. Though Gould does not discuss Jad’s piece or this related field of literature, her concerns of international activists coopting the Palestinian struggle for liberation should be read alongside the concerns Jad raises about peace development, and both critiques become even more significant in light of the histories of imperialist and Orientalist Westerners in the Middle East.

However, Gould’s analysis looks past some important dynamics at play on and around the wall, which can be better understood by exploring how activists and networks interact with the wall and spaces of graffiti, and how Palestinians interact and are in dialogue with those spaces and networks. For example, while Gould is right to address graffiti that references Nazi and Cold War Germany, the fact that the wall harkens to painful historical pasts that are not Palestinian does not preclude that Palestinians are not part of this conceptualization process. What if this is the language of resistance Palestinians choose? More generally, Gould’s implication that the globalization of the graffiti content is dismissive of Palestinian wants or needs suggests that there is not space for Palestinians to have globalized thoughts and ideas. Finally, particularizing the struggles of Palestine/Israel is part of the Zionist myth to justify settler colonialism. Thus, Gould’s critique that the language of Palestinian resistance must remain particular to Palestine needs to be carefully examined.

Part of Gould’s miscalculation stems from her comparative analysis of English-language versus Arabic-language graffiti on the wall. Early in her essay, Gould writes, “where Arabic occurs in [*sic*] the wall’s surface, its function is largely decorative.”³² Later, she addresses the imbalance in international attention to Arabic-language and English-language graffiti. The Arabic-language graffiti is much less inventoried than of the work



Palimpsest, Bethlehem, 2009.

of international artists and, whereas the graffiti of transnational graffiti artists tends to be explicitly political, the Arabic graffiti is “allegorical and opaque,” and thus less attractive to foreign media.³³ Conceptually, Gould raises some important issues that complement the imbalances I indicate at the beginning of this section, but Gould’s argument rests on a linguistic binary where English-language graffiti is conflated with international artistry and Arabic-language graffiti is equated with Palestinian artistry. Significantly, though she cites Peteet’s discussion of code switching in intifada graffiti, Gould does not consider this possibility in contemporary Palestinian graffiti.

The central theme of this paper is to point to the possibilities that are created by and for Palestinians through transnational networks that intersect at the separation wall. As the Palestinian liberation movement has become increasingly transnationalized (the Palestinian Authority’s recent elevation from “non-member observer entity” to “non-member observer state” status at the UN and the global BDS movement being two examples), so too does graffiti link up with transnational and solidarity issues around the globe, and throughout history. The fact that the wall bears messages from international artists directed toward a global audience does not mean that Palestinians are not part of this process. When we consider the historical contrasts and read the content of the first intifada graffiti against the heavy censorship and curfews that existed then, and the lack of communications technologies to keep Palestinians connected, the overtly political and localized nature of the graffiti is logical. Since the construction of the wall in 2002, and the graffiti that soon followed, Palestinians have not experienced the kind of mass curfews and police state that existed during the first intifada. In other words, the

communicative and informative functions of the graffiti of the first intifada, as defined by Peteet, were met through other means in post-Oslo Palestine. A new communicative need, staying connected with transnational political developments in a globalizing era, emerged at this time. The Palestinian effort to reach an international audience, and that audience's participation in dialogue through the networks and graffiti I have indicated, should be recognized.

In the narrow space I have indicated between Gould's concerns of the "global canvas" of the separation wall being appropriated by transnational activists and the Palestinian agency in creating linkages through the separation wall and its graffiti, I suggest a final mode of Palestinian tactic in Palestinian graffiti on the wall, a palimpsestic use of the surface. Above, I argued that there are power structures in place which lead to the reproduction and distribution of Western-produced images on the wall. Palestinians, who see tourists pass by the wall and photograph the same images time and time again, or who hear tourists ask where they can find certain images on the wall, are likely to have a sense of which images are more popular than others. The wall, with hundreds of kilometers in surface area on the Palestinian side, boasts no shortage of surface for someone to paint. If someone wanted to graffiti the wall, it seems odd that they would paint over another's image (intentions of erasure notwithstanding), unless there is an intended purpose.

President Kennedy's famous statement "Ich bin ein Berliner" was graffitied on the wall by Joy van Erven, a famous Dutch artist. This is among the popular images from the wall that circulate in the West. A photo of this graffiti from 2011 provides just one example of the wall as palimpsest. Looking at this image, it is difficult to discern what van Erven painted over, and what was painted over van Erven's text. However, perfectly centered below van Erven's all-capitalized black text and just below eye level, where there was no other graffiti, one graffiti artist wrote, "we want peace no occupation" [*sic*].³⁴ A recent Google search revealed that this section of the wall has since received several new layers of graffiti, including text which covers van Erven's painting of Kennedy's line, but for a period of time, anyone who saw or photographed this destination graffiti also took along with them a peaceful message, most likely from a Palestinian.

Ashley Toenjes completed her second MA in politics and government at Illinois State University. This article is an excerpt of her thesis, "This Wall Speaks: Graffiti and the Production of Transnational Space," which was supervised by Dr. Kam Shapiro. She received her first MA in 2011 at the University of Arizona's Department of Near Eastern Studies (now the School of Middle East and North African Studies), where her thesis, "Palestinian Women and the First Intifada: Static or Dynamic?," was written under the supervision of Dr. Maha T. Nassar and Dr. Charles D. Smith. Ashley will continue her PhD studies in geography at the Ohio State University beginning autumn 2015.

Endnotes

- 1 Charles D. Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2007), 122–23.
- 2 See Saskia Sassen, *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).
- 3 Julie Peteet, “The Writing on the Walls: The Graffiti of the Intifada,” *Cultural Anthropology* 11, no. 2 (1996): 139; and Steven T. Olberg, *Political Graffiti on the West Bank Wall in Israel/Palestine* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2013).
- 4 Kara-Jane Lombard, “Men against the Wall: Graffiti(ed) Masculinities,” *Journal of Men's Studies* 21, no. 2 (2013): 178–190; Katherine Creasap, “Social Movement Scenes: Place-Based Politics and Everyday Resistance,” *Sociology Compass* 6, no. 2 (2012): 182–191; Eric H. Doering, “With a Spray Can in Lefkosia/Lefkoshia: Murals, Graffiti, and Identity,” *Cyprus Review* 21, no. 1 (2006): 145–172.
- 5 Lisa K. Waldner and Betty A. Dobratz, “Graffiti as a Form of Contentious Political Participation,” *Sociology Compass* 7, no. 5 (May 2013): 377–389.
- 6 Peteet, “Writing on the Walls.”
- 7 Peteet, “Writing on the Walls”; Anne Marie Oliver and Paul Steinberg, “A Geography of Revolt,” *Public Culture* 3, no. 1 (1990): 139–145.
- 8 Peteet, “Writing on the Walls.”
- 9 Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists beyond Borders: Advocacy Network in International Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998).
- 10 Peteet, “Writing on the Walls.”
- 11 David I. Hanauer, “The Discursive Construction of the Separation Wall at Abu Dis: Graffiti as Political Discourse,” *Journal of Language & Politics* 10, no. 3 (2011): 301–321.
- 12 Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).
- 13 I maintain that these actions should be considered a tactic, rather than a strategy, because this more accurately captures the power dynamic and challenges of Palestinian struggles for power, whereas, in de Certeau's conceptualization, strategy is often employed to maintain power.
- 14 Olberg, *Political Graffiti*; William Parry, *Against the Wall: The Art of Resistance in Palestine* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2010).
- 15 Hanauer, “Discursive Construction.”
- 16 Avinoam Shalem and Gerhard Wolf, *Facing the Wall: The Palestinian-Israeli Barriers* (Cologne: Walter König, 2011), 79.
- 17 Parry, *Against the Wall*, 160–61.
- 18 Parry, *Against the Wall*, 16–17.
- 19 Shalem and Wolf, *Facing the Wall*, 67–68.
- 20 Parry, *Against the Wall*, 160–61.
- 21 Shalem and Wolf, *Facing the Wall*, 16.
- 22 Parry, *Against the Wall*, 118.
- 23 Hanauer, “Discursive Construction,” 311–12.
- 24 Hanauer, “Discursive Construction,” 309.
- 25 See Sara Roy, *The Gaza Strip: The Political Economy of De-Development* (Washington: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1995).
- 26 Roy, *Gaza Strip*, 78–9.
- 27 Parry, *Against the Wall*, 18, 20, 42; Shalem and Wolf, *Facing the Wall*, 144, 152.
- 28 Rebecca Gould, “The Materiality of Resistance: Israel's Apartheid Wall in an Age of Globalization,” *Social Text* 32, no. 1 (2014): 14.
- 29 Gould, “Materiality of Resistance,” 6.
- 30 Gould, “Materiality of Resistance,” 7.
- 31 Islah Jad, “The NGO-ization of Arab Women's Movements,” in *Feminisms in Development: Contradictions, Contestations, and Challenges*, ed. Andrea Cornwall, Elizabeth Harrison, and Ann Whitehead (London: Zed Books, 2007).
- 32 Gould, “Materiality of Resistance,” 32.
- 33 Gould, “Materiality of Resistance,” 32.
- 34 Shalem and Wolf, *Facing the Wall*, 150–51.