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Disturbing Natives? An Analysis of the Writings on Palestine's Wall

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The act of writing on walls has been a prominent spontaneous and planned technique to express and display manifold kinds of messages, from individual narratives to explicit political critique. Particularly in subaltern contexts, walls can serve as a practical form of communication to resort to, in lieu of freedom of speech and press. In the context of the Palestinian struggle with the Israeli state, as Julia Peteet noted, "the most ubiquitous sign of the intifada was writing" (Peteet 145). As a result of Israeli censorship that entailed restrictions to access to mass media such as television, radio, and newspapers, "graffiti became a form of mass communication" during the First Intifada (Rolston 8). In the past two decades and following the Second Intifada, the hundreds of kilometers of concrete space on the Israeli-constructed apartheid wall that is meant to segregate Palestinians from Israelis has in places been used as a space for writing by affected Palestinian communities and foreign actors.

The intention of this essay is to explore how, despite the physical violence of the wall, the concrete can provide a space that can serve the expression, display, and exchange of personal narratives, artistic manifestations, political comments, and educational initiatives that can, both individually and as a collective, create de-colonial knowledge that contests and potentially intellectually obliterates the very *raison d'être* of the wall itself. Reading the writings on the wall around Bethlehem as literary and cultural texts, this essay seeks to demonstrate how the writings, as performances of resistance, reclaim space through individual narration, form archival collections, and serve the expansion of transnational solidarity through their blurring of local and global struggles.

I begin with a historical survey of colonialism in Palestine that intends to highlight the wall's ideological genealogy. In light of the historical context, the wall is not an exceptional mistake, but rather part of broader Israeli settler-colonial endeavors, which need to be comprehended as a structure rather than an event. The confluence of settler-colonial inscription and indigenous erasure has been used by Israel since its establishment as a means to exclude Palestinians physically and discursively from Palestine. Despite efforts at elimination, the natives continue to survive. This essay will explore the ways in which indigenous inscription on the settler-colonial wall in Palestine indicates an affirmation of Palestinian survival and a disturbance for the settler-colonial project.

Excluding and Removing the Natives

A reading of the wall necessitates an understanding of Palestine's colonial context. While oftentimes presented as a diplomatic and/or religious dispute in popular Western and English-language media and political discourse, the so-called "conflict" in Palestine is a colonial one. Emerging in the late nineteenth century in Europe, political Zionism envisaged the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine, oftentimes presenting this goal as an answer to violent European anti-Semitic persecution. Contemporary segregation in Palestine needs to be understood as rooted in the incongruity between Zionism's vision of a (re)construction of a Jewish homeland on a geography that has for centuries been inhabited and claimed by another people, and the continuous survival of that people into the future. Zionism's discursive creation of a secular ethno-national tradition has been accompanied by settler-colonial expansionism. The presence of Palestinians in Palestine has been a crucial obstacle to these efforts. Deborah Bird Rose wrote that "just by staying at home" the native already got in the way of the colonizer (46). Settler-colonialism is a structure rather than an event and, as Kēhaulani Kauanui argues, analyzing it as a structure allows us "to challenge the normalization of dispossession as a 'done deal' relegated to the past rather than ongoing." As settler-colonial conquest entails the geographic expansion and seizure of territory, one can suggest that the continuous presence of the natives is a constant source of angst for the settler-colonial movement. As Khalidi formulated it: "The natives are still there, and they are restless."

Ethnic cleansing, removal, and transfer have been constitutive of Zionist practices in Palestine. Zionism's founding father, Theodor Herzl, recommended a need to "gently expropriate" the land and to circumspectly "try to spirit the penniless population across the border" through a process of "removal" (88-89). Yosef Weitz, who served as the director of the Jewish National Fund's (JNF) Transfer Committee, which strategically planned the ethnic cleansing in the 1930s and 1940s, suggested that "the Arabs should go," claiming "[i]t is our right to transfer the Arabs" (Pappé 23), and anticipate the "complete evacuation of the country" (Masalha 126) of the native people. Concurrently, Palestine was romanticized as a *terra nullius*, i.e. a vacant land that can be colonized, as is reflected in the prominent Zionist slogan of "a land without a people for a people without land."

This idea translated into Israel's colonial control and policies of segregation through practices that have over time been increasingly successful and technologically advanced. Palestinians who remained in historic Palestine following the 1948 ethnic cleansing campaign (Pappé 2006) have been contained within subaltern spaces through colonial subjugation. As Khalidi points out: "The Zionists' hope and expectation was that the refugees would simply disappear, and that even the memory that this had been an Arab-majority country for more than a millennium could be effaced." Since Palestinians have not been

eliminated, despite the military and political power of Israel, Khalidi concludes that Israel "is in many ways a failed settler-colonial project."

An Iron Wall: Historical and Political Context

Comparing Zionist settler-colonialism to other instances of European colonialism, Fayez Sayegh argues that the Zionist movement could neither assume its envisaged physical proportions, nor its political aspirations of self-segregation, while Palestinian Arabs continue to inhabit the land. Thus, Sayegh suggests that unlike in other European colonies, "Zionist colonization of Palestine was essentially incompatible with the continued existence of the 'native population' in the coveted country" (5). I suggest a view of the wall as a means of self-segregation for the settler-community. Adding to Zionism's early visions of racial purity, the absolute exclusion of the natives is envisaged in Russian Zionist Ze'ev Jabotinsky's 1923 text, "The Iron Wall." Born in Odessa as Vladimir Yevgenyevich Zhabotinsky, Jabotinsky, "an avowed believer in racial separation and the general cultural inferiority of the Arabs" (Brenner 47), was a leader of Revisionist Zionism, i.e. a militant branch of Zionism that was followed by current Israeli prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu's father, Benzion, who was Jabotinsky's secretary and founder of the New Zionist Organization of America.

In "The Iron Wall," originally written in Russian, Jabotinsky outlines that it is "utterly impossible to eject the Arabs from Palestine," and "to obtain the voluntary consent of the Palestine Arabs," as native people have "always stubbornly resisted the colonists." Expecting resistance and assuming that the natives would refuse to surrender, he demanded to "proceed regardless of the native population." Jabotinsky wanted the indigenous population to be placed "behind an iron wall, which the native population cannot breach." Avi Shlaim assesses that for Jabotinsky, the iron wall "was not an end in itself but a means to the end of breaking Arab resistance to the onward march of Zionism" (15). Regardless whether this formulation of an iron wall was a coarse metaphor or a provision for a future policy, Jabotinsky's writing essentially reflects right-wing Zionism's tendencies towards Palestinians in the early twentieth century, and offers an invaluable perspective for the analysis of contemporary Israeli policies, which continue to be based on ethno-religious exclusion.

Dispossessed and oftentimes deprived of access to the outside world, the vast majority of Palestinians still living in historic Palestine have been excluded from political participation under control of the state of Israel. Throughout decades, Israel has implemented policies to preserve a legal dominance of Israelis over Palestinians. Today's wall can be seen as a contemporary realization of Zionist colonial concepts that entail the exclusion and removal of the Palestinians.

Fragmentation and Separation: Contemporary Challenges

Today, the extent of Israel's policies of segregation reaches far beyond a wall that the natives cannot breach. Precisely, Palestinians are facing multiple dimensions of geographical separation within historic Palestine, as they are legally separated into various groups with different degrees of access to rights, i.e. as quasi-citizens of Israel, residents of Israeli-controlled Jerusalem, and stateless individuals in the West Bank and Gaza. Furthermore, they are divided into various geopolitically contained spaces, i.e. Gaza, the West Bank in general, and the enclaves within the West Bank. Around and within the West Bank, the Israeli-constructed wall facilitates the physical separations between Palestinians and Israeli citizens as well as amongst Palestinians themselves. The wall, which was built during the Second Intifada in the year 2000, stretches over 700 km throughout the Green Line that demarcates the West Bank, but also cuts into the territory of the West Bank. The International Court of Justice as well as the United Nations General Assembly found that the wall violates international law and called for its removal.

As a result of these policies of segregation, Palestinians are dispersed through a confluence of Israeli checkpoints, barriers, and walls that control Palestinians' movement inside, to, and from the West Bank, isolating Palestinian communities into separate areas – which Jonathan Cook has referred to as "remaining ghettoes," and "islands of Palestinian land surrounded by a sea of Israeli-controlled territory" (83) –while subjugating them to the control of the Israeli military and armed settlers. Patrick Wolfe concluded that "Gaza and the West Bank become less and less like Bantustans and more and more like reservations (or, for that matter, like the Warsaw Ghetto)" (404). Concepts of linear borders are contradictory to Israel's rule over Palestine. The colonial borders around and within the West Bank are flexible according to Israeli decisions with Palestinians being vulnerable to becoming impulsively "'walled off' from their surroundings" (Bowman 8). What would constitute a demarcation between the territory internationally recognized as the state of Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories has, according to Eyal Weizman, "splintered into a multitude of temporary, transportable, deployable and removable border-synonyms--'separation walls', 'barriers', 'blockades', 'closures', 'road blocks', 'checkpoints', 'sterile areas', 'special security zones', 'closed military areas' and 'killing zones' -- that shrink and expand the territory at will" (6). Palestine remains geographically and politically divided by Israel's multifaceted expediency. Thus, as had originally been envisioned by Jabotinsky, Palestine itself appears as a frontier that can be contested and manipulated by the colonizer at any time, but never breached by the natives.

The Orientalist Security Paradigm

The wall's construction has been justified through Israel's rhetorical (re)production of a security threat that has served as an excuse for human rights violations. The wall is thus euphemized as a "security fence" in Hebrew, whereas it is usually referred to as "apartheid wall" in Arabic. Concurrently, the exclusion of the natives continues to play a central role in Israeli political discourse. Israeli prime minister Netanyahu stated that he wants to surround all of Israel with a fence, to keep out the "wild beasts" (Beaumont). When visiting an illegal Israeli settlement in Hebron, Netanyahu assured the settlers that the barrier would prevent "illegal residents" and Palestinian "attackers" from entering (what he defines as) Israel ("Netanyahu Visits Construction Site").

The rhetorical transformation of the indigenous population into illegal aliens and the authorization of the settler-community as exclusive owners of the land has been reiterated through the discursive confinement of Palestinians to traditional Orientalist, Eurocentric spaces, where the colonized community is imagined as a corrupt, backward, and barbarian collective "Other," dehumanized, and propagated as an existential threat to Israeli projections of the "Self," which needs to be countered and encountered through security measures.

Zionism's rhetorical creation of ethno-religious difference between Palestinians and Israelis, and Israel's official use of remarkably basic dichotomies of the "Self" and the "Other," allow Israel to rhetorically justify the ongoing structural subjugation of Palestinians. Yehouda Shenhav and Yael Berda conclude that the justification for the control of Palestinians "relies on the belief that inside every Palestinian -- regardless of age, residence, or profession -- hides the ghost or demon of a Palestinian terrorist" (355). The survival of the natives then appears as a very fatal threat, whose abatement becomes Israel's *raison d'être*.

A Literary Analysis of the Graffiti on the Wall

The wall itself is another instance of the Nakba. The Arabic term, meaning "catastrophe" has initially been used to refer to the 1948 ethnic cleansing of Palestine. The Nakba, however, constitutes an ongoing present (Sayigh 2013), the experience of which forms a collective memory and shapes the national identity among the transnationally fragmented and dispersed Palestinian population(s). Given its impact on the everyday experience of Palestinians in the West Bank, the wall has become part of Palestinian subaltern (and) national identity.

Behind the wall, the indigenous population continues to survive, as their elimination was incomplete. The politicide and memoricide imposed on Palestinians have led to the perpetuation of Palestinians' subaltern conditions. While the wall is another hegemonic realization

of concepts of segregation deeply embedded in settler-colonialism, it has taken on multiple connotations for Palestinians. Primarily, the physical presence of the wall, which embodies the political violence of racial segregation, can potentially provide a space for narration as it conveys possibilities for written, drawn, and sprayed individual and collective expressions of the Palestinians encapsulated by the wall. On the Palestinian side, the wall displays a magnitude of multilingually inscribed narratives by a multiplicity of authors from both within and outside of Palestine, including writings, drawings, and posters which combine textual and non-textual forms of communication, with graffiti appearing as the most common technique.

As Peteet has argued, "graffiti were the silent narrative accompanying acts of resistance yet were themselves an act of resistance" (Peteet 143). Stemming from the Greek *graphein* (γράφειν), meaning "to write," the presence of graffiti can be traced back to prehistoric inscriptions on walls and stones. Fiona McDonald suggests that "drawing and painting on stone and making one's presence known through images" has been a "timeless obsession throughout mankind" (10). While sometimes regarded as vandalism, graffiti has become gradually more accepted in the mainstream in the second half of the twentieth century, when it became an integral part of urban cultures, particularly in New York City. Eventually, in the last decades, artistic components of graffiti have been increasingly recognized and graffiti writings have been commercialized to an extent. Today, different forms of graffiti, which encompass spray paint, brush paint, and stencil, have been associated with the urban hip hop cultures which emerged in the second half of the twentieth century. Morgan and Bennet have located graffiti writing as defining factors of hip hop "that have materialized on walls worldwide" (176). Hip hop emerged as a non-violent resistance against dominant power structures and marginalization, while in its original essence it is a tool of democratization and solidarity. In that context, graffiti has commonly been comprehended as a fringe form of communication. Allowing for the expression of protest, graffiti is a way for those located at the margins of a society to voice their narratives, make statements, and communicate political exigencies. As such, graffiti has been significant for the articulation of anti-establishment ideas. It can stand in for political participation and challenge power relations through form and content.

The wall plays an important role for contemporary Palestinian national consciousness and protest. As a physical construct and as the messenger of the political violence that it transmits, it is part of everyday Palestinian life and struggle and of the geography and landscape for directly impacted communities. As Larkin summarizes, "the wall has emerged as a dynamic canvas for multilayered local and international visual art, expressing marginalized voices, political criticism, social protest, and global solidarity through graffiti tags, slogans, murals, and posters" (135), while it constitutes "the world's largest canvas for oppositional protest art, global critique, and local resistance" (142).

The wall can be seen as a literary (and) public space that allows for acts of civil disobedience. Bearing recorded witness to Palestinians' refusal to silently accept their collective incarceration, the writings can transform the wall from a physical construct of colonial containment and control into a public space of indigenous response. The wall facilitates intricate intervention, challenging the multiple instances of erasure experienced by Palestinians' that have been imposed by Israel, the international community, and the Palestinian Authority (PA), which have all failed to adequately verbalize the sources of Palestinians' colonial suffering.

The act of writing as such can in itself be a means of resistance and an articulation of anti-colonialism. In her analysis of the significance of graffiti during the Intifada, Peteet attributes to graffiti a specific place within "a constellation of resistance tactics to intervene in relations of domination," arguing that both the acts of writing and reading "disrupted dominant-subordinate relations in various ways" (Peteet 143). The specific restrictions imposed during the Intifada era added to an already present structure of oppression. Palestinians were not allowed to have printing presses, to assemble peacefully, or to display national or political symbols. As a reaction to this heightened oppression, "the political messages of intifada-era graffiti acted as a way to circumvent the brutal censorship," as Toenjes summarizes (57). Graffiti became a means to challenge Israeli-imposed restrictions on freedom of speech, allowing Palestinians to disseminate political messages and to express their national identity (Toenjes 57). Graffiti served "as a notice board, changing daily, telling the population of developments such as attacks on Israeli forces, claiming martyrs, calling the people to demonstrations," with the purpose "to mobilise the population in the name of resistance" (Rolston 47). As Larkin argues, the "[e]ver-changing graffiti, murals, posters, installations, and street art at urban intersections and militarized checkpoints along the wall seek to challenge Israeli hegemony and reclaim Palestinian space, presence, and subaltern voices" (Larkin 142).

On Palestine's wall, graffiti functions as both an expression of resistance and a means of communication with the outside world. Politically, the drawings challenge Israel's discursive and geo-political hegemony. Like the mechanisms of Israel's colonial rule, the murals can flexibly change over time. They can be modified, erased, overwritten, and extended. Graffiti can also be indicative of dreams and illusions. Depicting utopian visions, some drawings imagine an alternative reality and a future of freedom and equality. The drawings' scrutinization of the status of human rights obviously aims at democratizing and transforming.

Reading the Writings on the Wall in Bethlehem

The predictability of the wall is challenged by the spontaneity of the writings on it. The following analysis is concerned with Bethlehem, a small town in the West Bank which is known internationally as the

birthplace of Jesus. The creative articulations in manifold colors create a stark contrast to the cold, grey concrete that they are written on. Through the omnipresence of watchtowers with opaque windows that form a Foucauldian panopticon as a technology of punishment, and a multitude of closed off gates –which, if necessary, can be opened to Israeli military vehicles – the wall symbolizes exclusion and abandonment. One gate is embellished with a drawn postal sticker that says "fragile," and a sticker displaying a breaking wall with the phrase "With Love and Kisses. Nothing lasts forever," extended with a combination of sun flowers and hearts in warm yellow, orange, and red colors. Countering brutal exclusion with cordial and even infantile inclusiveness, such drawings illustrate perseverance and evoke the hope that the concrete wall is only temporal and will be survived by the encircled community.

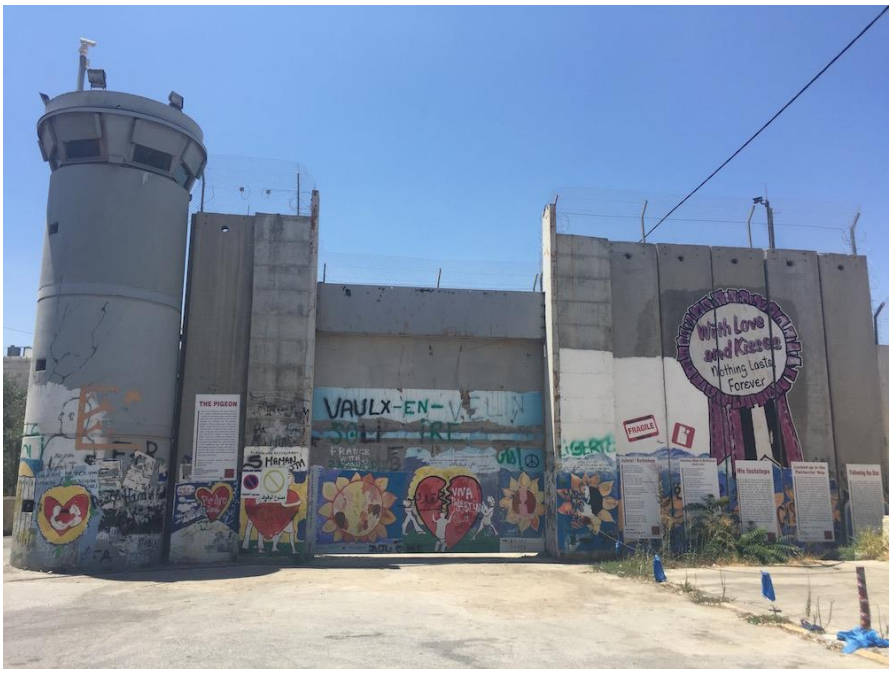

Figure 1: "The wall, a watchtower and a closed gate with various drawings." Photograph taken by author. Bethlehem, Palestine. August 2016.

In these drawings, colonial segregation is encountered with proclamations of survival, as the wall bears witness not only to human presence, but even more to Palestinian *Sumud* (صمود). The concept of Sumud, which translates as "steadfastness," refers to the Palestinians' attempt at a continuation of everyday life under Occupation, derived from the lack of alternative strategies of resistance. Sumud bears the plain condition of staying on the land and represents "a lengthy, patient perseverance to preserve (or not to give up on) Palestinian identity and rights in a colonial context" (Rijke and van Teeffelen 94). Thus, merely existing becomes synonymous with resisting. Like the concept of Sumud, the drawings – which symbolize this very strategy – can be seen as an affirmation of Palestinian survival and, hence, a cause of disturbance for the settler-colonial project.

At another spot on the wall, a drawing of the old city of Jerusalem reveals the wall's confluence of utopia and reality, or, the imagination of an alternative reality. The lively drawing, in different tones of beige, imagines a clearly visible Jerusalem behind a destroyed wall, whose cracked pieces lay on the floor. Jerusalem's old city is depicted in its smallest details, displaying houses, churches, mosques, the Al Aqsa, and trees, in a peaceful reconstruction of the city's geography, flora, fauna, and architecture. A flying dove carrying an olive branch represents a combined symbol of both peace and Palestinian national resistance. A vertical ladder figuratively connects the visualized Jerusalem with the actual Jerusalem, showing how the writings on the wall construct a post-colonial alternative to the status quo.

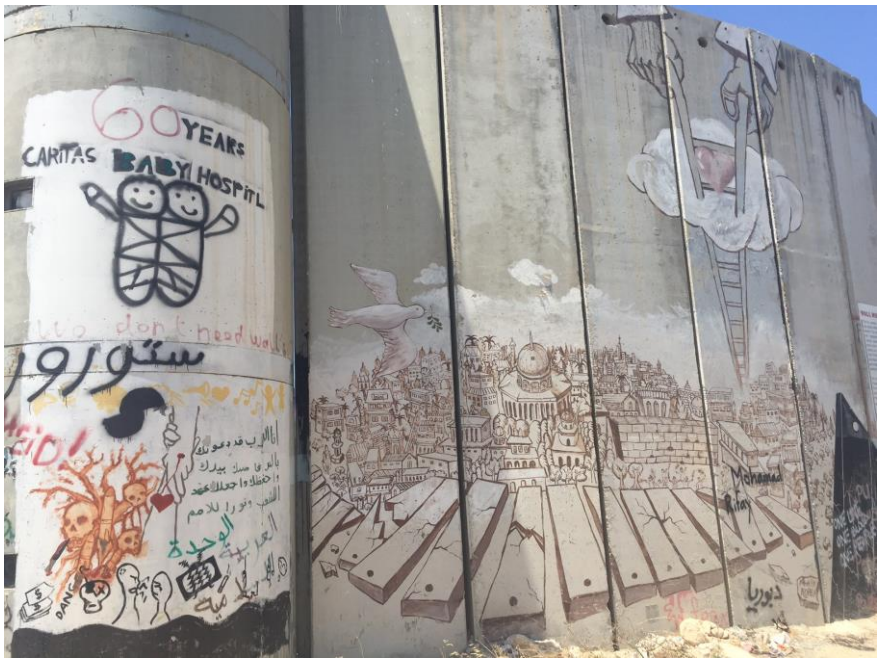

Figure 2: "A drawing of Jerusalem." Photograph taken by author. Bethlehem, Palestine. August 2016.

Although Jerusalem, which has been occupied since 1967 and was annexed in 1981 by Israel, is only around 12 km from Bethlehem, it remains inaccessible to the vast majority of Palestinians from Bethlehem or other parts of the West Bank.

The drawing of Jerusalem is one of many that evoke the leitmotif of open gates and doors, oftentimes drawn with people walking through them and transcending the wall's physical incarceration. Imagining an alternative world behind the wall, these drawings aim at making the wall disappear through creativity, articulating attempts to escape and liberate. The dismantling of the wall appears as an act of reclaiming Palestine, by connecting a physically segregated part of Palestine with other fragmented parts of Palestine, hence, reclaiming the freedoms of movement and return. In doing so, these drawings also creatively reclaim international law.

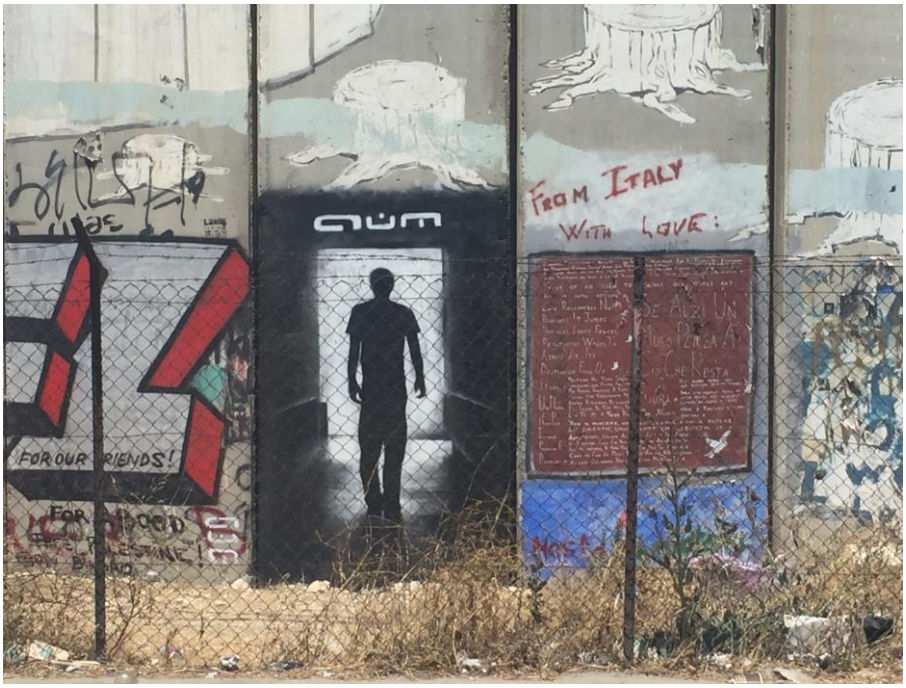

Figure 3: "Various drawings, including a depiction of a gate on the wall." Photograph taken by author. Bethlehem, Palestine. August 2016.

Figure 4: "An installed street sign reading 'Occupation Road'." Photograph taken by author. Bethlehem, Palestine. August 2016.

Concurrently, different sections of the wall are decorated with improvised street signs that read "Occupation Road," "Apartheid Avenue," and "Wall Street," creatively providing the chaotically designed path of the wall with an ironic urban structure. Written in English, the signs address an international audience. The generic part of the name derives from different terms for roads, while the specific part refers to the colonial conditions. The motif of streets is significant: while streets are generally public spaces used for transport, connecting several points and leading somewhere, colonial architecture has transformed many Palestinian streets into means of control. They are cut off by the wall itself and by occupation check pointsor used for the implementation of physical apartheid. Moreover, Jewish-only roads enable Israelis to drive through the West Bank without encountering the presence of Palestinians. Conversely, the sarcastic nomenclature of

the artistically created street signs corroborates the illegality of the wall under international law.

Another ‘consequence of the wall is its annexation of landmarks of religious significance. For instance, Rachel’s Tomb has been cut off from Palestinians since 2015. The burial place of the Hebrew matriarch Rachel is understood as a holy site by Jews, Muslims, and Christians. While there is no public indication for the location of the religious site, activists have placed signs identifying its position and providing an educational text about Rachel’s Tomb and Israel’s circumvention of international law.

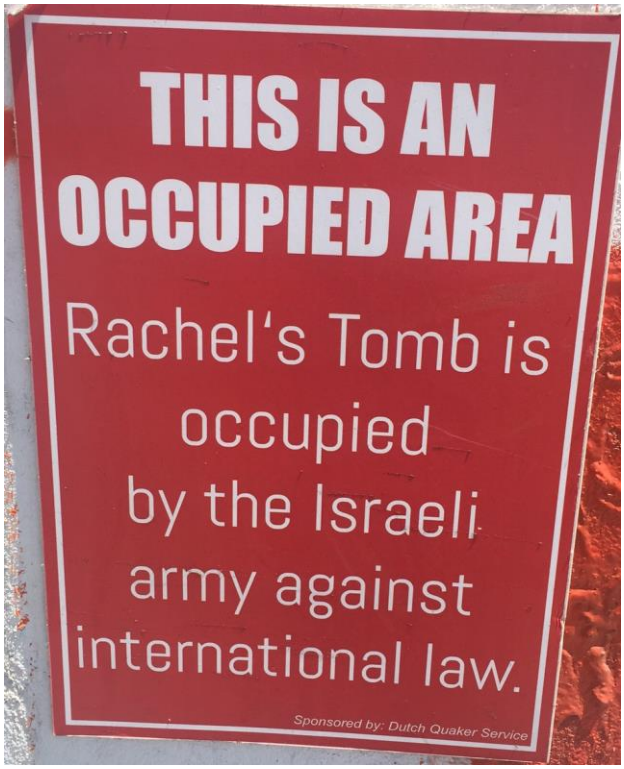

Figure 5: “A poster installed at the section of the wall that separates Bethlehem from Rachel’s Tomb.” Photograph taken by author. Bethlehem, Palestine. August 2016.

The writings appear as non-violent acts of dissent as well as instances of public pedagogy. As Palestinian protests tend to be grasped through Orientalist lenses in dominant Western discourses, they are oftentimes portrayed as religiously motivated insurgencies and anti-Western fanaticism and, hence, tend to be refuted altogether and in advance. The visual, oftentimes colorful, writings and drawings, however, bear witness to humanity, fragility, and trauma. Hence, reading the wall as literature might offer a reversal to the de-humanization of Palestinians and destabilize Orientalist fantasies about Palestinians for the Western reader.

Graffiti also serves the (re)affirmation of Palestinian national identity by displaying national symbols and commemorating martyrs. For example, the wall north of Bethlehem includes a drawing of a young, smiling Leila Khaled with her rifle and kuffiye and text that reads: “Don’t forget the struggle.” Here Khaled, who has been

defamed as a terrorist by Israel, is reclaimed and publicly presented as a liberation fighter. Similarly, art on the wall displays national symbolism, such as a Palestinian woman waving the national flag in the face of heavily armed Israeli soldiers. While the encounters with the Israeli military manifest colonial power relations, they are insufficiently visible to international audiences. Thus, the wall's depiction of everyday instances of colonial violence could invite an outside reader to grasp the situation in Palestine as a colonial one and to view it through the lens of the colonized.

Other examples of graffiti reclaim the location as "Palestina," or "Filasteen," often accompanied by drawings of the Palestinian flag. The multilingual reiteration of the geographic name is in itself a de-colonial gesture, as it defines the space as Palestine and connects it to the Palestinian people, thus countering the dominant Zionist narrative. The writings depict Palestinian efforts at indigenous reclaiming of their own geography. The physical space, literally colonized by the wall, simultaneously becomes a de-colonial articulation. Still, the wall remains a contested space that is, like the territory on which it has been constructed, under absolute Israeli control and subject to Israeli colonial designs.

The Local and the Global

Among writings sprayed in English on the wall around Bethlehem, one can encounter some general "make peace not war" remarks as well as writings that urge "end Israeli Apartheid," and to "live free or resist." In several places, one can read the simple phrase: "call for humanity." The English-language graffiti in particular pose a difficulty when it comes to distinguishing between content authored by Palestinians and messages written by internationals.

A definite distinction becomes impossible in Palestinian areas that receive heightened Western attention, such as Abu Dis and Bethlehem. Due to its prominence in Western popular cultures, Bethlehem attracts foreign visitors, including religious tourists, activists as well as foreign graffiti artists. As a result, the walls surrounding Bethlehem form a multilingual mixture in which global signs fuse with, or even overwrite, local Palestinian expressions. This phenomenon complicates the reading of the wall as a distinctively Palestinian literature.

The inscription of messages from abroad can bear manifold problematics. The tradition of foreigners using spaces of expression that could be used by Palestinians can in itself potentially constitute a mechanism of colonialism. Palestinians can protest the actual intention of the wall by seizing the physical space for expression and narration. The interference of Western actions complicates the identification of what is Palestinian. A Western supremacy is evident in the circulation of images from the wall in the West. As Toenjes summarizes:

> 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. (58)

Such tendencies can lead to an appropriation of Palestinian spaces for the dissemination of Western art. An uncritical reading of foreign inscriptions on the wall coupled with the incapacity to distinguish between Palestinian and foreign writings can cause a situation in which non-Palestinians speak on behalf of Palestinians on Palestinian space, consequently depriving Palestinians of their agency and, hence, adding to the erasure of the indigenous community.

Besides the occupation of space, another danger is obvious when the messages written by tourists enforce Israeli narratives and/or erase the colonial dimension of the suffering as experienced by the local Palestinian population. One such problem is that some English graffiti tend to naively conflate the wall as such with the broader Palestinian struggle (Larkin 151). Superficial comparisons between the wall in Palestine and other well-known historical examples of walls are common (Hamdi 17). Yet, the wall is not the ultimate symbol of Palestinian identity or struggle. The wall as a physical construct, like apartheid as a political and legal construct, are symptoms of Israel's colonial control of Palestine. Despite their cruel impact on Palestinian daily life, neither the wall nor the apartheid regime is the original source of Palestinian suffering. The wall is a fairly recent phenomenon, established over a century after the first Zionists designated Palestine as the ground of their colonial project. While the legal apartheid regime and the physical presence of the wall intersect, they are not mutually dependent on one another. Apartheid might be physically visible through the wall, but it is present beyond the wall and encompasses all sectors of West Bank life. A potential dismantling of the wall alone would not necessarily signify the liberation of Palestine. Neither would a potential legal end to apartheid automatically entail full liberation. Palestinians are confronted with a multidimensional system of oppression, the presence of which makes comparisons to other physically present or already dismantled walls in different political environments, such as the Berlin wall, complicated. There is also the danger of a cultural fetishization of the wall that might entail a discursive belittlement of the Palestinian struggle with colonialism into one against only the wall, thus, consequently potentially authorizing Israeli colonialism.

The Wall as an Archive

Concurrently, the wall could convey a space for the articulation and archiving of memory. As Israel continues to dispossess Palestinians not only of their land and property, but also of their history, the writings on the wall could be regarded as spontaneous or artistically arranged testimonies that resist the processes of dispossession through a recording of Palestinian narratives. While Palestinians' claims to Palestine rest on their physical/geographic, historical, and cultural

presence, the settler-community has been attempting to create their national narrative and to remove the historical discrepancy between themselves and the land. As a fairly recent ideology, Zionism continues to struggle with the lack of Zionist history in Palestine. As Derrida outlined, "there is no political power without control of the archive, if not of memory" (11), and, as Said has argued, the hold of memory and geography is closely linked to the desire for conquest and domination ("Invention" 247). Trying to engineer a national narrative, Israel's ongoing attempts to indigenize a Zionist history and geography through means of historical, geographical, biblical, archeological, and cultural rhetoric have been accompanied by efforts to erase the Palestinian past and present. The colonization entailed the destruction of Palestinian landscapes and cultural topographies. However, the survival of many ruins "constitutes material evidence refuting Israel's claim that Palestinians are not part of Palestine," as Ghazi Falah writes (281). Said framed the very question of Palestine as "the contest between an affirmation and a denial," claiming that "epistemologically the name of, and of course the very presence of bodies, in Palestine ... transmuted from reality into a nonreality, from a presence into an absence" ("Question of Palestine" 10). Accordingly, the struggle between Palestinians and Zionism is one between (indigenous) presence that is constantly overpowered and eradicated by (settler-colonial) interpretation.

The post-1948 dispersal and fragmentation of Palestinians rendered any idea of establishing museums and archives inconceivable, both in Palestine and in the diaspora. After tens of thousands of Palestinian books were looted and destroyed during and following the 1948 ethnic cleansing campaign, attempts to establish an archive were sabotaged by Israel. After exiled Palestinians had instituted the Palestine Research Center in Beirut, Israeli forces destroyed it (Masalha 138; 143). Today, the ongoing process of establishing archives continues to be complicated by settler-colonial erasure, political limitations, and the progress of time. Oral narration has been the main means to preserve cultural heritage (Allan 9). Palestinian history post-1948 has geographically and politically enfolded within transnational spaces, with generations of Palestinians unable to return or oftentimes even visit Palestine. There is no Nakba monument or institutionalized database of victims. In a settler-colonial context, indigenous efforts at recording, preserving, and archiving memory can naturally be seen as a contestation of the settler-colonial narrative, particularly in Israel, whose ethno-national identity formation largely depends on the denial of Palestinian history and culture.

In recent years, some museums have been inaugurated that engage with Palestine and Palestinians. The "Palestinian Museum" was opened in Birzeit (West Bank) in 2016, the idea for which was introduced in 1997 by the Taawon Welfare Association. The motivation was to provide an institution that would document the 1948 Nakba and modern Palestinian history and celebrate Palestinian culture ("About"). The museum "was designed as a transnational institution, capable of overcoming geographical and political boundaries to reach

Palestinians within historic Palestine and beyond" (ibid). The Abu Jihad Museum for the Prisoners Movement Affairs was inaugurated in 2013 in Abu Dis (West Bank). It is named after the kunya of Khalil Al Wazir, a Fatah leader who was assassinated by an Israeli commando in Tunis. The museum's founder, Abu El-Haj, had been sentenced to fifteen years jail at the age of 17, after which he spent a decade in Israeli prison. Initially illiterate, Abu El-Haj learned how to read and write in prison and later obtained a PhD. The museum reconstructs the history of Palestinian prisoners and provides collections of writings by prisoners, including letters, documents, diaries, and poetry. Prisons are an integral part of Palestinian life under colonialism, given Israel's usage of physical incarceration as a tactic of its occupation regime in the West Bank. As Abu El-Haj outlined in an interview, "[p]risons are a microcosm of Palestinian society." He observed: "We had doctors and farmers and each had his own level of education that was different. But everyone read, wrote and learned. We want to ensure this heritage is documented and preserved" (Hatouqa, "Palestinian Museum Showcases Prisoner Misery"). Abu El-Haj remembers: "The Israeli prison authorities perceived pens as Kalashnikovs. This great heritage born out of suffering needed to be salvaged and showcased" (Hatouqa, "Abu Jihad Museum: 'It's ours and it's watered by our blood'").

As the space on the wall is at times used for the collection of indigenous narratives and memories, it is relevant to explore to what extent the wall can be seen as having features and potentials of an archive or museum. The International Council of Museums delineates a museum as "a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment" ("Museum Definition"). An archive can be defined as:

> Materials created or received by a person, family, or organization, public or private, in the conduct of their affairs and preserved because of the enduring value contained in the information they contain or as evidence of the functions and responsibilities of their creator, especially those materials maintained using the principles of provenance, original order, and collective control. (Society of American Archivists)

The writings on the wall do not fulfill the conventional criteria of a museum or an archive, as the space on the Palestinian side of the wall is neither institutionalized, nor under the control of Palestinians and, thus, does not guarantee a continuous storage of any content. The sovereignty over the wall is, like the control over the West Bank, held by Israel, whose government can at any time remove, modify, add, replace individual parts of the wall, hence destroying the writings on it as well. As a consequence, any content created on the wall falls within Israeli control. Due to the bantustanization and the restriction of individual movement, no portion of the wall is accessible to all Palestinians in the West Bank. Nevertheless, given the colonial constraint, one can argue that the wall does, at least spontaneously, constitute collections and exhibitions of biographies and narratives,

even if only temporary. In doing so, it does provide a space for collective memory and action, albeit fragmented.

While built to exclude the natives, the inner side of the wall has been transformed into an improvised space of narratives and memories. The wall presents genealogies of suffering around and beyond the 1948 Nakba: pictures and statements outline experiences of removal, dispossession, colonial violence and exclusion. Like the natives themselves, their side of the wall can remain invisible to the colonizer.

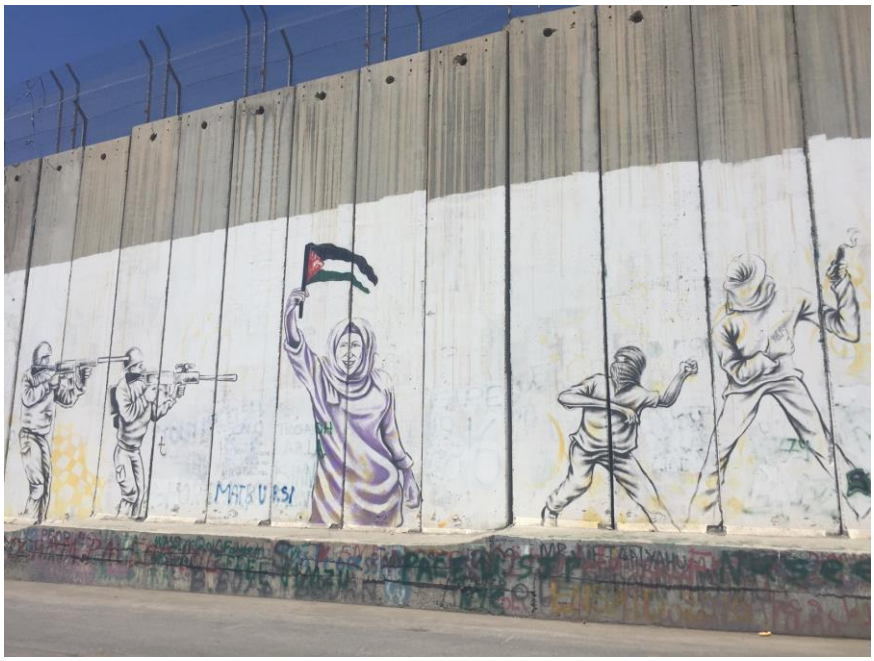

Figure 6: "A drawing of a woman waving the Palestinian flag between protesters and occupation forces." Photograph taken by author. Bethlehem, Palestine. August 2016.

Significantly, the wall provides educational capacities. This is evident in the so-called "Wall Museum" that entails over a hundred short, individual narratives of local Palestinians, mainly children and adolescents. It was established by the Arab Educational Institute, an organization that hopes that the Wall Museum will eventually destroy itself "by its very success" ("The 'Wall Museum'"). The youth's statements reflect individual fears, hopes, and dreams. While their personal experiences are distinct, many mention the Occupation and the wall as obstacles to the fulfillment of their dreams, which include simple ideas such as attending a university, finding employment, or looking beyond the wall or seeing the sea.

Writings include, for example, that of George, who wishes to emigrate: "I just want to get out of here. There is no future here and when I study in a foreign country maybe I can stay there. ... I don't want to be locked up here." Christina, a 16-year old teenager from Bethlehem, wants to become a soldier, combining the wish for liberation with goals of gender equality: "I want to fight for our freedom and show everyone that women are strong and can fight for what they believe in. ... We are all part of Palestine, men and women.

So why can't I fight for my country and for my people?" The vision of freedom is also evident in Adnan's formulation: "I just want to go outside, be free and have lots of room to play, just forget the wall, forget our prison." As is apparent from many of the writings, beyond the military occupation itself, the wall adds a specific dimension to the colonial incarceration of Bethlehem's youth, particularly since the younger generation has never experienced life before the wall.

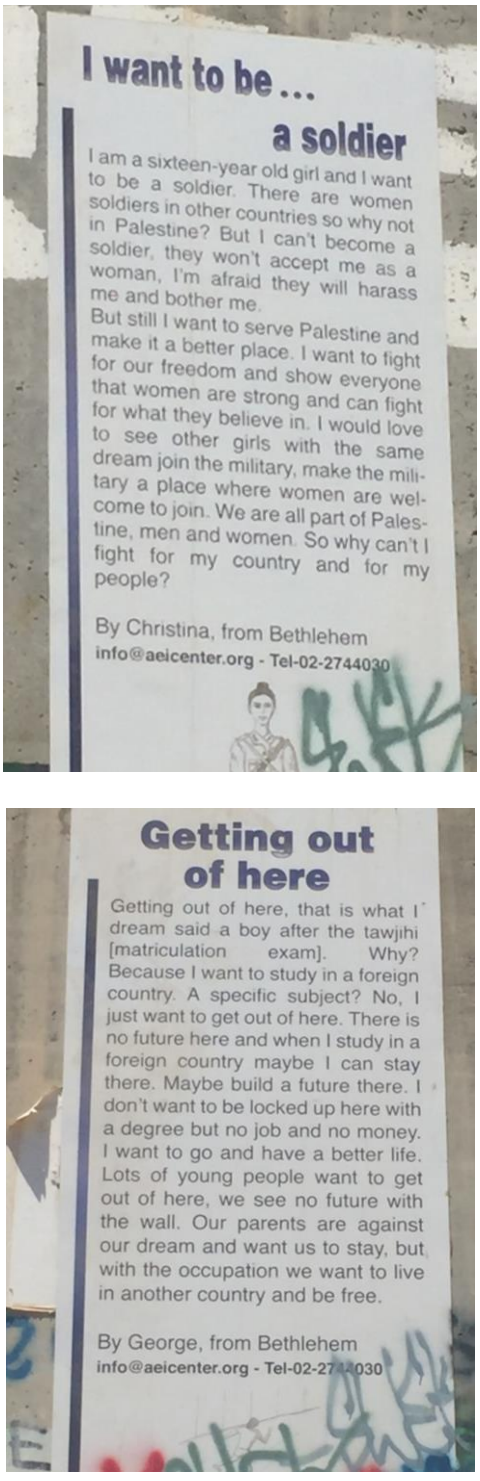

Figure 6: "narratives from the 'Wall Museum'." Photograph taken by author. Bethlehem, Palestine. August 2016.

By providing these narratives in English, the "Wall Museum" makes the manifold stories of Palestinians accessible to a wider audience, particularly tourists, who might not actively encounter these Palestinians during their trips to Bethlehem. Showing the human stories as a fragile contrast to the destructive wall, the Arab Educational Institute outlines that "by preserving human memory, the human story is a challenge to the wall" (ibid). This textualization of oral narration is important anthropological work, which uses the very wall whose purpose is to isolate Palestinian voices from the outside world, for the voicing of Palestinian narratives. Through their reclaiming of Palestinianness, the writings on the wall can be seen as a contestation of Israel's narratives and an affirmation of native survival.

The Global Dimensions of the Wall

In Bethlehem, a graffiti in Catalan proclaims a commitment to the liberation of Palestine, while a Catalan flag is accompanied by the Arabic word for "freedom." The wall has gained a transnational character due to its inscription of the global onto the local, which are not always distinguishable, as international activists and artists have participated in the writings, with and without Palestinian involvement. This phenomenon bears the effective danger that an aesthetic perception of the wall from the outside might overshadow the visibility of, or even beautify, the Palestinian suffering. Concurrently, international involvement could potentially amplify a connection of the Palestinian struggle with the outside world. Besides expressing solidarity with Palestinians, activists and tourists from outside of Israel/Palestine have left their imprint and their own desires of de-colonization or independence on the wall. Multilingual expressions of solidarity can hint at the symbolic significance that the Palestinian question has for other struggles in colonial and non-colonial contexts. While the foreign writings can alter and obscure Palestinian narratives, there is also a potential for transnational cooperation. As Larkin wrote, "[t]he distinctions between Palestinian and international wall interventions are often blurred, since local voices may be part of an international project and foreign artists may rely on local collaboration" (Larkin 136), as "[g]lobal activism and indigenous responses have converged and even blurred together in the struggle to free Palestine of Israeli occupation" (150). The intersection of local, national, and global struggles could allow for some writings to be read as transnationally compiled narratives.

While the wall is oftentimes absent from Western historiography, activism done by contemporary transnational human rights movements –inter alia the U.S. Campaign for Palestinian Rights, BDS movement, Black Lives Matter, Dream Defenders or Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP) – has repeatedly amplified the wall in the West, particularly through analogy. Even if not always focused on the Palestinian struggle *per se*, the oftentimes symbolic evocation of the wall in Western activism can

potentially aggrandize the visibility of the Palestinian status quo. Drawing connections between the Trump administration's policies of exclusion, activists in the United States have integrated into their protests slogans like "from Palestine to Mexico, all the walls have to go," thereby locating the wall in Palestine within a globally linked system of oppression.

Certain writings on the apartheid wall reflect the wall's positioning within transnational politics. One writing on the wall in Bethlehem remarks, "Trump, it does (not) work," pointing to racist histories and currents in the United States and connecting the geo-political context of Palestine's wall with other structures of containment. The wall can be interpreted as both a symbol and a frontier of U.S. imperialism because it serves to geographically transplant the defense of the U.S. foreign policy interests to the non-existing border between Israel and Palestine and to mask colonial violence as anti-terrorism measures. The dominion of U.S. imperial culture, according to Keith Feldman,

> produces and circulates knowledge to secure a purportedly stable opposition between the foreign and domestic that provides a symbolic architecture to secure consent for extraterritorial violence as essential for protecting the national home, even as the categories of foreign and domestic are persistently blurred and enfolded into the other. (28)

Israeli and U.S. concepts of homeland interrelate due to their colonial genealogy. The United States' exclusion of indigenous populations and marginalization of minorities and neighboring populations from the South, is correspondent to Israel's exclusion not only of Palestinians, but also of African asylum-seekers and certain Jewish populations. Given that the United States supports Israeli policies to the extent that a differentiation between both countries becomes impossible at the international level, the wall in Palestine bears a defining character for the U.S. white "Self" and the continuous formulation of the Palestinian "Other."

The remapping of racism extends far beyond ideological concepts. U.S. law enforcement employs strategies against Black Americans that have been experimented by Israel on Palestinians, with Israel having long established itself as a transnational authority for so-called anti-terrorism and Palestine having become a laboratory (cf. Khalili). Israel's wall has, particularly under the Trump administration, become a model for U.S. policies. The Zionist Organization of America (ZOA) propagated: "In an era in which the vast majority of terrorism is committed by Muslims, in order to protect American citizens, we should adopt the same profiling policies as Israel and be more thorough in vetting Muslims" (Guttman). Whether the targets are Black, Muslim, or Hispanic populations, Israel's policies in Palestine can generally serve as an inspiration for the exclusion of minorities. U.S. president Donald Trump glorified Israel's wall as a model for the wall he wishes to build between the United States and Mexico. Trump's plan was immediately endorsed by Netanyahu ("Facing Mexico's Fury").

The broad exchange of Israeli and US surveillance, policing, and military industrial complex reached its historical peak during the Obama administration, which, for example, granted a 145 million USD contract to Israeli arms producer Elbit Systems for surveillance equipment along the US-Mexico border (Miller). Meanwhile, Elta North America, a subsidiary of the Israeli arms company Israel Aerospace Industries, and Magal Security Systems, which built the barrier around the West Bank, both expressed interest in building Trump's wall (Abunimah). Elta is an inherent part of the U.S. homeland security industry.

While the security paradigm aids Israeli and U.S. nationalist ideas, it simultaneously connects subaltern populations. Particularly the wall's symbolic and physical representation of collective incarceration has motivated a strong Black-Palestinian discourse of solidarity, given that the wall defines Palestinians as surplus populations who are contained, in similar ways as Michelle Alexander has analyzed the situation of Black Americans as historical and contemporary surplus bodies in the United States. Angela Davis claims that "[b]efore Palestinians are even arrested, they are already in prison. One misstep and one can be arrested and hauled off to prison; one can be transferred from an open-air prison to a closed prison" (35).

The visualization of Palestinian narratives, the demand for freedom and liberation, and the global call for help and activism inscribe the global into the local on the apartheid wall. Through the display of U.S. and Israeli imperial culture, the writings on the wall destabilize the colonial paradigm, on which the wall was built. As a site of U.S. and Israeli extraterritorial, imperial, and colonial violence and a colonial frontier, it simultaneously becomes a site of de-colonial knowledge production.

Conclusion

The wall violently epitomizes the removal, containment, and collective colonial incarceration of the indigenous population through Israeli colonialism. The rhetorical identification of Palestinians by their ethno-religious difference from the settler community and their general dehumanization informed early Zionist discourses and have continued to shape Israel's approach towards Palestinians, from Herzl to Jabotinsky and Netanyahu. The wall's presence evokes an alternative reality for both settlers and natives. While it allows the settler-community to ignore Palestinians, whose presence disturbs the Zionist utopia, the wall incarcerates Palestinians but simultaneously provides many with a space of narration. Their audience is of course limited. Still, the transnational circulations of photos of the drawings, writings, and graffiti has undoubtedly contributed to the awareness of the wall's existence and strengthened the visibility of Palestinian suffering internationally. Images and slogans are universally accessible and easier to understand than human rights reports. Overall, the writings in Bethlehem can be read as auto/biographic narrations of individual

Palestinians, documenting the authors' struggles, affirmations of survival, and formulations of hope. Concurrently, the inner space of the wall serves as a resistance to Israel's hegemony. Thus, it has a decolonial potential. At the very least, the writings document and confront the outside world with Palestinian existence. It is impossible to identify individual authors of all writings, while it is also difficult to distinguish between Palestinian and international elements. The confluence of both entails the obvious danger of obscuring and prolonging Palestinian suffering through a reinforcing of colonial silencing. It does, simultaneously, offer a potential for transnational cooperation that can strengthen the visibility of struggles. Eventually, the writings as such are de-colonial expressions as they symbolize the survival of the indigenous population. They necessarily contradict Israel's narrative and, as individual and collective pieces of literature, deconstruct the very political and colonial structure that they have been constructed on. Through their de-colonial potential, the writings reaffirm that settler-colonialism is a structure rather than an event, while the writings can simultaneously be read as a potentially indigenous deconstruction of this structure and, thus, as a disturbance to the settler-colonial project.

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