THE WEST BANK BARRIER AS A CANVAS FOR POLITICAL

EXPRESSION:

THE DIALECTIC BETWEEN LOCAL PALESTINIAN RESISTANCE AND

INTERNATIONAL GRAFFITI TOURISM

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<u>Abstract</u>

Arguably the most notorious symbol of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the West Bank Barrier. The barrier and its negative impact on Palestinian life have been protested by Palestinians, Israeli activists, and international human rights advocates, but it is the politically charged graffiti found on its concrete wall segments that attracts the most international media attention today. Palestinians using graffiti as political expression have in recent years been joined by increasing numbers of international artists and tourists, who come to contribute their own graffiti on the wall. While graffiti tourism and graffiti by world-renowned international street artists have benefitted the Palestinian economy, it simultaneously fuels conflict consumerism and overshadows Palestinian artwork, used as resistance against Israeli occupation. Many Palestinians are resentful of international groups using their experiences as subject matter and Palestinian artists often must sacrifice artistic freedom to the demands of international sponsors. Though most international graffiti attempts to promote solidarity, the Palestinian narrative is often distorted, leading Palestinian artists to create counter graffiti or deface toxic graffiti to combat harmful stereotypes and accurately represent their values and stories. This project examines Palestinian responses to international graffiti-making through ethnographic study as well as a systematic literature review. Interviews and documentation highlighting international artist, tourist, and Israeli perspectives are included. Additionally, this paper uses the theoretical frameworks of conflict transformation and *poiesis* from the lens of the field of expressive arts to make the case that graffiti is a powerful nonviolent method for communities in conflict zones to raise awareness, assert and control accurate narratives, shift perspectives of outside actors, and build solidarity. Potential additional components to *poiesis* as a framework are offered, in which the intent, goals, and tangible outcomes of community creative resistance and social change are outlined. This information could be helpful in learning the motivations behind graffiti-making, perceived impact and effectiveness, and future steps towards using graffiti as a tool to protest injustice and build international solidarity without the graffiti losing its meaning or demeaning Palestinian locals, for whom the graffitied wall is part of their everyday lives.

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the history of the region of Israel-Palestine, there have been numerous periods of physical separation between Jewish and Arab populations due to political and cultural tensions. Today, arguably the most notorious symbol of this separation is the West Bank Barrier, whose purpose, according to the Israeli government, is to protect Israeli citizens from Palestinian terrorism. The barrier and its negative effects on Palestinian life have been protested by Palestinians, Israeli activists, and international human rights advocates; however, it is the vast display of colorful, politically charged graffiti found on its concrete wall segments that attracts the most international media attention and tourists. Palestinians using graffiti as a tool to express political aspirations and show their resilience to Israeli occupation have in recent years been joined by increasing numbers of international artists and tourists, who come to contribute their own graffiti on the wall. However, there are concerns that international graffiti is transforming the wall into a "global forum" that potentially overshadows or misrepresents the Palestinian voice. International graffiti has increased tourism in the West Bank, but consequently, this fuels the industry of graffiti tourism (where international visitors come to see graffiti and/or make their own) which to many Palestinians romanticizes their struggle and re-appropriates the wall instead of raising the awareness needed to build international solidarity and political action.

Academic research, along with most media articles and interviews, tend to focus largely on international graffiti and the graffiti tourism that surrounds the wall, with only recent articles focusing on concerns some Palestinians may have regarding the graffiti and how it may be impacting their cause. Little has been written in terms of exploring how Palestinians are responding to graffiti tourism and what they would find helpful. Other gaps include in-depth examination of how Palestinians, intentional artists, and tourists interact with and influence each other's graffiti, such as adding text, choosing where to paint over to make space for one's own, solidarity artwork, additions to artworks, tagging, and counter murals. This doctoral thesis hopes to shed light on these questions through ethnographic study as well as online research based on existing interviews, documented responses, and through the works of Palestinian activists, scholars, and artists. Additional focus will be directed towards interviews and documentation highlighting international artist, tourist, and Israeli perspectives, as these views are often left out of reports about graffiti on the wall. This information would be helpful in understanding the motivations behind graffiti participation, perceived impact and effectiveness, and future steps towards using graffiti as a tool to protest injustice. Graffiti that highlights collaboration with locals and internationals can potentially increase solidarity by building relationships through 'do no harm' principles and maximize the power of their work to call for social and political action from the international community.

While the graffiti on the West Bank Barrier has gained widespread news coverage, it has only recently received increased attention in terms of academic study, with a spike in published works in 2011 and then again in 2017. Most studies build on the groundwork of anthropologist Julie Peteet (1996), who examined the use of graffiti in East Jerusalem

during the First Intifada. Graffiti at this time was used as a form of communication between local residents and political factions to combat restrictions the Israeli government placed on Palestinian news outlets and gatherings. The graffiti encouraged resistance, giving information on upcoming political meetings to support the uprising. Once the graffiti served its purpose, it was often destroyed shortly after (Peteet, 1996). While the graffiti of the 1990s targeted Palestinian viewers, the graffiti on the wall today speaks to a global audience. Studies have noted the wide use of English instead of Arabic in order to promote international attention (Toenjes, 2015; Hanauer, 2011; Lovatt, 2010). Most current literature examines continued use of graffiti as Palestinian resistance (Lovatt, 2010; Olberg, 2011; Hanauer, 2011; Leuenberger, 2011; Parry, 2011; Heffez, 2013; Wiles, 2013; Oshinski, 2018).

Recent studies and news articles have addressed Palestinian opinions on international graffiti participation. Some Palestinians claim that it raises awareness of the Palestinian struggle, while conversely there is sharp criticism that international art is a distraction from the wall's negative consequences. One study assessed the issue of local graffiti projects funded and directed by international non-governmental organizations, or NGOs: "[Palestinian] graffiti artists are caught between either adhering to the external aesthetic and thematic expectations exerted on them by transnational institutions and foreign sponsors, or embracing their own artistic freedom" (Lovatt, 2010, pp. 25 – 26). Some researchers have concluded that the wall has become a global or transnational message board, thus potentially diluting the Palestinian experience with unrelated international references and platitudes. Toenjes (2015) argues that art by Western artists attracts the most international media attention, resembling "imperialism through

expressions of solidarity" (p. 64). Gould (2014) contrasts Palestine's graffiti with Belfast, arguing that while Northern Ireland locals control Belfast's artwork, "Bethlehem's canvas has been superimposed against the will of local inhabitants" (p.8).

There are numerous interviews with Palestinian locals themselves who have expressed a wide range of opinions on the act of graffitiing the wall and whether internationals should be involved. To my knowledge, Gagliardi (2020) is the first academic article to specifically focus on the phenomenon of Palestinians defacing international graffiti. This work is important in that it recognizes the perceived intrusion of international artists in Palestinian space for one's own gain. However, as this article focuses mostly on Australian artist Lushsux, it would be beneficial to expand this knowledge to include international artists as a whole. There still is room for research on interactions between locals and internationals via graffiti, as well as in-depth content analyses of the graffiti and the overall local response on the ground.

This doctoral study consists of ten chapters. Chapter 1 gives the reader a brief history of the West Bank Barrier and describes its origin, physical characteristics, political ramifications, and the negative impact it has inflicted upon Palestinian communities. Terminology regarding the West Bank Barrier is also addressed. For the purposes of this research paper, I use both the terms "West Bank Barrier" or "barrier" when describing its history, and "wall" to describe the actual concrete wall portions where graffiti is placed. Similarly, the terms "graffiti" and "street art" are used interchangeably in this paper. This chapter also outlines the timeline of graffiti on the wall, from when Palestinians first used it to express political resistance to the graffiti's attraction to tourists today. Due to this paper's in-depth focus on the wall and its graffiti, a general history of the Israeli-Palestinian

conflict is not offered, though there are many sources included in this paper that would provide an interested reader this information.

Chapter 2 explores *poiesis* as a valuable theoretical framework to understand the phenomenon of using street art and graffiti as a conflict transformation technique. Globally, there are examples of communities actively working to challenge narratives, raise awareness, and create change by way of shaping their physical environments with public street art. The philosophical concept of *poiesis*, originating in the time of Plato and Aristotle, has evolved over time to include a wider understanding of art-making, phenomenology, and social impact, as we will see in Chapter 2. This paper explores how *poiesis* can be used as a theoretical framework, through both the perspectives of the field of the expressive arts and conflict transformation to examine the potential of graffiti in conflict zones in terms of raising awareness and building solidarity. *Poiesis* is a foundational philosophy of the field of expressive arts that addresses the creative potential of individuals to shape their environments in response to outside circumstances. *Poietic* acts are those actions taken by individuals to creatively shape the world around them in order to make meaning or to reveal truths about certain situations. This is also the case in communities around the world, often in instances where an outside arts facilitator guides a community in conflict settings in addressing traumas, building support and coping strategies, and reimagining their future to take action for themselves.

The methodology used in this project is outlined in Chapter 3. This project, approved by the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences ethics review board at Trinity College Dublin, is a qualitative study that combines aspects of ethnography and a systematic literature review. Together, these methods offer a window into the perspectives

of Palestinians affected by graffiti tourism, with some focus on international artists, tourists, and Israeli perspectives. These three groups were selected due to the lack of research on intergroup interactions through graffiti (such as additions, defacing, and censorship) as well as in-depth research on Palestinian voices regarding the other groups' actions. My experience in visiting the region and exploring online literature led to the following research questions:

1) How are West Bank Palestinians responding to graffiti by international street artists and graffiti tourism?

     i. How do Palestinians creatively interact with international graffiti, such as defacing or transforming artworks, choosing where to paint over to make space for one's own, solidarity art, additions to artworks, tagging, and counter murals?

2) What are the perspectives of West Bank Palestinians towards making graffiti on the West Bank Barrier, in general and including international involvement?

3) What are the different attitudes about graffiti on the West Bank Barrier outside of the Palestinian community, including those perspectives of international artists, tourists, and Israelis?

4) What are the most common themes regarding graffiti content in general?

     i. How are these themes being used or responded to by local Palestinians, including content by both locals and internationals?

5) How can *poiesis* as a theoretical framework help to better understand graffiti in the context of conflict transformation and as a method to enact social change?

These questions were developed during field visits, informal interviews with local Palestinians, and online research. I have visited the region numerous times between 2012 and 2019. Five of these visits were specifically focused on the West Bank Barrier. I have spoken to numerous Palestinian artists, humanitarian workers, therapists, shop owners, teachers, and peace activists in the region, and have taken part in tours and done several solo visits to the wall to view and photograph the graffiti up close. However, due to the global pandemic of COVID-19 beginning in early 2020, I have not been back to the region since 2019 to conduct formal interviews on the subject matter. As such, existing ethnographic experience is instead complemented with a systematic literature review on perspectives by all the above groups with a special focus on Palestinian perspectives. This is further explained in the Methodology chapter.

This paper provides an analysis of graffiti in four locations, which expands the literature beyond a largely Bethlehem-centric focus. Though the main focal point of this study is Bethlehem due to its extremely high tourist and international street art presence (resulting in a separate space for Bethlehem in this paper, Chapter 4), there is abundant graffiti in other highly populated areas of the West Bank. Stretches of the wall near Ramallah and Qalandiya Checkpoint have been heavily targeted by local graffitists, but do not receive as much media or academic attention in terms of analysis or interviewing the artists who graffiti those areas. These areas also have substantial tourist traffic and have been spots of interest for globally recognized international street artists. The inclusion of a location without graffiti was beneficial in terms of providing a high contrast location regarding perspectives on graffiti on the wall, tourist traffic, and international influence. Ras Khamis/Shu'afat refugee camp acts as this high contrast focal point.

Chapter 5 is a collection of field and online data on the spectrum of Palestinian responses to graffiti on the wall gathered during this project. This information is based on existing interviews, blogs, articles, film clips, statements, and scholarly works given or done directly by Palestinians. Here the reader will get a glimpse of the complex nuances at play regarding graffiti, graffiti tourism, and international graffiti-making. Given that British street artist Banksy played a major role in opening the gates to increased tourism and international involvement, Chapter 6 covers some of Banksy's background as a street artist and professional political provocateur, and his influence on international street art presence in Palestine and Bethlehem's tourist industry. Though the focus of this paper is specific to Palestinian thoughts, attitudes, and concerns, Chapter 7 is an analysis on the perspectives of tourists, international artists, and Israeli perspectives, as they are also actors in the greater scope of how the wall is covered in the media and its impact on Palestinian residents.

Chapter 8 provides an in-depth content analysis that was conducted to gauge what kind of graffiti is on the wall, where it is, and who created the work, though ownership of graffiti can be difficult to prove depending on the art piece. Several themes were explored, such as the use of religious artwork, pop culture icons, different languages, political and cultural symbols, and a variety of other objects, such as children and animals. The purpose of this analysis was to examine if graffiti content has changed over time, where graffiti is most frequent, which imagery is used to influence specific groups, and which graffiti seems to provoke the strongest response from the local community. This last question is particularly important, as a variety of creative interactions to graffiti are present. These reactions, some by international artists, lead to questions regarding attitudes about graffiti tourism (whether welcoming, skeptical, or condemning), such as how Palestinians are

defending themselves against offensive or misleading graffiti. These questions could lead to implications on future research as to what Palestinians themselves would find helpful regarding graffiti and the tourism that surrounds it.

Chapter 9 offers a discussion of graffiti on the West Bank Barrier as aligned with the theories of conflict transformation and *poiesis*. After outlining creative interactions with international graffiti, what I refer to as *poietic* acts, ranging from ignoring the graffiti entirely to openly destroying it, the greater application of *poiesis* is examined. The intent behind these creative responses defines a unique characteristic of *poiesis* as it is proposed in this paper. In the case of this project, Palestinians using graffiti to physically change the wall's appearance to transform it into a speaker for their voices and stories to be heard around the world is a strong example of *poiesis*. I argue that the use of graffiti can be a pathway to adding additional components to *poiesis* as understood in the expressive arts and conflict transformation. I propose that *poiesis* in some conflict settings occurs with the intent driving creative methods is to influence others for social change rather than shift one's own perspective towards healing. In these cases, *poiesis* becomes transcommunal with the intent of raising the awareness of others to change their perspectives and hopefully increase solidarity and political action towards lasting change.

Finally, this study raises remaining questions about the future of graffiti tourism, international involvement in graffiti-making in conflict settings, and graffiti as a tool of resistance, all of which are outlined in Chapter 10. Assessment, the ethics of international art projects, and cultural sensitivity regarding graffiti content is discussed. This chapter also offers further questions and avenues for future research.

<u>Contribution to Knowledge</u>

The goal of this study is to contribute to existing knowledge on not only the West Bank Barrier, its graffiti, and the phenomenon of international involvement and graffiti tourism, but to also lay the foundation for research in other regions from around the world in which international graffiti participation may be a topic of contention for local communities. As such, this study is quite multi-layered, including graffiti by three different groups (Palestinians, international street artists, and tourists) making graffiti in four different locations and how Palestinians view and react to graffiti content, authorship, and motivations behind graffiti-making. In-depth academic exploration of Palestinian attitudes towards not only making graffiti on the West Bank Barrier in general but also towards the involvement of international street artists and tourists will hopefully shed light on the spectrum of Palestinian perspectives regarding these matters and whether art on the West Bank Barrier is viewed as beneficial or consequential to Palestinian goals for peace, solidarity, and justice. The local-global dynamic taking place between Palestinians using the wall as resistance and international visitors using the wall to display their own messages is a major theme throughout this study, in which themes of colonialism and privilege are examined.

This study also contributes more in-depth information regarding graffiti content on the West Bank Barrier and how specific imagery shapes how graffiti artists interact with existing artwork, particularly Palestinian artists towards the graffiti of internationals. Palestinian opinions on the use of particular imagery, colors, and symbols were examined, as this is one of the main points of both disagreement and intention regarding making graffiti on the wall, whether by local artists or internationals. Additionally, interactions

between international artists, tourists, and local Palestinians via graffiti, such as defacing or transforming artworks, additions to artworks, painting over others' art to make space for one's own, solidarity art, tagging, and counter murals, has not been thoroughly analyzed in the bulk of scholarly literature on graffiti in Palestine.

Finally, this paper seeks to explore the use of graffiti as it applies to the intersections of peace and conflict and the field of the expressive arts. Additionally, this thesis examines the West Bank Barrier and Palestinian graffiti through the framework of *poiesis* as utilized in the expressive arts field, which, to my knowledge, has not been applied to this context. Graffiti-making on the wall or as a response to international graffiti are creative acts that can be understood through the framework of *poiesis*. The goals and intent behind such creative acts align with certain principles of conflict transformation. As such, graffiti as a method of nonviolent, creative resistance is analyzed through the lenses of both *poiesis* and conflict transformation theory.

Though the perspectives of Palestinians on graffiti tourism have caught the attention of news outlets and academics in recent years, the perspectives of street artists, tourists, and Israelis are very rarely, if ever, included in such analyses. An in-depth inclusion of international artist, tourist, and Israeli perspectives on graffiti on the West Bank Barrier also provides a more holistic view on how graffiti is being perceived by those other than local Palestinians and what the graffiti's impact is. Additionally, an in-depth analysis of perspectives on the graffiti from the words of Palestinians, tourists, international artists, and Israelis has yet to be compiled in an academic fashion. This information, along with this project's goals in connecting *poiesis* as a framework to graffiti and conflict transformation,

can be helpful in determining how the graffiti could be changing attitudes about the conflict

overall or having any tangible impact regarding potential peace in the region, and hence

offer insight on what steps would be helpful in developing new arts-based initiatives in the

future.

CHAPTER I

History of the West Bank Barrier and Graffiti

In 2000, the right-wing Likud party leader, Ariel Sharon, made a controversial visit to the Temple Mount in the Old City of Jerusalem, a highly provocative move due to restrictions set by the Jerusalem Islamic Waqf (a religious trust that controls security at the Temple Mount) that prevent Jews from praying at the site. Sharon's visit was a defiant violation of these restrictions. His intentions were later described as a political stunt in response to then Prime Minister Ehud Barak's possible compromise of the Temple Mount's custodianship (used as leverage in peace talks with the leader of the Palestinian Liberation Organization, Yasser Arafat), as well as to demonstrate that Israel had no intentions of relinquishing control to the Palestinians. Palestinian outrage was swift and fierce, thus sparking a new uprising known as the Second Intifada, or al-Aqsa Intifada (Harms & Ferry, 2012). Unlike the First Intifada (1987 – 1993), which began with grassroots civilian uprisings and gradually became more violent towards its end, the Second Intifada was explosive, fueled heavily by Islamic extremist groups who encouraged attacks on Israeli civilians rather than Israeli soldiers. Thus, this intifada was far bloodier – for the first time, suicide bombers swept Israel as well as snipers and stabbings. The Israeli military responded with assassinations, live ammunition into protest rallies, and incursions into West Bank villages and refugee camps to fight suspected terrorists. In this time, an estimated 1000 Israeli civilians were killed in cafes, markets, and public transit at the hands of Palestinian gunmen and bombings, while roughly 3,270 Palestinians were killed by the

Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) (Sfard, 2018). After a few years of extreme violence, Israeli public demands for enforced separation became too loud to ignore.

The idea for a separation barrier originated in Zionist leader Ze'ev Jabotinsky's essay on Zionism (1923), where he claimed that a State of Israel could "proceed and develop only under the protection of a power that is independent of the native population – behind an iron wall, which the native population cannot breach." This "iron wall" was a metaphor for a strong military force of Jewish or British soldiers (stationed there as part of the British Mandate created in 1922), not an actual physical wall. Nevertheless, this essay laid the groundwork for some form of separation between the Jewish and Arab populations and resurfaced during times of violence. Talks of a barrier were revived during the administration of Yitzak Rabin in the early 1990s but were rejected by pro-settler members of the cabinet who resisted any policy that could endanger plans to annex West Bank territory. Prime Minister Ehud Barak's suggestion of building two barriers, one directly on the 1949 Armistice Line (Green Line) and one in the West Bank to protect settlers from nearby Palestinian towns, was also rejected (Sfard, 2018; Weizman, 2007). The violence of the Second Intifada finally cornered newly appointed Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's administration into action. Once plans for a new barrier were approved in 2002 followed by immediate implementation, opposition was instantaneous. Palestinians protested its projected route, decrying attempts at annexation and how it would devastate their economy by restricting access to farmland and employment in Israel. Zionists resisted the barrier for fears that their settlements in the West Bank would be abandoned on the "wrong" side, and that it would eventually become the future border of a Palestinian state (Bell, 2005). Israeli, Palestinian, and international human rights groups condemned what they perceived as

disproportionate collective punishment on the Palestinian people. Despite this, construction on the new separation barrier carried on and, as of this writing, the barrier continues to be built today.

1.1 Structure and Route

The West Bank Barrier, as it is referred to by the United Nations, is made up of a series of barbed wire and electronic fences, radar and camera systems, watch towers, security and bypass roads, tunnels, trenches, gates, and checkpoints (Weizman, 2007). Most of it is comprised of fencing and barbed wire complemented with sand traps that can identify shoeprints should anyone come too close. This portion can be up to 100 meters wide to accommodate for additional security and bypass roads, and requires vast amounts of land to construct, most of which is private Palestinian land (Dolphin, 2006; Weizman, 2007). Its projected completed length is 709km, but according to the 2017 report by United Nation Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) only 65.3% (approximately 460km) has been completed. Roughly 15% of it is concrete wall, mostly located in the West Bank's urban areas: East Jerusalem, Ramallah, Bethlehem, Qalqilya, and Tulkarem (B'Tselem, 2017). This portion consists of 8-meter tall,

Figure 1: The separation barrier in the At-Tur neighborhood in Jerusalem. Credit: Lior Mizrahi; Haaretz, 2018

45-centimeter-thick concrete slabs that are 1.5 meters wide stacked side by side

(Backmann, 2010). According to Israeli officials, these urban areas are surrounded by wall instead of fencing to prevent the passage of vehicles loaded with car bombs as well as hinder rooftop snipers targeting nearby Jewish neighborhoods and highways. Another reason was cost - each kilometer of fencing costs roughly $3.25 million, with the concrete wall portions costing substantially more (Backmann, 2010). The wall segments are emphasized in Palestinian and international news coverage, as its looming presence has become a symbol of military occupation and the extreme restrictions on Palestinian daily life.

One of the most controversial aspects of the West Bank Barrier is its route. Many critics suggest that had the barrier been built directly on the Green Line, international condemnation would be less intense, as Israel has a right as a nation to protect its citizens. However, the barrier's projected completed length is over twice that of the Green Line with roughly 85% built inside the West Bank (OCHA, 2017). A lawyer representing a Palestinian case stated: "The issue here is not whether Israel has the right to build the wall, it is whether it is has the right to build the wall in the occupied Palestinian territory" (Advocacy Productions, 2019). The route's design is allegedly based on security concerns but has changed several times due to influence from a wide range of political voices, including "popular farmers' committees, Israeli real estate developers, settler associations and their political lobbies, environmental activists, Jewish religious organizations, political and human rights groups, armed paramilitaries, local and international courts and international diplomacy" (Weizman, 2007, p. 162). The Bush administration also had considerable influence on the barrier's route after Sharon gained strong support from the United States (US) by connecting terrorism in Israel to the recent events of September 11th,

2001 (Abrams, 2013). However, US oversight pressured Israel to honor its security claims and protested when it sharply deviated from such – one instance was when Israel attempted to extend the barrier to run parallel to Allon Road, essentially annexing the Jordan Valley (Backmann, 2010). Originally, the projected route would annex 16% of West Bank territory to include existing Jewish settlements but was reduced to 10% after condemnation from American diplomats and Israeli human rights organizations (Abrams, 2013; Backmann, 2006). However, as stated earlier, after numerous changes, the barrier does annex about 15% of the West Bank today.

Though the barrier's route underwent multiple significant changes due to international pressure and outcry by human rights organizations, the strongest influence came from the Zionist settler

Figure 2: West Bank Area C Map - The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Human Affairs (2011)

movement. Fears that the barrier could possibly become the future border of a Palestinian state motivated many settlement leaders to put intense pressure on right-wing politicians to reroute it to include their settlements deep within the West Bank onto the "Israeli" side (Kershner, 2005). Those settlements that laid too far into West Bank territory (i.e. Ariel, Gush Etzion, and Ma'ale Adumim) instead received limited fencing, private roads, and greater military protection. Maps of the barrier show future government-approved additions intended to eventually encircle those settlements (OCHA, 2017).

The trespass into West Bank territory also shifted several neighboring Palestinian villages onto the "Israeli" side – as a result, roughly 49,000 Palestinians were caught between the Green Line and the barrier. This controversial space is referred to as the "seam zone," and is designated by the Israeli government as a military zone accessible only to the IDF and settlers who live there (Dolphin, 2006). The status of Palestinians living in this space is vague at best. Though they are on the "Israeli" side of the wall, they are denied Israeli citizenship and are restricted from entering both Israel and beyond the barrier into the West Bank where many of their families live. The barrier also creates contested spaces in other instances. In roughly four locations, it crosses the Jerusalem municipality line to create Palestinian spaces that are caught between the wall (on the "Palestinian" side) and Jerusalem's boundaries. Since these spaces are technically within Jerusalem's boundaries, Israel lays claim to these areas and forbids Palestinian Authority governance. Israel thus maintains responsibility for government services and security, but often neglects these communities as they lie behind the wall. Therefore, Palestinian communities such as Kufr Aqab and Ras Khamis are left without a police force or infrastructure, resulting in high crime, overcrowding, and severe pollution (Miller, 2014). Many residents in these areas

hold Jerusalem residency cards, but risk losing this status should Israel redraw Jerusalem's municipality lines to align with the barrier's path. Palestinians living in either the seam zone or these excluded Jerusalem towns are essentially caught in a liminal space. Isabel Kershner, a correspondent for *The New York Times* in Jerusalem, concludes her 2005 book *Barrier: The Seam of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* with:

> The Green Line has turned gray – not only because of the 600 kilometers of meandering fences, dirt tracks, walls and wire, but also because of the lingering ambiguity over the barrier's meaning and purpose. The dust of controversy, the depths of conviction, and the pain and trauma on both sides have all obscured what kind of border it will ultimately be. The political, legal, and diplomatic furor raised by the barrier is as much about the fundamental disconnect between the two peoples as it is about the actual concrete and steel. Whether the divide is between Tel Aviv and Ramallah, two cities striving for modernity and normality, or between Metzer and Qaffin, two communities struggling with the diminished importance of agriculture and the departure of their youth, or between the two Baqas, both Arab yet split between Israel and the West Bank, there are deep psychological, emotional, and historical chasms and great distances to cross (p. 226).

Living next to a barrier in which one cannot see the other side can have a serious impact on the perceptions each has for each other, whether it be Israeli vs Palestinian, or Palestinian vs Palestinian, as the Barrier separates everyone. The West Bank Barrier has thus thrust the Israelis and Palestinians into yet another period of separation after a generation of turbulent relations, once again resulting in large portions of each population not knowing what the reality is, or who the people are, on the other side.

1.2 <u>Perception - Language and Function</u>

Perceptions of the West Bank Barrier vary widely between Israelis, Palestinians, and international bodies. It has many names, and an individual's viewpoint on the barrier

(and occupation in general) can usually be deduced by which term they use to refer to it. Both the Israeli and American governments refer to the barrier as the "security fence" or "security barrier." Israel rejects terms that include the word "wall" because the wall segments only account for roughly 15% of the entire Barrier, arguing that to focus on this specific portion is unfair and biased. Israeli organizations that lean left politically and dispute the route of the barrier refer to it as a "separation barrier," emphasizing the segregationist aspects of its presence (Backmann, 2006). According to the Israeli government, the barrier is a temporary security measure with the sole purpose of preventing suicide bombings and civilian casualties. The official statement by the Israel Ministry of Defense claims:

> the 'Security Fence' is a manifestation of Israel's basic commitment to defend its citizens, and once completed, it will improve the ability of the IDF to prevent the infiltration of terrorists and criminal elements into Israel for the purpose of carrying out terrorist attacks or the smuggling of arms and explosives (Harms & Ferry, 2012, p. 174).

Once it was built in urban areas, car bombings and sniper attacks ceased almost entirely, largely achieving Israel's security goals. There is also support for other mechanisms related to the barrier, such as checkpoints, restrictive permits, and heavy military presence. The continued hostile rhetoric that comes from Palestinian extremist groups contributes to the lasting support of separation, in the West Bank and in Gaza, which also has a strongly guarded barrier. Israel maintains that the barrier is temporary, and should terrorist attacks cease and a geopolitical settlement be arranged, it can be dismantled, or at minimum, moved to the newly established borders. Netzah Mashiah, head of the Security Barrier Project during its construction, reiterates this point: "We are working from the principle that this barrier is temporary. And that the length of time it stays up depends on how the

Palestinians work towards peace. So, it can stay here five minutes or five decades"

(Backmann, 2006, p. 49).

Israel has asserted several reasons for the barrier's almost whiplash path and why it

trespasses so far into West Bank territory. National security is Israel's justification for

most of its actions in the West Bank and Gaza, and the barrier is no different. It winds up

and through the mountains in the West Bank to achieve strategic dominance, with security

roads high up on the mountains looking down on the Palestinian villages below on the

opposite side of the barrier. Topography was a major consideration regarding the barrier's

route, where arguments included that the terrain on the Green Line itself would have made

construction more laborious and less effective (Sfard, 2018). Dany Tirza, an Israeli

homeland security expert and primary architect of the West Bank Barrier, made the claim

that "mountains dominate valleys," therefore, the barrier needed to include the

mountainous terrain in the Palestinian Territories on the "Israeli" side (Weizman, 2007, p.

166). Yet even he recognized the political ramifications of the wall's chaotic route, calling

it a "political seismograph gone mad" (p. 162). Tirza was reprimanded after his intentions

to add sections of barrier that were not for security purposes, but rather to increase territory

for expanding existing settlements were discovered by the Israeli High Court (Sfard, 2018).

By the mid-2000s, Israeli public support for separation remained overwhelmingly high, but

opinions were heavily influenced by political and religious affiliation. Many Israeli leftists

supported the barrier should it be placed directly on the Green Line, whereas right-wing

groups supported West Bank annexation and approved the inclusion of West Bank Jewish

settlements on the "Israeli" side.

For the Palestinians, the harsher term of "Apartheid Wall" is often used, in reference to apartheid South Africa. "Colonization wall" and "expansionist wall" are also used to refer to the manner in which the barrier captures large swathes of Palestinian territory. Another term is "separation zone", as the barrier acts as not only a wall/fence, but as an elaborate system of segregation mechanisms, including checkpoints, roadblocks, security roads, and tunnels, explaining why in some areas the barrier is 100-meters wide. In his book *Palestine Inside Out: An Everyday Occupation*, Saree Makdisi (2008) explains how this system acts as an intricate segregation apparatus:

> …Israelis have built new roads that deliberately deviate from Palestinian communities, so they are referred to as bypass roads. The Israeli army calls these "sterile" roads because they are "uncontaminated" by Palestinians. The army has cleared about 200 feet on either side of these roads as additional "sanitary margins" where Palestinians cannot build, tend, cultivate or grow anything… As the Israeli architect Eyal Weizman points out, the Israeli road scheme emphasizes the profound contradictions of Israeli policy in the West Bank, where, as he puts it, two separate geographies inhabit the same landscape. The Jewish parts of the West Bank, he explains, are seamlessly incorporated into Israel: Jewish settlers enjoy continuous and uninterrupted travel along the road network reserved for them. The Palestinian parts of the West Bank, on the other hand are fractured and broken and fragmented into shards of territory cut off from each other. For Jewish settlers, roads connect; for Palestinians, they *separate* (pp. 32 – 33).

For this reason, many Palestinians view the West Bank Barrier as simply another piece of the larger segregationist system that Israel has implemented to control them and keep them separate, not only from Israelis, but from other Palestinians. Palestinian Israelis who live in Israel proper are technically allowed to cross into the West Bank but are still subject to discrimination at checkpoints and must provide valid reasoning for their presence in the West Bank. Many families who have been separated by the barrier are unable to obtain

proper permits, and often miss important family events such as graduations, holidays, and weddings.

For the Palestinians who witnessed the actual construction of the barrier, it is a painful recollection. Many woke one morning to find demolition orders nailed to trees on their property explaining that their land was in the way of the route, and should they wish to appeal, they had one week to do so. As many struggled to find the paperwork needed in time to appeal, they watched as bulldozers uprooted their olive trees and demolished their homes to make way for the new project. In urban areas, many suddenly found themselves with a concrete wall less than five meters from their front steps. Some have stated that the concrete wall has even changed the light, claiming they must leave their lights on in the day as the concrete wall is so close to their homes, it blocks out the sun (Backmann, 2006). The brutality in which the barrier affects their lives is what the Palestinians view as less of an Israeli security measure, but more as a method to entice them to leave.

The United Nations, and other international bodies, refer to the barrier as the "West Bank Barrier" in an attempt to be neutral. Other international bodies have followed suit to avoid being accused of "choosing sides." Rogers and Ben-David (2010) explain:

> Across the media landscape, including governmental, inter-governmental and NGO sources, the words 'fence', 'wall' and 'barrier' are combined with the descriptive terms 'security', 'separation', 'apartheid', 'anti-terrorist', 'West Bank' and a few others. Almost every combination has in-built connotations, receptive audiences and associated imagery as well as affiliations to one side or the other in the conflict… To seek neutrality is to put forward one of the more distant, technical expressions, such as 'barrier'. Indeed, 'barrier' became something of a preferred expression in news and diplomatic circles, albeit with opportunities for 'side-taking' adjectives inserted before or after the word." (pp. 203, 206 – 207)

It has been noted that Palestinian and Israeli government officials often change their terminology when referring to the barrier depending on the audience to whom they are speaking. "Apartheid wall" is often exchanged with "separation wall" when Palestinian officials speak at UN functions.

1.3 <u>Humans Rights Violations</u>

Though protests by Palestinians continue today, additional solidarity from Israeli and international protesters was strongest when the West Bank Barrier was still in its earliest stages of construction when Palestinian property was being razed to make way for its foundation. When the magnitude of the impact on Palestinian life became evident several months later, lawsuits quickly arose. A few cases from Palestinian farmers represented by Israeli lawyers eventually won over the Israeli High Court, who cited violation of the rule of proportionality (negative consequences on collective Palestinian life were too severe to justify security claims) and ordered the army to dismantle various portions of the barrier and find an alternative route. The strongest legal challenge came in 2004 when the Palestinian Authority took the case of the barrier to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to demand its removal. Israel fought back by insisting the barrier was crucial to its security and removing it prematurely would result in resumed terrorist attacks. The court empathized with Israel's concerns, but challenged discrepancies in Israel's security rationale, noting that the barrier disproportionately affected the majority of Palestinians who were nonviolent and included several Palestinian villages on the "Israeli" side, undermining the security argument. The court deemed the barrier illegal and ordered

Israel to immediately remove it and provide compensation to Palestinian families. Israeli officials dismissed the ruling and continued construction (Sfard, 2018).

Human rights violations suffered by the Palestinians is the most thoroughly researched area regarding the West Bank Barrier. It has severely restricted mobility, separated families, cut access to holy sites, and destroyed privately owned Palestinian land. As a direct result of the barrier and the stringent permit system, several Palestinian villages now have unemployment rates of over 70%, as many residents worked in nearby cities such as Jerusalem which are now beyond reach and tourism has nearly ceased in several areas (Soske & Jacobs, 2015). Its route has confiscated land Palestinian families have owned for generations, destroying the livelihoods of those who depend on agriculture. The long trek to get through checkpoints miles away to reach a school that lays across the barrier has greatly disrupted the education of Palestinian children. Many children have completely stopped attending schools across the barrier due to harassment by IDF soldiers and Jewish settlers. During a field visit to Kufr Aqab in 2016, Palestinian teachers expressed to me that those who live on the Israeli side but work in West Bank schools sometimes cannot make it to their students in time due to checkpoint delays. "Palestinians have the best excuse for being late," one teacher said.

The severe restrictions on Palestinian movement caused by the West Bank Barrier have captured the most attention from activists around the world. Though it is a formidable structure, as past and present barriers around the world have shown, the barrier's physicality alone cannot stop individuals from finding ways through, over, or under it. Like the Berlin Wall, the West Bank Barrier's physical presence is dramatic, but additional

resources are required for it to function as more than simply a physical obstacle. Israeli human rights lawyer Michael Sfard (2018) explains:

> The physical barrier was not sufficient enough to accomplish full separation, the fence's underlying purpose. A system was needed for also differentiating between people. For this reason, the separation fence has two dimensions. One is physical, made of concrete, barbed wire, and steel. The other is legal, made up of military declarations, orders, and a permit system. This legal fence is applied to the physical fence to do what the physical fence is not smart enough to do: selection. This legal fence prevents the Palestinian from crossing to the other side. It gives the soldier the power to impose the prohibition against doing so by force. And it allows free passage to anyone who is not Palestinian. To enforce the separation but also use the fence as a filter, the military had to cast a complicated legal net around it, impenetrable to Palestinians but open to Israelis, tourists, and almost everyone else. (pp. 263-264).

This "legal fence" is known as the permit system, in which West Bank Palestinians are forbidden from entering Israel without a permit. Permits are exceedingly difficult to obtain, sometimes taking months to process, and are often denied to residents without explanation. When a Palestinian does have a permit, the unpredictable challenge of crossing the barrier begins. Israeli human rights watchdog B'Tselem (2017) confirmed that there are currently over 32 checkpoints built into the barrier. Many are never open, rarely staffed, or only opened for limited, random hours depending on holidays, the current levels of tension, or the moods of the soldiers on duty. Farmers are often given access to a gate that is miles from their farmland, costing hours of crucial harvesting time. The checkpoint process is particularly detrimental to the lives of Palestinian laborers, who must arrive at the checkpoint as early as 3am in order to secure a spot in line, creating long lines before dawn. The crammed, narrow lanes in the terminal quickly become tense, with occasional fights breaking out between laborers. Competition to get through is intense and younger men will

climb the bars above the rest of the men to get to the front of the line, exacerbating the disorder. At any point, a soldier can move a man to the back of the line, further delaying his commute (Griffiths & Repo, 2018). Transport on the other side does not wait for late arrivals and tardiness costs many Palestinian laborers their jobs, several of whom, ironically, work in Jewish settlements in the seam zone or near Jerusalem.

The West Bank Barrier has contributed to divisions in Palestinian society in terms of gender and age. The chaotic and sometimes violent lines the laborers must use can be dangerous for those who are more vulnerable, thus a "humanitarian lane" has been added specifically for women, children, and elderly people (Griffiths & Repo, 2018). However, this lane is often closed, forcing elderly men attempting to cross to stand for hours in the cramped lanes, a physically demanding task that many men of age decide to skip. Griffiths and Repo (2018) noted that for women, particularly those with children, checkpoints can be even more demeaning. The narrow turnstiles do not accommodate strollers, making it difficult to get very young or multiple children through. If Muslim women must enter the laborer line due to the closure of the humanitarian lane, they risk involuntarily violating Islamic values. Physical contact with men other than a woman's husband is forbidden in Islam but is impossible to avoid in the crowded lanes of the checkpoint. There are also accounts of women being required to remove their hijab during the identification process, another violation should men other than their husbands witness. Consequently, many women and their families have decided to abstain from traveling altogether.

Overall, the West Bank Barrier is viewed as destructive to Palestinian life and a threat to future liberation, as Palestinian lawyer Raja Shehadeh proclaimed at a speech to the UN: "It will render the two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict practically

impossible… The Wall is not just a physical structure; it is a whole regime" (Al-Kidwa, 2004). With a generation born behind the barrier and not permitted to cross, many have never prayed in Jerusalem, met family on the other side, or seen the sea that lies only a short drive to the west. Palestinians continue to protest the barrier through weekly gatherings and boycott movements. However, the wall segments offered another form of protest the fence portions could not: a blank canvas for creative political expression via graffiti.

1.4 Graffiti: Political Expression, Solidarity, and Conflict

Shortly after the concrete slabs were erected, Palestinians began to paint murals, messages, and cultural symbols on them as a method of resistance. Graffiti as protest has been a historic form of Palestinian resistance against Israeli occupation, inherent to *sumud*, or steadfastness. During the First Intifada (1987-1993), or Palestinian uprising, most methods of communication for Palestinians had been blocked by Israeli forces, quashing potential for organized gatherings of protestors or announcements from political factions such as the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) or the People's Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). Refusing to be silenced, Palestinians turned to graffiti on neighborhood walls and cement military blocks to communicate with each other (Peteet, 1996). Khaled Horani, the director of the International Academy of Arts in Ramallah in 2012, told Al-Monitor (2012) that "the purpose of graffiti was to inform, like the media, because traditional media was not available during the first Intifada." The graffiti was primarily in the form of Arabic text, which the vast majority of Israelis could not read. The

abundance of graffiti allowed Palestinians to alert each other to political gatherings and upcoming protests, leading to frustration from the Israeli Defense Force:

> Writing on the walls – not seeking permission to write – was defined as illegal behavior and was responded to as such. Thus Israeli soldiers scrambled to ensure that graffiti were blackened out. The majority of the soldiers could not comprehend the actual content of the writing; they responded to images, in a public space, whose mere appearance signaled the social practice of defiance and reminded them of their inability to impose control without resistance (Peteet, 1996, p. 146).

The graffiti was purely functional, created for Palestinian eyes, and was often destroyed once its message reached the intended viewer. Peteet (1996) spent a significant amount of time in the West Bank studying the graffiti during this time, and emphasizes the importance of graffiti as rebellion in addition to collectively boycotting Israeli products and flying the Palestinian flag:

> Graffiti took their place in a constellation of resistance tactics to intervene in relations of domination. Both the act of writing and the reading of its content disrupted dominant-subordinate relations in various ways. The sheer ubiquitousness of graffiti was a constant reminder both of the abnormality of everyday life under occupation and of the mass uprising. They worked with the daily general strike to imprint on the landscape abnormality and resistance. The writing on the walls challenged Israeli claims to surveillance, constituting a glaring index of the Israeli state's inability to observe and control every place. In circumventing censorship and setting up a direct relationship with a public, graffiti invited an active response from readers (p. 143).

Graffiti as disobedience and rebellion challenged the Israeli military's ability to control Palestinian communication, organization, and protest, and became fuel for Palestinian collective strength, cohesion, and resistance.

The graffiti after the Second Intifada and on the West Bank Barrier differs significantly from the graffiti of the First Intifada. This is for a variety of reasons. First, the

magnitude of the wall's surface and its undeniable impact on Palestinian movement has made it the primary target for political graffiti. Though graffiti on the walls of schools and business buildings is still prevalent throughout the West Bank, the wall is specifically meant to segregate them from the rest of Israel proper – to hide them, control them, and to silence them. For this reason, the wall has become a canvas of Palestinian voices calling for justice and peace, expressing hopes for freedom and reunification with loved ones and holy sites, and demands for action from the international community, though the calls for action towards Palestinians are less explicit than the First Intifada which gave times and places to meet for gatherings and pointed to specific political factions to follow (Peteet, 2016).

Secondly, the wall's graffiti speaks to a global community. The graffiti of the First Intifada was mostly in Arabic and meant specifically for locals on the ground for political resistance purposes, not for tourists, journalists, or Israelis. Peteet (1996) recognized this in her article when she referred to herself and other internationals as "an unintended audience" (p. 144). However, even during the First Intifada, Peteet reported that some graffiti were meant for outside visitors to attract attention, "particularly when a foreign delegation was known to be coming to an area" (p. 145). This graffiti was written in English to communicate directly with these internationals. According to Peteet, by making their graffiti visible to internationals "the narrative had been fixed and circulated in the global information network and media. In this sense, graffiti took their place among other forms of resistance. Graffiti constituted a voice for those who felt voiceless in the international arena" (p. 145). This tactic is used heavily with the West Bank Barrier. English can be seen in most places with graffiti on the wall, though it is especially prominent in areas of high tourist traffic such as Bethlehem, Ramallah, and the Qalandiya

Checkpoint. Along with an abundance of English text, there is a wide variety of languages represented on the wall largely due to international graffiti-making and graffiti tourism.

For the most part, graffiti of the First Intifada relied heavily on Arabic text rather than elaborate imagery and murals. The graffiti was meant to convey important messages such as dates and times in which to gather or statements from political factions rather than as artistic expression. This is not to say that murals were not painted – Peteet (1996) claims that murals went up at night and were painted over during the daytime, so they remained elusive to the outsider's eye. But overall, the majority of graffiti was text or symbols associated with Palestinian political organizations, such as the red hammer and sickle of the Palestinian Communist Party (Peteet, 1996). In a strong shift in purpose and content, today's graffiti on the West Bank Barrier is aimed at tourists, Israelis, international journalists, state governments, and other Palestinians, and is comprised of any artwork from text to black and white stencils to huge, colorful murals. Peteet (2016) comments on the shift in intent for "post-2000 writing on the wall":

> Suggestive of moral stances and political positions, contemporary writing on the wall critiques Israel and the U.S., expresses outrage and solidarity, draws attention to human rights violations, compares the wall with apartheid South Africa and events in Jewish history, satirizes closure and mocks Israeli colonialism. Above all, it is a voice of rejection and a refusal to be silenced (p. 338).

The variety and abundance of work is striking, particularly in places of high tourist traffic where tourists and international artists also contribute their own artwork to the wall's surface. Artwork on checkpoints, particularly the two most notorious ones, Checkpoint 300 in Bethlehem and Qalandiya Checkpoint near Ramallah, is risky for Palestinians to create given the high military presence. However, those areas are extremely visible to tourists and other internationals who must pass through these gateways into and out of the West Bank,

so portraits of political figures such as Yasser Arafat, English text, and international street artists' work can often be found in these places to attract attention.

The inclusion of international street artists' work as well as the graffiti participation of tourists also is a major difference between the graffiti of the First Intifada and the wall's graffiti. After a few years, the wall and Palestinian graffiti captured the attention of international graffiti artists, most notably the elusive British street artist Banksy. Banksy has frequented the wall, contributing iconic graffiti images such as a dove donning a bullet proof vest behind a sniper's target and a masked protester throwing a bouquet of flowers. Banksy's creative presence in Palestine has become a key tourist attraction in the region, and his involvement encourages other world-renowned graffiti artists, such as artist Blu and Spanish artist Sam3, to join in on graffiti projects on the wall (Larkin, 2014). As a result, tourists from around the world have come to view the vast array of politically charged murals on the wall as well as participate in graffiti making, a form of tourism dubbed "graffiti tourism," or one aspect of the greater phenomenon of "dark tourism" (Amin, 2019; Isaac, 2011). Shops in Bethlehem and Jerusalem sell merchandise with the most sought-after graffiti images, while taxi drivers offer tours to see original Banksy works nearby. Australian artist Lushsux's murals of political figures and memes dominate much of Bethlehem's wall and are very popular among tourists. Cake$_Stencils, another UK-based graffiti artist, has lined the base of Bethlehem's wall with black stencils that contrast the innocence of children with the consequences of conflict (Inspiring City, 2019b). Though graffiti in Jerusalem and Ramallah have attracted international artists and tourists, Bethlehem in particular has seen a noticeable boom in tourism after Banksy established the Walled Off Hotel in 2017, which offers tourists the experience of the "world's worst view"

with the intent of raising awareness of the wall's negative impact. The Walled Off Hotel is run entirely by Palestinians with Banksy overseeing it remotely, and proceeds go to local projects and organizations.

The explosion of graffiti tourism in recent years appears to have both tangible benefits and consequences on local Palestinian communities. Graffiti by international artists has managed to simultaneously boost local economies while also creating a market or demand for the wall, and tourists who visit appear less interested in learning about Palestinian culture and their struggles and instead focus on the graffiti. The discussion on whether graffiti participation should be allowed, who gets to participate, and choice of graffiti content is complicated by the barrage of competing voices. To some, the wall has become a global space in which to share personal art projects, and many Palestinians are wary of allowing this open space to thrive for fear of establishing a norm of consumerism based on their suffering and struggle for autonomy and freedom. Growing criticism among Palestinian circles has addressed appropriation of the wall by internationals, which activists and scholars have argued creates a global forum that overshadows Palestinian artwork and stories (Toenjes, 2015; Gould, 2014; Hewafi, 2017). The range of Palestinian responses to graffitiing the wall, by both locals and internationals, will be explored throughout this thesis, including the specifics of graffiti content, particular international artists, and the actions of tourists who visit the region. However, it is important to first provide a background into the theoretical framework and methodologies used for this thesis.

CHAPTER II

Conflict Transformation, *Poiesis,* and Graffiti as Resistance

This thesis aims to explore how graffiti could potentially be a tool for conflict transformation in the Palestinian context, with a specific concentration on how graffiti fits into the framework of *poiesis*. This chapter will provide a foundational outline of three major areas of this thesis. First, a background of the field of conflict transformation is provided, with a focus on raising awareness and building solidarity. The second section will describe the evolution of *poiesis* as a theoretical framework from its original context in ancient Greek philosophy and the development to the contemporary understanding within the field of the expressive arts. The use of the arts as a method of conflict transformation will be provided through the lens of *poiesis*. Finally, this chapter will explore the intersection of conflict transformation, *poiesis*, and the potential of graffiti as an effective tool for raising awareness, challenging power dynamics, and fostering agency and solidarity in conflict settings.

2.1 Conflict Transformation at a Grassroots Level

Each conflict has its own unique characteristics, including its own history, cultural influences, domestic and external actors, and relational dynamics. As such, it is of the utmost importance that those who act as peacebuilders and/or conflict scholars work to establish the most nuanced understanding possible of the conflicts in which they engage. All components of a conflict must be considered, including economic, psycho-social,

environmental, and cultural factors, as well as the events that shape a conflict's current state, topics of contention in any existing peace processes, cross-cultural histories, and identities. The field of conflict studies is divided into several schools, with each utilizing varying methods and approaches to addressing these components with the goals to eventually manage, resolve, or transform conflict. This thesis specifically belongs to the field of conflict transformation, as it focuses on grassroots action, nonviolent resistance, small changes over time, and emphasis on shifting perspectives by raising awareness and eventually building solidarity.

Conflict transformation addresses the root causes of specific conflicts, community health and trauma, resistance, civil disobedience and non-violent movements, existing power dynamics, and identifying ways to build for a better future for marginalized and/or conflict-affected communities at a grassroots level. Norwegian theorist and sociologist, Johan Galtung, is considered by many to be the "father of peace and conflict studies" and is widely known for his triangle model of violence (Galtung Institut for Peace Theory and Peace Practice, 2023). Galtung (2000) asserts that conflicts can be broken into three main parts: attitude (hatred or disgust); behavior (violence); and contradiction (issues of the conflict) (p. 13). Conflict transformation seeks to the shift of these dynamics by creating healthier attitudes and behaviors in those involved to better address the contradictions. Hence, conflict transformation emphasizes the transformation of relationships. These transformations can happen at global, social, interpersonal, and intrapersonal levels (p 5).

Each conflict can involve numerous groups of actors, all with different power statuses and interests in either maintaining or ending the conflict. In the 2004 Handbook for the Berghof Research Center for Constructive Conflict Management, Miall (2004) explains

that these actors can be categorized into four main groups: 1) states and inter-governmental organizations; 2) development and humanitarian organizations; 3) international NGOs that work to prevent, resolve, or transform conflict; and 4) other stakeholders and groups that are part of the impacted society (p. 12). While the first three groups can indeed have major roles to play in changing the dynamics of conflict, Miall argues that the final group, the local actors, have not only the most responsibility, but also the most opportunity, in terms of changing how the conflict transforms and impacts them. Using Northern Ireland as an example, in which local NGO's and community leaders focused heavily on respecting cultural traditions and histories, thereby directly addressing memories and histories that hindered reconciliation efforts. He explains that "the impact of this peacebuilding on the macro level of the conflict is hard to evaluate; but on a small scale, the personal and group transformations that it can achieve are keenly felt" (p. 15).

The school of conflict transformation proposes that some conflicts are not necessarily resolvable, and instead views conflict itself as a catalyst for change, with both functional and dysfunctional characteristics (IGNOU, 2017). The goal is to change the dysfunctional characteristics of a conflict into positive and constructive aspects that are sustainable:

> The conflict transformation school asserts that conflicts are always in a flux, in a constant state of change and the aim is to transform them into something socially useful and non-destructive. Conflict, therefore is a dynamic and changeable process and the process which seeks to alter conflict must be equally dynamic and changeable. Conflict transformation also asserts that some conflicts are better off being transformed, rather than being resolved (IGNOU, 2017, p.1).

John Paul Lederach, professor of international peacebuilding at the Kroc Institute at Notre Dame, has written extensively on conflict transformation and peacebuilding. In his book

Preparing for Peace: Conflict Transformation Across Cultures, Lederach (1995) articulates the concept of transformation in the conflict transformation school:

> In sum, transformation as a concept is both descriptive of the conflict dynamics and prescriptive of the overall purpose that building peace pursues, both in terms of changing destructive relationship patterns and in seeking systemic change. Transformation provides a language that more adequately approximates the nature of conflict and how it works and underscores the goals and purpose of the field. It encompasses a view that legitimizes conflict as an agent of change in relationships. It describes more accurately the impact of conflict on the patterns of communication, expression, and perception. Transformation suggests a dynamic understanding that conflict can move in destructive or constructive directions, but proposes an effort to maximize the achievement of constructive, mutually beneficial processes and outcomes (pp. 18 – 19).

He emphasizes that "conflict transformation must actively envision, include, respect, and promote the human and cultural resources from within a given setting", which creates a dynamic in which the people involved in the conflict are not viewed as the "problem" and outside actors, mediators, etc. as the "answers" to the conflict. This puts those experiencing the conflict at the forefront of conflict transformation efforts, "validating and building on people and resources within the setting" (Miall, 2004, p. 4).

Miall (2004) explains that rather than focus on "the identification of win-win outcomes" for conflicts, theorists in the conflict transformation field instead focus on the existing relationships in a conflict and how those can be contributing to the continuation of violence, tensions, and stalemates. According to Miall:

> Conflict transformation is therefore a process of engaging with and transforming the relationships, interests, discourses and, if necessary, the very constitution of society that supports the continuation of violent conflict. Constructive conflict is seen as a vital agent or catalyst for change. People within the conflict parties, within the society or region affected,

and outsiders with relevant human and material resources all have complementary roles to play in the long-term process of peacebuilding (p. 4).

Miall argues that this understanding allows for a broad approach to addressing conflict, and agrees with Lederach's assessment that this promotes support for the people directly experiencing the conflict instead of featuring the actions of outside interventionists. Those at the forefront of the conflict know firsthand the dynamics, consequences, and conditions for resolving the conflict, and as such, should be consistently conferred with by mediators and other interventionists about steps forward.

The transformation of relationships is a long-term process, but one that keeps the focus on bottom-up rather than top-down processes and is flexible when conflicts inevitably shift over time. Francis (2002) explains that the "theory and practice of conflict transformation constitute an endeavour to bring something new to human thinking and interaction" (p. 59), thus developing new ways of perceiving and being in the environment in which one must interact. This then places the prime responsibility of transformation on the people involved in the conflict. Vayrynen (1991) focuses heavily on the actors involved in conflict for this reason, as their motivations, interests, and actions are subject to change as their societies and the conflict evolve and adapt to the realities on the ground (Vayrynen, 1991, p. 4). Vayrynen developed a theoretical approach that highlights how conflicts could be transformed on four levels: actor transformations, which include internal shifts in parties or the emergence of new parties; issue transformations, where main issues of the conflict are altered and what the conflict is "about" changes (Mitchell, 2002, p. 6); rule transformations, in which the rules and norms of governing a conflict are transformed; and structural transformations, where the overall structure of relationships and power dynamics

within a conflict change (p. 4 – 7). Mitchell (2002) writes that structural transformations in this regard typically fall under what most conflict transformation theories would consider "transformation," while the actor, issue, and rule transformations are less clear in which school they belong, though some have made arguments in favor of including them in the conflict transformation field (p. 6 – 7). Mitchell argues that while these do indeed have components of important change within conflicts, he instead offers the words conflict "enlargement," "escalation," and "polarization" to describe such changes, as in the school of conflict transformation, these changes are not typically included as positive transformations (p. 7). He asserts that conflict transformation must include:

> changes such as an increase in empathy on the part of adversaries, with stereotyping, dehumanization and demonization of the other side becoming less common; a decrease in the levels of social and geographical separation of the parties; and major changes in the nature and homogeneity of communications aimed at the others (p. 8).

These relational and structural transformations are crucial as they lay a stronger foundation for the chance at sustainable change rather than a "restoration" of relationships that existed before the conflict that undoubtedly contributed to the current state of tensions (p. 8 – 9).

Relationships in a conflict are influenced by tensions surrounding disputes over specific dynamics, such as economic, territorial, cultural, and historical dimensions. Leone and Giannini (2005) highlight that conflicts can be categorized into personal, relational, structural, and cultural levels, each bringing specific tensions, communication issues and possibilities, and potential for personal and interpersonal growth for actors involved (p. 14). Lederach (1995) stresses the importance of the cultural level, as this level can be more symbolic and deep-rooted: "conflict is connected to meaning, meaning to knowledge, and knowledge rooted in culture" (p. 8). In their book *Conflict Across Cultures: A Unique*

Experience of Bridging Differences, LeBaron and Pillay (2006) further emphasize the importance of acknowledging identity regarding peacebuilding and building stronger, more sustainable relationships by breaking conflicts into symbolic, relational, and material dimensions. They argue that directly addressing the symbolic and relational dimensions, which are deep-seated and often lie at the core of the conflict, can "create the atmosphere for sustainable change at the material dimension" (p. 21). This holistic approach aims to avoid a temporary alleviation of conflict (which often occurs when only the material, or visible, aspects of the conflict are addressed) and helps to create a sturdier, more sustainable solution to complex conflict. Acknowledging these symbolic and relational dimensions means intensive work in transforming attitudes, motives, assumptions, and perceptions held by the various actors in any given conflict.

Building on Galtung's conflict triangle model, Miall (2004) adds three components that cut to the heart of conflict transformation efforts: context, attitudes, and memories. The context of a conflict includes societal ramifications, such as government structures, societal and cultural norms, and other institutions, as well as the involvement of international and regional actors. Attitudes of a conflict's actors directly affects interpersonal relationships, which "involve the whole fabric of interaction within the society in which the conflict takes place as well as beyond to other societies" (p. 8). Relationships can include localized connections but also relationships that involve various groups beyond the immediate vicinity of the conflict, hence, on a more global scale (p. 4). Finally, memories are crucial to address as they deeply impact how the conflict is understood by involved parties based on past relationships, culture, and beliefs. For Miall, the memory component is important: "The way groups remember and construct their past is often central to the mobilization for

conflict, and thus a crucial matter to address in reconciliation and cultural traditions work"
(p. 8).

With these components in mind, Miall (2004) then expands upon Vayrynen's model of transformations, and breaks down types of transformations in conflict into five parts: context transformations; structure transformations; actor transformations; issue transformations; and personal/elite transformations. By adding the personal/elite component to the model, Miall emphasizes the importance of transforming individual perceptions and actions in conflict situations, as conciliatory efforts or peaceful decisions by influential individuals could tip the balance in some settings. Miall also emphasizes the importance of influencing relationships at the actor transformation level. Both the personal and the actor transformation levels address memory, behavior, and relationships, and these are interrelated and could impact the other transformation levels (p. 11).

2.1.1 *Raising Awareness and Building Solidarity*

Transforming relationships at such personal levels, but on a large scale, could create new pathways for building solidarity with communities living in conflict contexts. Parlevliet (2010) highlights this when connecting conflict transformation to human rights issues: "placing constructive social change at its core, conflict transformation acknowledges the need for addressing power imbalances and recognises a role for advocacy and the importance of voices that challenge the status quo" (p. 16). This emphasizes the importance of building solidarity between local actors and outside actors in a conflict. In conflicts with severely uneven power dynamics, creating advocacy among outside groups is an important step towards creating stronger solidarity movements, and is

largely dependent upon the motivation to bridge these power gaps within the local groups themselves. Hence, agency becomes crucial in conflict transformation from a grassroots level, specifically regarding personal and interpersonal transformations.

In conflict transformation, agency can be described from all levels of a conflict, including personal, societal, and global. From a personal standpoint, agency is defined as a "capacity to act," the motivation in which an individual or group feels empowered to put forth the actions and passion needed to make sustainable, social change (Hunter, 2021). Similarly, Bramsen and Poder (2018) explain that agency is "the ability to act and make decisions as opposed to being paralysed, de-motivated and having given up on being able to change things" (p. 12). Page and Petray (2016) define agency in the following terms:

> Agency is the capability of individual or collective actors to do something in the social realm, contributing to a process of 'making and remaking...larger social and cultural formations'. Agents reflexively perceive their own capability of undertaking social action with an understanding of how power operates. Agents can undertake action through the very structures which constrain them, reproducing or changing those structures in creative ways if they have the resources. Power is the capability to make action occur. An individual highlights the connection between their own agency and power in their capability of acting or transforming various social phenomena (p. 4 – 5; Ortner, 2006, p. 134)

Marginalized groups that have reclaimed their capacity to act are more likely to take the necessary steps to initiate social change through a variety of methods in order to raise awareness of their experiences to gain allyship and build solidarity.

Raising awareness of the nuances and dynamics of a conflict is often one of the goals at the forefront of many resistance movements. Movements with this goal tend to outline a groups' experience with conflict, including crimes perpetrated upon them by various actors, poverty, discrimination, income inequality, environmental disadvantages,

misogyny, ethnic or religious persecution, police brutality, and other violence.

Marginalized groups find opportunities to present their collective identity to outside groups

(Lee & Tapia, 2023) through unconventional means, such as nonviolent movements or

public events, thus penetrating the barriers established to suppress their voices in society. In

their article about solidarity through radical confrontation, Lee & Tapia (2023) interviewed

Kazu Haga of the East Point Peace Academy, a nonviolence trainer in the Kingian model,

who explains that nonviolent methods attempt to "win people over" to a particular cause (p.

88). He highlights different levels of involvement by outside actors and who marginalized

groups tend to target to build allyship and solidarity:

> With Active Allies, all you have to do is call them. Then ask yourselves who are the
> passive allies, and invite them. Passive allies are folks who are already down [with your
> cause], they just don't know how to get active. Neutral allies can be activated through
> education, invitation and public education. Passive opponents are people you can make
> doubt their stances, and to push them to neutral is the goal. [W]e need to know about each
> of them. If you only focus on Active Allies and Active Opponents (the extremes), you
> ignore the Neutral Allies. The goal should be to turn neutral allies from passive to active (p.
> 89).

The neutrality of potential allies provides space for local actors to shift allies' perspectives

and ignite motivations to rally them to one's cause. This begins with movements and

initiatives that feature education and raising awareness of the experiences, struggles, and

goals of local actors.

Lederach (1995) identifies three functions that encompass the steps toward social

change: education, advocacy, and mediation (p. 12). In some conflicts, to begin this process

is to educate those who may be unaware of the conflict's impact on those living in it or the

overall global and political ramifications. In referencing Curle (1971), Lederach explains the importance of raising awareness in working towards peace:

> ...education, or conscientization, is needed when the conflict is hidden and people are unaware of imbalances and injustices. This role is aimed at erasing ignorance and raising awareness as to the nature of unequal relationships and the need for addressing and restoring equity, as seen, of course, from the view of those experience the injustices. Increased awareness of issues, needs, and interests leads to demands for changing the situation (p. 12 – 13).

The goal of raising new levels of awareness is to point to such injustices and imbalances in the hopes of sparking new social action and creating new allies in which to build a stronger foundation of solidarity. To Lederach, this will result in a choice between violent or nonviolent methods to achieve the group's goals.

Nonviolent methods have gained popularity in recent history and are more likely than violent campaigns to gain new allies to support a cause. According to Atack (2012):

> Nonviolent political action and civil resistance involve a powerful confluence of ideological or philosophical concerns based on anti-war sentiment and moral opposition to the use of violence, and pragmatic considerations about the most effective way to mobilise popular power and to resist and replace authoritarian or undemocratic regimes and protect fundamental human rights (p. 7).

Sharp (1973) challenges the notion that nonviolence should be equated to pacifism, and emphasizes that nonviolence is a very active method of resistance:

> Nonviolent action is a technique by which people who reject passivity and submission, and who see struggle as essential, can wage their conflict without violence. Nonviolent action is not an attempt to avoid or ignore conflict. It is one response to the problem of how to act effectively in politics, especially how to wield powers effectively (UN, 2023).

Nonviolent movements use tactics such as protests, boycotts, petitions, public speeches, marches, and strikes (UN, 2023). If these do not achieve the desired goals, some groups employ more disruptive, non-cooperative tactics that still qualify as nonviolent protest but are often illegal. Grebbel (2020), an activist for the environmentally focused Extinction Rebellion, defines civil disobedience as "the active, non-violent refusal to accept the dictates of governments. It informs them that unjust actions will be opposed and the people will act illegally if pushed to do so." Civil disobedience tactics do not need to be extreme, but attention grabbing, such as blocking highways, chaining oneself to buildings, releasing animals into public spaces, refusing to pay taxes, trespassing and squatting, and graffiti.

Nonviolent movements have shown to be exceptionally effective throughout history. According to Chenoweth and Stephan (2011), who conducted a study of every known nonviolent and violent campaign from 1900 to 2006, nonviolent campaigns are twice as likely to succeed than violent movements. Chenoweth (2014) explains that over the last 50 years, nonviolent movements have not only become more common, but more effective, even in authoritarian countries. This is for a variety of reasons. According to the data from Chenowith and Stephan's study (2011), nonviolent movements averaged to be four times larger in size in terms of participation numbers. Though harm is always a possibility, nonviolent movements are typically less physically dangerous than violent resistance, making it easier and more enticing to participate. In contrast to most violent campaigns, where participants are overwhelmingly comprised of younger men, nonviolent movements tend to be more representative of the society's overall demographics, including participation by individuals from different races, genders, socioeconomic status, and cultures (Chenoweth, 2014).

Such inclusion allows for the opportunity to build a "coalition across racial, ethnic, or gender identity divides" (Lee & Tapia, 2023, p. 81), thus creating pathways to the beginnings of solidarity movements. Solidarity can be defined as a willingness to be open-minded, mutual understanding of differing perspectives, and the existence of respecting and supporting those perspectives (Christensen & Thor, 2017). Pratt, Cheah, and Marsh (2020) express that solidarity focuses on "building relationships and connecting parties that are distant from one another" (p. 44), which emphasizes the goals of bridging groups together for a greater cause despite differences, interests, and even geographical location. Rupesinghe (1998) proposes interventions that help local actors build allyship with any actors within a conflict that have the potential power to bring about positive change, such as corporations, the military, and media. When marginalized groups do not have a platform from which to be heard and are not represented in society, reaching out to groups who do have representative power and sympathize with their cause can be of great benefit. Francis (2000) highlights the importance of the media in shifting narratives that may be perpetuating the conflict:

> Outside support for such efforts, both moral and financial, can be important. Media work which challenges stereotypes and political hegemony can take a great deal of courage and commitment. It is important, however, that the will for these activities, and judgements about what is possible, come from inside the situation rather than from outside (p. 7).

Francis emphasizes the need for the terms of such allyship to be governed by local actors rather than any outside interventionists, as this minimizes misunderstandings and imposition of outside interests.

Building solidarity today, however, could branch far beyond the immediate setting of a conflict to cross transnational spaces due to globalization and the use of social media.

The internet has made information sharing exponentially easier, thus becoming an effective tool for groups to share news articles, images, and videos regarding their experiences of a conflict. Social media in particular has been shown to be a particularly powerful method in which activists and communities experiencing conflict build global solidarity. In questioning whether social media is becoming a new method of mobilization, Theocharis (2018) identifies various elements in which social media is being used in conflict:

> First, Web 2.0 platforms such as Facebook and Twitter have the capacity to dramatically reduce the costs of organizing and participating in collective action through embedded features, such as group and event creation (and many others). A second element is that user-generated political content can be easily personalized and adapted to one's values, identity, and self-expressive inclinations. The third element is that such content can be easily communicated across social networks of friends, acquaintances or simple 'followers', facilitating organization without the need for, or the support of, formal organisation, or other traditional mobilizing agents (p 186).

It is important to outline the prospects of building solidarity through online means, as this has been a heavily used tactic by marginalized groups around the world to raise awareness of the struggles they endure, most notably by Palestinians, the population of focus for this thesis. What remains to be seen is the use of social media to feature graffiti on the West Bank Barrier and the level of impact this may have on an international scale.

Overall, the primary components of conflict transformation theory that will be highlighted in this thesis are raising awareness and building solidarity by using graffiti to shift narratives and public perceptions. However, another key aspect that is important to examine is the creative action of shaping an environment to achieve these outcomes. Attempting to raise awareness and build solidarity by changing the physical landscape falls under the realm of *poiesis,* in which creative means are used to make sense and meaning

out of a situation through active shaping. As we will see, *poiesis* as a framework shares several aspects of conflict transformation, as it highlights empowerment and agency, the capacity to act in difficult situations, connections with others, and imagining better, more peaceful futures.

2.2 *Poiesis*: Origins to Today's Field of Expressive Arts

     Poiesis is a Greek term brought forth in the time of Plato and Aristotle that means "to make" – to bring into the world that which did not exist before. Originally, *poiesis* referred to artisanship and other modes of production. Creative art-making as we know it today was not included in this concept, as the idea of *poiesis* was separate from *praxis*, the word for action and skill, and any type of human will. Art-making was simply bringing together existing materials and arranging them in such a way as to bring a different product into the world, without any creative intention behind it. However, the meaning of *poiesis* has shifted over time, most notably since examination by philosophers Martin Heidegger and Giorgio Agamben, who both connected *poiesis* to other existing Greek terminology and expanded the meaning to include human intention, will, and being in the physical and sensual world (Knill, Levine & Levine, 2005; Agamben, 1999).

     Historically, there has been a hard line drawn between the concepts of *praxis* and *poiesis*, though more recently several scholars have challenged this notion. D.H. Whitehead (2003) argues that *poiesis* and *praxis* are actually interconnected, and that art-making and the artwork itself both are influenced not only by the will and intentionality of the artist, but also the allowance of the artwork to show itself:

     Rather than seeing *praxis* as the exercise of an intentional will alone, we may see its
     relation to *poiesis* as bringing about a transforming encounter between the artist and his or

her work in the unfolding conditions of artmaking, which itself communicates a poietic world-view to art's recipients.

Another term, *gnosis,* also becomes intertwined with *poiesis*, further defining art-making as a way of knowing. By actively making sense of the world around us through making art, one gains a new knowledge of one's own environment. This "worlding" (as Heidegger puts it) is not so much creating a world at odds with reality, but rather a shift in perspective by the opening of the imagination (Knill, Levine & Levine, 2005). This line of thinking gives life to the artwork itself. The artist may begin an artwork with intention, but as the work is in process, the artist becomes more of a guide in which the artwork itself begins to emerge. The artist and artwork are both influenced by each other, allowing for maximum creative potential. The artwork then goes on to influence its viewers in various ways and can act as an agent of social, political, and existential transformation that continues to carry the artist's message and engage an audience in the artist's absence. The artwork thus can have a *poietic* effect on its viewers in their internal response and outward reactions – in other words, the artwork itself continues to shape its audience and the environment in which it is placed.

Other modern philosophers and scholars have challenged the rigid framework that *poiesis* originally encompassed, specifically the notion that creativity and human will are separate from making. Tuckwell (2018) further challenges the Aristotelian separation of action and art by invoking the term *technē*, another Greek term for making or doing, which is separate from producing, in which the term *poiesis* falls under. But after highlighting the problem of *technē* in relation to *phusis*, or nature, as the capacity to act to change nature, Tuckwell claims "*technē* is thus a kind of intelligence coupled to action, and the work

thereby produced is art or *poiesis*" (p. 1). Art then moves away from simple production without human action or will into active intent to shape material in response to or with the world (i.e. nature) around the artist. Tuckwell emphasizes this shift and highlights a new form of *poiesis:* "Art is no longer somewhat degraded, derivative power to reassemble existing elements into different forms or contents, but the culmination of a creative workflow through which particular beings intentionally deviate the living world" (p. 4). Hence *technē* has a larger role in connecting art to action, resulting in a "secondary" form of *poiesis* that differs from the original Aristotelian concept: creative *poiesis*.

Much of the scholarship regarding *poiesis* is from the standpoint of philosophy and aesthetics, the study of beauty and interpretation of art and literature. However, one field has embraced the more creative aspect of *poiesis* as outlined by Tuckwell in the above quote, focusing heavily on the act of art-making itself. The concept of *poiesis* is a foundational philosophy of the field of expressive arts (EXA). EXA is relatively new in the world of creative therapies and interventions, originating in the 1970s through the work of Paolo Knill, Shaun McNiff, and other colleagues at Lesley College in Massachusetts, USA. EXA is primarily used as therapeutic intervention but has in recent years expanded to complement many disciplines, including counseling, law, education, medicine, restorative justice, conflict transformation, and peacebuilding. Unlike most arts-based therapies, EXA is rooted in phenomenology rather than psychology, focusing heavily on the senses and lived experience, in contrast with traditional psychological approaches in which in-depth emotional and intellectual interventions are prioritized. Rather than specializing in one art discipline, expressive artists are trained in all art modalities: poetry, visual art, music, dance, movement, and theater (Levine & Levine, 2011; Knill, Levine & Levine, 2005). The

facilitator does not interpret the artwork, but simply guides the individual through the process of the art-making and challenges the individual to find their own meaning within their work and throughout the process (Malchiodi, 2005). In *Art in Action: Expressive Arts and Social Change* (2011), Ellen Levine explains:

> [The expressive arts] has placed the emphasis upon an individual's resources and capacities, and promoted a notion of the artwork as opening up to and as being part of the world, pointing to the present and to a possible future. In the expressive arts, the artwork is seen not as a mirror of the self or even primarily as an expression of the self of the artist. Rather the work always goes beyond itself and has a multiplicity of meanings. (p. 36)

By giving the individual or community the space to explore the creative process in response to trauma or other turbulent situations, one is creating a much-needed space to move in times of feeling stuck. Expressive arts therapist, Stephen K. Levine, emphasizes that play is a major conduit of this experience, as confirmed by Ellen Levine:

> Expressive arts therapy has play at its base. It stresses the centrality of play as a way out of the locked situations into which individuals, groups and communities often fall. In difficult circumstances, the range of play is constricted. Engaging in exploratory, experimental and improvisatory processes can open up the range of play and help people to envision new ways of being and acting. Play can also lead to imagining new ways of changing or shaping the world we live in (Levine & Levine, 2011, p. 37).

Hence, the creative *poiesis* as outlined above becomes a strong foundation within the field of expressive arts in its creative potential to cope with and live in the world, and has begun to gain ground when addressing social change and peacebuilding.

Poiesis, as defined by Levine, is "the act of responding to what is given, imagining its possibilities, and reshaping it in accordance with what is emerging" (Knill, Levine, & Levine, 2005, p. 71). He also displays a wider framework for *poiesis* in *Art in Action*

(2011): "What is implied in the concept of *poiesis* is that art making is not divorced from other forms of production. It is not a specialized activity radically separated from others; rather it is an extension and development of the basic capacity of human beings to shape their world..." (p. 23). He rejects Plato's view that art-making, specifically visual arts, falls under *mimesis*, to imitate:

> Since within the Platonic framework, the things of this world are themselves imitations of their ideal forms or essences, the art-work regarded by Plato as an imitation of an imitation and therefore as only a pale copy of what truly exists. Moreover, artists themselves have no knowledge of true being; they let themselves be guided by the shifting realities of the sensible world, the realm of *aisthesis* (sense-perception) (Levine, 2009, p. 46-47).

Here, Plato is limiting visual art-making to phenomenological experience as understood from its origins – sensory perception with a strictly biological framework. Phenomenology would be expanded to include human consciousness and intention after Edmund Husserl later would reject this reductionist viewpoint. As a result, art-making is viewed by modern philosophers and expressive artists more than a simple imitation in response to what we see around us. Levine goes on to explain that Plato comes to a crossroads with categorizing art-making when it comes to performative arts, specifically poetry, which exist temporally rather than spatially. This is one opening in which art-making can be argued to include human will and intention, as performative arts cannot be reduced to an imitation of what one sees. Even visual art can be pulled out of *mimesis* and included into *poiesis* as visual art requires an audience, which is sometimes considered a performance in and of itself, as Levine will later argue. Through this lens, art-making can be described as shaping the world around us through creatively interacting with it. This active shaping can act as a framework in which to understand graffiti tourism in conflict zones – *poiesis* in EXA goes

beyond art as a way to find meaning, but as an action by the artist to make meaning out of what is happening in the environment.

If *poiesis* is the philosophical foundation of EXA, phenomenology is its core methodology. Though Plato restricted visual art-making to phenomenological experience alone, the field of expressive arts does not see this as a limitation and leans on phenomenological experience as it impacts our perceptions, actions, and being in the world. *Poiesis* was incorporated into the field of phenomenology by Heidegger, who suggested that in the making of art, one is making a new world - the act of "worlding" – and is meant to address or shift a present environment, or *Umwelt* (Whitehead, 2003). Linking *poiesis* to the active shaping of one's environment ultimately links this action to one's senses and sensing of the world.

Phenomenology adds physicality and the importance of lived experience to the need to shape our environments to make sense of the world around us. By viewing the world through a sensory perspective, we are forced to temporarily abandon psychological approaches and preconceived assumptions to fully focus on our lived experience as it is happening in that present moment. Interpreting our world through a phenomenological lens allows us to remain on the sensory surface of our experience which makes us describe our experiences very differently than we would from a cerebral perspective. Levine explains that *poiesis* is inherently intertwined with phenomenology:

> Within the framework of a phenomenological analysis of human existence, the arts occupy a central role. If art is understood as a mode of "showing" or "manifesting," then this central role for the aesthetic within a phenomenological philosophy makes sense, since phenomenology is based on the motion of the phenomenon, that which shows itself to us. For Heidegger, in his later writings, *Daiesin* (existence) understands itself primarily

through an encounter with works of art. In this encounter, human existence is seen to depend not on the defiant act of self-assertion of a worldless subject, but on the capacity to let meaning emerge through a shaping of that which is given. This capacity, following Heidegger, we will call with the Greek name "*poiesis"* (Knill, Levine & Levine, 2005, p. 31).

Tuckwell, who is not within the expressive arts field, also highlights the role of art-making in phenomenology, by tying *techne* to the body:

> In the orthodox sense, *techne* moves toward the surfaces of the body where its sensitivity becomes progressively differentiated into the activity of *making sense.* But in the opposite direction, diffusing into the depths of bodies, it moves toward the 'problematic' – which is to say, toward the conditions of its own emergence. Thus, *techne* not only enables the capacity to 'make' or produce sense but, the rather more general property, 'to sense.' This capacity to sense must be one of the primary properties that belong to *techne*; and moreover, this particular property to sense arguably brings to bodies a capacitive, pre-epistemological intelligibility that is not abstract but *calculative* in nature (p. 59).

As previously outlined, Tuckwell intertwined *techne* and *poiesis*, arguing that human intention and art-making do indeed go hand in hand. In other words, art-making is an intentional, creative attempt to actively shape our own meaning and make sense of the world we live in.

2.3 Arts-based Conflict Transformation and *Poiesis*

The arts have long been a tool used by arts-based facilitators, activists, protestors, and others affected by conflict in their societies to enact social and political change. For arts-based interventionists, the use arts in conflict settings requires a recognition of symbolically potent imagery, strong frameworks in which to conduct arts-based activities that have the potential to unexpectedly trigger emotions, and sensitivity to the cultural art

practices belonging to the respective community they are working with. A large portion of such work focuses on health-building, as without boosting community cohesion and wellbeing, any peacebuilding efforts will likely be less effective. Arts-based interventions led by experienced practitioners or change agents have helped communities use art to regain their strength in the face of war, discrimination, grief, loss, and trauma, while also empowering them to take steps to create change in their own ways. According to Susan Sontag, the late American writer and political activist, "art today is a new kind of instrument, an instrument for modifying consciousness and organizing new modes of sensibility" (Sontag, 1966). For many arts-based practitioners, this is the starting point for positive individual and community transformation.

Examples of such transformations can be witnessed in the work of numerous change agents who work at the intersection of conflict transformation, peacebuilding, and the arts. LeBaron specializes in these fields, working globally with artists and conflict scholars to promote arts-based community-building, mediation, and dialogue. She has directed workshops in which scholars, diplomats, peace-workers, and artists engage in creative, collective problem-solving regarding longstanding global conflicts, such as Northern Ireland and Israel-Palestine. These workshops include not only traditional dialogue techniques, but also in-depth, arts-based reflection and field trips to cultural spaces such as museums and music events in order to create a holistic experience of the cultures involved. In *Art in Action: Expressive Arts Therapy and Social Change* (2011), LeBaron explains how cultural components such as food, music, and even public transport can break down rigid barriers that often prevent the growth of relationships between peoples of conflicting parties (p. 9). She notes that "creativity is advised in addressing

conflict, yet people in conflict tend toward narrowed perceptions, evaluating possibilities critically and negatively (even when they are asked not to), thus experience limited room for maneuvering" (p. 11).

In conflict transformation, the arts are often seen for their value as non-traditional methods of communication, revelation, and reflection. Their phenomenological approach makes them more embodied than solely dialogue, thus deepening the experience, and can offer a space to broaden perspectives. Stephanie Syjuco, a professor at UC Berkeley and visual artist, speaks about social practice art, where the medium is the "public and the social relationships that unfold in a situation." She explains that the arts can help "disarm the viewer in terms of what they expect to see" by creating a "rupture in the idea of business as usual" (KQED Arts, 2015). The arts can impact the viewer by inducing shock, discomfort, wonder, elation, learning, empathy, and anger, thus jolting the viewer to attention and challenging them to consider the perspective being offered by the art piece. The arts are able to surpass the "limitations of verbal communication" and enable "expressing ideas and emotions through nonverbal means, and multiple senses" (Shank and Schirch, 2008, pp. 235–236; Ware, 2023, p. 923). Sheldrake (2012) further emphasizes the arts' ability to reach an audience in deep ways that shake emotional, cognitive, and moral foundations and invoke meaning-making:

> The artist creates an image, communicates via imagery, and the audience receive 'meaning' through their imagination. An image evokes meaning through a fourfold pattern: sensual experience, an interpretive framework for knowing the world, a judgment about the way the world should be and an invitation to decide how to live. In other words, artistic images have a capacity to touch the depths of human experience beyond the limits of rational discourse (p. 20).

 By surpassing these limitations, the imagination can be opened to consider new relationships, solutions, and perspectives.

The capacity of an individual or group to imagine a more positive or peaceful future while remaining realistic in terms of the conflict's dynamics and potential outcomes is what Lederach refers to as the "moral imagination" (Lederach 2005, p. 5). He describes the ability of individuals and groups experiencing conflict, as well as peacebuilders, to foster this way of thinking is key to approaching conflicts:

> This kind of imagination captures the depth of the challenge and at the same time casts light on the way forward. As aesthetics, the moral imagination seeks to connect with the deep intuition that creates the capacity to penetrate the challenges of violent conflict. Recognizing and nurturing this capacity is the ingredient that forges and sustains authentic constructive change (p. 71).

Though Lederach positions the moral imagination within the field of conflict transformation as a whole, he connects this concept strongly to the use of art in conflict contexts. Rather than relying on cognitive analysis, he argues that aesthetics can provide a more phenomenological understanding of conflict, thus tying understanding more closely with intuition and lived experience (pp. 68 – 69). Arts-based approaches often engage audiences in different sensory levels, and can reach an individual in a variety of powerful ways by engaging the imagination through visual art, music, movement, metaphor, or poetry. These components offer new ways in which to approach the world in more "intuitive" and meaningful ways, with the goal of creating new avenues for positive relationships and building peace.

Through an intensive workshop in Myanmar that used metaphor and other arts-based exercises, Ware (2022) explored whether poetry, music, and visual art could change

perspectives and attitudes in intra-group actors involving the Rakhine and Rohingya communities. She uses the term *psychological repertoire* to refer to the embedded cultural, social, and personal belief systems that shape group attitudes towards themselves and the "other," which often become "highly rigid, stereotyped, and key drivers perpetuating social divisions underlying the conflict" (p. 920). After conducting the workshop, participants were more willing to consider others' perspectives and accounts of the conflict as valid. The findings showed that working with the arts deeply affected those involved, and the "arts processes strengthened the potential impacts of a more dialogue-based approach" (p. 926). The use of visual art, music, and poetry allowed for more intimate interactions to take place by cutting through the interpersonal barriers established by living in conflict:

> Alternative approaches may therefore build intra-communal affective (emotional) connections, facilitating willingness to engage in challenging reconciliation. Creativity and imagination offer keys to shifting conflict-repertoires and building motivation to (re-)connect with the Other...(p. 922).

Ware then asserts that since arts-based approaches have the power to access "collective memory and expressions of individual and collective emotion," creative approaches have much to contribute to the field of conflict transformation (p. 922).

The use of imagery in arts-based approaches to appeal to emotions and personal experience can potentially shift destructive and rigid attitudes into ones of empathy, understanding, and openness to new perspectives. Lederach (2005) suggests that "people talk in images," therefore, one image may have the power to surpass the cognitive part of the brain that analyzes conflict, which Lederach argues most people tend to avoid (p. 69). Instead, an image can speak directly to the heart of the viewer, jarring them into a "transformative moment" that leads to new insight:

> We might call them the moments of the aesthetic imagination, a place where suddenly, out of complexity and historic difficulty, the clarity of great insight makes an unexpected appearance in the form of an image or in a way of putting something that can only be described as artistic (p. 69).

Such experiences could, to again quote Francis (2002, p. 59), "bring something new to human thinking and interaction" by way of creativity and imagining new relationships and solutions to the conflict at hand.

The above-mentioned characteristics of shifting perspectives, transforming relationships, and opening the imagination to envision more positive futures through creative means all connect to *poiesis* at an individual and communal level. Hence, *poiesis* is, in a sense, an effective framework in which to understand how individuals and communities can expand the physical, emotional, and creative spaces they live in to transform their understanding of the conflict for all parties involved, at both the personal and interpersonal levels of transformation, as outlined by Miall (2004). Knill, Levine, and Levine (2005) explain that these spaces then allow for a reboot in imagination, as one is no longer under the confines of rigid perceptions and can actively imagine new outcomes and approaches, allowing for the creativity needed to problem-solve and collaborate. This aligns strongly with Lederach's moral imagination concept, in which the capacity to act is revived, but acting is with the understanding of the conflict's confines, realities, and stakeholders.

Regarding the role of agency in arts-based methods, Hunter (2021) describes the power of art in creating opportunities for agency among various relational levels:

> Arts practice, when appreciated for its embodied, embedded, relational and affective capacities, enables creators, participants and audience to encounter complexity in ways that

go beyond linear, ideologically static or results-focussed engagement. Holding the paradoxical and the uncertain in everyday life within an aesthetic and/or cultural frame, can engender transformational experience. It can do so by making the familiar unfamiliar, mobilising meaning-making informed by generations past, and animating people to new learnings about themselves, others and the natural systems of which they are a part (p. 5).

From an expressive arts standpoint, the arts are used to not only heal communities by addressing trauma and build community cohesion, but also to empower those communities to take their futures into their own hands. Thus, fostering personal and communal empowerment can reignite a group's capacity to act in the face of conflict, which in turn can spark agency and desire for change.

It is important to outline expressive arts-based approaches to building agency as seen in the work of many in the arts and conflict transformation field, and the effects it has had on communities globally. One such example is Carrie MacLeod, a Vancouver-based expressive artist, who spent a significant amount of time in Sierra Leone, working with communities suffering from the consequences of war and political violence. Many of the region's youth suffered brutal limb amputations inflicted by militants to prevent them from taking up arms and fighting back (Human Rights Watch, 1998). The removal of their hands also prevented them from working, and their society often imposed intense social stigmas on them, even resulting in outright rejection (Cole, 2014). It is worth quoting MacLeod's assessment of their situation in full, as it gets to the heart of these boys' need to reshape their realities:

> Extreme violence reverses the chronological rhythms of daily life. How can one possibly make "sense" of an imposed reality when primary senses have literally been amputated? Youth in Sierra Leone unabashedly proclaim that everything becomes utterly unrecognizable after war. Home, in every sense, is nowhere to be found. The same

> Motherland is not there waiting to receive just anyone with open arms. Longings and be-longings are transported into waiting rooms, and familiar homelands become foreign territory. Yet despite outer discord, the younger generation yearns to reshape visions of transitional justice at the center of loss and longing. They must take on the difficult task of re-inhabiting spaces where layers of betrayal have taken place (Levine and Levine, 2011, p. 148).

The youths' need to "reshape visions of transition justice" and "re-inhabiting spaces" both speak to the process of *poiesis,* in which the boys must work to shape their perspectives of their traumatic experiences into ones of empowerment and confidence in order to regain footing in the world around them. MacLeod worked with several community leaders to create a drumming program that recruited young boys who had lost limbs, providing them with a new way to use their bodies that was energetic, creative, and collaborative. This program not only provided them with a space for safety, exploration, and support, but also allowed them to perform for the rest of their village, reasserting them as musicians into their society and breaking down the stigmas that had been imposed upon them by their peers, hence shifting their once damaged relationships to their overall communities into positive ones (Levine & Levine, 2011).

To further elaborate on *poiesis*' relational role in conflict transformation, expressive arts therapist Ellen Levine and several other expressive arts facilitators led a conflict resolution workshop at the European Graduate School in Switzerland with a group of Israelis and Palestinians. The goal was to remove the participants from the power dynamics of their home territories and place them in an environment that was safe, but unfamiliar to them. Contentious at first, the two groups eventually let down their guard and bonded through dance, visual art, and music. This workshop ultimately led to the erosion of defensive barriers for each group, and they began to question the dynamics of the conflict

they all had grown up in in their homelands, such as the negative stereotypes imposed onto each other, the perpetuation of violence, and closed-mindedness to peace initiatives. Through art-making, these Israeli and Palestinian individuals had their perspectives of each other and the overall conflict shift from rigid, angry, and defensive to openness, empathy, and hope. Those individuals later described some difficulties upon returning to Israel and Palestine regarding the political atmosphere and limitations in continuing their new relationships (Levine and Levine, 2011, pp. 39 – 40), but should this style of arts-based peacebuilding continue and applied on a larger scale, more individuals would have the opportunity to have a space in which to question their beliefs and challenge a conflicts' dynamics, resulting in larger and more sustainable change. Levine emphasizes the importance of the arts and *poiesis* in such contexts: "It is precisely the task of the expressive arts to bring individuals, groups and communities back into the experience of *poiesis,* the capacity to make effective change in the world" (Levine and Levine, 2011, p. 37).

Art pieces created by a community that challenge stereotypes or stigmas are sometimes made public to engage with the rest of society in order to change the narrative surrounding such topics. Carole Kane, a conflict transformation and expressive arts specialist, works closely with her community in Northern Ireland to address pressing societal issues of violence and community traumas. One project she worked closely with addressed the taboo topics of miscarriage, stillbirth, and loss of life in early days. The burial ground known as Plot Z1 in Belfast City Cemetery lays to rest over 7,000 babies, but no memorials or names were ever displayed, leaving the graves anonymous. In collaboration with the Community Arts Partnership (CAP) based in Belfast, Kane aided in

an initial project to bring together families who lost children, enabling them to speak about their losses and through a creative process, they eventually designed their own monument to memorialize their lost babies, thus bringing the conversation of loss of babies out into the open to allow for validation in their grief and remembrance (Cap Arts Centre, 2017). One mother of a child buried at the plot told the Belfast Telegraph (2019) that "to finally see this beautiful memorial in place gives our babies the dignity of recognition and also serves as acknowledgement of a loss suffered by so many." This is a good example of community visual art and *poiesis* in that the process of a community not only collaborating to create this memorial, but also participating in the public unveiling of it finally gave the families a platform in which to openly share the grief that they had been stifling for years and challenge societal perceptions on miscarriage, stillbirth, and early death.

Raising awareness and building solidarity through arts-based methods is not a new phenomenon, nor is the connection of the arts with conflict transformation initiatives. However, the use of graffiti to achieve these goals and its usefulness in conflict transformation receives less attention in scholarly literature. Graffiti is also understudied in the field of expressive arts, in which the framework of *poiesis* can be built upon to potentially include components that address nonviolence, education, activism, and solidarity through intention and revolutionary acts by way of creatively shaping the environment of conflict settings. One key question that arose while writing this paper is how *poiesis* organically arises from within communities as a response to the socio-political landscape in which they must survive, and how it is aimed outward to shape others' perspectives. This paper outlines how communities are using graffiti to shape the views of others by physically changing interculturally shared spaces, and outlines the intent, goals,

and tangible outcomes of community creative resistance and social change. This could offer insight on how *poiesis* and arts-based methods can be implemented into future projects that have grassroots community action and graffiti at their core. By shaping public perception, a community is creating a better, more equitable world for themselves. To repeat Levine, "world-building is self-building" (Levine & Levine, 2011, p. 24). The following section examines how graffiti can contribute to the framework of creative *poiesis* from a conflict transformation standpoint, in which graffiti is used to raise awareness, combat stereotypes, assert/reclaim narratives, reveal difficult truths, and impact outside groups and actors, resulting in tangible change.

2.4 <u>Graffiti and Social Change</u>

Around the globe, graffiti is used as a tool to challenge the public to not only consider power dynamics, political turbulence, systemic racism, and oppression, but to act upon them. Graffiti is a form of social protest that can bring discontent, anger, hope, and calls for peace into a public space and open conversation. Though graffiti is illegal in most places and is still frowned upon by many institutions and authorities, its links to activism and social change, particularly regarding identity issues such as marginalization of ethnic and racial minorities, the LGBTQ+ community, women, and those of lower socio-economic status, are receiving more academic attention. Glăveanu (2017) describes artistic creative activism, or "artivism," as "the deliberate use of art within activist action," and a "participative form of art grounded in everyday life, particularly our communal living" (p. 20). Graffiti of this nature seeks to engage the public by triggering discussions about various societal issues and can help to mobilize communities to take action for change.

One key aspect of graffiti revolves around spatial decisions – where is the art most visible and where will it have the most effect? While describing a mural in Egypt during the Arab Uprisings, Awad and Wagoner (2017) write that placing graffiti in "central places in the city ensures high visibility and infuses the space with the revolutionary identity, showing it is not under full state control" (p. 3). Such graffiti seeks to not only make an audience reflect upon the state of the society in which they live, but also to encourage viewers to engage with the issue by way of creative participation in collective self-expression. Active engagement by the audience could range from dialogue sparked by the graffiti to protests to individuals physically engaging with the graffiti itself by adding to the artwork. Using art to "reclaim" space is a form of not only empowerment, but also can be a revolutionary act – a demand for attention, recognition, and justice. Neilsen (2017) describes graffiti as a tool ripe with "democratic potential":

> Street art and graffiti are important social tools that measure the temperature of a society. When a society struggles there is a good chance the struggles are reflected on the streets. The persistence of graffiti and street art, the artists insisting on expressing themselves, the simplicity of the materials, the political and social commentary, and the resistance that lies within the act of painting and creating makes a powerful, democratic tool out of the street art and graffiti images (p. 321).

This "democratic tool" concept includes the ideas that everyone can be an artist (art is not limited to a creative elite housed only in institutions and museums); that graffiti is available in public and easily accessible spaces; graffiti encourages audience interaction with the environment (usually urban); content is usually closely aligned to the everyday lives of most people; gives voice to groups that are historically excluded from society; and graffiti is most often unauthorized, enhancing the revolutionary aspect of the act of participating in graffiti. After interviews with various street artists in Denmark, Nielsen

writes that "painting graffiti is an empowerment; a mere tool to create awareness, call for help, or express… discontent with or love for something in public space. …it is a fight for the rights of self-expression and to be heard" (p. 315). This sentiment is echoed by Brazilian artist Mundano: "…the most important thing about graffiti is that it's public; everybody can see it, unlike an exhibition or museum that's too far away from the crowd. So it's more democratic" (Mkhabela, 2016).

Vogel *et. al.* (2020) write that graffiti has much to offer the field of conflict transformation and peacebuilding, but it is often "overlooked" (p. 2148). This could largely be due to graffiti being categorized as an act of vandalism rather than an act of nonviolent resistance in conflict zones. They argue that graffiti can help understand the nuanced reality of daily life on the local level of a conflict, and "can make an important contribution to understanding local conflict dynamics, imaginaries, and visions of peace and conflict" (p. 2149). They break down key areas in conflict contexts in which graffiti specifically applies: resistance, communication, expression, memorialization and commemoration, inspiration, and division (p. 2150). Graffiti is a nonviolent method in which communities can share these characteristics as they pertain to their culture publicly by way of claiming and reclaiming interculturally shared spaces. Regarding graffiti as an act of resistance, Ryan (2016) writes that "street art may be seen as a symbolic re-appropriation or 'taking back' of the public space – a democratising act with anti-capitalist and/or anti-authoritarian undertones" (p.3).

Vogel *et. al.* (2020) emphasize the communicative and expressive functions of graffiti in conflict societies: "graffiti is an effective tool for representation and communication. It gives space to the voices of those who may otherwise not be heard, or

who are perhaps mistrustful of traditional communication channels" (p. 2153). In conflict

contexts, the "practical and rebellious" act (p. 2153) of graffiti may be the only method in

which a marginalized group can insert their experiences of the conflict into the public

sphere to challenge the systems in place. In other words, once a space is "reclaimed," so to

speak, then the communicative and expressive function of graffiti takes place, where the

urban landscape can be transformed into a "platform for the disenfranchised, to question

division, and to seek rebalancing inequalities" (Vogel *et. al.,* 2020, p. 2152). For those

groups who are traditionally denied access to a "formal platform," (p. 2153), such as the

media or political representation, graffiti is an alternative in which to express aspirations,

needs, demands, hopes, and criticisms of the status quo in a public fashion.

Memorialization is a common function of graffiti in conflict settings. Imagery

depicting those who fought and/or lost their lives for a cause can be seen in both active

and post-conflict societies. Such graffiti represent cultural traumas and aspirations, and

are "re-lived and immortalized on public walls and shape the public memoryscape"

(Vogel *et. al.*, 2020, p. 2154). Murals in Northern Ireland, though sometimes

controversial and divisive, memorialize those killed during The Troubles and call for

peace between Protestant Loyalists and Catholic Unionists. Many murals are of

paramilitary militants, which has led some artists and activists to call for new murals

that promote a renewed sense of moving forward rather than dwelling in the past. Anne

Ward, the Community Development Officer at the Arts Council and head of innovative

programs aimed at making new public art, remarked in an interview: "Young children

walking past masked gunmen has an impact on the local community. So, the program is

all about the community wanting to transform … and creating a new Northern Ireland"

(Feliciano, 2017). Graffiti featuring imagery of what the current community imagines for the future could potentially shape the landscape into a more positive and inspiring atmosphere that promotes hope and peace.

Graffiti can be quite effective and influential in terms of conflict transformation and social change. The power of graffiti lies in its publicity – the more attention it attracts, the more influence it could potentially have, particularly in places where space itself is contested or politicized, such as Belfast, Northern Ireland, the split city of Nicosia, Cyprus, or the West Bank, Palestine. Placing work in such spaces not only "reclaims" the space, but helps groups shape public narratives around them and their communities. When speaking about graffiti in Ramallah, street artist Hamza Abu Ayyash emphasized the importance of its public locations: "Using the walls is the easiest way to spread an idea because everyone passes by a wall in a street — a politician, a housewife, a child, a doctor, or a homeless guy. Everyone" (Al-Monitor, 2012). Thouri, a Jerusalem-based street artist and women's activist, echoed this importance: "The purpose of street art is to force your existence on somebody: putting it in people's faces but still in a subtle and beautiful way" (Al-Monitor, 2012).

This in turn allows graffiti to act as a method in which to reach greater audiences to educate them about a particular group's experiences of the conflict and their goals moving forward. Many groups are demonized by forces in power, who live with stereotypes and misrepresentation that further alienate them from society. This can be directly challenged when graffiti is used by such a group to convey their "collective imagination," "unified story," "shared sense of belonging" and their "history, identity and aspirations" (Vogel *et. al.,* 2020, p. 2154). Graffiti, therefore, can help raise

awareness of a group's losses, daily struggles, and experiences of discrimination,

oppression, and/or violence while also promoting peace, justice, and hope. In describing

a graffiti project in Argentina, Ryan (2016) concluded that "street art as an alternative or

underground medium can broaden public awareness around certain issues and provide

an effective source of counter-information in the absence of a free press" (p.135). This

can be even more effective when social media is implemented as a platform. Alexandre

Tilmans, the director of the arts non-profit BazArt in South Africa, notes the powerful

combination of graffiti and social media:

> If we take graffiti in the '80s, it was a form of very strong communication. The messaging
> that was used at this time of political unrest was meant to shock, create awareness and
> express strong views. What we have seen recently with the current events, should it be
> gender-based violence or the pandemic, (are) walls that have been painted, creating an
> awareness and a dialogue between the citizens of this world. It is interesting to note that
> those walls that have been painted in the four corners of the planet have also been shared on
> social media, creating a bigger buzz than just one wall by itself (Luthuli, 2022).

Social media increases a groups' platform from the public spaces of localized conflict to

a transnational space easily accessible to millions around the globe, increasing their

chances of building international solidarity.

Everything described above can be witnessed in a variety of places around the

world undergoing political and social change, particularly in places experiencing conflict.

Street art in Baghdad demands change amidst corruption in government, in which artists

have been "taking spray paint to grimy concrete walls… and sketching out their vision for a

brighter future" (The Guardian, 2019). In São Paulo, young artists known as *pichadores*

compete with each other to graffiti the hardest to reach places in order to display messages

that challenge racism, promote feminism, and advocate for impoverished communities.

One artist claimed: "If [graffiti] was legal, no one would bother. We are part of the periphery, of the marginalised community, and we say very clearly: I exist, I'm here, and I want you to see me" (Vargas, 2015). A further example is that of Indigenous artists and communities who use graffiti to challenge settler colonialism and systemic violence and discrimination, and transform the public narrative imposed upon them into one they create for themselves. Here, the use of graffiti is a powerful tool that can lift suppressed voices of societies into the public sphere, thus empowering them to reshape the narratives in which they are ordinarily represented (which is often laced with racism, xenophobia, etc.).

Graffiti provides a mechanism in which to publicly assert a collective identity and calls for solidarity and justice. Campana (2011) describes the use of art for such social change:

> The arts' role in activism can include the communication of a movement's or group's worldview, opposition, and vision; facilitation of dialogue towards political and social consciousness for both participants and the broader public; creation and expression of collective identity and solidarity; and working towards 'cognitive liberation', a critical transformation from hopeless submission to oppressive conditions to a readiness to change those conditions (p. 281).

This brings into focus the power graffiti can have on tangible and sustainable change in terms of conflict transformation. Nohad Elhajj (2020), an independent researcher who published for Open Global Rights, an independent human rights forum partnered with the Center for Human Rights and Global Justice and the Future of Rights Program at New York University School of Law, speaks about graffiti's potential impact and limitations on the public sphere:

Graffiti is defined as "a form of visual communication, usually illegal, involving the unauthorized marking of public space by an individual or group". The definition by itself poses a duality; would unauthorized marking of public space become positive communication? Would it possibly shift perspectives? Maybe not all, but some graffiti certainly does convey political messages. The question here is not about authority per se but the disruption of this authority. The act itself is intrinsically disruptive and political whether graffiti is acceptable or not. Starting from this understanding, graffiti, as a visual act, then can be leveraged as a participatory and accessible medium to shift public perspectives on human rights issues. Yet, the human rights movement does not only need to shift the public opinion but also to shift the current governance structures, which is beyond the impact of graffiti.

While graffiti alone may not shift the actions of governments, it can act as a stepping stone that informs public opinions and ignites social and political change. However, it could be helpful to reiterate Nielsen's quote about the "democratic potential" of graffiti, where the key points include "persistence," and "resistance" regarding the acts of graffiti. Graffiti can promote engaging in difficult conversations, attempting to include passersby in the dialogue of social change and action. Elhajj states that graffiti "overwhelms the observer with emotions of anger, despair, longing and revolt but also with hope," which can begin the process of impacting public perspectives. However, I would like to challenge the final sentence of Elhajj's above statement limiting graffiti's potential on a macro-level scale, and instead argue that all of these points can indeed have a snowball effect to "shift the current governance structures" in place in any given society should enough people mobilize. Graffiti can act as one such mobilization technique.

One example of graffiti acting as a catalyst for mass mobilization is that of the case of the 2020 George Floyd protests in the U.S. It can be argued that graffiti during the Floyd protests helped change the global political landscape, in that graffiti that featured Floyd not

only spread from coast to coast in the U.S. George Floyd murals sprung up along the walls in Palestine, Syria, Canada, Germany, the UK, and Spain, giving considerable extra weight to the Black Lives Matter movement by building strong support overseas (Neeson, 2022). This goes to show the power of graffiti in bringing people together out of solidarity to promote change transnationally. Some activists have credited Black Lives Matter as the catalyst for renewed Palestinian support among non-White groups in the U.S. The communication director for the Institute for Middle East Understanding in California and Palestinian-American, Omar Baddar, told USA Today that "a huge reason we have rising social consciousness in America is driven by the Black Lives Matter movement, and that leads to similar demands for foreign policy as well," and that Black activists' efforts to visit Palestine to learn their experiences has "caused the solidarity to really blossom" (Ramirez, 2021).

Referring to specifically to graffiti in the California Bay Area, Choi (2020) describes the actions of Black activists who, in response to the murder of George Floyd, are "weaponizing street art to unite the masses and reclaim their communities' stolen narratives, re-imagining better futures alongside comrades across the nation." Reclaiming narratives is, in a sense, challenging falsehoods about collective identities. In many conflict situations, protecting these truths is vital as often they are distorted by government run media or malignant actors in order to maintain power or avoid scrutiny as well as demonize groups to justify discriminatory actions. Graffiti uses public space to reveal these distortions and assert the truths that often go unsaid or unchallenged regarding systemic issues. Graffiti can show these truths to the world and raise awareness about conflicts in particular contexts.

Graffiti reveals how *poiesis* can be extended as a framework to assess a community's use of visual art to enact social change. Art, from a political activist standpoint, should be public and intrusive, not in a gallery where access is limited or exclusive. Artwork needs to be able to achieve the desired outcomes of those who create it for social justice purposes. The artwork described in places such as Bethlehem, Belfast, and Baghdad are all murals or graffiti on very large, very public spaces, and are essentially installation pieces. The primary goal of installation art is to invite the viewer to see the landscape differently and interact with it in a new way. In general, installation art refers to "works which take into account the viewer's entirely sensory experience" and "is created with the focus on the viewer, where he/she becomes almost the main subject of the artwork" (Lansroth, 2016). As with most graffiti, the purpose is to reach the largest audience possible, a feat that is significantly harder to achieve should this same artwork be in a gallery, in which only interested and able parties will go out of their way to witness. Establishing a massive art piece in a public space almost imposes the artwork on the wider community, hence reminding the public that often-silenced communities are in fact still very much alive and forcing the rest of society to pay attention. The intent of graffiti is the motivating factor, in which desired outcomes can be achieved. These outcomes make up the key characteristics for *poiesis* from the standpoint of this thesis – raising awareness, combatting stereotypes, asserting/reclaiming narratives, revealing truths, art directed outside the community, and tangible change.

These characteristics of *poiesis* as described above are directed towards those outside the community making the artwork to have influence on the political and social atmospheres in their societies. Communities using graffiti collectively to impact their

relationship to their societies have several outcomes in mind. Raising awareness of their struggles with poverty, oppression, discrimination, persecution, or violence is one major step to educating outsiders about their experiences. This allows the marginalized community to humanize themselves to outside parties, making their message more palatable for those unfamiliar or wary of the community. Revealing truths often portray the causes of these struggles, such as police brutality, systemic racism, nativist government policies, or bigotry. These truths are often distorted by those perpetrating such injustices to justify further human rights violations. Compromised truths and demonization lead to negative, inaccurate stereotypes that can deeply impact a particular group's image, such as the portrayal that Romani people being thieves or the inherent criminal nature of young Black men in America, making it harder for them to become full, respected members of society. Educating outsiders about the causes of not only their struggles, but also those who have perpetuated the harmful image imposed upon them allows these groups to reclaim their own image by asserting accurate narratives of who they are as a community. This process should eventually lead to tangible change for this community, such as new policies or laws (police accountability or reparations), better societal representation (less job discrimination or more positions in power), educational initiatives (cultural competency courses or new history course curriculums), recognition of historical and present successes (memorializing human rights activists or attention to modern day scholars of that community) or more platforms from which to speak (university lectures or television presence). These are some examples of tangible change that can occur when acts of *poiesis* shift perspectives to transform interpersonal relationships, hence shaping the sociopolitical environment to better a particular community's situation.

This aligns with the *poietic* shaping of a landscape with the intent to raise awareness and build solidarity. When describing the sport *parkour* in urban areas, Potter (2019) describes *poiesis* as a way in which one creates meaning by interacting with the environment, where *poiesis* "emerges out of the embodied experience of reconfiguring space" (p. 7). Reconfiguring a landscape to raise awareness and solidarity is a primary goal of graffiti, in which the artist and the audience engage in a dialogue. Christensen and Thor (2017) write that graffiti is powerful not only for the viewer, but also the graffitist, where "solidarity felt through the creation and sharing of the art is linked to the fundamental notion that there are no pre-requisites for either production or consumption" (p. 603). Graffiti offers a unique method in which to establish a "translocally and globally connected sense of space-molding" (p. 588), where open-mindedness, connection, support, and engagement are aesthetically expressed on the walls of public spaces. Shaping the urban landscape into an atmosphere that challenges injustices and systemic issues outlined above while promoting togetherness, peace, and social action is a *poietic* act, one that invites engagement by all involved.

However, there appear to be numerous obstacles to be addressed considering the phenomenon of graffiti tourism and the potential misrepresentation and appropriation of space, as outlined in the previous chapter regarding tourists and global street artists in Palestine. Questions regarding graffiti's impact on building solidarity and raising awareness are complicated due to the phenomenon of tourists, international street artists, and/or international arts-based non-profit organizations and NGOs visiting areas of conflict to create artwork. This phenomenon is not exclusive to Palestine. More tourists are traveling to Northern Ireland to write their own messages on the peace walls of Belfast

while being escorted by a tour guide from Black Cab Tours, a company that offers "unbiased" tours of Belfast that include the coastline of Northern Ireland, historical sites, and a close look at the peace walls constructed since the Troubles (www.blackcabtours.co.uk). Graffiti as retaliation and remembrance between political factions and communities in Northern Ireland still occurs, such as in the case of the friends of murdered journalist Lyra McKee placing red handprints on the side of the Saoradh's headquarters, the Republican group responsible for her murder, who later painted over the handprints (Hall, 2019). However, the tourist fascination with the murals has led to some communities in Northern Ireland seizing an opportunity for "Troubles tourism," creating more tension in the region due to disagreements on the ethics of advertising a history of pain and violence that is still very much alive. The massive peace wall on Shankill Road has become one of Northern Ireland's most popular tourist attractions, and due to tourists taking the opportunity to write their own messages of hope on the wall alongside the existing murals, signs have been erected in some locations that read "Please respect artwork" (ConnollyCove, 2017). This parallels with concerns expressed by Palestinian activists, as the surge of graffiti tourism could potentially complicate graffiti's original function of resistance and education. Graffiti-making by tourists raises additional questions as to how locals respond to what could be perceived as intrusions upon their space, particularly if they respond creatively, which would fall under the active shaping of the environment and capacity to act aspect of *poiesis*.

No other context experiences such extreme levels of outsider graffiti-making as in the case of Palestine, hence the choice of examining the West Bank Barrier and graffiti tourism to better understand how graffiti is not only an act of resistance, but how

internationals are participating in the creative shaping of the political landscape. The inclusion of international graffiti-making has potentially shifted the function of graffiti in this context and the dynamics in the relationship between internationals and Palestinian locals, in both positive and negative ways. Palestinian attitudes towards graffiti participation by outsiders could influence how they physically interact with the wall and shape how graffiti continues to be used as a method of resistance. It is important to examine the current function of graffiti in this context and the intent behind its use, as the wall continues to be an active spot of creative expression in a setting that remains volatile yet popular among tourists. In Palestine, the graffiti could be adding a new level of visual impact to increase the power of activist and solidarity movements by shaping the West Bank Barrier into a global message board calling for freedom, solidarity, and justice. As Oshinski (2018) explains it, through graffiti, artists and locals can "transform a structure designed to oppress and silence into a mouthpiece for freedom and creative agency" (p.32).

This active shaping of social environments through graffiti could offer insight on how *poiesis* can be used as a theoretical framework in understanding graffiti's role in conflict transformation, specifically revolutionary efforts by a community to creatively shift public perceptions towards a more inclusive and equitable society. *Poiesis* as a theoretical framework can help understand not only how graffiti is being used by the Palestinian community as a method of resistance and maintaining hope for future change, but also can help elucidate Palestinian responses to international graffiti participation and graffiti tourism, as well as how their graffiti impacts international viewers. The case of Palestine will act as a glimpse into how creatively altering a physical landscape can potentially help communities make large scale, tangible changes to political atmospheres

and public perceptions. Through the lens of both conflict transformation and *poiesis* as

theoretical frameworks, graffiti will be examined to determine its potential for shifting

perspectives of various actors involved in graffiti-making on the West Bank Barrier.

Graffiti could potentially be useful in transforming perspectives of internationals who visit

Palestinians, which, if successful, could have a significant impact on raising awareness of

the Palestinian situation and creating a stronger solidarity movement around the globe.

CHAPTER III

Methodology: Fieldwork, Online Research, & Ethics

The methodology of this project consists of ethnographic research complemented with a systematic literature review which was conducted to gather information from a wide array of primary and secondary sources on Palestinian perspectives regarding the West Bank Barrier, graffiti, and graffiti tourism. The purpose of conducting in-depth literary research was to provide a holistic window into the perspectives and responses of Palestinian locals to graffiti tourism through direct quotes, digitally published works (such as academic articles), activists' statements from human rights organizations, news outlets, online videos, tour group websites, educational institution websites and statements, and artworks by local artists. The goal of this research is to not only collect Palestinian perspectives on graffiti tourism, but also what Palestinian actions are occurring regarding graffiti tourism via physically interacting with international graffiti and/or marketing the wall and its graffiti to make a profit where possible. Additional information sought after were tourist, international artist, and Israeli perspectives in order to shed light on these populations as they are usually less represented in media interviews and scholarly works. Including these perspectives in this paper presents contrasting information that could highlight potential dissonance regarding motivations for participating in or refraining from making graffiti on the wall, and perceived benefits and/or consequences of the graffiti itself.

3.1 <u>Ethnography</u>

Ethnographic research is a descriptive methodology that is used to study specific

cultures and social groups, and societal structures as a whole (Prus, 1996). The core

approach of this method is the long-term immersion of the researcher into the culture or

environment of interest to get a direct, authentic experience. The researcher's role is as an

active observer and participant in the daily lives of specific people, gaining a more

expansive and in-depth view of the culture to increase understanding (Hammersley &

Atkinson, 1983). Ethnographic research is useful in developing a clearer picture of cultural

norms such as customs and rituals, social patterns, and hierarchical structures because the

direct immersion of the researcher and interaction with individuals and communities

removes potential filters such as surveys or interviews in data collection.

Though ethnographic research is helpful for expanding knowledge of a particular

culture, it is inherently limited as the researcher is most often an outsider who is unfamiliar

with that culture and is limited by their own perspectives, experiences, and assumptions. As

such, it is of the utmost importance that researchers recognize potential biases and

preconceived notions they may have and be active in understanding their positionality

throughout the entirety of the project as outside researchers to ensure accurate

representation of the culture they are studying. Creating a more thorough and authentic

representation of important nuances otherwise unknown to outsiders is only possible

through centralizing the voices of those who are indigenous to the specific context. This is

the goal of this study, as it evaluates the appropriation of space from Palestinian locals by

international graffiti artists and tourists, and themes of power, privilege, and colonialism

are addressed. Graffiti on the West Bank Barrier is a method of resistance used by

Palestinians and a way in which to raise awareness of the impacts of the occupation on their lives. It is of key importance to center this study around their perspectives and responses to international graffiti participation and to explore their thoughts on whether graffiti tourism is helping or hindering their cause, considering it is often international graffiti that is featured in media coverage.

Ethnographic research conducted for this project includes five trips to the region that were specific to the West Bank Barrier. During this time, I obtained photographs on the ground and conducted informal interviews with Palestinian residents who work in the fields of therapy, arts, education and academia, and conflict resolution. These interviews not only provided in-depth insight about the wall and its graffiti directly from Palestinians living in the areas chosen as focal points for this research, but also inspired new questions about graffiti tourism as a phenomenon and the broad range of Palestinian responses to international artists and tourists making graffiti in these spaces. One international street artist was interviewed as well. These informal interviews were conducted primarily in March and April of 2016, April 2019, and July 2019.

I spent two months living in both Ramallah and the A-Ram/Qalandiya region in the spring of 2016, an experience that influenced this current project with constant interactions with the wall and its impact, up close exposure to existing graffiti, and interactions with local artists. I also traveled to the region in the summers of 2016 and 2017 to visit the West Bank, learn more about the wall, learn intermediate Arabic, and to strengthen relationships with Palestinian contacts. I made multiple trips specifically to Bethlehem in 2019 to spend time examining the graffiti on the wall and speaking to peace workers, an international graffiti artist, and researchers. The Walled Off Hotel was visited twice to observe tourists

and their interactions with the high volume of the graffiti on the nearby wall. Additionally, I also visited Ras Khamis and Shu'afat refugee camp in 2019 to learn about the wall's impact and speak to a humanitarian worker who works in the area. The lack of graffiti on the wall in this area was a striking contrast to the other three areas, where graffiti by both locals and internationals is a growing phenomenon. A Ramallah-based professor was also spoken to about the wall and the lack of graffiti in Ras Khamis. My experience in Abu Dis was very minimal, and, with only one brief visit to the city in 2016, the information in this paper is mostly reliant on online research to represent this area.

After field research to these locations in the West Bank was conducted, I concluded that Bethlehem would be the primary focus of this project. While graffiti is present in all but one of the four locations, Bethlehem has by far the highest tourist traffic, hence the need by many graffiti artists to place their work in this area. Bethlehem is mostly visited by religious tourists seeking to visit the Church of the Nativity, but Banksy's Walled Off Hotel has caught the attention of many prospective tourists and has redirected much of the tourist traffic towards Checkpoint 300 and that stretch of the wall. Bethlehem has also provided the most opportunity for Palestinians to market the graffiti in a way that could potentially curb the impact the wall has had on the local economy. Due to these factors, the majority of information taken from online sources will be focused on Bethlehem, its residents, and visitors to the city. Organizations, artists, activists, and other actors in Bethlehem and the immediate surrounding areas such as Beit Jala and Beit Sahour will be investigated for information on graffiti tourism. Regardless of the fact that Bethlehem has received by far the most media and academic coverage, the choice to focus on Bethlehem is also based on the hope to discover new information regarding Palestinian creative responses to

international graffiti such as corrections and additions to existing graffiti, marketing, and

defacing, as well as to explore international perspectives on making graffiti on the wall.

This is information that, to my knowledge, is scarce in academic literature.

According to Hammersley (2006), ethnographic research is sometimes met with

mixed reactions from the global research community:

> …some ethnographers tend to treat what they observe in the situations they study as if this
> can be assumed to be typical of what always happens there. And there are several reasons
> why this may not be the case. An obvious one is the danger of reactivity, that our own
> behaviour affects what we are studying, and that this will lead us to misunderstand what
> normally happens in the setting. This is especially likely if we only spend a relatively small
> amount of time there. But it is also important to remember that what goes on in any
> situation changes over time. Some of these changes are cyclical, in shorter and/or longer-
> term patterns. (p. 5)

Hammersley explains that there is disagreement on whether the ethnographer should

"locate what is being studied in the context of the wider society, or whether instead he or

she should concentrate on studying in great detail what people do in particular local

contexts" (p. 6). With today's heavy use of technology, researchers are increasingly using

virtual or online ethnography, raising major concerns within the wider research community

due to the lack of in-person, face-to-face contact or cultural exposure conducted by the

researcher and the reliance on what information is provided solely by previously

documented interviews (p. 9). Without complete immersion into a culture or environment

for a significant period of time, a researcher attempting to gain an in-depth understanding

could potentially overlook key characteristics unique to that context and therefore would be

less likely to get nuanced information to create an accurate representation when presenting

the collected data. However, while online research cannot act as a legitimate substitution

for first-hand experience, it can be argued that ethnographic research accompanied by existing online data such as documented interviews and primary sources featuring the population of interest can offer a more holistic picture by allowing the ethnographer to fill in potential gaps missed during time spent in the region. To be sure that the information in this thesis is as accurate as possible, my ethnographic research is complemented by a qualitative systematic literature review, including primary and secondary sources, to fill in gaps I was unable to explore further due to global travel restrictions in place because of COVID-19.

3.2. The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on this Research Project

As of the beginning of 2020, I was preparing to travel for field work purposes; however, the pandemic's arrival in February of 2020 proved to be a major setback in this research initiative. I worked to adapt to the challenges of COVID-19, most specifically the inability to travel to the region of focus. As it was originally designed, the project required numerous in-person interviews from locals as well as tourists. Due to the pandemic, tourism in the region had almost entirely ceased. Interviews could not be conducted online due to security reasons – there have been numerous instances of reported Israeli surveillance overreach that were likely to cause hesitancy and could put interviewees at risk (Regev, 2019). I decided to wait several months to see how coronavirus developments would unfold, with the hopes that by autumn of 2021, travel to the region would be possible. Given that during the desired time to conduct fieldwork (June 2020 – December 2021) the Delta and Omicron variants became dominant and were still challenging vaccines (a report by the Washington Post on August 18th, 2021 reported that about 60% of those

hospitalized in Israel with COVID infections were vaccinated, leading the country to consider a new lockdown) and considering the low vaccination rate in the Palestinian Territories, it was determined that it was still not safe, productive, or ethical to return to the region at the time, and likely not for the foreseeable future. As such, I came to the decision to alter the project in such a manner that removed the need for additional fieldwork while still maintaining the integrity of the project.

Foregoing additional fieldwork was not ideal since one of the key foci for the project was to amplify Palestinian voices by directly interviewing and asking them questions that are not often asked in known interviews. As I do not want to impose my own views on the matter, nor speak for the Palestinian people, another method was to investigate Palestinian thoughts and opinions that have already been documented either in books or online through interviews, film clips, and works by Palestinian artists, scholars, and activists. The same approach was used for Israeli, international artist, and tourist perspectives, but there is not as much existing documentation on such attitudes towards graffiti on the West Bank Barrier.

This approach lays the foundation for a future project in which Palestinians are asked questions about what they would find helpful regarding tourism and graffiti on the wall. To the best of my knowledge, they are not often asked such questions, nor provided a platform in the Westernized world in which they can address tourists or international artists directly. Tourists, international artists, and Israelis can be also included in direct interviews about the graffiti – their thoughts on its benefits or consequences, how it impacts the conflict, etc. This information would be helpful in learning the motivations for international graffiti participation, the perceived effectiveness of graffiti and graffiti tourism as resistance, and

future steps towards using graffiti to protest injustice and build international solidarity without the graffiti losing its power as a resistance method or demeaning the Palestinian locals, for whom the graffitied wall is part of their everyday lives.

3.3 Online Research Methodology: A Qualitative Systematic Literature Review

It was determined that the online research methodology best suited for this thesis was in the style of a qualitative systematic literature review. This highly critical method is more in-depth and focused than a traditional, narrative literature review in that it is specific to the researcher's main questions rather than providing background information, existing work, and gaps in scholarship (Rother, 2007). Data is primarily found by searching established scholarly databases, usually medical or scientific in nature (Xiao & Watson, 2017). Shaffril, Samsuddin, and Samah (2021) point to the need for more scholarship on the systematic literature review in non-health fields, where qualitative evidence is often at the forefront. However, in 2013, the Cochrane Collaboration, the body that created the reputable Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews, published its first qualitative systematic literature review (Gülmezoglu et. al., 2013). This broadened the methodology to include new data analyses, though it still is primarily used in health fields. As this thesis is strictly qualitative, the databases used to locate data were Google, Google Image, Google Scholar, travel sites, and news site search engines.

Another reason for choosing qualitative systematic literature review methodology for this thesis is the time required to conduct such an in-depth literature search. Though rapid and scoping literature reviews are more in-depth and critical than narrative literature reviews, they traditionally are done quickly to examine existing literature and determine if there is a need for a more thorough systematic review (Grant & Booth, 2009). Data

collection for this thesis included several long-term field trips to Palestine, as well as four years of in-depth online research. Systematic literature reviews ensure low publication and selection biases through a thorough search of as many sources as possible on specific research questions, explaining the time required to complete such a search. In the case of this thesis, this method allowed me to maintain a tight frame that focused specifically on my research questions pertaining to Palestinian responses to graffiti on the West Bank Barrier while being open enough to search numerous, varying online sources, resulting in a nuanced data set with differing opinions and actions. Noblit and Hare (1988) describe two main ways in which to synthesize data in qualitative searches: aggregate and interpretive. Whereas aggregate synthesizing summarizes the data, the interpretive approach breaks data down into themes and/or constructs (Grant & Booth, 2009). This approach aims to "interpret the data, and from that interpretation, new understandings can develop that may lead to development of a theory that helps us to understand or predict behaviour" (Seers, 2015). As one of the main questions in this thesis pertains to expanding *poiesis* as a framework in the field of conflict studies by understanding Palestinian behavior towards international graffiti making, the interpretive approach to analyzing data was conducted. Additionally, the scope of this project includes numerous locations, stakeholders, and graffiti styles, which warranted categorization of this data into organized themes for further analysis.

According to the Cochrane Collaboration (Lefebvre *et. al.,* 2023), given the critical nature of conducting a systematic literary search, the researcher should reference all data discovered in the search to minimize potential bias. This includes a very transparent and consistent explanation of the researcher's exclusion criteria and why specific information

was omitted in the final data set. This is largely referring to articles that are either low on reliability or validity, or data that appears to be fraudulent. Due to the minimal academic research on Palestinian creative responses to international graffiti, a substantial portion of this thesis is comprised of blogs, opinion pieces, and social media posts, all of which lack scholarly standards for reliability and validity. However, this information was collected in addition to a foundation of peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and reputable news sources. Information that fit exclusion criteria were websites that led me to a single photograph of graffiti with little or no explanation, duplicate sites (i.e. sites that copy a story directly from a separate news source verbatim), and the majority of travel blogs by tourists. Though I included some travel blogs in this thesis, there were far too many to include them all. As to not clog this paper, I only chose travel blogs in which the tourist specifically writes about their thoughts on the graffiti in Palestine, as many blogs include photographs but do not go into depth about their experiences with the graffiti. Many other blogs mention a tour through Bethlehem but write mostly about the Palestinian food, culture, and their thoughts on the conflict. Other than these exceptions, I included almost everything that I could find on the subject of graffiti in Palestine and graffiti tourism in this thesis. I did not exclude any sources that specifically addressed this thesis' specific research questions and was sure to search a wide range of news sites with known differing political stances as to gather a spectrum of opinions. Only articles written in or translated to English were included in this study.

3.4 <u>Sources of Online Data Collection</u>

      To best capture an accurate depiction of perspectives about graffiti and graffiti tourism, this project will rely heavily on quotes directly from those interviewed by various sources or who have written their own works about the subject matter. This was done by extensively searching for interviews, quotes, statements, academic articles or books, and artworks on websites of universities, human rights organizations and NGOs, travel blogs and tourism sites, professional sites of artists and activists, social media pages and public accounts, and news sites both international and domestic. For clarity, this paper distinguishes between graffiti tourism and graffiti making. For the purposes of this paper, graffiti tourism is the phenomenon in which internationals visit the region to view the graffiti on the wall as part of a tourist experience, whether they make graffiti themselves or not. Graffiti-making is actively painting the wall, which includes both locals and internationals. This search hopes to present as accurate a representation as possible of the following: Palestinian thoughts and opinions on graffiti on the wall, graffiti tourism, and international street artist and tourist graffiti; Palestinian artists' arguments for or against painting the wall, either by locals or internationals; the perspectives of international street artists and tourists who come to view and/or paint graffiti; perspectives of Israelis should this information be available; how Palestinians creatively interact with international graffiti; and, if possible, any evidence of what Palestinians would hope to see happen in the future for graffiti tourism, whether it be collaboration with internationals, additional educational factors in tourism, or no tourism or graffiti participation at all. This project was open to any and all perspectives found both in informal field interviews and in the online search to try to accurately reflect the rhetoric on the ground involving graffiti and tourism.

The use of news articles is important, as many outlets interview the same activists and artists in the region and gather statements on their views on tourist presence. Internationally popular news sites were searched for articles on graffiti on the West Bank Barrier and if any Palestinian locals were interviewed in the process. Some news outlets from the Westernized world included in this online search were The New York Times, BBC, The Washington Post, Reuters, The Economist, and The Guardian. Many Western news outlets, however, tend to write from a relatively dispassionate perspective of graffiti on the wall, or sometimes focus on the author's perspective and personal opinions of the situation. News articles from Middle Eastern news outlets tend to offer more nuanced representations of the Palestinian perspective and often a notably more critical view of graffiti tourism and international involvement. As such, Middle Eastern news sites such as Al-Jazeera, Middle East Eye, Middle East Monitor, and Al-Monitor were included in the research process. More specifically, Palestinian news and opinion sites were of the utmost importance when searching for viewpoints relating to Palestinian responses to graffiti by both locals and internationals. Sites included in the search were The Electric Intifada, Al-Hurriya (news from the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) perspective), the Palestine Chronicle, and the Palestine News Network.

Information from additional institutions were included in the search, such as statements from universities and research institutes in the West Bank such as Bethlehem University, government-affiliated organizations such as the Ministry of Tourism, and peace organizations such as the Wi'am Center in Bethlehem. Humanitarian and human rights organizations were also analyzed, such as the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and the American Near East Refugee Aid

(ANERA). Though these two organizations are not solely run by Palestinian actors, they provide services in Bethlehem and have strong relationships with Palestinian leaders on the ground. The websites of all these groups will be searched for statements regarding the graffiti and tourism, as well as any academic works by Palestinian scholars, student organizations and protests, events regarding graffiti unveiling or community murals, or blogs by activists that may reveal Palestinian perspectives on this matter.

Interestingly, some sites that proved to be useful for researching the wall and its graffiti were found on the wall itself. Some human rights or watchdog organizations as well as arts or community collectives spray-painted their website addresses on the wall for passersby to see. One site, Bethlehem Ghetto (www.bethlehemghetto.blogspot.com), was a collective of both Palestinians and internationals living in Bethlehem who wanted to post their experiences living under occupation online to alert others around the world to the hardships of daily life in this environment. Not only did this site offer descriptions of Bethlehem's people and ways of life, but it also offered a list of resources around Bethlehem, such as human rights organizations, research institutes, arts organizations, international organizations, and online resources based around Bethlehem such as news organizations and blogs. Other solidarity groups, such as the Scottish Palestinian Solidarity Campaign, painted their logos and/or websites to the wall, making it easy for interested parties to find them online. Some of these sources were searched as well for statements regarding graffiti and the West Bank Barrier, though the majority of the site addresses I found were those of international groups or artists.

Much attention will be paid to Palestinian graffiti artists and their work in response to the wall and international graffiti. Many interviews with these artists are available in text

and video on Al-Jazeera and YouTube, as well as in a film documentary entitled *The Man Who Stole Banksy* (Tribeca Studios, 2018)*,* where Palestinians are interviewed about graffiti around the West Bank and the impact of Banksy's presence. Many artists have websites as well as social media accounts showcasing their work accompanied by their rationale behind the artwork's content. Some artists are more outspoken than others, such as Taqi Spateen (Bethlehem) and Ayed Arafah (Dheisheh refugee camp), and are present in numerous media outlets, particularly Al-Jazeera and street art websites, and video interviews. Other artists, particularly the ones who refuse to paint the wall at all for fear of detracting from its ugliness, tend to be less visible in news sources. I worked to search sources diligently for a wide array of Palestinian voices to accurately represent as many viewpoints as possible. However, activists and artists are the most represented in terms of international media outlets and interviews. Another goal was to include Palestinian residents from a variety of backgrounds and occupations living within the vicinity of the wall in Bethlehem, including therapists, social workers, restaurant owners, merchandise shop owners, tour guides, students, scholars, peace workers, taxi drivers, religious leaders, and if possible, those living in nearby refugee camps. Palestinians from these backgrounds are also deeply impacted by the wall and the ramifications of graffiti tourism, yet they are not included in media interviews as often as activists and artists. Their perspectives will likely vary depending on occupation, age, degree of visible interaction with the wall (i.e. graffitiing the wall or using the wall to advertise), political awareness and affiliation, how close they live to the wall, and potentially gender.

Social media has also helped provide information both in terms of interviews as well as photographs for this project. Available on Facebook are interviews with Palestinian

artists who explicitly explain their motives for painting on the wall (or not) and their thoughts on graffiti tourism and international involvement. There are also Facebook pages for international Palestinian solidarity groups who offer statements and photos of their visits to the area. Many graffiti artists not only have their own professional sites with work on the wall, but also have Instagram and Twitter accounts where their work and their fans' comments are publicly available. Several photographs were taken from these pages and accounts for research in this project. These accounts tend to be very active and sometimes even show the entire process of the art-making such as painting over another work, setting up the paint, passersby, and so forth. Twitter is useful for some international artists' work, particularly Lushsux, the prominent Australian street artist who frequents Palestine. Lushsux often posts his work on Twitter and lets his fans post input on where and which celebrity he should paint next. No information used in this project was taken from private accounts – only fully public accounts were targeted for use in this project and credit for information and photographs is accurately given.

To add contrast to the Palestinian perspectives, the opinions and thoughts of international artists, tourists, and Israelis on graffiti and graffiti tourism will be included collectively in one chapter in this paper. These perspectives are less available, and while the focus of this paper is on Palestinian reactions to graffiti, these other perspectives are nevertheless important in gaining a more in-depth understanding of all actors at play and why clashes between perspectives exist. One important source to include is international artists' professional websites. Some artists have documented their own work in Palestine and have commented on their reasoning for creatively engaging with the wall and what they hoped to accomplish. Some artists have been interviewed by international media

outlets and art blogs, or more specifically, street art blogs and websites. For example, street artist Cake$_Stencils has been interviewed by Inspiring City, a UK-based art blog that covers street art all over the globe. Other sources include international media outlets that have covered artists' visits to the region, such as the case of two Italian artists who were arrested for a collaborative mural depicting a Palestinian activist and banned from Israel for ten years. These sites include the BBC, the Washington Post, and other internationally known Western news outlets, as well as more pop culture/news websites and magazines such as Medium and Hyperallergic.

Tourists are somewhat more difficult to examine, as they are not typically interviewed by news outlets about why they visited Bethlehem, what they know about the conflict and think about the graffiti, or why they themselves chose to graffiti the wall during their visit. However, one method in which to find perspectives directly from the tourists themselves is to include blogs and travel sites. TripAdvisor highlights numerous destinations and tours popular with tourists visiting the Bethlehem region and includes testimonials and ratings. The Walled Off Hotel is listed with over 300 reviews since 2017, with many tourists describing seeing the graffiti as a "learning experience." Their praise and criticisms of both the hotel and various available tours of the wall and its graffiti can provide a small window into how tourists see the graffiti in the context of the conflict as a whole. Additionally, Banksy has quite a following of devoted, outspoken fans and many of them have travel blogs where they speak about their experience visiting his work in the West Bank. A large number of tourists who come to Bethlehem are coming to view Banksy's work up close, as well as visit his gallery located on the first floor of the Walled Off Hotel. Other tourists have general travel blogs and have entries from all over the world,

and many have made the trek to Palestine to visit Ramallah and Bethlehem to explore the graffiti on the wall during their stay.

Reviewing tourism and political/educational organizations located in Israel and Palestine also provided insight on both tourist attitudes about graffiti as well as how the graffiti is being marketed in the region. Websites of such organizations include testimonials from tourists, photos of tourists posing with graffiti in various locations, and descriptions of the tours provided and how the trips are being advertised. These tours are particularly prominent in Ramallah, Jerusalem, and Bethlehem, and are run by both Palestinian and Israeli groups. The tours are often sold as political tours, in which tourists are offered trips into politically contentious areas like refugee camps and contested religious sites, and areas of high conflict between Jewish settlers and Palestinian residents. The West Bank Barrier is often featured in these tours, with a focus on the problem checkpoints create for Palestinian laborers and the surveillance and watchtowers that Palestinians must live with daily. However, after a survey of numerous tourism businesses that offer trips to the barrier, graffiti appears to be the highlight of such trips in most locations. Most organizations specifically advertise the opportunity to see an authentic Banksy piece on the wall, usually in Ramallah or Bethlehem, while a few only mention graffiti in general. This online research did not include any of the countless independent tour guides, mostly based in the Ramallah area.

Additionally, there are several Israeli political tours that are offered by Israeli human rights organizations B'Tselem, Breaking the Silence, and Ir Amim. These tours give tourists as well as curious Israelis (who for the most part cannot enter the West Bank for the other tours) the chance to learn about the conflict more on the Israeli side of the wall,

including issues of housing rights for Palestinians in East Jerusalem and how the wall has separated families on either side. As graffiti is significantly less common on the Israeli side of the wall, information from these sources was expected to be less abundant, though one exception can provide insight. Known as the al-Ezariyah Divide, a small space on the wall near a checkpoint in Abu Dis is covered in graffiti by tourists and some Israelis on the Israeli side of the wall. This space could provide a unique collection of perspectives regarding graffiti and tourism from an Israeli location, though it was expected that information on this location will be scarce.

While Israeli perspectives on the West Bank Barrier itself is readily available from the thoughts of politicians, lawyers, human rights activists, and peace workers, Israeli thoughts on its graffiti and graffiti tourism is significantly more difficult to find. Israeli thoughts on the attention the graffiti is getting from the international community, graffiti content, and graffiti tourism and the Walled Off Hotel are not included in most articles, let alone the inclusion of Israeli artists graffitiing the wall themselves. Due to restrictions on Israeli travel through various parts of the West Bank, many Israelis likely have to rely on secondary sources such as military acquaintances and images online to see the graffiti taking place out of their sight. Some Israeli sources of interest were Ha'aretz and +972 (both left-leaning news sites that feature both Israeli and Palestinian columnists), the Jerusalem Post, and the Times of Israel. Additionally, Israeli activist sites will be investigated for statements regarding the graffiti and the wall. Sources included will be human rights groups like Ir Amim, B'Tselem, and Breaking the Silence. More conservative and far-right views on graffiti were very difficult to find due to lack of interest in graffiti. These organizations tend to be focused primarily on expanding settlements, strengthening

security measures for Israeli citizens, opposing Jewish assimilation and inter-racial

marriage, and gaining more political power in the Knesset (Israeli government). As to

provide a variety of Israeli perspectives, quotes from Israelis not explicitly affiliated with

any political or ideological group were searched for as well.

This project also conducts a graffiti analysis that examines graffiti content, location,

and authorship. Throughout my ethnographic field visits, numerous photographs were

collected in A-Ram, Qalandiya, and Ramallah, but especially Bethlehem where the graffiti

is most abundant and tourist traffic is highest. However, graffiti changes rapidly on a daily

basis in many areas, and unless one is on the ground for a long period of time, it is easy to

miss new graffiti that appears. As such, in addition to many photographs taken by me

directly, online sources provided information both before and after my time in the region,

such as murals that have long ago been painted over and the work of artists who painted the

wall in 2020 and 2021. The Google search engine in particular has been helpful in

providing resources that have updated photos of new graffiti not seen during my last visit to

the region, directing me to photographs from graffiti blogs such as Inspiring City, news

sites such as Al-Jazeera, and more scholarly sites such as The Arts Journal. It also helped

locate graffiti photographs from unexpected sources such as shopping websites like

Pinterest. They also were useful in showing where graffiti was being added to the wall

during the pandemic, which was important to examine due to the near total cessation of

tourism in the region, and therefore, a significant drop in international graffiti participation.

All photographs in this paper taken by me during my field research are listed with location

and date taken. Photographs taken from other sources are labeled with location, date, and

credited to the photographer or source.

The purpose of conducting a thorough analysis of graffiti content and authorship is to get a closer look at attitudes, symbolism, and intent behind the artwork. In other words, who is making the graffiti and what message the graffiti is trying to convey. Unless the work is signed or has some other identifying information, the former will be mostly hypothetical, as most graffiti is anonymous, and one can only deduce authorship by way of context clues. This will be explicit throughout the project – if authorship is known, credit will be given; if authorship is assumed or unknown, this will be addressed as such. Graffiti content includes a wide variety of imagery and texts, including but not limited to: Palestinian symbols; texts in numerous languages from all over the world; flags and other national symbols; religious artwork mostly of Westernized religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) and nearby holy sites; maps; pop icons and cartoons; dystopian figures and dismembered characters; animals; women; children in dangerous situations; political figures and celebrities; and Palestinian political prisoners and martyrs. This content is crammed together on long stretches of the wall, most notably in Bethlehem, where the majority of this graffiti analysis is conducted. An analysis of graffiti content present on the wall is important given Palestinian responses to international artists' and tourists' choices of imagery, whether it is culturally inappropriate, cultural appropriation, irrelevant to the context, or toxic.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

Due to ongoing tensions within the region, ethical considerations needed to be carefully addressed. I adhered to the ethics code established by the Trinity College Dublin Faculty Ethics Committee. The project proposal was submitted for the research ethics

review process, and I ensure strict adherence to ethics board rules. Any problems that arose during implementation of the research were immediately addressed. As graffiti participation on the West Bank Barrier is considered illegal by the Israeli government, steps were taken to protect the confidentiality of those interviewed informally to avoid possible retribution. All names and information regarding informal interviews of locals conducted by me in the region were changed to protect privacy and ensure anonymity. Any real names used in this thesis were found on publicly accessible websites, social media accounts, and news articles. Data was handled based on Trinity College's ethics and data management protocol as per the School of Religion's research ethics committee.

3.6 <u>Reflexivity</u>

Due to the sensitive nature of this study, reflexivity was practiced throughout the duration of this project to uphold research ethics and reduce potential biases. Reflexivity attempts to address issues of gender biases, power dynamics, and cultural blind spots by the researcher, especially when working in international contexts (Sultana, 2007). Ethnographic research seeks to minimize this dilemma by attempting to represent participants through their own words rather than the researcher speaking for them. However, due to the strict limitations imposed on this study by COVID-19 and additional travel to the region, the original formal interviews to be conducted with targeted populations had to be set aside.

One theme in this study is the concern that Palestinian voices are being overshadowed by internationals, so it was important this study did not repeat this concern. My own positionality as a foreign researcher needed to be recognized to address power

relations and biases that could have impacted this study. As an American citizen in peace studies, I am acutely aware of how U.S. policies have further jeopardized the peace process in the region. I have never experienced animosity from Palestinians based on my citizenship, but nonetheless was open to potential skepticism or resentment from Palestinians I spoke to regarding my background as not only an American, but as a Western researcher. I did my best to keep my biases in mind when speaking about American tourists who make graffiti but may be unaware of the wall's impact on Palestinian life and tried to represent all perspectives and actions without judgment. Similarly, my arts education has emphasized the importance of thorough assessment of risks when working with symbolically potent materials (i.e. the arts) in marginalized communities. As such, the same approach in recognizing my biases and personal opinions applied towards international artists who use the wall for media attention without assessing the impact of their actions.

Western appropriation is a major element of this study; therefore, I recognized my Western research background and was diligent in ensuring nuanced representation of all involved. Though the term "Israeli-Palestinian conflict" is perhaps the most globally used term to address the current state of the region, the majority of Palestinians reject the term – to them, this is a military occupation imposed on them by Israel, not a two-sided conflict. As such, I do not use the term "Israeli-Palestinian conflict" to describe the Israeli occupation, though the general term "conflict" is present throughout this paper, as it is sometimes used by Palestinians interviewed by media outlets to refer to the situation as a whole, including the wall, Israeli military presence, house demolitions, struggle for independence, family separation, etc.

I also understand the exhaustion felt by some Palestinians of having yet another Western researcher interested in their experiences. Many Palestinian activists feel that Palestine has too often become an exotic research subject without regard for the wellbeing and richness of its people. I wrote this thesis with this in mind, and it was my sincerest intent to not only accurately represent the complexity and nuances of Palestinian perspectives on this matter, but to challenge those internationals with backgrounds similar to mine to be more aware of and sensitive to the impact their presence and actions may have on an environment and culture that is not their own.

3.7 Gender

It was important to look at the topic of gender in the context of graffiti, as it is an overwhelmingly male-dominated field. Female Palestinian street artists are both less common and tend to be less visible in the public sphere than male artists. However, there are Palestinian women who have attempted to promote social change through graffiti, specifically for women's rights. Numerous sites were searched for female perspectives on both graffiti in general and the work of female graffiti artists themselves. Islamic law in Palestinian society heavily influences cultural norms that can restrict women's movement and socializing outside the home, limiting opportunities for some women to participate in creative movements. Due to all the aforementioned factors, it was expected that more male voices would be included in this paper, particularly when it comes to artists themselves. While opinions of female activists and educators on graffiti tourism are somewhat accessible, finding direct quotes from Palestinian women who are street artists directly marking the wall proved to be difficult and limited.

This project aimed to be gender inclusive by using a non-binary framework to remain open to how interviewees and those quoted in existing media interviews chose to identify gender. However, LGBTQ+ voices included in this study were also limited due to homosexuality and transsexuality being taboo in Palestinian culture. As such, the data is skewed towards cisgendered male Palestinian participants, though this varied somewhat among locations. More young female perspectives were present in the Jerusalem and Abu Dis regions. A-Ram did not turn out as many female perspectives as it seems somewhat more conservative than the other two areas.

Based on my research, this gender discrepancy did not appear to be an issue with tourist graffiti making, but is present with international graffiti artists, who also tend to be men. There are reports of some female international graffiti artists who have visited Bethlehem and Abu Dis, but information on these artists was rather difficult to find. When visiting the region, I have witnessed fairly balanced gender representation (male/female) in terms of tourists.

3.8 Photograph Data Analysis

When in the target areas, I came into very close contact with the wall in a number of ways, including walking along its path, accompanying a Palestinian contact by foot or car, on a Palestinian shuttle bus, and being stuck at and passing through checkpoints. When traveling by foot, primarily in Bethlehem, Ramallah, and A-Ram, I was able to take up close photographs of graffiti on the wall and on watchtowers. Checkpoints are more difficult to photograph given the high military presence, though I was able to gather some visual data on Checkpoint 300 and Qalandiya Checkpoint. When in the car, I took

photographs as well as videos to capture as much graffiti as possible. These instances took place more in the countryside, like outside of Abu Dis and Ramallah and near al-Ezariyah. As graffiti is publicly accessible and there is no sensitive information to be protected in photographing the images themselves, these photographs have been kept in designated folders on my personal laptop and external USB drives.

Once over 350 photographs were taken, a significant amount of time was spent examining details of graffiti images. This includes potential authorship, graffiti location (city/town), graffiti placement (base of wall, watchtower, etc.), whether graffiti was tagged, painted over, or added to, if graffiti was placed on top of existing graffiti, any accompanying text with images, and graffiti content, including image, tone, message, and potential intended audience. I conducted the same examination with photographs collected from online resources and several picture books extensively documenting the wall's graffiti, such as *Facing the Wall: The Palestinian-Israeli Barriers* by Shalem and Wolf (2011) and Parry's (2011) *Against the Wall: The Art of Resistance in Palestine*. When examining text graffiti, I focused mainly on whether it was part of a larger image, but also looked at text that dominated space or was clearly directed at a particular image, such as a second artist commenting on an existing piece. I considered what language the text was in and translated it when I was able via Google Translate, though the majority of graffiti in Bethlehem was in English. Other graffiti in different languages were already translated in photobooks and online articles. The exception to the use of Google Translate is when I happened to be in Palestine with a contact who could translate Arabic graffiti for me on the spot. The textual analysis in particular was useful in understanding the amount of traffic of foreign visitors in the region, as it is easier for them to write on the wall than to take the

time to stencil artwork or paint murals. It also revealed the types of messages tourists are writing on the wall, ranging from basic tagging to prayers to calls for justice.

This analysis, along with the help of Palestinian contacts, provided me with solid examples of particular graffiti that helped to connect which messages Palestinians often point to when praising or criticizing international graffiti. Examining photographs from the wall over a period of seven years allowed me to witness how the graffiti changed in terms of content, such as what had been erased and added, as well as graffiti relevant to political situations, such as the pandemic or the death of George Floyd, that I could not witness in person but had access to up-to-date online images. The analysis also enabled me to make the most informed conclusions on the intent of the graffiti and its artists as well as authorship when not explicitly available.

3.9 <u>Areas of Interest and Fieldwork (2016-2019)</u>

Field work was conducted between the years of 2016 – 2019, though my experience in the region extends back to 2012. In the next section, a brief background for each location of interest for this thesis will be given, as well as my specific ethnographic experience in those areas. As noted earlier, the one exception to my extensive field study is Abu Dis. Abu Dis has been included as an area of interest in this paper – its high levels of contention between Israelis and Palestinians and its political significance have made it a location abundant in graffiti by both local and international artists. However, I was unable to spend the desired amount of time in this location, thus the vast majority of information regarding graffiti in Abu Dis is based on remote research. The following sections outline a brief history and political relevance of each target location and my field work when in the area.

3.9.1 *Abu Dis*

The city of Abu Dis has been severed from East Jerusalem by the barrier since 2003 (Hanauer, 2011). Before the wall, Abu Dis had a spectacular view across the valley to Jerusalem's Old City and the Dome of the Rock, less than 3km away. Now, these holy places, as well as markets, schools, and hospitals are out of reach due to the wall and the permit system, though many of the city's residents hold a blue permit card that confirms Jerusalem residency status. There are future plans for Abu Dis and neighboring al-Ezariyah to be surrounded by a wall to include the large Jewish settlement of Ma'ale Adumim onto the "Israeli" side. This is the largest settlement in the West Bank and already surrounds Abu Dis and al-Ezariyah with satellite settlements that are attached and land set aside for development, also known as area E1. The E1 Plan comprises of a Jewish housing plan that would fill and connect the land between Ma'ale Adumim and Palestinian East Jerusalem, and essentially split the West Bank into two large halves. The wall built in this area "combined with the E1 Plan would effectively destroy the geographical and economic viability of a future Palestinian state" (Dolphin, 2006, p. 134). Abu Dis has been a political token for international peace efforts, in which various actors have failed to persuade Palestinian leadership into substituting East Jerusalem with Abu Dis as their preferred capital of a future state. The issue has become highly charged for Palestinians since May 2018 when US President Donald Trump overturned decades of diplomatic consensus by moving the U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem (BBC, 2020). The move was condemned by Palestinians and most countries as it officially recognized Jerusalem as Israel's capital, abandoning years of efforts in the peace process.

Tensions have risen in recent years between IDF soldiers and Palestinian youth due to increased military raids on the Abu Dis al-Quds University campus (Jaradat, 2013; Middle East Eye, 2018). The university fought a prolonged battle to prevent the wall from annexing most of its land – in the end, about a third was lost and the wall runs through the campus. In protest, many Palestinian youth and artists have covered the concrete with Arabic poetry, messages of resilience, and murals of now out-of-reach Jerusalem. Some graffiti make references to violations of Judaic principles clearly aimed at Israelis, such as "ISRAEL: THOU SHALL NOT STEAL STILL APPLIES" (Parry, 2011). While the West Bank side of the wall in Abu Dis is decorated with artworks by Palestinian locals and international artists, most tourist graffiti is on the Israeli side on what is referred to as the Abu Dis and al-Ezariyah divide (Larkin, 2014). Israeli peace organizations such as Bat Shalom and Ir Amim conduct educational tours of the wall near Abu Dis for Israelis and internationals alike, many of whom carry along spray paint or markers for the occasion (Hanauer, 2011). Here, one can find a sea of graffiti expressing international solidarity, such as "Scotland supports Palestine" or "Algeria is with Palestine, Freedom *inshallah*" (Arabic for "God-willing") (Olberg, 2011; Larkin, 2014).

Abu Dis is an important location to examine for several reasons. Graffiti on both sides of the wall is rare, making Abu Dis a unique location to study interactions between all graffiti participants. This raises the question of who the intended audience is for each group, as Abu Dis could be reaching a wider audience because both sides of the wall are used. Additionally, Abu Dis is the only area in this study where most graffiti are not located by a nearby checkpoint, and could potentially offer a contrast in graffiti participation,

though the graffiti done by internationals on the Israeli side of the wall does occur near a checkpoint.

3.9.2 *A-Ram and Qalandiya Checkpoint*

A-Ram is a town that is part of the Ramallah governorate, just north of Jerusalem. As of 2004, an 8-meter-high wall runs along Jerusalem's municipality line which lands directly on A-Ram's main road (Kershner, 2005). The wall surrounds A-Ram from three sides, severing it from its neighboring villages while its northeastern side is flanked by encroaching Jewish settlements. Roughly half of A-Ram's residents hold Jerusalem residency cards, but once the barrier was completed access to Jerusalem was essentially lost (Backmann, 2010). This includes Jerusalem's hospitals, where 95% of A-Ram's women gave birth, and major complications in crossing checkpoints to Jerusalem are frequent (B'Tselem, 2017). Many students have lost access to schools that lie just across the barrier, while many shop owners have had to lay off most employees or close down entirely as a result of restricted movement for customers from East Jerusalem or other nearby West Bank towns. Selling property has become exceedingly difficult due to the inability to get decent prices because of the crumbling economy and poor living conditions. As a result, A-Ram has largely deteriorated into abandoned buildings, neglected plots, and deserted streets (Kershner, 2005). The wall also separates adjacent Qalandiya refugee camp from Qalandiya village, further worsening conditions for its residents and is a point of contention. Qalandiya checkpoint, situated just east of Qalandiya refugee camp, was originally constructed as a roadblock during the Second Intifada and has since become the largest and most infamous checkpoint in the West Bank (UNRWA, 2019). The inadequate infrastructure to channel hundreds of laborers through it daily to work in Israel proper has

caused chaos and tensions with military forces, which is later used by the Israeli government to continue to justify the wall (Griffiths & Repo, 2018). According to B'Tselem (2017), work to extend areas of the barrier with more concrete wall has been taking place since 2016, which are intended to solidify separation between A-Ram and nearby Jewish settlement Neve Yaakov.

Widespread media attention on the checkpoint has drawn activists, artists, and researchers from around the world, making the stretch between Qalandiya checkpoint and east through A-Ram another graffiti hotspot. Directly next to the checkpoint are two large murals depicting Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat and imprisoned political leader Marwan Barghouti, both of which have remained on the wall for over a decade. The stretch of wall between the checkpoint and A-Ram is home to the world's "longest letter," which was written by South African peace activist Farid Esack to the Palestinian people and is roughly 3km long (El Fassed, 2009). It was painted by Sendamessage, a Dutch-Palestinian organization that takes online requests for messages people from around the world wish to see on the wall.

A-Ram and Qalandiya Checkpoint have also been popular areas for Palestinian artists based in Ramallah to display political messages intended for residents, such as Majd Abdel Hamid's Palestinian Declaration of Independence in scrambled Arabic letters (Amin, 2019). There is noticeably more Arabic script on this portion of the wall compared to Bethlehem, most likely because A-Ram is not specifically a tourist destination. However, as one gets closer to Qalandiya checkpoint, English becomes more common, as it is the main gateway to the West Bank's major city, Ramallah, which is frequented by tourists. One graffito by Italian artist Filippo Minelli that has received ample media attention is

large light blue letters done by a paint roller that simply says "CTRL+ALT+DELETE," suggesting that the wall, Palestine, or perhaps the entire situation, needs to be shut down and rebooted to start again fresh (Shalem & Wolf, 2011, p. 184).

Examining this area is important for two reasons. A-Ram and Qalandiya checkpoint are not tourist destinations, therefore the graffiti on this stretch of the wall differs somewhat from both Abu Dis and Bethlehem. Arabic graffiti is more prevalent to speak to local residents, and Ramallah-based artists work in this area to speak directly to the Israeli occupation and the Palestinian struggle. This area is underrepresented in research, though I have directly witnessed graffiti from all three target groups. Secondly, there are new renovations to upgrade Qalandiya checkpoint in response to years of tensions and negative coverage of the checkpoint process. While these changes have made the commute for some Palestinians easier, others feel that the upgrade indicates that Israel is only trying to ease international condemnation caused by the old checkpoint and has no intention of ever withdrawing from the West Bank (Rasgon, 2019). This suspicion and resentment could lead to increased political protest via graffiti on the wall near this upgraded facility.

A-Ram is where my initial interest in the wall and graffiti originated while I was working for an arts-based graduate internship. I walked for roughly 40 minutes directly at the base of the wall. Along the way I began to notice random text and stencils along the wall, some in Arabic but mostly in English. This surprised me, considering where I was walking was not a tourist spot, but on a street comprised of only Palestinian food markets and auto shops. I stopped to examine one of what would be numerous "Happy Birthday" messages I would encounter. As one continues to walk along this stretch of wall, one can see more and more birthday messages from internationals that read something like "Happy

Birthday Bob from Scotland," "Happy Birthday Donna from Dan and Shirley, California,"

and so forth.

Numerous times during the field work in A-Ram, one particularly notable piece of

graffiti stood out – the 3km

long graffiti piece by

Sendamessage of a message

by South African peace

activist Farid Esack to the

Palestinian people. The

2,000-word letter by Esack,

"Open Letter to the

Palestinian People", was

chosen by Sendamessage to

Figure 3: Farid Esack's "Letter to the Palestinians" near A-Ram. Photograph by researcher, April 2016.

be its most notable piece (after roughly 850 previous graffiti works) and painted alongside

Palestinian activists (The Palestinian Chronicle, 2009). It is written in one single

continuous line high on the wall as to avoid covering up existing graffiti at the base and

cost approximately $21,000 to paint (Hubbard, 2009). It now has lasted 12 years and

stretches from A-Ram to just south of Qalandiya Checkpoint. The letter recognizes the

plight of the Palestinian people through comparisons to apartheid South Africa and pledges

solidarity and calls for justice:

> At public rallies during the South African liberation struggle the public speaker of the
> occasion would often call out: "An injury to one?!" and the crowd would respond: "Is an
> injury to all!" We understood that in a rather limited way at that time. Perhaps we are
> destined to always understand this in a limited way. What we do know is that an injury to
> the Palestinian people is an injury to all. An injury inflicted on others invariably comes

back to haunt the aggressors; it is not possible to tear at another's skin and not to have one's own humanity simultaneously diminished in the process. In the face of this monstrosity, the Apartheid Wall, we offer an alternative: Solidarity with the people of Palestine. We pledge our determination to walk with you in your struggle to overcome separation, to conquer injustice and to put end [sic] to greed, division and exploitation (JFP, 2011).

Underneath this long letter, there are numerous advertisements and business posters plastered to the base of the wall, all from the street's mechanics, convenience stores, grocery shops, and other various shops.

The graffiti on Qalandiya Checkpoint is often quite political and done by mostly Palestinian locals, though much of it is in English to reach a greater audience. The Qalandiya Checkpoint is arguably the busiest checkpoint in the West Bank (comparable to Checkpoint 300 in Bethlehem) not only for Palestinian laborers to enter Israel for work, but also for tourists to enter the West Bank to visit the busy Palestinian city of Ramallah. As such, it is very heavily guarded by Israeli military in vehicles, inside the checkpoint, and in surrounding watchtowers, making it extraordinarily risky to graffiti (or even photograph) the wall in this location. Nevertheless, Palestinian locals have found ways to paint large political murals and scribble text directly next to the checkpoint for all passing through to the Israeli side to see.

The primary focus of the work I undertook during my internship was to drive to various locations in both the West Bank and Israel proper to offer communities arts-based activities to help build coping mechanisms, strengthen support systems, and use the arts to promote imagination for change for a better future. In traveling to these communities, there was near constant interaction with the West Bank Barrier, the checkpoints, and its graffiti, especially Qalandiya Checkpoint. Additionally, much time was spent traveling alone through the checkpoint on foot and then waiting for public transport to return to Ramallah.

In that time, much observation took place of the large murals of political prisoner Marwan Barghouti and the deceased PLO leader Yassar Arafat. Also, nearby is a Banksy stencil of a young girl being lifted into the air with a bunch of balloons. I noted that this stencil is extremely popular and mass produced by Palestinian souvenir shop owners onto t-shirts, magnets, coffee mugs, and hats to sell to tourists in Ramallah, Bethlehem, Jerusalem, and al-Khalil (Hebron).

It is important to note that all of my direct experience and observation is in regard to the original Qalandiya Checkpoint. Graffiti added after the upgrades has not been a major area of study and, due to COVID-19, I have not been able to return to the region to examine any new graffiti. Though there is high tourist traffic moving through the Qalandiya Checkpoint, there is a low occurrence of tourist or international artist graffiti, and as such, will not be the main focal point of this study.

3.9.3 *Ras Khamis and Shu'afat Refugee Camp*

Ras Khamis is within Jerusalem's municipal boundaries, thus technically qualifying its residents as Jerusalemites, but they are often denied access. However, as previously mentioned, Ras Khamis and Shu'afat refugee camps are in the unique situation in which they are within the Jerusalem municipal boundaries but have been cut off by the wall. This has caused confusion and chaos, since due to the geopolitical agreements, the Palestinian Authority cannot operate within the Jerusalem municipality since it is under Israeli control, but the Israeli government has ceased functions there since it is behind the wall. The result has been the deterioration of infrastructure and order, including no sewage or garbage services, contaminated drinking water, cheap housing which has led to overcrowding, and no authority, leading to high levels of drug trafficking, crime, and violence (Miller, 2014).

The clashes here between the IDF and Palestinian youth are frequent and intense, with house demolition orders looming over nearly every house in the region. Israel is responsible for city services such as infrastructure and sewage. However, services are typically denied despite the collection of heavy taxes, and Palestinian Authority operation there is against Israeli law. Its population of 25,000 are thus resorting to burning garbage and living with contaminated water. Low housing costs due to deterioration but still within municipality has resulted in an influx of Palestinian newcomers, spiking crime, and overcrowding. Ras Khamis is sandwiched between the wall and Shu'afat refugee camp, forcing residents to build higher buildings, which are at risk of house demolitions.

To get a better understanding of the wall's impact on Shu'afat refugee camp and Ras Khamis, I scheduled an informal interview with a Palestinian humanitarian worker in that area. They met me across the street of the checkpoint into Ras Khamis and Shu'afat refugee camp. We began the tour immediately at a boys' elementary school, a one-minute walk from the checkpoint turnstiles. The wall stands directly across the street from the school's entrance, maybe 6 – 7 meters away. The wall in this area was built originally in 2004, but my contact explained to me that the portion we were standing in front of had been moved. "This wall right here was actually further back. But this spot right here was known as the Coca Cola spot, where people come to deal drugs. About three or four years ago, the wall was moved closer to the camp where it is now. Right here." When asked what impact they think this has on the children they replied: "A lot! They come to school, come out, and see this here. It fills the hearts with anger and sadness." The next portion of the wall makes a 90-degree angle and travels up a nearby hill, charred black with dumpsters at the base. When asked where the wall impacts youth the hardest, the humanitarian

worker claimed Beit Jala near Bethlehem is a serious area to examine, along with both the Aida and Shu'afat refugee camps.

The next stop was a military watch tower (whether or not it was staffed at the time was unclear) and a huge metal gate in the wall. "This is for military only," they explained. The view from here is one of the most expansive in terms of seeing the path of the wall from above. From here, one can see the wall stretch all the way to Hizma and almost A-Ram. The settlements on the other side are close, reveling in the amount of space allotted to them and the surrounding greenery. "They are human, but we are not." They pointed at the military gate. The strong smell of burning garbage surrounded us. I turned to see a pile of garbage on fire right up against the wall. "This is the problem for this generation. They see this wall, this tower, this gate, and the strangers on the other side, they have no face. All this wall does is create more anger, more depression, they are losing, piece by piece, what it means to be a Palestinian." My contact explained that the names of the streets have been changed to soften the image of the camp, with the intent to erase the refugee status from it entirely. They sighed and said "But this is good. We [Palestinians] need to learn to unite together and live with each other. Christians, Muslims, etc. When we can win at this, we can win the bigger picture." We made our way back towards the checkpoint. "Just two days ago, they came and demolished a house, and the sports center. The only one," they said. "It had a pool, it had everything." It quickly became clear there is nowhere for children to play. "No," they said. "It's too dangerous out here on the streets, with the cars. Imagine, a teenager grows up in a closed apartment building. Nowhere to go, express himself. It hurts his spirit."

A stark contrast that came to light during the visit to Ras Khamis was the lack of art on the wall inside the camp compared to the amount of art in Bethlehem. Aside from the torched section from burning garbage, the wall was practically bare. I brought this observation up to a teacher from Ramallah. While most questions directed at him involved the impact of the wall on communities rather than graffiti, he was able to offer some insights on this matter. His response to why he thought Ras Khamis and Shu'afat refugee camp had very little graffiti on the nearby wall was "I guess because there are no international organizations there doing graffiti projects." This answer was surprising, considering that graffiti as resistance to the wall began with Palestinians, not international graffiti artists or NGOs, and the intensity of conflict in this area could potentially provoke open resistance via graffiti. While there is a significant presence of international aid workers in Shu'afat refugee camp (UN, ANERA, etc.), there does not appear to be any arts-based international groups of that same caliber, nor does this region seem to come into the radar of any major globally known street artist. One reason is likely that this would be an area of low visibility for graffiti meant to capture global attention. It would also be safe to assume that individuals without organizational protection or clearance would have a more difficult time getting into the camp to graffiti the wall, which would undoubtedly attract the unwanted attention of nearby Israeli guards. I personally had a somewhat intense experience trying to leave the area through the checkpoint and was aggressively questioned by an armed Israeli soldier. This all leaves the question of why Palestinian artists have not graffitied the wall in Ras Khamis or Shu'afat refugee camp.

As COVID-19 spread around the world, and access to the region became limited for further ethnographic research, it was concluded that the location that should be the primary

focus for this project would be Bethlehem, though with my field work and additional online resources, I felt it is important to include information on the other locations of interest, especially the areas near Ramallah and Qalandiya Checkpoint. A significant amount of time was spent in Bethlehem during the fieldwork time period, and as I moved to online research to complement my findings, Bethlehem received the most attention for marketing, tourism, and graffiti, hence, offered the most online documentation to use for accurate representation of Palestinian responses towards graffiti.

CHAPTER IV

Bethlehem

       The city of Bethlehem lies just south of Jerusalem and is home to one of the world's most revered Christian holy sites: the Church of the Nativity, the birthplace of Jesus. The wall in Bethlehem was completed in 2004 including Checkpoint 300, arguably the most notorious checkpoint in the West Bank due to its limited capacity to channel thousands of Palestinian commuters into Israel each morning. Perhaps the most contested religious site in the area is Rachel's Tomb, a pilgrimage site for Muslims, Jews, and Christians alike. The site was supposed to be included into Area A, which is under full Palestinian control under the Oslo Accords, but due to pressure from Jewish religious leaders, it was instead included into Area C, Palestinian territory under Israeli security control. When the wall was being designed, its route was planned to annex Rachel's Tomb from the West Bank into Israel proper. The wall now dips past the Armistice Line, cutting through Aida refugee camp and into the city to tightly encircle Rachel's Tomb (POICA, 2002). As a result, this area of the wall is a hotspot for protests, and there are more watchtowers built into the wall in this region, further perpetuating the conflict's power dynamics. After multiple occurrences of pipe bombs and firebombs being thrown over the wall towards Rachel's Tomb, additional fencing was added to heighten the wall to prevent any possible damage.

       The small town of Beit Jala that lies within Bethlehem's limits has been struggling for 15 years to prevent the completion of a barrier segment that would completely cut

residents from the last remaining green land in the area. One 1.2km gap was left open as a result of intense lawsuits, and in 2015, plans to close that gap were approved and construction restarted in 2016. This caught the attention of international Christian leaders, where this closure threatens to separate the 19th-century Salesian Monastery and the Salesian Sisters' Convent. Clashes have occurred and fierce lawsuits have continued as construction resumed and as of the date of this paper, the gap remains open (B'Tselem, 2015). Additionally, plans for future wall construction show major cuts into West Bank territory to include the Jewish settlement Gilo and its smaller neighbor Har Gilo just southeast of Bethlehem onto the Israeli side. Palestinians living in this part of Bethlehem have organized weekly protests as a result of the continued growth of these settlements and the possible future movement of the wall that threatens to separate their villages from each other.

In recent years, Bethlehem has welcomed over 2 million tourists a year due to its significant Christian sites, which has given Palestinians a platform to reach a global audience with graffiti. Graffiti by Palestinian artists began to stretch from Checkpoint 300 all the way into nearby Aida refugee camp. This successfully intrigued international artists and tourists, many of whom have contributed their own graffiti onto the wall's surface. The main graffiti hot spot is directly across the street from the Walled Off Hotel, built in 2017 by Banksy, where the street is crowded with artists and awe-struck tourists interacting with the wall. Artists use popular figures in their murals to catch more tourist traffic, such as US President Donald Trump and Disney characters to Palestinian political heroes such as Ahed Tamimi. There are numerous Christian references, such as Christmas trees, Santa Claus, and an icon of Saint Mary near Checkpoint 300 that attract large numbers of pilgrims each

year (Sanchez, 2017). God and especially Jesus are referenced numerous times in many locations around the wall, often in attempts to either appeal to the viewer's sense of compassion and morality, or to shame those perceived as responsible for the Palestinians' current situation.

One significant event involving this stretch of the wall was when Pope Francis announced a surprise visit to Bethlehem in 2014 to pray for peace at the wall near Checkpoint 300. The Israeli government attempted to cover the existing graffiti near the checkpoint to avoid media coverage, though not all graffiti was covered in time – the pope was photographed standing under graffiti text that called for Palestinian rights, such as "Free Palestine" (RTE News, 2014). One can now see white paint highly contrasted with the grey of the concrete slabs used to return this portion back into a blank slate.

Despite the boost in tourism, the graffiti attraction seems to have had the unexpected side effect of transforming the wall into a transnational art gallery, minimizing the attention given to its political ramifications and leaving Palestinians struggling to be heard over the intense surge of international expression. The graffiti in Bethlehem has by far received the most media and research coverage – while there is increased tourism to see the wall and graffiti in Ramallah and Abu Dis, only Bethlehem seems to capitalize on the unique experience of actively engaging in graffiti making on the wall for tourists. Bethlehem has the highest numbers of tourists each year throughout the West Bank, thus making this location ideal in examining graffiti made by tourists and international artists and the greater industry of graffiti tourism.

4.1 <u>Fieldwork in Bethlehem</u>

  During a two week visit to Jerusalem, I arranged to meet with a tour guide in Bethlehem to take a tour of the Aida refugee camp and to see the wall's impact on nearby Beit Jala. While waiting for the tour to begin I took a walk along this stretch of the wall to view its graffiti. Walking along the wall down Hebron Road, there is humor, cynicism, anger, and hope emanating from the diverse array of graffiti images that decorate the entire length in sight. There are numerous "Fuck Trump" images, as well as ironic images of apologies from Britain and profound quotes coupled by mislabeled celebrities. The darkest images were done by Cake$_Stencils, where silhouettes of children and soldiers are playing with toys that all have been made dangerous with bombs or barbed wire. I eventually came across the Walled Off Hotel, which I had reservations about going to, but when I later asked my tour guide how this hotel was received by the community, he said it has raised awareness of the situation while also creating over 50 jobs for residents. I decided to have lunch the next day in its lobby full of Banksy's iconic wall graffiti of flower bombs, doves, and lost balloons.

  Graffiti in Bethlehem is a massive compilation of tags, slogans, Palestinian symbols and people, elaborate murals by both Palestinian and international artists, defaced graffiti, graffiti that has been repainted, pop culture references, messages of solidarity by tourists from other countries, calls for the end of other world conflicts, comparisons to other conflicts, criticisms of countries, and contact information for nearby businesses. The corner where the Walled Off Hotel stands remains very busy throughout the day with tourists. I spent two afternoons sitting in the lobby of the hotel observing the tourist traffic and how tourists interacted with the graffiti. If one sits there long enough, it is as if the wall changes

colors in real time. This is largely due to the activity of tourists with the odd marker or

paint to throw up a quick message, but mostly the shop next door, The Wall Mart, offers

tourists the opportunity to buy stencils and spray paint their own art on the wall. This is

quite a unique experience given the controversial nature of the structure in which they are

graffitiing and is popular with tourists.

However, based on conversations I overheard while visiting as well as talks with

Palestinian locals, the main tourist attraction in the area aside from Christian tourism is

Banksy. He has multiple popular pieces on the wall nearby, and many taxi drivers will approach tourists to give "authentic" Banksy tours. The Walled Off Hotel has been a major tourist attraction since

Figure 4: Stretch of the heavily decorated wall in Bethlehem. Photograph by researcher, July 2019.

its opening in 2017. The hotel is full of Banksy's art, from the politically charged murals on

the bedroom walls to the dystopian colonialism theme throughout the lobby to a Banksy

museum and art gallery in the back. It appears Banksy's presence is a catalyst for not only

other international artists to visit the West Bank but is really the main reason behind the

boost in tourism in the area. Most of the conversations overheard when visiting the hotel

revolved around the room with the Banksy art gallery rather than the wall directly across

the street. This led me to question whether visitors are learning anything about the wall itself (the conflict, its impact, etc.) or are simply fascinated with Banksy and the street covered in colorful graffiti. I had read that Palestinian activists feel this defeats the purpose of the graffiti, which was originally meant to resist the wall and the occupation with the added intention of educating the world about its consequences. Instead, many feel the graffiti and the focus on Banksy's work has instead created a demand for the wall and a market for the conflict. As such, many activists, local and abroad, as well as some scholars and artists are quite critical of Banksy's intentions. One critic says of Banksy's newest art piece, *Scar of Bethlehem*, in the gallery of the Walled Off Hotel:

> This work serves as perhaps the best example of the fact that Banksy's artistic intent has always been provocation and only provocation, not genuine advocacy for change or any desire for a definitive stance. *Scar of Bethlehem* turns the continual subjugation of Palestinians into visual fodder for art-seeking tourists, and it does this within an opportunistic hotel business built for people who wish to engage with the trauma around them from a safe distance (Holmes, 2019).

The Walled Off Hotel remains controversial in terms of who it is actually serving. Though my Bethlehem contact told me the hotel has created jobs, he also said some are upset and frustrated with the kind of attention it has brought to the area. Tourists make graffiti that is irrelevant to the conflict, or focus on conflicts elsewhere, negating the uniqueness of the Palestinian situation. Some critics find the sale of Banksy's work on the hotel website out of touch and an attempt to profit on the suffering of others. While all proceeds go to local needs, the sale of wall memorabilia is sometimes perceived as grotesque and as if it is romanticizing the wall itself. The new wall collectibles from Banksy's "Defeated" series depict a wall that has been partially torn down and eroded, with a dilapidated watchtower and tangled steel rods. While the series appears to suggest that the wall has been "defeated"

in its current appearance, the dark aftermath of whatever happened to this portion of the wall is described glowingly on the website:
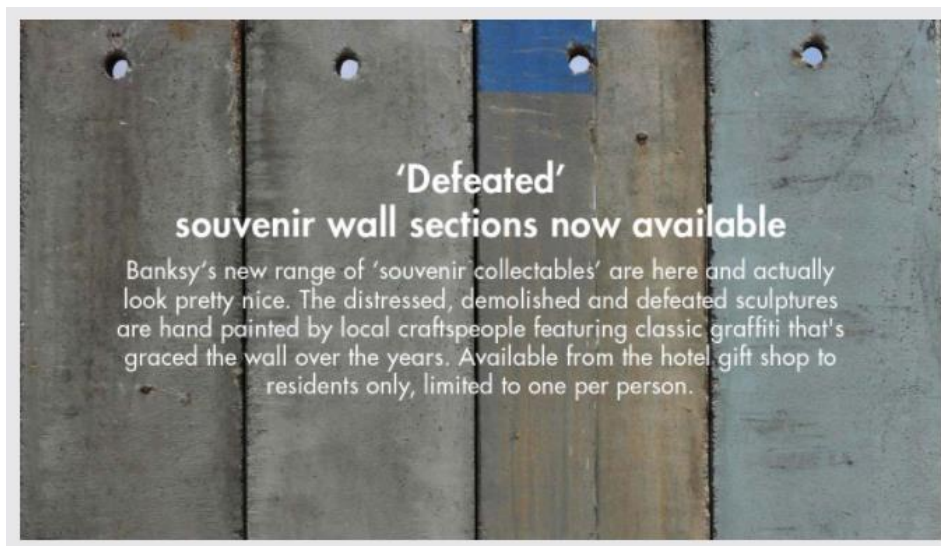
Figure 5: Banksy's "Defeated" sculptures as handcrafted by local artisans.
Credits: The Walled Off Hotel

Local craftspeople have been hired to create these art collectibles and only the hotel's guests are allowed to buy them – one per person. These collectibles, along with t-shirts and tote bags featuring Banksy's images of an IDF solider and a Palestinian having a pillow fight and a watch tower fit for an amusement park, are also sold in the hotel's gift shop.

While sitting in the lobby of the hotel as well as observing from across the street, perhaps what struck me most were the tourists' behavior and abundance of selfies. Tourists shuffle in groups around the wall right outside the hotel entrance and a little way down the street where the graffiti is most prevalent. They can be seen perusing the 8-meter-tall gallery of contemporary and political images along the wall, and often stop to take group selfies with some of the more iconic images, such as "Make Hummus Not Walls," Mike Tyson, or Rick and Morty references. The photographs are taken right up against the wall as to only include the favored graffiti, which inevitably cuts out any details of the wall in which the art is painted on. As a result, there is little context to the West Bank Barrier in these photographs – in fact, if the chosen graffiti is not of Palestinian artwork specifically, these photos could have been taken anywhere. Witnessing this in real time triggered two more questions:

1) How many of these tourists are posting their photographs to Facebook, Snapchat, TikTok, or Instagram?

2) If social media were not a factor (or photographs forbidden) would tourists a) still visit this graffiti or b) choose to participate in graffiti making?

This led to contemplation of the possible motives for graffiti participation: social media attention, solidarity and genuine interest in the cultural and political nuances of the region, or just a unique opportunity only found here in Bethlehem?

As I walked along the wall one afternoon, I witnessed a man kneeling and painting grey patches at staggered locations on the wall's base. He was painting over existing graffiti to make way for his own new pieces. I immediately recognized the grey swatches as those of UK-based artist Cake$_Stencils. Cake$_Stencils has traveled to Bethlehem

several times to plaster the wall with his dark, but playful stencil pieces. As previously

mentioned, his images revolve primarily around children playing with dangerous objects,

highlighting the problems the adult world inflicts, such as war and corruption, on the

innocence of the youth and how they adapt through imagination. Among his pieces are

children playing with barbed wire, a rocket in the box, and jump rope with an armed

soldier. One stencil that directly addresses the wall itself is of a roller coaster out of reach

behind a concrete barrier resembling that of the West Bank Barrier. Cake$_Stencils' work

is meant to bring attention to the cruelty of the wall, especially with his ubiquitous use of

barbed wire. Barbed wire was originally made to keep in cattle, so to him, its use towards

other humans is intended to remind a population "who's the meat" (Inspiring City, 2019b).

Surprised that I had actually run into an international graffiti artist in the act, I approached

the man and asked if he was in fact Cake$_Stencils. He replied he was. I told him that I

was studying the West Bank Barrier and would be interested in having a conversation with

him if he would be willing to talk about his work. We agreed to meet the following

afternoon in the Wall-Mart next to the Walled Off Hotel.

The next afternoon I found Cake$_Stencils intently focused on cutting a new stencil

while the Palestinian cashier casually watched behind him. I asked him a variety of

questions, ranging from how he chooses where to graffiti (at the time, he had only done

work in Bethlehem) to how I had noticed his work becoming more explicitly politicized (a

new stencil had a man hanging from a wad of U.S. dollar bills). When asked about his

work being vandalized or graffitied around, he replied nonchalantly: "You must agree with

this." Once the art is up, it is left to the mercy of anyone who encounters it thereafter.

Cake$_Stencils feels that continuing to come and paint his creative statements could

perhaps raise awareness of the situation, and offered to help me paint my own stencil, to which I politely declined.

To the appreciation of some locals, the content of Cake$_Stencils' work is more in line with addressing the consequences of conflict and power dynamics, but his work still has not escaped being vandalized. From my conversations with other local residents, when it comes to Cake$_Stencils' work, it is less about what he paints and more about how much space he takes

Figure 6: Grey swathes at the base of the wall in Bethlehem as Cake$_Stencils lays foundation for future stencils. Photograph by researcher, July 2019.

up on the wall, and where. Walking along the wall, one could see his large patches of grey paint every 2-3 concrete slabs that stretched from the base of the wall up to about 3 – 4 feet. Cake$_Stencils is erasing prior artwork to make way for his new stencils, which has been a problem for some locals, but is not something only he is guilty of. Many international artists have painted over whatever works are present in their chosen location, and some Palestinians have covered up existing works as well.

I left Cake$_Stencils to his work at the Wall Mart and headed to my next appointment with my Palestinian contact at a nearby youth center. This was the same contact I had taken tours with a few months before when I went on my first fieldwork trip to visit Beit Jala. This time I chose to ask him specifically about the graffiti. Several

questions were presented to him: how do the locals feel about internationals making graffiti? Is there any graffiti hostile to Israel? Has graffiti helped tourism? He told me that during youth groups at the nearby peace center there are sometimes discussions about hostile graffiti and the overall consensus is that it is frowned upon and sought out to be erased. It doesn't help anything, he said, and it is typically done by internationals. I imagine it could potentially backfire and make the environment more tense between Israeli soldiers and Palestinian locals. He gave me information about several of the local pieces as we walked along the wall, as well as some of the contradictions in stories regarding "Make Hummus Not Walls" (ownership is apparently disputed) and Palestinians selling space on the wall to tourists.

The contact claimed that while he thinks it is great tourists are enthusiastic about interacting with the wall, he described an incident where he encountered two women painting over a local's graffiti to make room for their own. He encouraged them to paint but to be aware of others' artwork. While I pondered this scenario, I did not expect it to happen in front of me almost immediately after he told me about it. When walking up back up the wall towards the Walled Off Hotel, we ran into Cake$_Stencils. I had not mentioned my previous meeting to my counterpart, but he knew immediately who Cake$_Stencils was based on his work. He walked right up to him and praised his work. "Keep up the great work!" he told Cake$_Stencils, "but be sure not to cover up other great work." This was a real time example of a local both praising an international artist for his work while directing him to not take space away from local voices, confirming some of what I had read about Palestinian concerns regarding international artwork overshadowing graffiti created by Palestinian residents.

We made our way to Checkpoint 300, where the wall has been covered in smooth white paint to cover previous graffiti done by locals. This was the spot in which the Pope would eventually place his hand and pray for peace near Checkpoint 300. Compared to other parts of Bethlehem, this portion of the wall is relatively barren of graffiti, but since the Pope's visit in 2014, graffiti is slowly springing back up. My contact explained that not many locals have been brave enough to replace the graffiti since this portion of the wall is so close to the checkpoint and is surrounded by watchtowers. At the moment, the most noticeable graffiti is large, spray-painted letters

Figure 7: Graffiti resumed after Israel painted the portion of the wall near Checkpoint 300 white before the Pope's 2014 visit. Photograph by researcher, Bethlehem, July 2019.

reading "Border 50m. Please prepare your freedom for RESTRICTIONS" and an arrow pointing to Checkpoint 300. Along the same stretch of wall by Checkpoint 300, the wall makes a 90-degree turn. Just on the other side lies a mural of St. Mary, painted by British artist Ian Knowles, who runs an iconography school in Bethlehem and offers free art lessons to Palestinian students. Groups of Christians annually march from the checkpoint to the icon as a form of protest and pilgrimage.

Upon the closing of our tour, my contact shared information about an unknown artist, assumed to be international, who comes out only at night at random times to paint

large graffiti of the number 161. These murals are in numerous locations in the city of

Bethlehem, not only

on the wall itself. No one seems to know what 161 is in reference to, whether it is a Bible

verse, or some other literary reference. Upon further research, the only possible group I

found that would potentially fit this tag is an anti-fascist group on Twitter called the 161

Crew, who vehemently denounce racism, xenophobia, and nationalism. It is possible this

unknown artist could be a part of this group, but this is only a guess.

After visiting Bethlehem several times between 2016 and 2019 and being exposed

to the abundance of graffiti on the wall and those participating, the complexity and nuance

of local creative resistance, international involvement, and consumerism became clear.

These experiences, along with the time spent in the other locations, led me to develop the

research questions for this thesis. The following section will examine perspectives on the

wall, its graffiti, and international involvement from Palestinians all over the West Bank.

CHAPTER V

Palestinian Voices Regarding Graffiti on
The West Bank Barrier

Palestinians from all walks of life have reacted to the West Bank Barrier in a variety of ways, including placing graffiti on the wall to make statements of resistance and calls for solidarity as well as finding ways to use the wall's physicality for marketing purposes. Their thoughts on internationals placing graffiti on the wall, however, are more mixed and their opinions on the consequences and benefits of graffiti tourism have only been covered in limited news articles. Most of these articles are by Western news organizations and as such, through the lens of outsiders. These articles sometimes do not include interviews of Palestinian locals, artists, or activists and make their own suggestions to readers (usually prospective tourists) that they should visit the wall to learn about the conflict or give advice on how to interact with the wall once there. One main purpose of this research is to conduct field work and document existing articles that include local Palestinians' responses regarding graffiti tourism, with the hope that this phenomenon will receive the careful assessment it needs. Based on the collected data, Palestinian responses prove to be quite nuanced and vary dramatically. Palestinian perspectives lie on a spectrum ranging from believing the wall should be left completely blank to supporting open global graffiti participation. As such, this has led to a variety of ways in which Palestinians have taken actions towards the wall and graffiti-making by both Palestinians and internationals, such as marketing, censorship, and even outright defacing of unwanted imagery and messages.

Though there is a chapter later in this thesis specifically analyzing graffiti content in detail, it is important to outline some content in this chapter for context.

5.1 <u>Palestinian Artwork and Thoughts on Graffiti as Resistance to the Wall</u>

Palestinian protest against the Israeli occupation comes with great risk. Whether protest is through outspoken activism, social media posts, participation in boycotting Israeli goods, or gathering in large crowds, protestors are often met with further restrictions, censorship, arrest and prison time, or extreme force and violence by Israeli soldiers. International media often negatively portrays or misrepresents Palestinian protestors as extremists or anti-Semites, making solidarity overseas more difficult. Palestinian-American human rights lawyer, Noura Erakat, told Salon magazine in an interview that "the question of Palestine has been demonized and every form of protest has been demonized… and that's part of the struggle" (Leah, 2018).

This has not stopped Palestinians from being active in protesting the West Bank Barrier years after its construction, specifically with graffiti. Shortly after the construction of the wall, Palestinian graffiti in the form of Arabic statements, portraits of martyrs and political activists, poetry, and murals of Jerusalem sprung up along the newly constructed concrete walls that run through the West Bank's urban spaces. There were disagreements within Palestinian communities on whether the wall should be painted for fears of "beautifying" what they often refer to as the "apartheid wall", but graffiti has been a historic form of Palestinian resistance against Israeli occupation. Many Palestinians feel the need to continue this method of political expression to not only display their resilience to Israel's oppression, but to use the wall to attract outside visitors to increase solidarity and

educate them about the wall's disastrous consequences. Bethlehem's Arab Educational Institute launched a project called the "Wall Museum", in which they hung over 110 posters along the wall in Bethlehem, Beit Sahour, and Beit Jala that share women's and children's stories of the conflict. The stories recall feelings of fear during IDF military raids, uncertainty about separated family members, or stories involving Palestinian symbolism and hopes for peace. The creators of these posters describe the goal of their "museum":

> The use of inverted commas around "museum" is deliberate. The museum is not intended to become permanent. It is in fact our hope that the Wall museum stories contribute to cracks in the Wall, to its breaking down, and in fact to the collapse of all walls around us and around the Palestinian people in particular. In other words, we hope that the "Wall Museum" by its very success will eventually destroy itself (Murra & van Teeffelen, 2013).

Other Palestinians, in response to the wall's negative impact on their economy, have
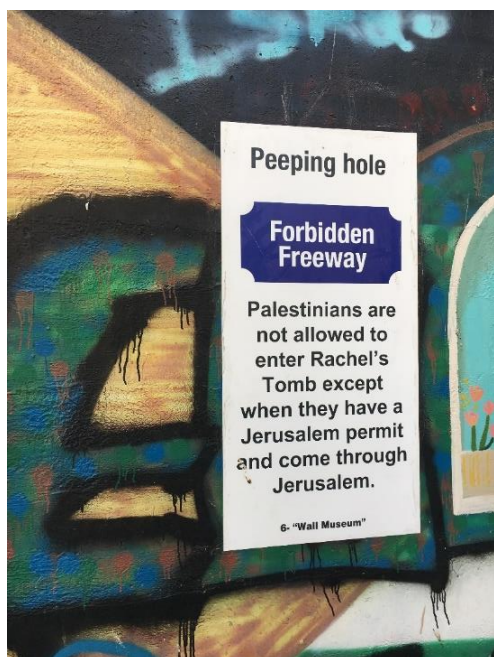
Figure 8: "Wall Museum" poster in Bethlehem near Rachel's Tomb. Photograph by researcher, July 2019.

appropriated it for business purposes, by transforming stretches of it into giant advertisement boards, posting phone numbers, directions to their shops, and restaurant menus. Joseph Hasboun owned a restaurant in Bethlehem called Bahamas Seafood that closed in 2000 due to the violence of the Second Intifada and lack of tourism at the time. When the wall was erected near his closed restaurant, he reopened it as The Wall Lounge, using the wall to advertise both the menus for this new lounge as well as Bahamas

Seafood. There are tables at the base of the wall for mostly local visitors to sit and dine, and

the menu offers a "Wall Chicken Sandwich" (Parry, 2011, p. 20 – 21). The tag of @alaa_taxi_driver can be seen every few meters on the wall in Bethlehem near Checkpoint 300. Large arrows often can be seen directing tourists down the road to a particular restaurant. One restaurant owner even uses the wall as a backdrop to project football games for his customers (Larkin, 2014).

However, the most notable and attention-grabbing method of resistance has been political graffiti. Many Palestinian graffitists paint cultural symbols on the wall (as well as on buildings, in alleyways, and street signs) throughout the West Bank. One resident from Beit Sahour near Bethlehem told Nour Magazine:

> …[the Palestinians] didn't accept the wall, because it separated us from our people outside the wall, and the wall itself is scary, huge, illegal, and ugly to see. So, it started as a way to express our emotions towards it, and then it turned into art! And we started having fun with it (Maalouf, 2021).

One of the most popular graffiti images is a young Leila Khaled, an activist with the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine most known for her role in a plane hijacking in 1969. There is a large mural of her in Bethlehem near Checkpoint 300 in her iconic pose smiling and holding a gun, while simpler stencils of her face

Figure 9: Leila Khaled mural in Bethlehem. Photograph by the Palestinian Poster Project, 2012.

appear ubiquitously along the wall accompanied by the text "I am not a terrorist"

(photograph by researcher, 2019). The key is a prominent symbol within Palestinian culture, signifying the house keys kept by those who were expelled from their land in 1948 during the Israeli War of Independence, or as the Palestinians know it, the *Nakba*, or catastrophe. This image is painted in numerous spots on the West Bank Barrier to symbolize the Right of Return for refugees, a seriously contentious topic in Israeli-Palestinian peace talks, and one that neither side will bend on. Another popular image painted on the wall by Palestinians is cartoonist Naji al-Ali's signature creation, Handala, the Palestinian refugee boy with his back always to the viewer. He is destined to remain 10 years old until he is able to return to the home he lost in 1948 (Guyer, 2017).

Most of what was placed on the wall at the beginning were strictly Palestinian symbols, text, and murals of landscapes no longer within reach. But as graffiti on the wall has become more popular, there are disagreements between Palestinians about graffitiing the wall, specifically regarding choice of content and capitalization or marketing the wall for profit. There is competition for space, not only to assert one's own message and combat appropriation by internationals, but also to profit from graffiti tourism. But there continues to be arguments on whether there should be art on the wall at all, and if so, what kind of content should be allowed. This excerpt from an Al-Monitor article (2012) is worth quoting in full to show Palestinian disagreements on this topic, beginning with an interview with Khaled Horani, the director of the International Academy of Art in Ramallah:

> The erection of the wall is a very violent action for the land and the human beings around it. But at the same time, it is a big grey canvas, which looks like it invites you to do something," he said. Though many artists, not least foreigners, have left their prints on the wall, many young Palestinian artists refuse to do the same. "We don't want the wall to be beautiful. It's better that it's something ugly because it makes people's lives difficult," says Reem Masri, a woman who belongs to a group of street artists from the International

School of Art in Ramallah that calls itself "On the Walls." Ayyash [a Ramallah-based artist] is also against painting on Israel's separation wall and argues that it would amount to accepting its existence. Thouri [a women's rights graffiti artists] however has yet to make her mind up: "I understand the argument against it but historically, like with the Berlin Wall, it has been a great place for sending messages."

Artists in particular have been vocal about their perspectives on graffitiing the wall. One exchange between two Palestinian artists took place as follows:

"[Artists] are changing the reality of the wall," said Muhannad Al-Azzeh, an artist whose murals cover the walls of refugee camps in Bethlehem. "It's a military color, and an ugly color, so keep it as ugly. I will not want to make this wall a beautiful thing."

"This space is there," Abdel Hamid countered. "You have an opportunity to use it in a conscious way" (Estrin, 2010).

Another artist, Alaa Albaba, who is based in Al-Amari refugee camp near Ramallah and whose work often uses fish as a metaphor for Palestinian refugees (Paganelli, 2016), at the time agreed that the wall should not be painted. In 2019, he told Al-Jazeera:

On a personal level, I think the wall needs to stay gray and ugly. It needs to be maintained that it's a symbol of apartheid, nothing more. If we paint on it, we would redefine it. I find it provoking that the wall provides a public space - one that provides great exposure for artists, especially with prominent international artists leaving their work there. I'm not in a position to judge. I can't deny their messages were loud but as a Palestinian, I see the wall differently. It is present in our subconscious. It's there standing between us and the rest of Palestine, at least the one that shapes our national identity (Al-Jazeera, 2019).

Albaba joins several artists and activists who feel that by painting the wall, the wall becomes a focal point in the Palestinian narrative and could potentially become inseparable from how Palestine is envisioned in the minds of internationals as well as block the imagination for future political aspirations of those who live in the wall's shadow. Another local artist who goes by the moniker "Issa" explained to Al-Jazeera (Ashly, 2017) that "the

more we reproduce images of the wall, the more the wall becomes normal in people's imagination. Then our imaginary [sic] stops at the wall. It becomes the first subconscious image of Palestine."

Another contentious topic among Palestinians and graffiti regards gender roles. Several female Palestinian artists view graffiti as a way to raise voices that often go unheard in their own society. Female graffiti artists are not only less common due to many factors including cultural restrictions and less access to resources, but when they are active, they tend to be even less visible in the public sphere when their male counterparts receive the majority of media attention. However, there are many Palestinian women who have observed the effectiveness of art in public spaces to promote social change and justice, specifically for women's rights in society and calls for peace. Female street artists often must struggle to be heard but are resilient in getting their message out to their communities and the world through dedication, creativity, and persistence. Though not as restrictive as some other Middle Eastern countries regarding women's education, transportation, and ability to work, there are still patriarchal norms and policies influenced by Islamic law in Palestinian society that can restrict women's movements and social participation outside the home, limiting opportunities for some women to express themselves publicly in creative ways.

Regardless of the many obstacles faced by Palestinian women, several female graffiti artists take to the streets to graffiti walls around the West Bank to demand women's rights and social change. One artist who lives in a Palestinian refugee camp in Jordan has defied social norms and frequently paints the walls in her camp while donning a hijab and a gas mask. Laila Ajjawi began her career writing on the walls of her refugee camps in

Jordan and eventually continued with an Egyptian-based graffiti initiative, Women on Walls (WOW), that promotes women's role in enacting social change. She told Azeema Magazine that her first art piece on a wall in her refugee camp helped her come to realize "public art can interact with the audience. It can reach the public directly, without any borders, at an intermediate level" (Cameron, 2021). Much of Ajjawi's work challenges gender stereotypes and attempts to bring these conversations out into the public, forcing these topics to be seen by society rather than being shoved aside. She tells Azeema Magazine:

> I never cared at all about other's opinions – no matter what. I have received many messages from girls telling me that they love to see a woman in a field dominated by men - without any problems. I'm doing what I love [so] people shouldn't even question my gender (Cameron, 2021).

Laila also uses her graffiti to raise awareness of the struggles that Palestinian refugees must face and has visited the predominantly Jewish West Jerusalem neighborhoods accompanied by other graffiti artists:

> We want to remind [Israelis] these were Palestinian neighborhoods, this is Palestine and we are still here… It is kind of taking back our streets and not allowing the *status quo* to continue… I am not under the illusion that our street art or the unarmed demonstrations are going to end the occupation tomorrow morning. None of these things isolated from the rest of it is going to end the occupation. But they build a system of resistance. They are all part of a larger web of popular resistance (Musleh, 2012).

During the online search for this project, it seemed that most women who were street artists had similar missions and were targeting walls in neighborhoods rather than graffitiing the West Bank Barrier. Areej Mawasi is one East Jerusalem-based street artist who brings up the lack of street art by women on the wall:

In my opinion, graffiti in Palestine is not as professional as it is in other countries – even though the separation wall and many other places are full of great street art, but still many of the works are made by international artists. And few of them are female (Suzee in the City, 2012).

Mawasi creates graffiti both in neighborhoods around Jerusalem as well as on the wall. Another street artist based in Jerusalem, Thouri, explains to Al-Monitor (2012) that while painting on the wall to protest occupation is important, she also feels the need to speak up now about women's rights and equality in Palestine. "Ending the occupation is not the only end-goal. There will come a day when the occupation is over," she said. "I want my community to be ready for it and have space for me and other women." In addition to living under occupation, many Palestinian women's rights activists point out that women are also living with gender discrimination and inequality, largely due to conservative political and religious leaders. Dr. Hanan Ashrawi, a leading human rights and women's rights activist, abruptly resigned from her post at Birzeit University in 2020, writing in her resignation letter that "the Palestinian political system needs renewal and must be reinvigorated through the inclusion of youth, women, and further qualified professionals" (Shahwan, 2021), a sentiment echoed by Palestinian female artists in their graffiti throughout the West Bank and Israel.

Other Palestinians' works have created controversy within their culture and have been subject to censorship. One example is of a Palestinian artist covering Qalandiya checkpoint with the rainbow flag to challenge questionable LGBTQ+ policies in the region shortly after the legalization of gay marriage by the U.S. Supreme Court in 2015. The artist took note of global media "celebrating freedom for a group of people who have historically been oppressed, and the use of the rainbow as a symbol of freedom and equality and what it could represent for other oppressed groups" (Jarrar, 2015). The artist felt international

media misconstrued his message by instead praising Israeli progressivism regarding LGBTQ+ policies, a claim he feels is false considering religious restrictions within Orthodox Jewish marriage laws on whom one can marry. Jarrar explained his rationale for the piece to Hyperallergic:

> For me the colors of the Rainbow are the freedom colors and I love them, so I decide to paint them on the wall in a public space… These colors are ultimately an expression of freedom. My goal is to send out a message to the whole world, which is still celebrating freedom, about the oppressed people living under military occupation, mainly embodied in the Qalandiya checkpoint and the Apartheid Wall. Therefore, this work comes in a purely political context to draw the world's attention of the Palestinian question, the Apartheid Wall, and the Occupation, period! (Vartanian, 2015):

However, the mural was immediately painted over overnight by Palestinian conservatives who disapproved of the reference to homosexuality. Several residents of the area were also interviewed by Hyperallergic after the mural was covered and many locals had expressed appreciation for its erasure. One 19-year-old local, Rana Abu Diab, expressed her thoughts upon seeing the mural for the first time and her disappointment regarding its erasure:

> I thought, 'woah, that took courage to do that.' I am a supporter of gay marriage so it wasn't irritating to me in any sense, specially [sic] that I know that this issue is a field for conflict between us and Israel … it was good for Palestine to be part of this global conversation. Those I know against gay marriage are saying, 'we're so happy that this was erased.' For them this flag doesn't represent freedom, but it made me wonder why people are irritated for something posted on this wall … is it part of your house and you want to keep it clean?

She also commented that many who supported the gay flag mural feel that "the segregation wall is not our identity and you can draw on it whatever you want, like an open canvas …. We are not ruining it in any way, it is [by its nature] an act of ruining" (Vartanian, 2015). Others told the interviewer for this article that this was the first time they had ever seen

positivity and support regarding the LGBTQ+ community from residents, especially on

social media (Vartanian, 2015). The mural's appearance and rapid disappearance indeed

Figure 10: Khaled Jarrar's rainbow mural "Through the Spectrum" painted on the Israeli separation wall near the Qalandiya checkpoint in the West Bank, 2015. Credit: Khaled Jarrar, 2015.

Figure 11: Jarrar's gay pride flag mural being whitewashed, 2015.
Credit: Fadi Arouri's Facebook page.

sparked an important discussion within the Palestinian community, including its gay and

queer members.

Overall, most artists discovered in this research support painting the wall as a form of resistance, but the graffiti content should remain relevant to the conflict in some way or another. Even the use of color on the wall is a topic of disagreement. Several Palestinian artists disagree with using color to graffiti the wall for concerns that it detracts from the ugliness of the structure itself and what it represents. Palestinian artist Ayed Arafah disagrees with covering the wall's surface with elaborate artwork: "I won't touch the wall with colors, it's an act of normalisation or beautification" (Wiles, 2013).

While black graffiti sends the intended message, colorful graffiti does happen to be one of the key attractions for tourists, especially works that include pop culture icons. The use of pop icons when graffitiing the wall appears more common among international artists and tourists, though it is often done in ways that are irrelevant to the conflict, which is a concern for Palestinians. Notably, when Palestinian artists use pop culture icons, they are used in ways to quickly capture the attention of passersby to then offer a greater message that is relevant to the conflict. In August 2019, Bethlehem-based street artist Taqi Spateen painted a mural over a large swathe of tourists' graffiti to show the popular Nintendo character, Mario, leaping through the widely recognized environment of green tubes featured in his video games. However, the tubes have been substituted with Israeli watchtowers and the villains in the image are not the typical "baddies" of the game but are instead armed soldiers (photograph by researcher, 2019).

Spateen has several works along the wall in Bethlehem, most of which adapt pop culture references to fit various aspects of the conflict. Directly outside the Walled Off Hotel he painted Disney's Alice in Wonderland logo, but it instead reads "Palestinians in Wonderland" above Alice looking through a door to the other side. Spateen painted the

Palestinians in Wonderland mural to emphasize the severe restrictions of movement experienced by most Palestinians: "Alice needed a chocolate to became [sic] smaller and pass from the hole, but here in Palestine the occupation has imposed an entry permit, military check posts to reduce our dignity" (Sharar, 2021). Alice has since been painted over, but Spateen has reclaimed that space with the Mario mural, sparing most of his own "Palestinians in Wonderland" logo that escaped erasure and now tags the corner of the Mario painting, which he describes as a way to depict the lack of a solution to the Palestinian struggle. "As Palestinians, we do not have an endgame," he told the Anadolu Agency. "All the time we have a tool to resist, our limit is just the sky." But he also shared that he does not want to give the impression that the Palestinian people live with a victim mentality: "We are not a sad people, and we do not ask pity. We are a strong nation to live the life and keep our continuous struggle, despite attempts to obliterate our identity" (Sharar, 2021). He has recently painted an image of Gazan paramedic nurse Razan Al Najjar who was killed by an Israeli sniper while trying to provide medical assistance during a protest (Inspiring City, 2019a). This image was placed directly next to a large mural of Ahed Tamimi, a Palestinian teenage activist sent to an Israeli prison for hitting an IDF soldier after her cousin was shot by a rubber bullet, dedicating this area of the wall to the latest Palestinian victims and heroes of the conflict.

Spateen regularly paints on the wall, often video recording and posting parts of the process on Instagram, from the time he sets the foundation for his upcoming mural to being stopped by IDF soldiers while painting up on a ladder. He started painting on the wall as a way to deviate from typical art expression to reach a greater audience: "I felt I need to be outside the frames, telling the story by a language that anyone from anywhere understands.

At that point I decided to draw on the most egregious landmark, the apartheid wall." He understands the power of graffiti as a weapon that can cross borders in ways that Palestinians cannot: "Our bullets stop on the body, but the effect of your brush travels all over the world, so it is a dangerous tool" (Sharar, 2021). Through a translator in an online interview with The Museum of the Palestinian People in Washington, D.C., Spateen spoke about graffiti on the wall from his own personal view as both a Palestinian and an artist, touching on the complexities of ethics, participation, and the wall as a tool:

> The apartheid wall is …. one of the most attractive attractions to the visitors of Palestine from all around the world's [sic] citizens. They would come and they would walk around the wall as if it was a holy site, just to realize, to understand, and to see the amount of art placed on there and read all of these humanitarian and political messages. Which led a lot of artists, countless artists, from all around the world to come and leave their fingerprints on this ugly wall to deliver a message and to show their support and to help relating in and sending a message to the wall, being with every visitor that comes to Palestine, and with every camera takes pictures and shots of the wall.

> At the same time, the Palestinian artists were generally taking a stand away from the wall – not touching it, not painting on it and not wanting to have any connection to it or any relation to it. I personally saw the [inaudible] wall from a different angle. Once I saw the wall and I saw the people coming to see the art on it, I thought to myself 'well, you know what? This could be one of the most useful locations for us Palestinians to send our art worldwide and to tell our story. Why not using [sic] it?' And since then, I started painting and making my art and graffiti on the wall, spreading it worldwide to all of the world and our story as Palestinians (MPPDC, 2020).

While there are still disagreements within Palestinian circles on what kind of art should be placed on the wall, if any, the addition of international participation in graffiti making has indeed added a new level of complexity. After Banksy's initial visit to the wall in 2005, international artists from around the world soon caught wind of the artistic possibilities the

wall offered, and they followed Banksy's example by visiting the West Bank and creating political graffiti. Tourists, especially street art fans, were soon attracted to the region – initially to view the vast array of street art, but later recognized an opportunity to make art on the wall themselves.

5.2 Palestinian Perspectives on International Involvement and Graffiti Tourism

Palestinians have responded to international graffiti tourism in a variety of ways. Some have welcomed the boom in tourism, while others feel the graffiti tourism is turning Palestine into a grotesque theme park. Some Palestinians have rejected what they perceive as ingenuine concern by internationals about their situation and condemn graffiti "cloaked in illusory narratives of nonviolent resistance and tokenized as performative symbols of solidarity" (Gagliardi, 2020, p. 431; Gould, 2014). Amahl Bishara, a Palestinian professor of anthropology at Tufts University, has written that "many Palestinians have rejected the idea that outside artists should come and embellish their surroundings (often without permission) and leave" (Bishara, 2017, p. 39). Bishara spent much time researching the wall and its graffiti in the initial stages of its existence and has come to the conclusion that many Palestinians have attitudes of "sheer ambivalence, of 'rejection' and 'refusal' to appreciate, admire or even look at the graffiti that otherwise hide the Wall's ugliness and normalize its presence" (Gagliardi, 2020, p. 433). When interviewing a community political leader in the village of Bil'in, Bishara writes that he told her "the flowers that are painted on the wall are not more beautiful than the olive trees that were uprooted to build the wall" (Bishara, 2013, p. 244).

In Bashara's book *Back Stories: U.S News Production and Palestinian Politics* (2013), she studies how Palestinian stories have been filtered through a Westernized media lens and thus, negative stereotypes and orientalism by Westerners overshadow the accuracy of Palestinian stories. Much of this occurs when photojournalists cover the wall's graffiti. She describes the danger for Palestinians to write in their own language:

> Not only are the graffiti in Arabic rather than English, but they also might be read as reflecting a violent politics. In one Agence France – Presse photograph from Gaza, guns jut into the frame, and flags give the scene a nationalist and militarist air. Given associations between Arabs and violence, such an image might as well be taken as a backhanded legitimation of the wall as much as it would be a protest of it (p. 247).

Bishara recalled watching a young girl spray paint "Children Against the Wall" in English directly in front of a group of foreign journalists and photographers, guaranteeing an impactful moment to be caught on camera in a language that the journalists could understand. Bishara recognizes that while this moment captured on film is indeed a triumph for the young girl, it still does not remove the reality of the wall, just as international graffiti and international coverage of graffiti does not necessarily provide Palestinians with global support in their struggle. She writes:

> In the next few years, as I watched the separation barrier fill with graffiti, much of them written not by Palestinians but by internationals, I came to see graffiti – and journalists' photography of graffiti – as exemplifying the problems Palestinians faced in expressing themselves to the amorphous international audiences they sought (p. 235).

While international graffiti does have the "positive potential to benefit Bethlehem materially by drawing more tourists and enlivening the economy," (Gagliardi, 2020, p. 433), many Palestinians see international graffiti as simultaneously drowning out their messages of resistance by transforming the wall into a global art gallery.

Other Palestinians, however, welcome street art by internationals, often with the stipulation that the artistic statement be relevant to the context. They feel that the boost in tourism is good for the economy, and it is a good opportunity for Palestinians to tell their story. Palestinian-Canadian lawyer and a former spokesperson for the PLO, Diana Buttu, stressed the importance of tourists visiting the wall to Ma'an News:

> For some Palestinians, foreigners coming to see the wall is essential for their ability to stay alive. If they don't get people to recognize what is going on in Palestine, then their deaths become just numbers. The idea of showing others the wall is a way of ensuring that their oppression and resistance is not experienced in silence (Ashly & Alqam, 2017).

For some Palestinians, creating a tourism market based around the wall and its graffiti may be an issue, but it is also an impactful way to reveal the truths of their situation and the injustices they face under occupation to foreign visitors. One of Banksy's first paintings in the area was a dove wearing a bulletproof vest on the wall of the Palestinian Heritage Centre in Bethlehem. He reportedly approached the center's director, Maha Saca, with the sketch and got her permission to paint it. "I chose this picture because it really affects us," Saca said in an interview. "This is what happens to peace in Palestine. Even the bird of peace cannot protect himself" (MacKinnon, 2007). This is one known example of an international artist asking for a Palestinian's permission to paint in their space, which does not appear to be common when painting the wall. This could be because the wall is a public structure unwanted by the Palestinian community and owned by the Israeli government, rather than on the side of a Palestinian-owned museum.

Many Palestinians have rejected international artworks that contain inappropriate or hostile rhetoric. Abdel Hamid expressed in an interview that he is unhappy with some of the art internationals place on the wall, in particular one image that equated an Israeli flag

Figure 11: "Alt-Right Propaganda" is written over a mural by Lushsux, Bethlehem, 2017. Credit: Jaclynn Ashly/Al Jazeera

with a Nazi swastika (Estrin, 2010). When visiting the West Bank, one peace worker shared that facilitators working with Palestinian teenagers discourage placing hostile graffiti on the wall as it is destructive. Lushsux, though his murals of memes, contemporary global figures, and cartoon characters are popular with tourists, is very unpopular among Palestinians who see him as profiteering from their experiences. He also has been accused of anti-Semitic connections on Twitter – he follows Pewdiepie, a Twitter handle that posts racist tweets, and even directed viewers of one of his Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu murals to "Subscribe to Pewdiepie" (Hewafi, 2017). As such, Lushsux's work is specifically rejected by locals, some of whom consider his work to be "Alt-Right Propaganda," a reference to the far-right trolls of the dark web. Palestinian activist and filmmaker Soud Hewafi, who is very vocal about his distaste for Lushsux, proclaimed: "I don't want a colonialist to teach me how to fight colonialists," referencing Lushsux's Australian background. Indeed, one of the strongest perceived examples of Western art colonizing the wall are the works of Lushsux. Lushsux has reportedly encouraged his social media followers to choose the content of his next West Bank Barrier mural, as well as where else he should graffiti. According to TRT World News (2017):

> Some of the ideas were crowdsourced, with the artist asking fans on Twitter for suggestions for captions. He is currently asking fans which famous figure he should paint next, with

suggestions ranging from another of [Mark] Zuckerberg to Wikileaks founder Julian

Assange. Asked via Twitter why he chose to crowdsource his ideas, Lushsux said he was

"just trying to be social on social media."

This attitude has raised concerns and stoked anger within Palestinian circles. Many argue

that since the content of his murals do not usually address the conflict or wall directly, the

power of using graffiti to protest its detrimental presence is lost.

In an article he wrote for Medium Magazine, Hewafi (2017) uses Lushsux as an

example for his opinions on international street artists coming to paint the wall:

> As many others before him, an Australian tourist "Lushsux" began to draw on the apartheid
> wall, without hesitation, when he realized this wall provided him a large and free space to
> work as a graffiti artist. What attracts Lushsux the most is the easiness to use this space to
> attract attention and gain more followers for him and his art. For this reason, he decided to
> stay here longer. This brings up the first question mark regarding this "Resident Tourist."
> Simply, he is using what is considered by a category of people — Palestinians — as a
> symbol of suffering and oppression — the apartheid wall — for his own benefits, without
> understanding or feeling what this place means for the people he is using. Many have done
> the same, and it ended at this place/point, where once the apartheid wall provides the desired
> "Likes," it's time to leave.

To Hewafi, not only is coming to paint the wall a violation of space and an unethical

opportunity for those seeking notoriety via social media, but what international artists paint

on the wall reflects what those artists know or assume about Palestinian culture and

ideologies. He criticizes Lushsux's mural of Donald Trump and Benjamin Netanyahu

kissing and other murals aimed at Jewish people:

> His graffiti of Jewish people is actually racist against Jews. Since there were and are
> Palestinian Jews, his racism is also against Palestinians. In addition, the Bibi-Trump kiss, in
> a vague opportunistic way, played with Palestinian emotional senses and presented a
> political, sinful love affair between Trump and Bibi, to advance his own ideals of how
> communities should perceive homosexual relationships. There are many other murals by

him that also depict these problematic views… In my opinion, anything on the internal side of the apartheid wall, which is the side that is imprisoning Palestinians, somehow expresses what the Palestinians think, or at the very least what Palestinians accept. Therefore, he is saying that all of us are racist, alt-right, and fascist (Hewafi, 2017).

He later told Al-Jazeera that "it's not very surprising that now we have a tourist promoting racism on the wall and thinking he will go unquestioned" (Ashly, 2017).

With the surge of global graffiti participation in recent years, some Palestinians and peace activists have raised concerns that the attention the wall is receiving is a double-edged sword. While artwork by prominent international artists has in some areas increased revenue and global attention, there are questions over whether the existing artwork or graffiti participation is actually raising awareness of the Palestinian struggle, or if it is simply a one-of-a-kind opportunity to publicly display one's own art on such a controversial structure. Based on many of the visiting graffiti artists' websites and interviews with journalists, the illegality and risk component of defacing the West Bank Barrier laid by the Israeli government seems to be a major attraction to creating projects on the wall, not necessarily the conflict or impact of the wall itself. Even Banksy's website once suggested that the wall is "the ultimate activity holiday destination for graffiti writers" (The Guardian, 2011). Growing criticism among Palestinian circles has addressed appropriation of the wall by internationals, which "deterritorializes" the space and creates a global forum that overpowers the Palestinian voice. As a result, some Palestinians have felt compelled to defend themselves from misrepresentation by outside artists. The most retold story of Banksy's work in Palestine is when he was approached by an elderly Palestinian man while painting the wall. The old man commented that the artwork made the wall look

beautiful, but as Banksy went to thank him, the man replied "We don't want it to be beautiful, we hate this wall. Go home" (Gould, 2014).

  Part of the Palestinian community feels that graffiti has romanticized the wall for tourists in particular, attracting visitors with the unique experience of not only viewing elaborate and massive graffiti artworks, but also to participate in making graffiti themselves. When standing outside the hotel, one can observe tourists laughing at various stencils, taking selfies with pop culture graffiti images, and excitedly adding their own messages to the concrete surface. Based on some tourists' graffiti content, it is unlikely they grasp the wall's negative impact on Palestinian life, and they take this ignorance back to their home countries while their graffiti remains. The graffiti they leave behind is often filled with platitudes and irrelevant imagery, such as stencils of Batman or tagging "Sam Was Here!" There is even the cliché tourist message "I went to ____ and all I got was this stupid T-shirt" written on the wall, fitted to the context to read: "I went to Palestine and all I got was this stupid stencil" (photograph by researcher, 2019). When walking along the wall from Qalandiya to A-Ram, there are multiple small texts that simply read "Jane was here" or "Vincent and Sarah Forever." The number of birthday wishes on the wall is striking – in my field visits, I encountered a similar abundance of these messages in Bethlehem just as when I was walking along the wall in A-Ram. There is even a marriage proposal in Dutch in Abu Dis (Shalem & Wolf, 2011, p. 64). These are the kind of messages that some Palestinians point to when they claim the wall is losing its meaning by becoming a tourist attraction. In a Times of Israel article, Khader Jacaman, a Bethlehem resident, echoed this concern by expressing his irritation with Lushsux in that there was "no relationship" between his murals of Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump and the Palestinian

cause. "The Palestinian people don't want them to come, paint and go," he said. "Their [social media] followers don't do anything" (Agence France-Presse, 2017b). The Walled Off Hotel even addresses irrelevant art on its website on its Frequently Asked Questions page. It gives a brief description of the wall, and then reads:

> Q: Painting the wall - Is it legal?
> A: It's not 'not' legal. The wall itself remains illegal under international law.
> Q: Is it ethical?
> A: Some people don't agree with painting the wall and argue anything that trivialises or normalises its existence is a mistake. Then again, others welcome any attention brought to it and the ongoing situation. So in essence - you can paint it, but avoid anything normal or trivial. (Q & A added).

Here, the hotel acknowledges that any graffiti that is "normal or trivial" may be offensive to those Palestinians who have skeptical or negative views of international graffiti participation, and that tourists should consider their graffiti content.
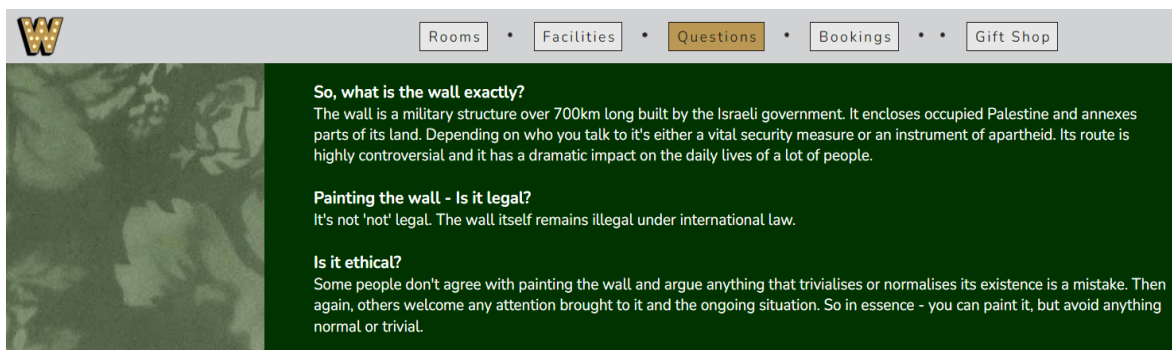

Figure 12: FAQ page from the Walled Off Hotel's website, 2022.

There is some debate between Palestinians over the benefits and consequences of the Walled Off Hotel itself. Hewafi and Arafah had this exchange while being interviewed for Equal Times (Demoulin, 2017):

> "They say they opened the hotel so that tourists can help the Palestinian economy, but there are lots of shops and local restaurants that have lost customers," says Hefawi. "I don't think that's true," counters Arafah. "The hotel attracts people from different horizons. Thanks to

the Walled Off [Hotel] there are more tourists than before. It brings work for taxis and the neighbourhood shops."

Jamil Khader, a Palestinian Fulbright Fellow and Dean of Research at Bethlehem University, challenges criticism that the hotel is exploiting the Palestinian struggle and argues that the hotel is a powerful symbol towards fighting colonialism and a strong challenge to the role of Britain in shaping current day Palestine. In an article he wrote for Al-Jazeera (Khader, 2017a), he explains which Banksy artworks in or near the hotel offer Palestinians imagery that unites the Palestinian struggle with other marginalized peoples around the world:

> Through his putatively apolitical artistic symbols, Banksy offers Palestinians a common struggle with other disposable communities around the globe, including refugees (the three refugee-less paintings), the unemployed and unemployable (the three rat clocks), and impoverished British communities (the girl with the balloon located just outside the site). This universality is the only way towards, as the logo embroidered on one of the bouncer's black windbreakers says, "decolonization."

He goes on to say that the hotel is a parody of "occutourism," or the consumerism and capitalism that has grown around the occupation and the wall, and that this is Banksy's way of pointing to the "problem of commodifying Palestinian suffering and oppression within the contradictions of Palestinian captive economy under occupation." To Khader, even the invitation to Israelis to come visit the hotel is a parody or sarcasm, challenging the Westernized notion that multiculturalism and tolerance through simply seeing the side of the "other" will somehow create peace.

Several Palestinian locals seem to be content with graffiti tourism but wish tourists would put more effort into showing respect and learning about Palestinian life and culture. A blog by Bethlehem residents, *Bethlehem Bloggers: Voices from the Bethlehem Ghetto*,

writes this frustrated post about tourists who seem naïve once crossing the wall into Bethlehem, a Palestinian Territory:

> It is extremely offensive to the people of Bethlehem when foreign visitors come through the wall and fail to notice that they have left Israel. After all its [sic] not as if the wall is a particularly unnoticeable boundary – it consists of 30ft of solid concrete with sporadic gun towers and steel gates! Its [sic] not hard to miss people... When visiting or writing about Bethlehem, please try to be sensitive to the fact that many of the things associated with the word 'Israel' have caused these people almost permanent suffering since 1947. The very least we can offer them in terms of respect is to at least [not] addressing [sic] these people with the name of their enemy (January, 2006).

Despite these criticisms, some Palestinians feel that tourists desiring to come to visit the wall should do so to get a real experience of what is happening in Palestine. Ala'a Asakereh, the taxi driver in Bethlehem whose business tags can be seen spray painted numerous times on the wall, told Media Line (Huddy, 2018) that Palestinians "have to tell people what's going on here. As a tourist you should see what's going on here."

Graffiti tourism and "occutourism" in Palestine has warranted similar criticisms present in various locations highlighted in conflict or dark tourism, where tourists take selfies that many would regard as inappropriate or insensitive due to the nature of the location. Unlike many of those locations visited in dark tourism, where the location is a historical site of a past conflict, visiting the West Bank Barrier is visiting an active site of ongoing conflict. One could wonder if photographs were not allowed, would tourists come to paint the wall at all? Would tourists even come to visit the wall if they couldn't take selfies with a Banksy piece? These are questions in the greater field of conflict and dark tourism. Conflict tourism involves visiting areas of current and past conflicts, while dark tourism includes visiting places of death and tragedy, such as mass grave sites and

genocide museums. While some tourists visit these places to learn history or a part of their own heritage, other tourists are accused by organizations, guides, fellow tourists, and those impacted by the featured tragedy of insensitivity and only being interested in photographing themselves in controversial places. Are tourists coming to actually learn about places such as Auschwitz or Chernobyl or are they coming to document their trip to post on social media for attention? There have been accounts of tour guides becoming upset at tourists acting disrespectful or taking smiling selfies while posing in the halls of Auschwitz, seeming to not understand the gravity of the place in which they stand. The Auschwitz Museum responded in a sternly worded tweet:

> When you come to @AuschwitzMuseum remember you are at the site where over 1 million people were killed. Respect their memory. There are better places to learn how to walk on a balance beam than the site which symbolizes deportation of hundreds of thousands to their deaths (Hucal, 2019).

While the Auschwitz Museum is a particularly harsh example, this type of behavior and disconnect has been increasingly occurring in a wide variety of conflict settings and places with dark histories. Regarding the West Bank Barrier, there is a similar criticism that the entertained attitude by many tourists while spray painting the wall and taking selfies of the variety pop icon images displayed on the wall seriously downplays the severity of the wall's impact on Palestinian life. Other critics have dubbed tourists' graffiti pilgrimages as "spraycations," further highlighting local resentment of the ignorance that accompanies this participation at their expense (Amin, 2019).

Academic scholars appear to view graffiti and wall tourism as something that is potentially exploiting Palestinian suffering but could also offer a powerful method in which to reveal the Palestinian reality to the rest of the world. Though they express concern that

wall tourism and graffiti tourism can come with risks of colonization and misrepresenting the Palestinian culture, Khader confirmed these perspectives by emphasizing the usefulness of international visitation to get Palestinian stories into the minds of tourists. Isaac and Ashworth (2012) have made arguments that "dark tourism" or "conflict tourism" are not necessarily one dimensional in terms of tourist intentions for visiting turbulent regions. Dark or conflict tourism can potentially be used to help change the image of such places while simultaneously boosting local economies through tourism. Tourists can get a close up look at what locals are experiencing on the ground level regarding conflict in their communities, and through speaking with locals be exposed to different perspectives, interact with political and religious sites, and all this while experiencing that culture firsthand. However, the original hope regarding graffiti tourism in Palestine, where tourists would come and experience Palestinian culture and get a close look at the wall and learn about its impact, seems to have dwindled away in many Palestinians. One can now easily buy prints of Banksy's imagery or other murals on the West Bank Barrier without so much as a visit.

Sendamessage, the Dutch-Palestinian non-profit group that charges roughly $40 USD for internationals to request messages to be painted on the wall, takes a different approach. They often accept messages that consist of memes, jokes, birthday messages, and even marriage proposals, content otherwise not related to the conflict or the impact of the wall. Faris Arouri, the Palestinian coordinator of the group, feels that painting on the wall is an act of peaceful resistance by Palestinian people. "You're not only defying the existence of the wall, but you're also showing the international community our refusal, first of all, to such a structure… it's an attempt to humanize the Palestinian society in the eyes of the

world, showing that the Palestinians are not just militants who are violently resisting occupation." Arouri expressed to CNN that the variety of messages requested to be painted has been "incredible" (Gray, 2009), though he did confirm that both the art and messages received are vetted to weed out any extremist, politically affiliated, or hostile rhetoric. He also emphasized that the project does its best to keep their messages non-controversial, claiming: "We don't want our work to end up a part of an ultra-Orthodox artist or Zionist artist or fundamentalist Muslim artist's work. We want to stay away from controversy — this kind of controversy" (Estrin, 2010). For Sendamessage, poetry and messages calling for peace and the removal of the wall by internationals is a powerful, globally inclusive way to inspire hope and encourage solidarity.

In attempts at solidarity, many tourists visit Palestine in person to paint messages that equate the wall to other global conflicts such as the U.S. – Mexico border wall or Kurdish independence, leading critics to claim these detract from the uniqueness of the Palestinian situation. Some Palestinians meet solidarity graffiti with skepticism. One graffito reads "Ubuntifada," combining the word for Palestinian struggle "intifada" with the African term "ubuntu" which is roughly translated as "I am because you are," signifying collective oneness through humanity. One Palestinian I spoke to in Bethlehem appreciated the sentiment but would rather see that solidarity used to challenge international government policies towards Palestine. Another new term to describe international interest in participation in the region is "solidarity tourism":

> Solidarity tourism, like any form of tourism, is an income generator, which can be seen as helping people who are suffering under occupation. But when well-meaning tourists come to witness the struggle, they also unwittingly create an economic demand for maintaining the status quo (Zananiri and Ben-Barak, 2017).

It would seem that the consensus is that internationals should more thoroughly consider what they choose in terms of graffiti content, colors, messages, or whether it should be done at all.

5.3 Palestinian Creative Responses to Graffiti Tourism

As a method of adaptation to the wall's negative impact on trade, business, and tourism in the West Bank, many Palestinians have found creative ways to use the wall to counter that loss. Some have projected sports matches on the concrete, using the wall as a backdrop to entertain guests at restaurants, while others have used the wall as an advertisement board to boost sales for their small businesses, such as Alaa the Taxi Driver and the Bahamas Seafood restaurant. However, a substantial amount of marketing regarding the wall focuses on its value as an artistic canvas. This includes taking advantage of the international desire to see the existing graffiti to make profit.

Today, the wall and putting graffiti on it is marketed as a unique opportunity for tourists to experience aspects of one of the world's most notorious conflicts. There are numerous examples as to how some Palestinians have made a profit off the wall and its graffiti. Merchandise associated with the wall and its graffiti has become quite popular in shops in Bethlehem, Ramallah, and Jerusalem. Tourists can find magnets, posters, keychains, and figurines of the wall and famous graffiti images, most notably "Make Hummus Not Walls" and some of Banksy's more popular works. Banksy's Walled Off Hotel advertises the "The World's Worst View" while the Wall Mart next door sells stencils and art materials for tourists to paint the wall themselves. Taxi drivers in Bethlehem tempt tourists with personal graffiti tours. These examples all refer to those

Palestinians who have found ways to profit from the wall and the wall's graffiti without making graffiti themselves. Moodi Abdalla, a Bethlehem graffiti artist who owns a Banksy souvenir shop close to the Walled Off Hotel, told Middle East news outlet Media Line (Huddy, 2018) that he "is banking off Banksy's name":

> It's hard to make a living here. It's a very hard life, you know, around the wall because the area is empty and very dead life here… I don't sell very touristic stuff. I sell, like, very simple things. It's all about the graffiti. I'm not like trying to be rich or like something. I'm just open to make a living here… When there's clashes or demonstrations happening here, it's like, we are like in the middle actually, in the middle. We can smell the tear gas, we hear all the shots. We hear everything. It's like a very crazy area. Very crazy.

Even though he does make his own graffiti, Abdallah is able to profit through an international artist's work rather than his own. But merchandise is only one of several ways in which the wall and its graffiti are being marketed and sold. Other ways in which the wall and its graffiti are being marketed include selling space on the wall to those who want to provide their own messages (both domestically and abroad), personal taxi tours, and the Walled Off Hotel and its Wall Mart. The Walled Off Hotel's manager, Wisam Salsaa, feels that the hotel has brought much needed work to tour guides and organizations, local shops and hotels, and taxi drivers. He considers the ability of local businesses to profit from the hotel "a very important form of resistance" to Israeli occupation (Cook, 2018).

There are a handful of organizations selling the opportunity for people living internationally to have their own messages written on the wall. Sendamessage, the organization responsible for the Farid Esack letter art piece, is one such organization. They are not seeking profit but rather using the money they receive for materials and donations

to local Palestinian charities (Gray, 2009). Palestinians selling space on the wall to tourists

for their own graffiti has become a unique phenomenon particularly in Bethlehem. When

walking along the wall in Bethlehem, there are several grey squares along the top half of

the wall. One contact on the ground explained that these are the educational posters created

by the Arab Educational Institute to show stories of those impacted by the occupation.

These posters are apparently sometimes painted over by locals to sell to tourists for graffiti-

making.

Taxi drivers in the region have also found ways to benefit from the graffiti,

particularly Banky's graffiti. While walking through the streets of Bethlehem near

Checkpoint 300 and the Walled Off Hotel, it is quite common for taxi drivers to pass by

and offer personal tours of authentic Banksy works nearby. One extremely popular piece is on a building in Beit Sahour – a depiction of a young, masked man throwing a bouquet of flowers, which has been adopted by local groups and stenciled all along the wall

Figure 13: Tourist spray paints own stencil on the wall in Bethlehem. Credit: The Walled Off Hotel.

and nearby buildings, substituting the bouquet of flowers with an olive branch along with

Arabic script (photograph by researcher, 2019). Alaa the Taxi Driver has taken to

graffitiing his phone number directly to the wall outside the Walled Off Hotel to attract

tourists for graffiti tours around Bethlehem. It has been successful – he is mentioned

glowingly in 53 of the Walled Off Hotel's TripAdvisor reviews.

Banksy's Walled Off Hotel has become one of the major tourist attractions in

Bethlehem. Just one year after its opening, the hotel had hosted over 140,000 visitors from

around the world with the wall as its featured attraction (Cook, 2018). On the website, the

rooms are described as "scenic" and allures tourists by claiming that "the hotel boasts floor

to ceiling views of graffiti-strewn concrete from almost every room. And for the

exhibitionists amongst you - many are within range of the army watchtower"

(walledoffhotel.com). Additionally, the Wall Mart describes itself as "your one-stop shop

for decorating the wall and the only store in the Middle East offering bespoke stencil

tutorials" (http://walledoffhotel.com/shop.html). Visitors can buy and customize their own

stencils as well as art materials to paint the wall themselves. They are even provided with a

ladder should they wish to paint their images higher off the ground where the majority of

graffiti is. Ironically, the original Walmart, the supercenter corporation in the U.S.A., also

sells Banksy's West Bank Barrier graffiti prints at their stores in the U.S.

(https://www.walmart.com/browse/home/banksy-prints/).

Travel and tourism organizations appear to play a large role in attracting tourists to

the regions where the wall is most graffitied. These tours are particularly prominent in

Ramallah, Jerusalem, and Bethlehem, and are run by both Palestinian and Israeli groups.

The tours are often sold as political or "alternative" tours, in which tourists are offered trips

into refugee camps, areas of high home demolition rates, contested religious sites, and areas

of contention between Jewish settlers and Palestinian residents, such as Hebron/al-Khalil.

The West Bank Barrier is often featured in these tours, with a focus on checkpoints and

watchtowers to highlight the burden these put on Palestinian residents. These tours are conducted by Palestinian tourism businesses as well as two Palestinian-Israeli cooperatives, which offer a broader view of the region and include experiences such as "Meet the Settlers" and visits to holy sites in Israel proper. However, after a survey of several of these tourism businesses that offer trips to the wall, the graffiti on the wall appears to be the highlight of such trips. Tours that highlight the wall's graffiti are Green Olive Tours (Jerusalem), Hantourism (Jericho), Murad Tours (Bethlehem), Beyond Borders (Jerusalem), Abraham Tours (Jerusalem), and Elijah Tours and Travel (Jerusalem). The only tour company that does not explicitly advertise Banksy or the graffiti on the wall is Alternative Tours (Jerusalem).

A few Israeli tour organizations offer political tours to the wall and are often run by Israeli activists or ex-military members who are critical of Israeli policy towards the Palestinians. Breaking the Silence, Bat Shalom, and Ir Amim all run political tours to educate tourists, and in some cases Israelis, about the wall and other aspects of occupation, though focusing on graffiti for these groups is more difficult as there are limited locations in which graffiti is placed on the Israeli side of the wall. However, Breaking the Silence, for example, coordinates with Palestinian community leaders to include a West Bank visit for tourists to meet and speak to Palestinians about their experiences living under occupation. In these instances, it is likely (though not advertised) that tourists will get a glimpse of the graffiti on the Palestinian side of the wall, particularly if Qalandiya Checkpoint and Checkpoint 300 are major destinations in these tours.

One destination popular with the Israeli tours is the al-Ezariyah Divide near Abu Dis, which as described by Larkin (2014) is another international tourist hotspot for graffiti but

is the only hotspot to my knowledge that lies on the Israeli side of the wall. Larkin describes this section of the wall as the "initial scene of solidarity marches" after its construction in 2003 and is the most visible section from the Old City of Jerusalem (p. 150). Much of the international graffiti takes place during "wall tours" conducted by both Palestinian and Israeli political tour companies. The tours typically cost anywhere from $0-$35 USD. Tourists on these tours use the opportunity to spray paint or write messages of solidarity on the wall at this stop. This area is also where one will find many messages that read "Scotland supports Palestine" and "Algeria is with Palestine, Freedom inshallah" (p. 151).

It appears that there is a variety of Palestinian responses to international graffiti that are taking place between graffitists, both Palestinian and international, through the graffiti itself rather than physical interaction, which includes defacing, corrections, and additions to existing works. This appears to be mostly by Palestinians aimed primarily at international art but also at other Palestinian art. Defacing occurs at a variety of levels and extremes, which include erasing graffiti to make space for new art, censorship, tagging, and full-blown defacing. In this paper, defacing refers to destroying an artwork completely, damaging it enough to send a message, or tagging with text that challenges the image (such as labeling a work as propaganda). Some defacing occurs to protest the marketing of the wall and to send a message to internationals that their graffiti content is not always wanted nor helpful. Defacing most often occurs with either tagging with English or Arabic text or complete erasure with paint rollers. Based on observation, conversations with locals in the region, and interviews recorded by various media outlets, reasons for defacing and painting over other works include protesting the capitalization of the wall; erasing or challenging

anti-Semitic or hostile images; censorship (Palestinians towards other Palestinians); and erasing irrelevant graffiti created by internationals.

Much of the defacing of international graffiti involves imagery that misrepresents the Palestinian narrative, fueling pushback against using the wall as a way to profit or make a name for oneself, as many international artists are accused of doing. In one peculiar instance, a

Figure 14: Make Hummus Not Walls painted by Palestinian artist Issa (mural appears to be a replica); Photograph by researcher, July 2019

defaced mural was repainted. Issa defaced his own "Make Hummus Not Walls" mural in front of the Walled Off Hotel to protest the mass production of his work, which he claimed was meant to be a "pun." After defacing his popular mural, he and a few friends wrote "Wanksy will save the world" and #Mam7onE7tilal (Horny for the occupation) on the wall in the mural's place, easily viewed from the hotel's front window. The #Mam7onE7tilal hashtag was spared erasure for two months, which Issa claimed referred to the hotel's role in promoting "conflict fetishisation." The use of Latin letters rather than Arabic script was deliberate, Issa told Al-Jazeera, so that "Arabs wouldn't read it and the foreigners wouldn't understand it" (Ashly, 2017). As Ashly (2017) concluded after her interview with Issa: "Palestinians and their suffering are reduced to celebrated symbols, devoid of the larger political realities shaping their lives." However, when visiting the hotel, the "Make

Hummus Not Walls" mural still stands. Upon closer inspection, the original mural appears to have been repainted by an unknown artist to look as though it never disappeared (the old letters at the base are still visible underneath) (photograph by researcher, 2019). One would assume the reason behind the reproduction is due to its popularity with tourists and potential revenue.

While much of the counter graffiti by Palestinians is a response to marketing the wall and a perceived fetishization of the occupation by internationals, some Palestinians target specific content that appears, such as hostile rhetoric, anti-Semitic graffiti, or artwork that inaccurately represents the reality on the ground. Based on the research conducted, any image of Trump that does not criticize him is destroyed. His hostility towards the Palestinian people and readiness to jeopardize the peace process contributes to the persistence of locals to deface any depiction of him in their space. The hostile and occasional anti-Semitic content could be placed there by Palestinians but after reading online interviews and

Figure 15: Trump mural that formerly read "I will build you a brother" in reference to the U.S.-Mexico wall defaced. Photograph by researcher, Bethlehem, July 2019.

speaking to Palestinians during field visits, this does not appear to be the case. While some

Palestinians make graffiti that criticizes Israeli policy or hypocrisy within Judaism, openly

hateful and violent works are typically not common

among Palestinians. One Palestinian peace organization discourages its youth groups from

painting hateful rhetoric on the wall, as it is not only unhelpful, but it could also be

dangerous to locals who fear retribution from Israeli soldiers. During an interview, a

Palestinian tour guide claimed that most racist or anti-Semitic graffiti is created by tourists

who assume they are showing solidarity or protesting Israeli occupation, but in actuality is

frowned upon by many in the Palestinian community. In one instance, the teenagers he

worked with had a dialogue about the use of hostility in organized resistance against

oppression and chose to gather and to deface a message likely written by a tourist that reads

"Fuck Israel." Images or text that speak to alt-right, Far-right, or anti-Semitic groups are

often rejected by local Palestinian groups and are targeted for defacing.

Lushsux and his large murals of pop culture figures are a serious topic of contention

for many Palestinians who loathe his presence in their space. To outspoken Palestinian

artists and activists, Lushsux's graffiti is both offensive and inaccurate. A mural of Joe

Rogan, a controversial American podcaster and comedian, painted by Lushsux included a

text bubble asking: "Can you pull up that picture of me on the illegal border wall?" In

response, Hefawi, who has defaced several of Lushsux's works, defaced it almost

immediately, writing "This is not a border wall. It's an apartheid wall" and "Palestine is on

both sides of the wall" (Ashly, 2017). The fact that Lushsux is accused of alt-right and anti-

Semitic connections adds another reason for locals to deface his work. Hewafi raises

concerns about Lushsux's connections to the alt-right and took offense to a Morgan

Freeman/Nelson Mandela mural by saying:

By looking into [Lushsux's] paintings, you will come to see that he is drawing from a specific, subtle, and sinister agenda that is characterized by racism, the alt-right, and fascism. For example, using the quote of Nelson Mandela on a mural depicting Morgan Freeman. If this does not express racism against Black people, than [sic] it implies the shallowness of Palestinians (Hewafi, 2017).

Lushsux will sometimes paint one celebrity with a speech bubble of words from another celebrity, such as the aforementioned Larry David image with the Bernie Sanders quote, both Jewish celebrities. It appears he only has taken this approach with Black or Jewish celebrities, reflecting a racist or racially insensitive tendency by usually White people where all people of one race "look the same." According to Ashly (2017), Lushsux is reportedly aware of the negative feelings many Bethlehem residents have towards him and his work, but continues to make art on the wall regardless, calling his defaced murals "Israeli modern art masterpieces." This only makes matters worse, as he is using the term "Israeli art" to refer to Palestinian action against his graffiti, hence insulting the locals and thus alienating himself even further.

The act of defacing has also challenged the beautification of the wall's appearance by international graffiti art and memes, and instead has revealed the ugly nature of consumerism, colonialism, and occupation. One work that was defaced by Palestinian residents of Abu Dis was a piece called *Face 2 Face.* French artist JR and Swiss artist Marco created an exhibit in which they blew up black and white portraits of Israelis and Palestinians making funny faces and posted them along the wall in various locations. The goal of the project was to highlight the similarities between the two groups in a lighthearted way, potentially sparking dialogue and empathy for the "other" (JR, 2007). However, after enduring increased political tensions, Palestinians in the Abu Dis area felt that they were

not the ones who needed a lesson in Jewish and Arab similarities and argued that this piece should have been on the Israeli side of the wall. Defacing this exhibition is largely due to what Khader (2017a) referred to as a Westernized tendency to assume that the pathway to peace is simple exposure to the "other." Almost all the portraits have been torn apart or painted over – most of what remains today are tattered shreds offering ghost images of Jerusalem's faces.

There have been other Palestinians as well as international residents who share similar thoughts on how international artists are using the wall as a potential career opportunity and use similar tactics such as defacing and correcting artworks as a response. But there is also a concern about who gets to deface work, even if such actions are intended to show solidarity. One Palestinian rights advocate from the U.S. also targeted Lushsux's murals, spraying "Palestine is not your drawing board" in Arabic and taking a paint roller to other works (Ashly, 2017). While his actions reflect genuine solidarity and protest of Lushsux's actions, one could question whether Palestine is any more an American activist's drawing board considering the role the U.S. plays in funding Israeli policies that harm Palestinian life.

Corrections and additions to existing graffiti are other examples of artists directly engaging with existing graffiti. This is different from defacing as the correction of or addition to
an existing artwork appears to have a different intent. Counter-graffiti or defacing an artwork attempts to cancel out an unwanted graffiti message through destruction, covering up, or tagging. There appears to be a different purpose to correcting or adding to an existing artwork, as the artist does not destroy the artwork, but instead tries to alter or enhance the

existing graffiti's message. Corrections to existing art pieces are attempts to change the

artwork to more accurately reflect the reality on the ground. Palestinians seem to employ

this tactic more than international artists and tourists. Some documented occurrences of

"corrections" include Banksy's young girl frisking a soldier, while another Banksy mural

that depicts a set of armchairs next to a window facing a mountain landscape was "de-

beautified" to more accurately portray the environment the wall has created. The scenic

landscape appears to have been a print glued to the wall rather than spray painted and was

ripped off, leaving only the armchairs and a blank window frame (Shalem & Wolf, 2011, p.

129). An artist has since come along and re-painted a new scene into the empty window

frame, and the window now offers a view of a solid brick wall, a more accurate depiction

of the landscape as a result of the separation wall. One young Palestinian explained the

correction:

> Someone bricked up the window Banksy painted on the wall. Maybe they didn't like his
> work, or the idea of a beautiful landscape. For me, the issue is not about rejecting the view
> but whether it's the right time to imagine it (Larkin, 2014, p. 144).

Similarly, Banksy's pieces that depict beach or mountainous landscapes appearing through

holes in the wall are made of paper material rather than spray paint, and these scenes are

often ripped off the wall. Ganivet (2019) highlights the potential reasoning behind this:

> The idyllic landscape on the other side features the beach, the mountains, or the forest -
> scenes that don't necessarily correspond to the experiences of Palestinians, both because the
> Israeli government is annexing their territory, and because Banksy's ideal projection is not
> necessarily what the local population wants. (p. 118).

Tearing apart the scenic views is another way in which Palestinians are rejecting a Western

tendency to romanticize the peace process. Even if the wall were to come down tomorrow,

Israel still has control over the coastlands and tensions would not disappear. Indeed, the beach of the Mediterranean Sea is quite a dangerous place for Palestinians living in Gaza, where Israeli blockade ships deny Palestinian movement beyond 10 nautical miles (18km) from the coastline (10 nautical miles less than set in the Oslo Accords) (Times of Israel, 2019; B'Tselem, 2013) and the Israeli military has fired upon Gazans on the shore during high tensions, including children (Hussein, 2020). By tearing away the scenic landscape portions of Banksy's artworks and leaving just the subject (children, armchairs, etc.) alone with a view of the wall, the artwork's meaning changes to reveal a truth of Palestinian reality – that wall continues to dominate many aspects of their lives, even if they can imagine a world without it.

Some of Banksy's works have been outright destroyed. Banksy has created artworks that have used animal symbols to make political points without realizing that they are offensive to many of those who live there. The first was of the donkey having its papers checked by an IDF soldier, which was intended to be a slight towards the strictness of the Israeli occupation. There is some conflicting information on this particular mural. Based on media

Figure 16: Banksy's armchair with a view piece before and after being "corrected." Credits: PA | The Guardian, 2011 (above); Parry, 2011, p. 29 (below)

interviews, both previously mentioned Walid the Beast and a restaurant owner and shop owner, Mike Canawati, have claimed to have cut this mural out of the wall in which it was painted and sold it to an art dealer (Tribeca Studios, 2018; Estrin, 2010). In the case of Canawati, he claimed, "I don't like the idea of putting Palestinians as donkeys," and decided an alternative way to respond to Banksy's donkey piece painted on building nearby. He reportedly cut the artwork out of the side of the building and planned to sell it to a British art dealer to raise money for charity for his community. The dealer withdrew the offer in the end, so Canawati kept the piece in his souvenir shop's driveway. He expressed that this endeavor inadvertently made him into an art dealer, saying "If the buyers come, I am ready to cut down all the walls of Bethlehem" (Estrin, 2010). Another of Banksy's painted over works is of a rat with a slingshot to signify the Palestinian children who throw stones at the IDF. A local Palestinian took offense to this, saying "We don't make jokes about kids who sacrifice their lives for their land. They are not rats – they are lions… I'm sure it's worth a lot, but it's not worth more than our dignity" (Harrison, 2007). The piece was scrubbed out and

Figure 17: Graffiti showing the way to Jerusalem from Bethlehem is corrected to show the wall as an obstacle. Credit: In Locamotion, 2018

painted over, and later, someone spray-painted on the remaining concrete slab "R.I.P. Banksy Rat" (Parry, 2011, p. 51).

Another striking example of "correcting" an art piece appears in Bethlehem (In Locamotion, 2018). One graffitist had spray painted the words "Bethlehem" and "Jerusalem" onto the wall with an arrow telling the viewer that Jerusalem is only 8.8km away. Another graffitist took a permanent marker to make the Bethlehem to Jerusalem map more reflective of reality for Palestinians by sketching in the wall, complete with a watchtower, between the words "Bethlehem" and "Jerusalem," hence separating them. The graffitist then added their own arrow to inform the viewer that the only way to Jerusalem from Bethlehem is through the wall. It is unclear who is responsible for the correction, but the assumption is that it is a Palestinian resident.

In some cases, rather than "correct" the artwork, which involves directly altering the original piece, new text or more imagery is added to existing graffiti to enhance the message or add another viewpoint to the piece. In Qalandiya near the old checkpoint, one of Banksy's most popular works is of a young girl in a dress being lifted into the air by a bunch of balloons. Instead of being defaced, a graffitist repainted her in another location and she is now accompanied by a large bird clad in the colors of the Palestinian flag with additional balloons in its mouth, asking "Sister, you need more?" (Wall in Palestine, 2010). The addition of the Palestinian bird offering Banksy's girl more balloons (potentially a local and international graffiti

Figure 18: Palestinian bird added to replica of famous Girl with Balloons by Banksy. Photo credit: Wall in Palestine, Flickr, 2010.

combination), which are helping her float upwards to escape over the wall, could suggest that collaboration between the Palestinian and international communities is one pathway toward Palestinian liberation. Alternatively, the fact that the Palestinian bird is offering the girl his balloons rather than using the balloons to escape himself could speak to the Palestinian reality that they are confined within a wall, but internationals are free to leave. The addition of the Palestinian bird adds a new dimension to Banksy's stencil of the girl, perhaps complicating the message by adding nuances relevant to the Palestinian experience.

Censorship of artwork on the wall appears to be a less common occurrence. The most notable example was mentioned earlier in this chapter, in which a Palestinian artist painted the rainbow flag on the Qalandiya checkpoint to promote freedom for the Palestinian people but was erased shortly after by religious conservatives who disapproved of the reference to homosexuality and did not want the mural to link acceptance of gay marriage to Palestinian values (Jarrar, 2015). Another instance of censorship did not actually happen on the wall but close by when someone wrote "religion is dead" on a wall by a Ramallah hospital, which, considered a controversial statement in Palestine, was spray painted over and erased. But Abdel Hamid feels that such statements were "unthinkable" not too long ago and this type of graffiti is "an actual interaction between people where communication is going both ways" (Al-Monitor, 2012). Additionally, both Abdel Hamid and Horani feel that there is self-censorship among Palestinian artists, who feel they must confine themselves to content that is socially acceptable in Palestinian society, so they represent themselves as "Palestinian enough." Abdel Hamid told Al-Monitor (2012) that

"there is this pressure that you are representing the oppressed. So if you are doing graffiti, it should attack Israel."

5.4 Targeting Specific Tourist Groups via Graffiti

One response to graffiti tourism has been to target specific tourist groups via graffiti as a form of communication and influence. With over 2 million visitors a year, extremely high tourist traffic in Bethlehem has inspired many Palestinian graffitists to use the wall to send a variety of messages to specific sets of visitors. While the use of English is meant to widen the potential audience in general, targeting specific audiences occurs through pop icons from particular cultures, specific national references, and religious symbolism. Based on the data gathered in this thesis, the most targeted international audiences appear to be international youth and social movements, American citizens, and Christians.

Appealing to these demographics is likely an attempt to spark some form of social action and political pressure due to each group's potential influence on their countries' political standing on Israel and Palestine. Popular movements today, such as Black Lives Matter and the Extinction Rebellion are often led by, but not limited to, today's youth. The Millennial and Gen Z generations are generally (and globally) outspoken about human rights violations, government and personal accountability, and the climate crisis, following young activists like Sweden's Greta Thunberg and Hong Kong's Joshua Wong. These groups are technologically savvy, navigating social media and the internet with ease and effectiveness, making their social justice movements easily accessible which helps them build momentum outside their own countries. Thus, using memes and pop icons to tell the

Palestinian story goes straight to the heart of this population, and this is what often occurs on the West Bank Barrier.

For example, the connection between Palestinians and Black Americans has been strong since before George Floyd. When Ethel Minor, a Black student part of the civil-rights organization Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), published an article criticizing Israeli policy towards the Palestinians in 1967 (Fischbach, 2019), she and the SNCC laid the foundation for a "a new discourse into American political life" in the Black community's "open support of the Palestinians" (Fischbach, 2019, p. 37). With increased visibility of police brutality via video recordings over the last decade, the Black Lives Matter movement launched in 2013 in response to 17-year-old Trayvon Martin's death at the hands of George Zimmerman and quickly gained support globally (www.blacklivesmatter.com). In 2014, 18-year-old Michael Brown, an unarmed Black man, was shot numerous times by White police officer Darren Wilson in Ferguson, Missouri, sparking a massive uprising by the local Black community. This eventually spread to nation-wide protests as more unarmed Black men were killed combined with the lack of accountability or punishment for those police officers using excessive force. As protesters faced violent responses from police forces, Palestinians overseas offered advice on how to handle being tear-gassed, while Palestinian-Americans led marches and walked alongside Black Americans in nation-wide protests (Rickford, 2021). Graffiti on the base of the wall in the West Bank at that time read: "From Ferguson to Palestine – Resistance is not a crime. End Racism Now! <3 STL-PSC." [signed the St. Louis Palestine Solidarity Committee] (Tamari, 2014). Though the Black community has significantly less political power in the U.S. than the massive, mostly White evangelical lobby, the Black Lives

Matter movement is quite powerful both domestically and abroad, offering a strong

international support system that could potentially link Palestinian issues to its own fight

against racism, oppression, and police brutality.

Another demographic that some Palestinians are trying to reach specifically are

American tourists in general, which is evident in the abundance of negative or critical

graffiti regarding its military spending or support. Nationalistic symbols and references are

used to target some British tourists but are more often directed at American tourists to try

and remind them of their own countries' historical roles and current involvement in shaping

the region today. American citizens are targeted via graffiti to potentially try and educate,

appeal to, or guilt and shame them into understanding the U.S.'s role in the current state of

Palestine and Israel. A Gallup poll in 2021 showed trends over time in American public

opinion about Palestinian statehood and where the U.S. should place pressure regarding the

peace process. The findings showed that even though Americans are "warming" to the

Palestinians and a very slim majority of Americans support Palestinian statehood (52%),

the overall majority of Americans still strongly support the State of Israel and feel the

majority of pressure regarding the peace process should land on the Palestinians (Saad,

2021). Palestinians use graffiti to directly criticize the USA and its staunchly pro-Israel

stance:

> 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 [sic] 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 [italics added] (Toenjes, 2015, pp. 63-64).

Directly connecting the US to the Israeli occupation through graphic and outwardly accusatory graffiti could potentially hold a striking and educational value for American viewers, many of whom are likely not well versed in the nuances of the occupation nor the Palestinian struggle. However, should the American public's support for Palestine increase over time, it could seriously alter existing U.S. foreign policy towards Israel and potentially create ripples across the globe, particularly in Europe.

Another way to instill feelings of shame and guilt or appeal to the morality of tourists who visit Palestine is to use religious graffiti. Christians who make pilgrimages to Bethlehem are targeted with graffiti that appeals to their morality and sense of spiritual justice, often through images or references to God, Jesus, Bible verses, and Christian iconography. The vast majority of this graffiti is found in Bethlehem, where there is a high number of religious tourists and pilgrims who come to Bethlehem visit the Church of the Nativity and Rachel's Tomb, which now lies on the Israeli side of the wall. However, religious graffiti can be found on numerous portions of the wall outside of Bethlehem. Accurately assigning authorship to some of these works is somewhat difficult because it appears that both Palestinians and internationals use religious graffiti, though tourists seem to use religious symbolism and statements more often than international street artists.

Most of the graffiti that reference God and Jesus reflect feelings of hope, peace, and love. However, God, Jesus, Bible verses, and Christian iconography are also used to invoke shame and guilt. References to God often are threatening, invoke shame for building walls, attempt to instill fear of being watched and/or remind the viewer of inevitable judgment.

This work is to appeal to the viewer's sense of morality, empathy, and spiritual responsibility. In Toenjes' analysis of Christian imagery, she highlights one significant example of how Christian-themed graffiti is used to appeal to Christian tourists near Bethlehem, specifically near Rachel's Tomb. Palestinians today no longer have access to this holy site, but tourists do when they visit Israel. The wall cuts so close to the site that one can hear tours being given by Israeli tour guides from the Palestinian side. However, before the wall completely cut tourists off from visiting the site from the Bethlehem side, graffiti lined the existing walls before completion attempting to reach those pilgrims' sense of compassion. Toenjes (2015) describes the purpose of Christian graffiti back when the wall had not yet cut Rachel's Tomb from Bethlehem, and tourists still could access the holy site from the Palestinian side:

> 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*." 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 (Toenjes, 2015, p. 62). [italics added].

Given the high tourist traffic for Christian sites in Bethlehem, this type of graffiti is deliberately placed near sites where tourists will see it and be forced to confront their own morality and spirituality. Though the wall was completed in this area, and tourists can no longer access Rachel's Tomb through Bethlehem, the stretch of the wall that lies directly behind the holy site is still covered with Christian imagery, although now it is often

accompanied by posters or photos that explain how Palestinian's have lost access to the site (photograph by researcher, 2019). Often, references to Judaism and Christianity are combined to widen the message. Toenjes (2015) asserts that "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" (p. 61).

There is also the instance of one graffiti that was commissioned by local Palestinian nuns. It was painted by Ian Knowles, the former principal of the Bethlehem Icon Centre, whose main goal is "dedicated to the renewal of iconography as a living part of the spiritual landscape of the Holy Land" (Woods, 2019). Knowles was approached by the nuns to paint the Icon of Our Lady who Brings Down Walls in his Byzantine artistic style directly on the West Bank Barrier. Pilgrims in Bethlehem travel to see this icon located near Checkpoint 300. It was painted in response to the wall's impact on residents, and out of a "desire of local and International faithful to pray before an icon that would bring peace and hope for the demolition of the wall" (Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, 2019). Knowles describes the piece as "a contrast to violence and injustice, in the hope of peace and reconciliation for all…" (Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2012). This graffiti has effectively created a following in which internationals visit Bethlehem to offer prayers for peace.

Jesus is perhaps the most common religious image found along the wall in Bethlehem. Jesus staring at the viewer disapprovingly, peering silently through broken parts of wall, weeping, or referenced as such through text are all examples of the artist suggesting the wall and the policies behind it are against the core principles of Christianity. Images of a bleeding and broken Jesus, such as Cake$_Stencils' graffiti, accompanied by calls for peace and empathy attempt to appeal to global humanity, but more specifically, to

force Christian viewers to confront the cruelty of the wall and how it can reconcile with their faith.

While much of this graffiti can be directed to the Christian tourists in general, the Christian group with the most power to enact social change in the region would be American Evangelicals. A substantial portion of the religious visitors to Bethlehem are American Evangelicals, who make up roughly 25% of U.S. citizens. They are a major voting bloc in U.S. politics, making them a particularly powerful group with considerable influence over U.S. policy. Right-wing evangelicals strongly support Israel's annexation of the West Bank due to dispensationalist beliefs – the belief that once the entirety of Biblical land is under Israeli control, the Messiah will return and Armageddon will begin, a much-anticipated event by most evangelicals (and an event that ultimately is, theologically, at the expense of the Jewish people) (Haija, 2006). As such, U.S. policy as heavily influenced by evangelicals has been detrimental towards Palestinians, further costing them land and pushing them out of their homes. Many politically active far-right church leaders view Palestinians as radical Islamists, impacting how their congregations also view Palestinians as a whole. Ironically, Palestinian Christians are often left out of the American Evangelical picture, making it clear to Palestinians who the American evangelicals value in terms of salvation and redemption. But after a survey was conducted highlighting misconceptions that Americans have about Bethlehem and showing the impact the wall has on Christian tourism and residency, Leila Sansour, Palestinian-British filmmaker and head of project Open Bethlehem, explained: "Either the wall stays and Bethlehem ceases to be a Christian town, or Bethlehem retains its Christian population -- in which case the wall has to come down… The international community needs to wake up to what is happening and choose."

She explained that the view of Bethlehem by Americans versus that of its residents are "wildly at odds" (Sansour, 2006), with many not understanding its demographics and political atmosphere.

Some of the existing artwork on the wall has led international artists to express their own guilt by way of both nationalistic and religious artwork. The artist of the Palestinian *Pietà*, Katie Miranda, expresses guilt and helplessness she feels watching the conflict from afar in the U.S.: "Those of us living in liberal democracies should never take for granted the hard-won freedoms we have." The mural has since been painted over (Mondoweiss, 2019). As discussed in Chapter 7, Ron English, a world-renowned American street artist, has taken to the wall to criticize his own country's hand in further marginalizing the Palestinian people. Near Aida refugee camp in Bethlehem, English created a piece titled *Pardon our Oppression,* in which an armed clown in soldier's gear peers through the wall's slabs painted in bright red and white. His goal behind the piece was to highlight the US as an accomplice to Israel's oppression of Palestinians:

> The concept behind Pardon our Oppression was to link American support to the oppression of the Palestinian people. Since Israel is our welfare state, we have a certain responsibility for the Palestinian people that we don't seem to want to acknowledge (Parry, 2011, p. 59).

This mural has since been mostly destroyed. He also painted another piece nearby where children are shown being bombed by a "little American pilot – again with the same thematic" (p. 59). It would appear that some international artists' motivations for visiting the region are out of a sense of helping Palestinians educate international audiences on the realities on the ground in Palestine, and perhaps to highlight the lack of interest and action

by the international community, as confirmed by a graffiti message in Bethlehem that cries "EU, UN, WHERE ARE YOU?" (Parry, 2011, p. 69).

Overall, the discussion on whether graffiti participation should be allowed, who gets to participate, and choice of graffiti content is complicated by the barrage of competing voices. Arafah laments: "People come here now as though they are visiting the pyramids in Egypt, like they are visiting a tourist attraction. They see the beauty of graffiti now instead of the suffering" (Wiles, 2013). This can be observed by visiting the Walled Off Hotel – tourists take up close photographs of attractive graffiti, resulting in no context as to what the graffiti is painted on. Palestinian activist Amany Khalifa told Al-Jazeera that "the wall has become a product. It has become exotic and sexy for internationals" and is "exoticising Palestinian trauma" (Ashly, 2017). In the book *In Ramallah, Running* (Mannes-Abbot, 2012), Palestinian artist Emily Jacir laments on international arts-based groups constantly arriving in the region presumably without an invitation: "Every day there seems to be a new international group coming to do an art project… I am too exhausted. This feels like an onslaught of art missionaries. All of a sudden there seems to be a plethora of projects using Palestinians as subject matter" (p. 148). This also applies to international NGOs who fund art projects intended to show solidarity but outside interests often dictate graffiti content: "[Palestinian] graffiti artists are caught between either adhering to the external aesthetic and thematic expectations exerted on them by transnational institutions and foreign sponsors, or embracing their own artistic freedom" (Lovatt, 2010, pp. 25-26). Two artists from the Ramallah-based al-Mahata Gallery, Hafiz and Misbah, recalled a similar negative experience working with international sponsors, and decided in the end to cut off collaboration to instead pursue their own creative endeavors. Hafiz explained that as

Palestinian artists, "either we surrender our artistic creativity to foreign NGO's who [seek to] align us to their views or we go underground. For me, my upcoming ambition is to throw all this away and go again to underground graffiti" (p. 26). The wall seems to have become an open invitation to showcase art projects with the intention of helping an oppressed people, ironically mostly without their consent or support. Whether internationals are aware of it or not, "there is growing concern over the small but dangerous industry of commercialising apartheid, and the fear that it might have a vested interest in actually maintaining the wall" (Amin, 2019).

Tourists who visit and take part in painting the wall can be seen clearly having fun, smiling and posing for photos with their artwork. This has created tension for some Palestinians as it indicates that the tourists are enjoying the experience of painting on the wall rather than learning about what the wall does, who it impacts, and how they can help. One report by French journalist in Equal Times news describes one such situation:

> A pair of young tourists lean a ladder against the separation wall in Bethlehem, in the West Bank. They take it in turns to climb a few metres up to spray paint a stencil of a bear's paw print that they have cut out themselves. When they've finished, they ask the Palestinian woman who sold them the material to take a photo of their work. They are all smiles. "They were smiling because they had fun painting the wall. They said they hoped that one day, maybe, a bear would destroy it," says the Palestinian woman who took the couple's photo (Demoulin, 2017).

Demoulin also spoke to Jamal Juma, the coordinator of the Palestinian Stop the Wall campaign. He explained that in the Palestinian view, to him, "the wall should have stayed as it was, it should not be turned into a painting that's nice to look at. But we can't stop people from expressing themselves." Arafah added "To tell the truth, the graffiti brings so much business that we can't really oppose them" (Demoulin, 2017).

Some Palestinian voices also reject artists that they perceive as using the wall to gain notoriety or for personal gain. Hewafi expressed this view to Equal Times: "Palestinians have been fighting against occupation for 70 years. The artists are using our cause for their own interests, to become popular" (Demoulin, 2017). Though graffiti making and artwork may often come across as harmless and fun, internationals have a responsibility to consider the ethics and impact of their actions. It is unclear how many tourists take selfies with graffiti images to post with little context to their Snapchat, TikTok, and Instagram accounts. Hefawi told Al Jazeera in 2017 that "for years, foreigners have not been challenged about their activities here," suggesting it is time for tourists, as well as international artists, to be held accountable for their actions. Khalifa explained that "Palestinians have been put into a position where we have to make internationals understand the situation, without making them feel uncomfortable" (Ashly, 2017).

Lushsux is the most common target of such criticisms, but other artists, including Banksy, have been challenged in this way. While undoubtedly many Palestinians do enjoy Banksy's work and his attention to their cause, it still instills resentment, concern, and skepticism for some of the locals in the region. What many of Banksy's fans and the tourists who come to see his work do not seem to realize (based on media interviews, graffiti websites, and TripAdvisor) is that while many well-renowned artists do visit Palestine with perhaps good intentions, it is the Palestinian locals who live there with the artworks and are either misrepresented or overshadowed in the competition for art space on the wall. Their work and its use as political resistance is hardly in the spotlight as graffiti tourism has taken over – indeed to many, as Demoulin (2007) puts it: "Now commonplace, the phenomenon has in fact been imposed on Palestinians without them encouraging it."

Nour Magazine's Mikaela Maalouf sums up the phenomenon of international graffiti

involvement articulately:

> …it can be seen that the wall has attracted a diverse group of artists and tourists, and serves
> as a canvas to a multitude of art forms: be it cartoon art, portraiture, word art (etc.) and
> serves as a way to disseminate news, opinions, emotions, encouragement, and narratives.
> Whether the emergence of 'big-name' Western artists attaching their names to art on the
> wall has helped or hurt the Palestinian people and artists is still debated. However, the wall
> does serve as an enormous storyboard that reflects the Palestinian narrative, history, and
> culture – things that are hugely important for the international community to learn about
> and understand (Maalouf, 2021).

This argument, whether the "emergence of 'big-name' Western artists attaching their

names to art on the wall has helped or hurt the Palestinian people and artists", is one that

has made Banksy, his fellow street artists, and his huge fanbase seeking out his work in

Palestine quite a controversial topic.

CHAPTER VI

Banksy: The Gateway for International Street Art on the West Bank Barrier

Given his undeniable presence on the West Bank Barrier, inclusion of other international artists in his West Bank Barrier projects, and the resulting impact on tourism in the region, it is important to set aside a portion of this dissertation to discuss the conversations and controversy surrounding Banksy himself in this context. As we have seen, Palestinian opinions of Banksy and his work vary widely, ranging from rejection to praise, and his presence continues to be a topic of contention among Palestinian activists and artists regarding the potential for his notoriety and his following to harm their cause or, conversely, the best way to use it to gain global solidarity. Banksy already had a considerable following before traveling to Palestine in the mid-2000s. When he began to document his work on the West Bank Barrier, it enticed several other European street artists to follow suit, opening the door to international attention to the wall and graffiti tourism occurring in the region today.

6.1 Background

Banksy is widely believed to be from Bristol, UK and began his controversial career as a street artist in the 1990's. He has chosen to maintain anonymity not only to elude authorities, but also the mystery behind his identity seems to give extra allure to his work (Ellsworth-Jones, 2013). His style of work is whimsical but is always political in nature,

challenging local and global societal and systemic problems. Banksy works to speak to the public through his street art, directly engaging them to critically think about systemic issues and their own power as a community to make change. In an interview, Banksy explained:

> You don't have to go to college, drag 'round a portfolio, mail off transparencies to snooty galleries or sleep with someone powerful, all you need now is a few ideas and a broadband connection. This is the first time the essentially bourgeois world of art has belonged to the people. We need to make it count (Ellsworth-Jones, 2013).

His rejection of elitist art galleries and the exclusivity of the fine arts world has always been apparent but became even more pronounced in 2018 when one of his paintings shredded itself immediately after being auctioned off for £1 million at Sotheby's fine arts auction house in London. Ironically, some art critics speculate that this performative stunt may have actually increased the piece's value (BBC, 2018).

Banksy's work seeks to challenge societal issues of racism, oppression, colonialism, classism, elitism, and warfare. Much of his work uses rats, chimpanzees, and children engaging in defiant acts such as graffiti, looking at the viewer questioningly or sternly as if to invoke conversation, or wearing provocative signs. Sometimes the subject is seen playing with something of innocence, like a child in a sandbox, but the context in which it is placed challenges the innocence and provokes feelings of risk and danger (Banksy, 2023). Banksy's graffiti always addresses a conflict at hand, which is why many Palestinians appreciate the work he has brought to their towns. His work in Palestine has captured international attention, directing the public eye towards Palestinian life under Israeli occupation through his imagery of bullet-proof vested doves and protesters hurling bouquets of flowers like Molotov cocktails. However, his presence in Palestine has been nothing less than controversial.

6.2 <u>Banksy in Palestine</u>

Banksy first arrived in the West Bank to paint on the West Bank Barrier in 2005, three years after its construction began and the negative impact on Palestinian life was more visible. His views on the Israeli occupation and treatment of the Palestinian people are quite clear not only through his artwork, but also through his own words on social media posts and rare interviews. He has blamed the wall for turning Palestine into "the world's largest open-air prison" (The Guardian, 2011). To this day, he has created about nine known art pieces on walls in Palestine, both in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

After his initial solo trip to the region in 2005, Banksy returned in 2007 to do a collaborative project with a team of international artists related to his ongoing work in London called *Santa's Ghetto.* Around twenty artists, including Italian artists Blu and Eric the Dog, British artists Antony Micallef and Paul Insect, and American artists Ron English, Swoon, and Faile joined Banksy and staged an exhibition in Manger Square and painted their works all around Bethlehem, on houses and shops as well as the wall (Shalem & Wolf, 2011). In a letter to The Times, a British newspaper, Banksy explained that Bethlehem is not as festive for Christmas as people would imagine, given that the barrier has devastated its tourism industry. "It would do good if more people came to see the situation here for themselves," he wrote. "If it is safe enough for a bunch of sissy artists then it's safe enough for anyone" (CBC Arts, 2007). It can be argued that Banksy was a huge catalyst for international street artist interest in spray painting the West Bank Barrier, and after his initial visit and *Santa's Ghetto*, the number of international artists who visited the region skyrocketed. Some prominent artists include Australian artist Lushsux, French

artist JR, American twin artists How and Nosm, and Spanish artist Sam3, though countless international artists have graffitied the wall in the last decade and a half.

After making several visits to the region to paint the wall and surrounding areas, Banksy went even further in 2017 with the establishment of the Walled Off Hotel. Built directly next to the wall in Bethlehem just around the corner from Checkpoint 300, the Walled Off Hotel offers tourists the "World's Worst View," with its windows depriving its viewers of a scenic landscape and instead opens up to the graffitied concrete slabs less than 50 feet away, reportedly only allowing 25 minutes of sunlight in its 10 rooms per day (Graham-Harrison, 2017). The hotel is styled similarly to the Waldorf Hilton luxury hotel and the interior is covered in political and dystopian imagery thematic of conflict,

Figure 19: The Walled Off Hotel and West Bank Barrier, Bethlehem; Credit: Cailin's Blog, 2017 (www.travelyourself.ca/)

oppression, government hypocrisy, colonialism, and violence. In the lobby, guests can find gas masks hanging from the walls and Greek statues with face cloths to protect themselves from tear gas, all while portraying an atmosphere of lavishness. There is also a museum/gallery located in the back part of the building, showcasing both his work and art by Palestinian artists. The museum's curator, Housni Alkateeb Shehada, shared that the gallery is an effective way to showcase the work of Palestinian artists, who often struggle

with Israeli restrictions to travel to try and establish themselves outside the West Bank. He

claimed that there was discussion of projecting Palestinian artwork on the wall itself, but

that there is fear of retribution by Israeli soldiers. The gallery seems to be the safer way for

Palestinian artists in Bethlehem to get maximum exposure to internationals in the region

(Graham-Harrison, 2017).

Banksy outlined some of his goals for this hotel in a released statement, one of

which is for tourists to go beyond only taking photographs of their stay, but to also learn

about the wall's impact and Palestinian struggle. "[The hotel is] a three-storey cure for fanaticism, with limited car parking," he quipped. The colonial themes found in the hotel's design are a

Figure 20: The West Bank Barrier as seen through a window of a suite in the Walled Off Hotel, Bethlehem. Credit: The Walled Off Hotel

recognition of Britain's role in the region. He has also invited Israelis to come to the hotel

to get a close-up look at the wall and graffiti for themselves. Wisam Salsaa, the hotel's

manager, echoes this: "I would like to invite everyone to come here, invite Israeli civilians

to come visit us here. We want them to learn more about us, because when they know us it

will break down the stereotypes and things will change" (Graham-Harrison, 2017).

Many Palestinians support Banksy's attention to the wall in that it has brought

international media attention but would perhaps be more appreciative if he were to put

graffiti on the Israeli side of the wall, which remains, for the most part, barren and void of

graffiti. It is a crime for Israelis to graffiti the wall, and most graffiti that does exist on the Israeli side is either hostile to Palestinians, done for profit, or is an attempt to soften the wall's appearance, though some stray graffiti that address the wall explicitly are scattered around the country. It is illegal for most Israelis to travel into the West Bank, so information on the impact of the wall on Palestinian lives as well as most of the political graffiti (including Banksy's) are only largely accessible to Israelis via military enlistment, the internet, and social media. Graffiti by international artists on the Israeli side of the wall could provide a more powerful political statement, as it could be used to capture the attention of a greater audience, including tourists and Israelis, and raise awareness of the consequences of the wall.

To my knowledge, only one international artist has been confirmed to paint on the Israeli side of the wall. Now living in Tel Aviv, British artist James Ame, also known as AME72 or the "Lego Guy," is globally known, especially after he achieved the world record for the world's largest stencil (Landmark Street Art, 2022). He has painted his Lego man in Tel Aviv often as a way to challenge authoritative overreach by police and call for peace. He painted a series of Lego men on the Israeli side of the wall near the At-Tur/Zeitim Checkpoint just east of Jerusalem, spray-painting messages such as "Where's the missing peace?" (Shalem & Wolf, 2011, p. 43). Ten years later, he posted on his Facebook page that he had painted a sister art piece of a Lego man spray-painting the words "Still searching." Similarly, he painted a hooded man paint-rolling the words "NOTHING TO SEE HERE" on the Israeli side of the wall to point to the lack of view due to the wall's presence. He later tagged his moniker over the words (Shalem & Wolf, 2011, p. 44). This is something that sounds like what more Palestinians wish out of Banksy,

especially considering how valuable and attention grabbing his works tend to be. As one

Ramallah-based graffiti artist put it in the 2018 film *The Man Who Stole Banksy*: "I think

Banksy's art – it's not about influencing the artists here [Palestine]. It's more about putting

this place in the spotlight. It could make more difference if he paints on the other side of

the wall. We know what's happening here." Ironically, AME72 has visited the Walled Off

Hotel and painted near the wall there and is often questioned if he is the real Banksy

(Landmark Street Art, 2022).

Many Palestinians, however, still consider Banksy an ally and appreciate the new

levels of tourism his work has brought to the region, as well as his contributions to

Palestinian establishments. All of the Walled Off Hotel's employees are Palestinian, and

any surplus profit made by the hotel is then donated to various Palestinian charities in

Bethlehem. Banksy sold three of his paintings in London for £2.2m and donated the

proceeds to a Bethlehem hospital (McDonald, 2020). In the summer of 2020, a group of

Palestinians in Bethlehem launched a surprise exhibit to offer thanks to Banksy's

involvement. The exhibition coordinator, Yamen Elabed, explained that he organized the

event "to show Banksy that we are grateful for the support… I just want the message of

thanks to reach Banksy … he has helped our economy with 'alternative' tourism"

(McDonald, 2020). Elabed later described the danger Banksy faced in order to come and

graffiti the West Bank wall and felt that Palestinians should be appreciative of his efforts.

Banksy's spokeswoman reportedly shared that during his first major trip to the West Bank,

he was watched heavily by the IDF and that "Israeli security forces did shoot in the air

threateningly and there were quite a few guns pointed at him" (BBC, 2005).

The Walled Off Hotel also provokes mixed feelings from Palestinians who feel Banksy is capitalizing on Palestinian suffering. But Salsaa praises the boost to the Palestinian tourism industry the hotel has brought and "outright rejects claims from some locals and foreign critics that the hotel is exploiting Palestinian misery and is an example of 'war tourism'" (Cook, 2018). Others greatly appreciate the hotel's museum and gallery, not just for featuring Palestinian art, but also its role in educating visitors about daily life in Palestine and living under occupation. Khader (2017b) authored an article for the Middle East Research and Information Project highlighting the gallery's contents:

> One of the walls in the educational area provides visitors with significant information about different aspects of the Palestinian struggle under occupation. Many high quality photographs and posters present facts about the settlements, the wall, and checkpoints. In one interesting glass case, a cross-section from the earth reveals the contrast between the Palestinian and Israeli underground water distribution systems: The narrow rusty iron pipes used in Palestine pale in comparison to the thick, wide copper pipes that Israel uses in controlling the water resources and consumption in the West Bank.
>
> A section of the wall in the educational area also pays tribute to the boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) movement. It presents a sample of some major products, including Coca-Cola cans, Sabra salads and Ahava Dead Sea personal care items—all of which have been the target of the BDS. There is also information about BDS' impact and reception around the world. In an adjacent section, a video loop plays the testimonies of former Israeli soldiers, detailing their daily violations of Palestinian human rights.

In an interview with Inspiring City (2019a), Salsaa made the argument that without the wall's graffiti or the Walled Off Hotel, many internationals would never consider visiting Bethlehem. He expressed that the hotel is important in giving tourists an up-close look at the experiences of Palestinian residents of Bethlehem. "The hotel magnifies the

Palestinian's voice," he said. "And it makes the world hear us in a way that doesn't depend on either us or the Israelis suffering more casualties" (Cook, 2018).

6.3 <u>Criticisms and Concerns</u>

Despite the boost in tourism the hotel has provided, the Palestinian reaction to the hotel has been mixed, with some feeling that the artwork is naïve, or that the hotel is exploiting and marketing Palestinian suffering. This appears to be for one of two reasons. Firstly, some Palestinians feel that Banksy is using the wall and their suffering to further his career and would prefer that outsiders do not graffiti on the wall, let alone a world famous one. Graffiti on the West Bank Barrier should be strictly a method of resistance for Palestinians, or not drawn on at all. One large stencil in Bethlehem expresses negative feelings towards Banksy and reads "BANKSY… HE'S NOT THE MESSIAH. HE'S A VERY NAUGHTY BOY" (LifePart2.com via YouTube, 2019). Additionally, some critics have referred to international interest in making graffiti on the West Bank Barrier, including Banksy and his hotel, as "Pal-exploitation" (Khader, 2017b). A second reason some Palestinians have been critical of Banksy's work is content and symbolism. Many Palestinians are fans of Banksy and welcome his work but take issue with some of his chosen content. Based on available information, the two main criticisms regarding graffiti content revolve around animal symbolism and/or imagery that potentially makes light of the Israeli occupation and the wall. These criticisms are reflected in how some Palestinians respond both in statements and physical interaction with his graffiti. One story involving Banksy and a correction is when he was approached by a Palestinian man while painting a soldier being frisked by a young girl. The man observed Banksy's work but then proceeded to notify Banksy of an error in his portrayal of this encounter. The soldier's gun was placed

within reach of the soldier and out of the reach of the girl, which in aesthetic terms leaves

the power with the soldier, not the young girl, and in reality, would put the girl in serious

danger. Banksy finished the painting as is, but then repainted it with the man's suggestion

in another location in Bethlehem (All That's Interesting, 2011; PaliRoots, 2020). The

director of the Alrowwad Cultural and Arts Society in Aida refugee camp, Abdelfattah

Abusrour, expressed his criticism of another Banksy piece:

> I do appreciate deeply Banksy as an artist and love his work. [But] some paintings seem
> naive, like the fight with pillows. The fight was never between people as individuals, but
> against a system … as long as there is occupation and injustice such 'declarations' are
> irrelevant and non-respectful to the suffering of the oppressed. We didn't receive a penny
> from the Walled Off Hotel. I don't like my cause as a Palestinian to be exploited as a
> business, even though I appreciate the work of Banksy (McDonald, 2020).

Khader feels entirely different about the pillow fight scene:

> The homosocial and intimate subtext of the pillow fight between an Israeli soldier and a
> Palestinian youth betrays the dialectic of involuntary participation and forced identification
> in such power games between persecutors and their victims.

> The homologous image of this pillow fight cannot be anything but the "death (soccer)
> match" in Auschwitz.

While Khader feels the Walled Off Hotel is Banksy's way of making *"*a powerful

anticolonial statement about the Zionist colonial project," he also asserts that the

consumerism based around the wall that is continuing to develop is a problem (Khader,

2017a). Though Banksy is challenging capitalism, much of the tourism surrounding the

wall is a result of his artwork, which is one key factor that complicates his presence in

Bethlehem.

Figure 21: (Above) Banksy's original mural of a girl searching a soldier (location unknown - photograph from All That's Interesting blog). (Below) Banksy's corrected mural with gun placed behind the girl, Bethlehem (photograph from PaliRoots).

Several Palestinian residents have taken issue with Banksy's choice of donkeys and rats when making artwork in the region, as they feel they are being compared to livestock and/or pests. One restaurant owner claimed that calling a person a donkey in Palestine was similar to calling them an "idiot" and said "We're humans here, not donkeys. This is insulting. I'm glad it was painted over," referring to its destruction shortly after its completion (Harrison, 2007). One resident, however, found humor in this painting. Fyras Twemeh, a local architect, told Reuters "It's offensive for the Israelis, not for us. It shows how much their minds are limited so they even check donkeys" (Harrison, 2007).

In her book *Border Wall Aesthetic: Artworks in Border Spaces,* Ganivet (2019) critically analyzes Banksy's role in jumpstarting the international street art movement into Palestine by using the term "glocalization." According to the Oxford English dictionary, glocalization is "the practice of conducting business according to both local and global considerations." Graffiti by internationals in the context of the West Bank Barrier would essentially mean that international graffiti artists are addressing local concerns by way of a globally recognized art modality (graffiti) on the wall. But this comes with risks when it comes to lack of assessment or collaboration with locals, as Ganivet explains:

Glocalization may have come up against its limits here. There is certainly a local consideration (the wall) that is subject to a global practice (graffiti). But what is the significance and extent of cultural appropriation by an artist and a territory in conflict? Does the mixing of cultures generate deeper misunderstanding when it occurs in the middle of a conflict? Can art that is driven by illegality open up uninhibited avenues for reflection? (p. 121)

She goes on to explain how this phenomenon applies directly to Banksy:

Banksy's evolution expresses the problem with the wall as an artistic subject and object in a contemporary geopolitical conflict. Onsite creation encourages condemnation and the spread of messages, but media projection also creates an ambivalence in which the identification of artists who are unfamiliar with the lived experience of the wall creates a gap in understanding (p. 122).

This statement further confirms some concerns Palestinians have regarding inappropriate or irrelevant graffiti content that seemingly well-intentioned internationals place on the wall without fully understanding the meaning or impact their graffiti may have. While Banksy appears to have a relatively good understanding of Palestinian suffering and Israeli occupation, many of the street artists who were inspired by him to come to the region to paint, as well as his fans, are not always as well versed.

Regardless of such criticisms from the Palestinian community, Banksy's fans around the world still flock to see his works in Bethlehem and Ramallah. They come to see his artwork in the Walled Off Hotel, which, while bringing people to the region with the hopes of exposing them to the reality of the conflict, may actually have the opposite effect. There are some Palestinian activists who feel that Banksy, not the wall itself as a structure or learning about Palestinian culture, is the main draw and tourists leave the region having seen Banksy's vision of the conflict while never actually learning much about the conflict from a local Palestinian's perspective. Some fear this instead romanticizes the situation,

which likely is not Banksy's intent but seems to be a reality, nonetheless. The evidence for this argument is apparent if one looks at the reviews of the Walled Off Hotel, which have been listed in more detail in the next chapter.

Many news articles centered around Banksy and his work often do one of three things: write from a more academic perspective on Banksy's work in Palestine, focus on the author's perspective, or focus on the fans' perspectives of the situation. All three are almost always from a Western news organization, blog, or author, and if so, most of the time do not get the perspectives of local Palestinians on Banksy's work, let alone the other works in the area (this does not seem to be the case from Middle Eastern news outlets, such as Al-Jazeera and Middle East Eye). Many fans are extremely loyal to Banksy as an artist, as can be seen in some blog posts written about his work in Palestine. One post in a blog dedicated to Banksy's work even seems to indicate that the violence of the Second Intifada may have subsided due to Banksy's art in Palestine (The World of Banksy Art, 2012). This is a strange deduction, considering that Banksy did not begin painting in Palestine until 2005 (the author claims Banksy's art began showing up in 2002). The Second Intifada ended in 2005, preceded by two years of already waning violence, largely due to the wall's construction (The Washington Institute of Near East Policy, 2004). When two of Banksy's works were torn off walls in Bethlehem and sent away to be auctioned off by galleries overseas, fans were outraged and spoke out, complaining that Banksy's art without the context of the environment in which is created loses its power. One fan wrote "The work was stolen from the people of Palestine and that should be considered a crime and not allowed to leave the country" (Art Net, 2011).

While entering a foreign country to remove art and sell at one's own gallery overseas should indeed be considered a crime and a form of colonization, what was not challenged in this article was the claim that the Palestinian people were at a loss. The Palestinian response to all international work, let alone Banksy's, has varied widely, with many not sharing the same level of admiration of Banksy's work as his devoted fans. Some have sought to profit from his work instead and indeed, one of those art pieces torn out of a wall and sold was done so by a local Palestinian, not a foreign art collector. The focus of the film *The Man Who Stole Banksy* is one of Banksy's works being sold by a Palestinian bodybuilder and taxi driver named Walid the Beast (Tribeca Studios, 2018). Walid the Beast took offense to Banksy's piece of an IDF soldier checking the papers of a donkey and told interviewers that the painting was "very ugly for the people." He ordered machines to the building, carved it straight out of the wall on which it was painted, and sold it on eBay to a Dutch art collector for $100,000. He told the cameras during filming that "Banksy can't change anything" (Kelsey, 2018).

There has also been tension and controversy over ownership of Banksy's pieces, as he tends to paint on a variety of surfaces. One such instance occurred in Gaza in 2015 in which an art piece depicting the Greek Goddess Niobe crying over recent destruction from Israeli strikes in the area. The mural was painted on a door, the only part of the building that was left standing. The man who owned the building did not realize that the door was allegedly painted by a world-famous street artist, so when he was approached by a local artist to purchase it, they agreed on the price of roughly $175 USD. It wasn't until after the man found out that the piece was potentially a Banksy artwork did he feel that he had been scammed, considering Banksy's work often sells for hundreds of thousands of dollars at

minimum, and demanded to have the door returned. Eventually, the door was seized by Gaza police and housed in a separate facility (Abu-Rahma & Almasy, 2015).

Additionally, there are concerns over outsiders profiting from Banksy's work in the West Bank rather than the benefit going to Palestinian residents. In one such instance, Banksy managed to obtain a chunk of the West Bank Barrier and wrote the word "Spike" on it in black. He then hid it in Palestine as part of a "treasure hunt" – whoever found it and sent him a photo message with the word "Spike" on it could keep the piece. Since 2005, it has passed through multiple owners. Its current owner is an Italian opera singer who has chosen to make the piece a non-fungible token, or NFT, a digital version of the art piece that can be sold to a new owner. The highest bidder would receive "certain extra perks, including a trip for the buyer and guest to see the physical Spike in Switzerland" along with dinner with the opera singer himself (Escalante-De Mattei, 2021). Legality, authenticity, and copyright issues aside due to the digitalization of the piece (Banksy has been absent from any attempts to sell this artwork), there is the ethical question of taking a piece of the West Bank Barrier and using it as a method in which to make money or travel to Switzerland, completely out of the context in which this piece was created.

Overall, Banksy's work has boosted tourism in the area and grabbed international headlines, bringing more attention to the wall than any other international artist in the region has. But this also comes with the risk of marketing the Palestinian situation and overall conflict, and several Palestinian activists have expressed this concern. Additionally, while many Palestinians appreciate the risks Banksy has endured to paint in the West Bank, some openly criticize some of his pieces, despite their value, in order to protect their cause and narrative and combat misrepresentation by an outsider. However, one defining trait of

Banksy's work that distinguishes him from many other international artists and tourists is that his work always addresses the context in which it is placed. The content of his work in Palestine focuses on the wall and occupation, while much of the other graffiti content on the wall is irrelevant to the situation, leading some Palestinians to question the effectiveness of graffiti as resistance with so much international artist and tourist involvement.

CHAPTER VII

Perspectives of International Artists, Tourists, and Israelis

Despite the large numbers of international artists and tourists who come to Palestine to graffiti the West Bank Barrier, much of the news media or scholarly work that covers the artwork do not conduct interviews with them about their motivations for or experience of making art on the wall. Authors of picture books of the wall's graffiti have managed to obtain quotes from international artists, but very little from tourists, as most of these books were published before graffiti tourism skyrocketed. As a result, the perspectives of internationals, both street artists and tourists, remain less understood, leaving questions regarding motives for making artwork on the wall, what they think their work contributes to the area, if they think their art has an impact on the conflict, or how much they know about the conflict overall. International artists often give interviews to graffiti blogs and artist websites, of which this project aimed to locate and collect quotes. Al-Jazeera has interviewed a few tourists, but otherwise, this information remains in the background. Similarly, Israeli perspectives on the wall's graffiti and graffiti tourism is rarely included in media coverage or academic articles. Israelis as a whole have less access to the graffiti, and it is illegal to graffiti their side of the wall, making information on their perspectives even more scarce. This chapter attempts to shed light on international artist, tourist, and Israeli perspectives as they are also actors when it comes to the wall and Palestinian graffiti is often directed at them in order to influence their perspectives. Understanding these

perspectives is crucial in determining the impact of both Palestinian and international graffiti on those who witness it as well as motivations to contribute one's own graffiti.

7.1 <u>International Artist Perspectives</u>

The West Bank Barrier has been frequented by international street artists from all over the world since 2005, and there appears to be no signs of their travel to the West Bank waning any time soon. Most artists, especially the ones more outspoken about their experiences graffitiing the wall, tend to be from Western countries, particularly the U.S. and Britain. In the introduction to his book *Wall and Piece* (2006), Banksy explains his feelings on graffiti in general:

> Despite what they say graffiti is not the lowest form of art. Although you might have to creep about at night and lie to your mum it's actually one of the more honest art forms available. There is no elitism or hype, it exhibits on the best walls a town has to offer and nobody is put off by the price of admission.
>
> A wall has always been the best place to publish your work (p. 8).

Banksy has always been open about his intentions for his public street art, which is mostly to challenge corruption and oppression caused by corporate elites and political figures. This is evident in his work in Palestine.

While Banksy's intentions are clear, other internationally known street artists are sometimes less outspoken about their motivations for targeting the wall specifically and what they hope to accomplish with their graffiti, though their artwork often is more explicit. One set of artists are How and Nosm, a pair of Brooklyn-based twin street artists, who chose to travel to the West Bank and spray paint the wall in various locations. In an interview with The Culture Crush (2023), an online art and culture forum, How and Nosm

explained their passion for humanitarian work and their overall motivations for visiting

Palestine and the surrounding areas:

> How: Yes, we do outreach projects at least once a year. It depends how much time we have, so we have done several over the last few years. The last one we did was when we went to Palestine, the Jordan Valley, we worked with kids and with Bedouin women. First we went to see how it was there, and bring attention to the problem because we are known and people look to what we do. We went there with MAP, Medical Aid for Palestinians, they sponsored it and we worked with the kids. It was about teaching them that they could do murals and we taught them about stencils and spray cans. We showed them our world a little bit just so they can see that there are other things besides violence in their town.

> Nosm: So we did a workshop with about 20 kids, between 10 and 12 years old and we created a mural on paper and then collaged it onto a wall. We did sketches and ideas first, we had different teams, and then they closed them in with brushes and acrylic paints and pens, then when each one was finished we would cut out different shapes in the paintings and collage it together on a wall and create one huge mural.

This is a promising example of a pair of artists using their notoriety to entice followers to

pay attention to the Palestinian situation, but it is also a good example of international and

local collaboration. Though they had experience graffitiing in over 60 countries, they told

Brooklyn Street Art (2013), a graffiti magazine that tracks street art all over the world, that

their experience while spray painting the West Bank Barrier itself was not what they were

expecting:

> After a half hour, soldiers yelled down, asking what they were doing.
>
> "We're from New York, we paint," they shouted back, and continued spraying. Moments later the gate rolled up to the side and four soldiers came out, with the lead officer shouting, "What are you doing here?"
>
> "We're painting," they replied.

"It's illegal," he shouted back. "I'll have to arrest you."

The Israeli soldiers then apparently spray painted over the mural of a key representing Palestinian hopes for returning to lost homes with the Star of David. The mural was located directly on the military gate in the wall leading from Bethlehem to Rachel's Tomb, a very risky and provocative space to paint such a large Palestinian symbol under Israeli watch. The artists described being disappointed that their work was defaced in front of them, but not until Nosm giddily told Brooklyn Street Art (2013) that he was amazed at getting that kind of attention. "We painted a key and the gate opened!" he proclaimed.
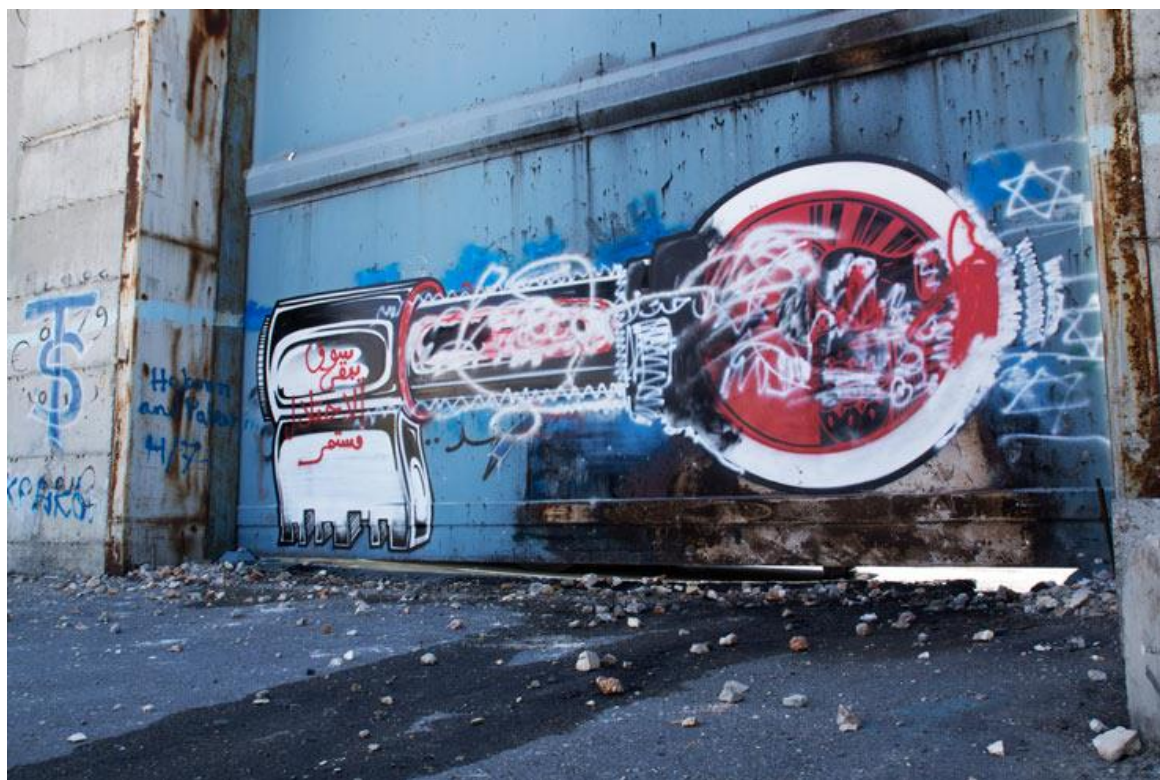
Figure 22: How and Nosm's key mural on Israeli military gate after being defaced by Israeli soldiers, September 2013. Credit: William Parry/Map

Two artists who did not have as pleasant an experience are Italian street artists Jorit Agoch and Salvatore De Luise (Parry, 2018). They traveled to Bethlehem to paint a large Ahed Tamimi mural while she was still sitting in an Israeli prison cell. They were arrested,

along with their Palestinian accomplice, but then released the next day and given 72 hours to leave the country (Cuddy, 2018). Upon departure, the two artists had to sign a document that would ban them from the country for the next ten years (Parry, 2018). According to their lawyer, they were painting the mural to show solidarity with Tamimi. The lawyer later questioned why the two artists were arrested when there is an abundance of graffiti on that stretch of the wall, suspecting it was the mural's timing coinciding with Tamimi's upcoming release (Scharf, 2018).

Like Agoch and De Luise, some international artists risk painting the wall with political messages in order to make a statement about Israeli occupation and challenge the international community's silence regarding human rights violations against the Palestinian community. Swoon, a New York-based street artist, contributed two pieces to the *Santa's Ghetto* project that focused specifically on calling for human rights for the Palestinian people. Her image of a woman weaving a skirt captured her intent to highlight the wisdom of human rights activists:

> [This] was inspired by a woman Eduardo Galeano described in *The Book of Embraces*. She wore a huge patchwork skirt filled with a million and one pockets, which were in turn filled with a million and one scraps of paper, each of which contained a few words that would remind her of a story. Wanting to embody that in some way, I glued all kinds of pockets all over the Wall, into the figure of this woman, and in the pockets I placed little strips of paper containing quotes by Arundhati Roy, Assata Shakur, Martin Luther King, and anyone else I could find saying inspiring things on the subject of the struggle for basic human rights and freedom (Parry, 2011, p. 43).

By mixing playful and dangerous imagery, Cake$_Stencils' artworks seek to highlight the way conflict can rob children of their innocence and creativity. His interview with Inspiring City (2019b) revealed that he is heavily aware of and is influenced by Banksy's presence in the West Bank:

When you stay at the Walled Off Hotel, you are a part of Banksy's big installation. To be either a spectator or a creator. You can choose how far you want to go into the world he has created. You are free to make what you want and you are also free to go at anytime.

He uses the "Cake$" in his moniker to remind himself not to "paint cakes", meaning to avoid painting something decorative but useless or meaningless, and uses the wall in Bethlehem to try and use his art for political and social change. "I'm not a fan of street art festivals and big colourful murals. For me it's not enough. You should want to change something," he explained. "For me it is better to do something than to do nothing… this wall will be defeated." As his work is really only seen in Palestine on the wall, Cake$_Stencils was asked why he's chosen to focus on this one particular location. "You can get knowledge about the world in two different ways," he told Inspiring City. "A horizontal way and a vertical way. Horizontal is when you travel from one place to another. Vertical is when you stay in one place and you are trying to figure out how people think and who they really are. I prefer the vertical way."

Ron English took to the wall with a different audience in mind. An American street artist who has risked painting graffiti in controversial places around the world, English was part of Banksy's *Santa's Ghetto* project to Bethlehem in 2007 and painted three pieces near Aida refugee camp in Bethlehem. His work was aimed directly at the American government for its hand in the continuation of the Israeli occupation through military and financial support. In *Against the Wall: The Art of Resistance in Palestine* (Parry, 2011), English explains his motivation for targeting the wall for graffiti:

I probably never would have had the nerve to go to Palestine on my own - but this experience made me realise how important it is to actually go to places to experience things firsthand – the American media is very biased and we rarely get the truth about much of

anything abroad. I wish there was a way we could get more Americans to see what their tax dollars are doing to other people around the world (p. 59).

His work directly addresses the conflict and he felt that the Palestinian people he met expressed "support for [the *Santa's Ghetto* artists'] artistic efforts" (p. 60). However, the main point behind the project potentially sounded alarms for some locals, particularly activists. According to a CNN report (Schwartz, 2007), the goal of *Santa's Ghetto* in Bethlehem was to increase tourism by using the wall to display graffiti, and to "offer the ink-stained hand of friendship to ordinary people in an extraordinary situation." When explaining his work depicting an evil-looking Mickey Mouse wearing a *keffiyeh* that reads "You're not in Disneyland anymore," English explained that this was an "offhand comment on the actual project (*Santa's Ghetto*), of trying to morph the Wall into a tourist attraction" (Parry, 2011, p. 59). He then described potential issues with painting the wall and explained Banksy's intent for the *Santa's Ghetto* project:

> A problem with painting the Wall is that it does tend to make it into a great work of art instead of an aggressive prison Wall. It was our hope that the art would attract more people to see the effects of the Wall on the people of Palestine. I think Banksy's intention was to bring attention to the Wall by deflecting the spotlight that was following him around – and it most certainly worked – I don't know if any amount of paint could beautify something so oppressive (Parry, 2011, p. 10).

Faile, a New York-based duo of artists Patrick McNeill and Patrick Miller who also participated in *Santa's Ghetto*, echoed Banksy's sentiment about the wall being attractive to street artists: "The walls here are bigger than we expected. But it is the best street art place ever. The wall space is amazing and intense. It is the type of place artists should be" (Skaggs, 2007).

Based on these comments, it appears as though the goal of these international artists was to both show solidarity for the Palestinian people while also turning the wall into a tourist attraction through their reputations as established graffiti artists. This would not only boost tourism to combat the economic loss the wall has caused, but also bring visitors to Palestine to witness the wall's impact on Palestinian life. This overall goal is both embraced and rejected by locals. Some feel appreciation for outside artists taking the time to visit the region and risk painting political works on the wall to assist their community. Others, mostly activists, scholars, and other artists, not only feel that the wall should not become a tourist attraction due to the suffering it has caused their community, but also that it is not the place of international artists to make that decision on behalf of the Palestinian community.

Lushsux takes a different approach to the wall in Palestine, one that has brought him considerable notoriety in the region with a wide array of fans and critics, local and international. One key reason many Palestinians dislike him is due to his overall attitude about painting the wall. Lushsux's use of popular figures such as Rick and Morty and his somewhat anti-Semitic comments and imagery have led many to believe that he is simply in the region to gain fame and attention rather than make any real statement about his views on Palestine or condemnation of the Israeli occupation. In an interview with Reuters, Lushsux explained that his work is meant to capture the attention of passersby and believes the best way to do this is less direct artwork:

> The wall is a message in itself. I don't need to write 'Free Palestine' or something like that, something really direct ... that people will ignore… I just paint what I usually paint and maybe people will start looking at the background and looking at the razor wire and looking at people stuck in here, and maybe that'll work better (Reuters, 2017).

This comment shows his disagreement with many locals that graffiti content should be relevant to the wall or Israeli occupation. His huge memes do attract many tourists, and there is often a subtle jab at the conflict overall through the use of word bubbles and text that accompany the images. However, Lushsux has made it clear in other interviews as well that he does not feel obligated to outwardly address the wall or the Palestinian experience, despite the criticism he receives from the Palestinian community. He told Agence France-Presse (2017b): "To be fair, you have to have a very high IQ to understand the Israeli-Palestinian conflict... I'm not pushing a number required to solve it. I'm here to paint memes."

Some high-profile international artists not related to street art have chosen to visit the wall themselves and even paint their own messages. One such instance was Roger Waters, songwriter and bassist for the popular band Pink Floyd, who traveled to Bethlehem to see the wall for himself. Waters has been an outspoken human rights advocate for many years, and on a solo tour to Israel, even changed the location of his concert from Tel Aviv to a Jewish/Arab village and adapted some of *The Wall*'s lyrics to "We don't need no occupation." His reasoning for the change in location was as such:

> The peace village provides a great backdrop to this concert and performing a gig there, where Arabs and Jews live together in a peaceful community, symbolises my support for all those on both sides who reject extremism and violence in their quest for a just peace (War on Want, 2006).

He chose to spray-paint "No Thought Control" on the wall in Bethlehem (NBC News, 2006).

Additional international reactions to the wall and graffiti have included projects that do not involve graffiti, but rather events or installations near to or separate from the wall, some even taking place overseas. To commemorate the 100-year anniversary of the 1917 Balfour Declaration, Banksy launched an "apology party" for Bethlehem residents near the wall by his Walled Off Hotel. An excerpt from Banksy's statement before the event launched read: *"This*

Figure 23: Pink Floyd's Roger Waters graffities the wall in Bethlehem, 2006. Credit: Magnus Johansson | Associated Press.

conflict has brought so much suffering to people on all sides – it didn't feel appropriate to 'celebrate' the British role" in the region (Beaumont, 2017). Children were invited to enjoy a deformed cake decorated in the colors of the British flag, but the occasion was to unveil a new art piece on the wall itself. The piece is etched directly into the wall, showing the symbol of the crown and underneath lay the words: "Er… Sorry," suggesting British regret for the current state of Palestine. The piece was even unveiled by an actor dressed as Queen Elisabeth II accompanied by a man in a suit and top hat. Sad music played offkey while British flags hung over the heads of Palestinian children wearing British flag caps. One of Banksy's statements read at the event took at a jab at Britain's hand in displacing the native population of Palestine when promising the land to incoming Jews: "The British didn't handle things well here – when you organize a wedding, it's best to make sure the bride isn't already married" (BBC, 2017). Though the display was intended to be critical of

Britain, activists in the nearby Aida refugee camp raided the party in protest, in which activist Munther Amira planted a large Palestinian flag in the middle of the banquet table. "We came because we didn't like the use of the British flags or the way they were using Palestinian children" as a centerpiece, claimed Amira (Beaumont, 2017).

In 2018, Block 9, a collection of London-based artists, launched a "Creative Retreat at The Walled Off Hotel." According to a profile on SoundCloud, the retreat was based on traditional creative retreats often held in Switzerland or France but adapted to fit the "geo-political landscape of Palestine" to "stimulate creativity and cultural connections." World renowned artists such as Brian Eno, Mashrou Leila from Beirut, DJ The Black Madonna from the U.S., Roisin Murphy, and Samir Joubran all collaborated in the hotel (with the exception of Eno and Leila due to unspecified travel restrictions, who participated remotely) to create a 7-song album with music based on their time in Palestine. While this is artistic expression different from graffiti making on the wall, the Walled Off Hotel was yet again featured as a place for artists to express their support for the Palestinian community (Block9, 2018).

Another event that used the wall to catch internationals' attention actually took place in the UK rather than locally at the wall itself. Bethlehem Unwrapped, a "festival of hope" and celebration of the real "little town of Bethlehem" launched by St. James Anglican Church in Piccadilly, England, placed a life-sized replica of the separation wall in its community square (The Londonist, 2013). The director of the festival, Justin Butcher, explained that the goal was to paint a more accurate picture of what Bethlehem looks like today:

> We are unwrapping the traditional Victorian sentimental images of Christmas and showing this is what Bethlehem today looks like: an 8-meter-high concrete separation wall surrounding it. (Bethlehem Unwrapped, 2013).

The installation was placed right in front of the church entrance, a stark contrast to the surrounding architecture that captured the attention of residents and tourists, many of whom were unfamiliar with the wall in Palestine, or at least the gravity of its impact on the residents of the West Bank. Lucy Winkett, a rector at St. James Church, felt that it should be the responsibility of the church to reflect the world as it is and what many people have to live with in conflict areas:

> I think most people, whether they're Christian or not, probably have an image of Bethlehem in their minds, which has got shepherds and fields and a star and wise men, and in some ways of course there are bits of Bethlehem that are not completely unlike that. But I don't really think it's good religion to continue to have that image of Bethlehem without acknowledging what the actual town of Bethlehem is experiencing (Bethlehem Unwrapped, 2014).

People who visited this art installation were interviewed for their reactions, many of whom were most struck by the size and presence of the piece. "It takes your breath away a little bit," one said. "It definitely cranes the neck, and it's frighteningly real." Another remembers his time in South Africa: "I lived in South Africa, but the walls were hidden. It's daunting imagining living with something like this." Visitors were encouraged to place their own messages on the wall and by the end of the event, which also included Palestinian musicians, poetry, dance, and food, the wall replica was covered at the base with graffiti, similar to how it looks today in Bethlehem. "People are sending their messages of solidarity for the people of Bethlehem by doing their own graffiti on the wall, making their marks," said Butcher (Bethlehem Unwrapped, 2013).

International street artists appear to have a collective interest in the wall's massive colorless structure in what would seem like an open invitation to color its surface in spray paint and political graffiti. However, their motives for doing so range somewhat from what appears to be genuine concern of the wall's impact and a desire to create art for social action to a more cavalier approach that simply sees the wall as the ultimate graffiti opportunity given its political ramifications and high risk. The Italian artists willing to risk arrest to paint a mural of a celebrated Palestinian activist while she was in prison is an example of the former. Lushsux's statement of just being in the area to paint memes, his joking about his work being scrutinized, and letting his Twitter followers choose his graffiti subject matter are all examples of the latter. This range in motives and opinions from international graffiti artists is what lies at the heart of some of the concerns coming from the Palestinian community about international involvement. Based on most artists' statements to media outlets, it does not appear that harm or intrusion is any of their intent. However, more assessment of the impact of their presence and their artwork would likely benefit the Palestinian community through better understanding of the context, emphasizing respect for the local population, and the benefits and consequences of their graffiti.

7.2 <u>Tourist Perspectives</u>

Tourists' perspectives and thoughts on graffiti and tourism are much less documented than those of international artists, who have platforms on social media, professional websites, and media interviews to release statements about their work. Tourists, on the other hand, are not there in the region on a mission as artists – they are

usually there as travelers to learn about the region and to see Banksy's graffiti and hotel. While many of these tourists are likely to post photographs or selfies of the graffiti to their social media accounts, tracking individual accounts would be extremely difficult and time consuming. One exception was Twitter, where some tourists' experiences were posted and easily located via Google. Instead, the key sources for locating tourist perspectives on graffiti and graffiti making were travel blogs, video interviews by international media outlets, and tourism sites such as TripAdvisor. Together, the information located provides a small window into the perspectives and motives of tourists who visit the wall to see the graffiti, and in some cases, make their own.

Most of the travel blogs are written by solo travelers who chose to take political or alternative tours or simply visited Bethlehem and walked along the wall near Checkpoint 300. These blogs are often a mixture of travelers marveling at the graffiti, particularly Banksy's work, and those who appreciate the graffiti but also seem to understand that it is a sensitive topic for Palestinians. *In Locamotion* is a travel blog centered around social justice and conflict, and after outlining some history about the West Bank Barrier and the graffiti in one entry, its author raises questions about the effectiveness of walls as well as about tourists adding their own graffiti (In Locamotion, 2018). While outlining her trip to the West Bank, another traveler tells the reader: "I am not sure I'd call the Separation Wall a tourist attraction" (Tavani, 2020). Another tourist claimed that seeing Palestinian stories via graffiti was a highlight of their trip, but their feelings towards the Walled Off Hotel gift shop and the neighboring Wall Mart were quite negative:

> We never intended on visiting, and we never did stay the night so can't speak to the
> rooms themselves, but judging by the spectacle and the Disney-esque feel of the place, I
> can't imagine ever wanting to. Was it interesting? Yes, of course. Did it prompt me to

> think about the intersection of art and commerce? Yes. Will it bring much needed
> attention to a terrible situation? Also yes. Will it provide local jobs and training and
> runoff business to an impoverished area? Absolutely. That said, I'm glad we went, but
> I'm left wondering if any attempt to capitalize on a revolution can ever feel authentic.

This tourist went on to say that it felt grotesque watching children ask their parents to buy stencils to put their own graffiti on the wall, sarcastically adding "just like Banksy!" (Stafford, 2017).

TripAdvisor was an especially useful website in terms of understanding what tourists thought of their experiences of the Walled Off Hotel and their time touring that area of Bethlehem. As of this writing, there are 356 reviews on TripAdvisor with the overwhelming majority giving it 5 out of 5 stars. Many claim their experience in the "Banksy hotel" was "eye-opening," "thought-provoking," "incredible," and "exciting." They also express that the hotel is a great way to learn about the "100 years of conflict" and reflects the "frustration" the Palestinians are going through. Though many who left reviews seem to be interested in learning about the history of Israel and Palestine, many do seem to have extremely limited knowledge on the nuances of that history (i.e. the current situation in Israel/Palestine has not been going on since biblical times nor is it only 100 years old). Most reviews talk about the educational value of Banksy's work, claiming that his artwork really amplifies the struggles Palestinians face due to Israeli occupation. One reviewer commented: "I didn't think I would ever visit Israel/Palestine because of the treatment of Palestinians but Banksy changed that. His motivation was presumably to raise awareness and in my case he has totally succeeded." (TripAdvisor, July 2017). Though Banksy is mentioned in the vast majority of reviews, only 14 reviews I witnessed in the time frame of this project mentioned the Palestinian artwork in the museum's gallery.

Only three of the 356 reviews were considered "poor" or worse by the website's standards, two in English and one written in French. These reviewers focused on a more nuanced "educational" standard for the hotel, complaining that the museum was "one-sided" and did not reflect numerous perspectives including "wider challenges within Palestinian society" and overall, was not a "useful educational tool." While these two reviewers seem to have a more in-depth knowledge of the overall Israeli-Palestinian situation, their complaints that the Walled Off Hotel should highlight the Israeli side of the conflict in great detail seems unrealistic given the hotel's creator and its location. The French writer seemed more disturbed by the overall atmosphere of the hotel, writing:

> It feels like a hip British pub. Clientele of young passing tourists, small museum. The hotel and its pub are located a few steps from the separation wall, the Israeli army gatehouses, the Aida refugee camp and it all seems unreal. Are we in London or maybe Berlin? A certain unease sets in.

Another rare characteristic discovered among the reviews were tourists who were struck by the wall's graffiti in positive ways, but made an effort to instruct potential travelers on graffiti content. One such tourist wrote a review in June 2017, claiming that the Wall Mart staff were friendly and willing to help visitors make their own graffiti, but cautioned that visitors should "just remember the political situation and consider adding something of meaning for the local people."

Another set of reviews on TripAdvisor were for Bunksurfing Alternative Tours, an organization that offers political tours of the West Bank including religious sites, the chance to experience traditional Palestinian food such as *maqluba*, but most specifically, an opportunity to see graffiti on the wall and Banksy's work up close. As of this writing, the page had 200 reviews, all of them five out of five stars. The tour guide is highly

recommended, and the reviewers describe a variety of activities included in the tour, including meeting some of the tour guide's family. One reviewer promised that one "will see a very human side of the struggles that get lost in translation into mainstream media" (September, 2019). Of the 200 postings, only 15 mentioned Banksy by name, and only 9 mentioned graffiti when these keywords were typed into the search bar, so one can conclude that this particular tour was striking to tourists for other reasons beyond graffiti and Banksy. However, those who wrote about the graffiti were quite clear about its impact on them. One tourist titled her post "Creativity Under the Gun" and wrote: "We also witnessed the incredible creativity and beauty of the Palestinian resistance, in the graffiti on the wall, the personal stories pasted up on posters…" (August, 2018).

The rare tourists who are interviewed by media outlets tend to both be attracted to the graffiti while also recognizing the political ramifications of its presence. "Art is something everyone can connect to, it speaks to the people of the United States and throughout the world. It can have a political influence," Jake and Kayla, two American tourists, told Equal Times (Demoulin, 2017). Only a few tourists interviewed expressed some concern for how the wall could be turning into a tourist attraction instead of an educational experience that amplifies Palestinian culture and resistance. Speaking to The Media Line, a German and Austrian tourist expressed both the pros and cons of being attracted to the wall and the graffiti for them:

> "To come here as a tourist, to look at this, is kind of strange because it isn't a touristy place," Naomi Pappaenberger, a tourist from Germany who recently visited the barrier in Bethlehem told The Media Line. "There was a wall in my country too that became a famous tourist attraction, but I was too young to visit, so here I am," Pappaenbeger said, using the Berlin Wall as an analogy.

> Her travel companion Johanna Schwartz from Austria agreed. "It seems like it is a museum, but for the people living here it is a real life struggle… On one side I think it's good that people see it,

that people read the stories and talk to people and really meet people locally and get to know the stories. On the other side of course it's maybe bad if it's just done for making money and for just another tourist attraction" (Huddy, 2018).

Another 30-year-old British tourist, Paul Saxton, also expressed concern about the wall losing its context in the sea of elaborate street art. "The wall risks becoming a street art gallery rather than actually politicising what it is about," he told Agence France-Presse. "While it is great to look at - these are fantastic works of street art - maybe they could fit in any city rather than being in this place where there is a very deliberate issue" (Agence France-Presse, 2017a).

Information that was difficult to find was tourists who posted about any experience personally making their own graffiti. Presumably this is because it is technically illegal to do so based on Israeli law, and tourists must pass through Israeli checkpoints and ports of entry to get into the West Bank, making it a bit risky to post publicly about such activities should they wish to leave the country or to later return. Another assumption for this discrepancy is the logistical difficulties of researching individual social media accounts. Given the number of observed tourists taking selfies with graffiti in Bethlehem, it should be safe to assume that it is highly likely that some tourists post photos of themselves painting graffiti on the wall or themselves with already existing graffiti on Instagram, Facebook, and other various social media platforms. Accessing these photos to get a better idea of who is painting the wall would be very difficult as these accounts are rarely open to the public. It would appear though that these tourists have spoken to the Palestinian employees of the Walled Off Hotel as well as the Palestinian owner of the Wall Mart Next door. "Tourists take time to choose the symbols they are going to paint to show their support for the Palestinian people," one Walled Off Hotel employee told Equal Times (Demoulin, 2017).

Overall, it would appear that tourist attitudes also vary in terms of whether or not to partake in creating graffiti on the wall, chosen content, and whether or not the graffiti is telling an accurate story of the Palestinian experience or Israeli occupation. That some tourists feel that the Walled Off Hotel is "partisan" or does not represent "both sides of the conflict" is telling of their overall knowledge of the situation. While tourists cannot be expected to understand in-depth the nuances of Israeli policies, the impact of the wall, and the experiences of Palestinians living near the wall, it does raise questions as to what they are learning while they are visiting the region and what experiences they take with them after their visit.

7.3 <u>Israeli Perspectives</u>

Finding Israeli artwork as well as perspectives on graffiti on the West Bank Barrier is even significantly more difficult to locate than tourist perspectives. Israeli thoughts on the attention the graffiti is getting from the international community, graffiti content, and graffiti tourism, artistic events regarding the wall, and the Walled Off Hotel are typically not included in most academic or news articles. This is presumably for two reasons. The first is likely due to the fact that marking the wall with graffiti is illegal according to Israeli law, making graffiti on the Israeli side quite rare. Conversely, the majority of Palestinians believe that the illegality of the wall itself negates any illegality of vandalizing it. Additionally, graffiti is first and foremost a method of resistance against occupation, which has resulted in most graffiti being placed on the Palestinian side of the wall in highly populated areas such as Bethlehem and Ramallah. Due to the illegality of graffiti on the

Israeli side, and that this barrier was constructed for the benefit of Israelis, there is less likely to be Israeli citizens placing graffiti on this structure in protest of its existence.

Secondly, it is illegal for Israelis who are not settlers or IDF soldiers to be in the West Bank in Palestinian territory, specifically Area A where the Palestinian Authority is the governing body. This prohibits the majority of Israelis from seeing the impact of the wall on Palestinian communities and the graffiti messages left for the international community to see. Many Israelis likely must rely on secondary sources such as military acquaintances, family that are settlers living in the West Bank, and images online to see the graffiti. Some reports have suggested that Israelis have visited the Walled Off Hotel, though it was likely a risk for those travelers to do so. Banksy has also invited Israelis to stay at the Walled Off Hotel, though this is likely to be a rare occurrence given the legality and risk for Israeli citizens.

In her studies of graffiti of the First Intifada, Peteet (1996) spoke of the complexities of graffiti interpretation by multiple parties. Of Israeli viewership, she wrote:

> For the most part, Israelis in the occupied territories read graffiti as defiance and lawless anarchy. But the Israeli readership was not homogeneous. Some soldiers read them as defiance to be met with a violent response. For others their presence and content reaffirmed the sense that it was time to withdraw from the territories – to heed the writing on the walls. For soldiers, graffiti might have reinforced their daily experience of the occupied territories as spaces of either lawlessness or unstoppable resistance – or both (p. 152).

At the time of her writing, the West Bank Barrier did not exist and integration between Israelis and Palestinians was more common in everyday life. With the construction of the wall, Palestinian graffiti artists are speaking to a much wider audience, though many Israelis will never personally witness the vast array of international and local street art dominating the streets of Ramallah and Bethlehem.

Graffiti in Israel proper is vibrant, with Tel Aviv being a hot spot for young Israeli street artists. Jerusalem also has its share of both Israeli and Palestinian street artists who speckle the walls in the new city with their politically motivated works. However, Israeli street artists, for the most part, have not generally been known to graffiti the West Bank Barrier. Much of the art one can find on the West Bank Barrier on the Israeli side are murals meant to beautify the structure for those living close by. These usually are murals of landscapes or children and doves – relatively pleasant and positive artwork. This is a practice also seen in the Jewish settlement of Gilo, where smaller walls erected to create checkpoints within the West Bank are painted to almost match the horizon perfectly, giving the viewer as soft an appearance as possible of the cement blocks (Shalem & Wolf, 2011).

However, there are some instances of graffiti on the Israeli side of the wall, though for some art pieces it is unclear if the artist is an Israeli, a Palestinian resident of Israel-proper, or an international street artist. One could make assumptions of authorship for these artworks based on the location of the graffiti and its proximity to nearby neighborhoods, and whether its Israeli or Palestinian (this section is specifically examining known or presumed Israeli artists, rather than known international art on the Israeli side of the wall, which is examined in other sections of this paper). On the stretch of the wall between al-Ezariyah and At-Tur, East Jerusalem, an artist transformed the wall's concrete slabs into painted segments of brick walls and stone walls. Shalem and Wolf (2011) interpret the extra layers of wall façade as the artist attempting to emphasize the segregating factor of the West Bank Barrier (p. 49).

One Israeli artist, Yoav Weiss, launched a project called buythewall.com in which he sold pieces of the wall to customers who wished to reserve a piece of the concrete for

when the wall inevitably comes down in the future, similar to a souvenir piece of the Berlin Wall. In a statement on his professional website, Weiss says that unlike pieces of the Berlin Wall, where people took pieces as it was torn apart, his project "guaranteed 'wall futures' in the event that the wall was torn down", as the Israeli Foreign ministry deems the wall temporary (https://www.yoav-weiss.com/buythewall). Buyers could choose a piece of the wall from four areas: near Tulkarem, Abu Dis, Rachel's Tomb, or in the Hizma region. He painted in dotted line portions on stretches of the concrete wall near these areas to create a canvas of abstractly shaped pieces of the wall (Shalem and Wolf, 2011, p. 46). According to Ganivet (2019), when visiting his website at the time, instructions to buy a piece of the wall were as follows:

1) Click on the pictures below to choose the area from which you would like your piece.
2) Choose a specific piece you would like to buy and click on it.
3) Click on "buy this piece."
4) Pay for your piece.
5) Wait for peace.

This endeavor proved to be a risk for Weiss – the project required him to physically visit the wall to mark it, which he claimed got him arrested once and almost a second time. On his website, mock pieces of the wall have been turned into tables and lawn decorations.

Another graffiti piece was originally done by AME72, in addition to his Lego Man works, but had Hebrew text later added. AME72 painted a silhouetted Biblical scene of a shepherd speaking to a herd of sheep. The Hebrew text added later is in the form of speech bubbles coming from the shepherd and sheep. The shepherd is saying "There is no one but Him," while the sheep repeat "there is no one" (Shalem & Wolf, 2011, p. 42). The author of the text is unknown.

One art piece in Bethlehem, however, is explicitly of Israeli authorship and condemns Israeli policy towards house demolitions. The Israeli Coalition Against House Demolitions (ICAHD) is a non-violent Israeli group that works to combat the illegal demolition of Palestinian homes and works with local Palestinian organizations throughout the West Bank.

Figure 24: ICAHD Graffiti, 2008. Photo credit: ICAHD

They painted a large mural in 2008 of a bulldozer with a wrecking ball smashing into a heart. The heart overpowers the wrecking ball, causing the wrecking ball to crack, highlighting the power of solidarity and compassion (Parry, 2011, p. 31). This is the only confirmed mural created by an Israeli organization to my knowledge that outright challenges Israeli practices in the Palestinian territories.

There however appears to be some interest by artists to make art works regarding the wall's presence. Galit Eilat, a former director of the Israeli Center for Digital Art in Holon, was one Israeli perspective located during this research, in which she explained that she was frequently approached by both Israeli and international artists who wished to make artwork related to the wall. Despite this, she expressed doubts regarding the potential impact of such works:

> There's a phrase we use... about how everyone can make a living off the occupation—building contractors as well as artists. The wall is like a gigantic canvas that receives everything that is applied to it. But the wall is no reason for a celebration...The Palestinians don't need its presence underscored for them (Eidelman, 2010, p. 107).

Overall, the search for Israeli thoughts on graffiti on the West Bank Barrier provided extraordinarily little information.

To conclude this chapter, the necessity of exploring alternate perspectives on and motives for making graffiti on the West Bank Barrier lies in highlighting more nuance and complexities in the growing phenomenon of graffiti tourism and international/outsider graffiti participation. These perspectives, especially those of Israelis, are largely left unresearched by scholars, which, if closely studied, could offer insight on both the possible damage being done to the Palestinian message by outside involvement, as well as the potential power of collaborative efforts between all involved if more assessment and communication were to be established before graffiti-making takes place. Additionally, should internationals be thoroughly interviewed about how the graffiti they witness speaks to them at a personal and/or political level, one could gauge the level of impact both Palestinian and international graffiti on their perspectives of the conflict and whether this could lead to future social action by those individuals. The implications chapter will consider these questions in more detail.

CHAPTER VIII

Graffiti Content Analysis

This chapter aims to analyze graffiti content on the West Bank Barrier. As there are many disagreements in Palestinian circles about graffiti content (about both Palestinian and international graffiti), as well as symbols used from cultures worldwide, it is important to examine what is being placed on the wall and ask questions as to why certain content themes are present, what is most common among different groups, and how the local community responds to such content. Graffiti content often influences how certain Palestinian residents are responding and reacting to artwork placed on the wall by locals, international street art, and graffiti tourism, and certain imagery is used by Palestinians to communicate to specific foreign visitors, hence the in-depth examination of imagery and placement of graffiti.

8.1 Arabic and English Text

One form of graffiti placed ubiquitously on the West Bank Barrier is written Arabic text. This happens in most places where a concrete wall portion of the barrier is present but is especially more common in places with less tourism, such as Qalandiya, Abu Dis, and A-Ram. As discussed earlier however, this text appears to differ from Arabic text from the First Intifada in that it does not indicate dates and times for gatherings nor does the text disappear overnight to avoid discovery. Arabic text on the wall today makes a wide variety of statements about peace, anger, hope, or loss, while many are statements of resistance,

proclamations of nationalist pride, or warnings or allegiances to various Palestinian political organizations. Some examples from around the West Bank include [translated to English]:

- "I will not ask for compassion (or mercy) from any one because a day will come, in which I will not have compassion for anyone." – Abu Dis (Shalem & Wolf, 2011, p. 60)
- "Salute to PLO." – Ramallah (Shalem & Wolf, 2011, p. 22)
- "The Palestine flag is high." – Ramallah (Shalem & Wolf, 2011, p. 18)
- "The party of life and freedom. God bless the liberators, who fight to eliminate evil from earth." – Written over a Banksy piece of a boy and a beach scene, Ramallah (Shalem & Wolf, 2011, p. 16)
- "The Dome of the Rock: al-Quds in my heart." – Stencil of Dome of the Rock, Bethlehem (photograph by researcher; 2019)
- "The sentences are the sustenance." – Bethlehem (photograph by researcher; 2019)
- "The worst view in the world." – Bethlehem (photograph by researcher; 2019)

English text is far more common particularly in Bethlehem and Ramallah in order to reach a wider international audience, but the Arabic text speaks more to the locals who live near the wall. Poetry written in Arabic appears frequently as well, often from celebrated Arab poets such as Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darweish. English text, however, often has similar messages for its viewers. In Ramallah one can read text such as "We shall be free!" (Shalem & Wolf, 2011, p. 23), "we don't want you, why don't you leave us" (p. 24), and "the wall must fall" in Abu Dis (p. 68). In Bethlehem, there are many messages of compassion and peace such as "Love Each Other" and "Build Bridges Not Walls" (photographs by researcher, 2019). Though there are numerous languages on the wall, mostly from European countries, English and Arabic are by far the most common.

8.2 <u>Palestinian Symbolism</u>

There are several significant Palestinian symbols found graffitied on the wall throughout the West Bank. As mentioned in the background chapter of this thesis, some of the most prominent symbols painted on the wall are Leila Khaled, Handala, and the key, all signifying resistance, hope, loss, and resilience. Some Palestinians have managed to skirt heavy Israeli military presence and graffitied risky areas near checkpoints and active watchtowers, painting political figures and calls for an end to the occupation.

Nationalistic symbols are also popular, with the Palestinian flag being quite ubiquitous, often accompanied by nationalist text in Arabic. Majd Abdel Hamid's Palestinian Declaration of Independence in scrambled Arabic letters covers a large space of the wall in Ramallah. According to Amin (2019), Hamid was deliberate in placing this 14-meter long, 2-meter-high mural in a place less frequented by tourists, as it was meant to act "as a message of hope for Palestinians, and them alone." Maps of the entirety of Palestine (or what most countries today recognize as Israel and the Occupied Territories combined) are also common. The shape of

Figure 25: Majd Abdel Hamid's Palestinian Declaration of Independence in scrambled Arabic letters (Amin, 2019).

the land is depicted unanimously but the background varies, filled in with the Palestinian flag or with the design of the iconic Palestinian *keffiyeh*. The *keffiyeh* is a headscarf in

Middle Eastern cultures often worn around the neck or over the head and face to protect

one from the sun and sand. The one specific to Palestine has a black and white chain link

design. According to a Middle East Eye report, the design has a wide variety of meanings:

> It has been described by some as "a fishing net, a honeycomb, the joining of hands, or the
>
> marks of dirt and sweat wiped off a worker's brow." Others suggest the design represents
>
> ears of wheat, in reference to Jericho, one of the first known cities to cultivate the grain.
>
> Palestinian performance artist Fargo Tbakhi adds "barbed wire" to the list, explaining the
>
> pattern could depict "that ever-present symbol of the occupation", although he relates most
>
> to the fishing net design, also called the *fatha* (opening) (Saber, 2021).

After Israeli authorities banned the Palestinian flag in 1967 until the Oslo Accords in 1993,

the *keffiyeh*, in a way, became
Palestine's "unofficial flag"
(Saber, 2021). This design is
seen in several spots along the
wall in various forms: as a
background design inside a map
of Palestine or to text or is worn
by people in murals. A large
mural near the original Qalandiya
checkpoint shows Yasser Arafat
clad in his *keffiyeh*.

Figure 26: "To Exist is to Resist" along with woman in a keffiyeh. Credit: Stop the Wall Campaign.

      Complementary to the nationalist symbols and text are images celebrating and

longing for certain places, such as Jerusalem and other harder to reach areas of the West

Bank and Gaza. The Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem is also found several times in

Bethlehem due to its proximity yet inaccessibility to locals. A large mural in Bethlehem

elaborately depicts a birds-eye view of Jerusalem with a ladder being offered from the sky

downward by a large pair of hands, presumably God's (Shalem & Wolf, p. 159-160).

8.3 Symbols of Resistance

While there are numerous symbols of resistance graffitied all over the wall, raised

hands and balled up fists indicating power and strength are among the most popular. Many

of these show a raised fist in the foreground of a landscape of Jerusalem or farmland, often

accompanied with the Palestinian flag. Sometimes, this fist is crushing through the wall

revealing one of these landscapes, such as a large mural in Abu Dis of a giant red fist

busting through the concrete to open the view to a green hilltop with Jerusalem sitting on

top (Shalem & Wolf, 2011; Parry, 2011). The peace dove is often included in these murals,

indicating that the fist is not meant to suggest violence, but resistance and calls for peace.

One section of the wall in Bethlehem shows one large mural featuring two raised fists

along with the text "Down with this wall!" Another smaller, more quickly sketched graffiti

shows a faceless, male figure raising his fist into the air while wearing the *keffiyeh*

(photographs by researcher, Bethlehem, 2019). These are just a few examples, but they are

extremely common along the wall in most populated areas of the West Bank.

8.4 Jewish Symbolism and Israeli Occupation

Particularly in the Jerusalem area, there is an abundance of graffiti referencing

Israeli occupation, IDF soldiers, historical references to Jewish experiences of oppression,

and principles significant to Judaism. Artwork or text that refers to the suffering of the Jews

during the Holocaust as well as the current Israeli occupation of the Palestinian Territories is potentially a method in which to invoke feelings of shame, guilt, and hypocrisy from both Israelis and Jewish people living overseas. One such example was a piece that the Pope saw during his visit - "Bethlehem look like ghetto Warsaw Ghetto," in reference to the large Jewish ghetto established in Poland by Nazi Germany (RTE News, 2014). Other works seek to appeal to the Jewish people's history of immense suffering and genocide and question the Israeli government's violent actions towards Palestinians, implying that the Jewish people have gone from the oppressed to the oppressor. In Bethlehem, another artist writes "Israel: Have you become the evil you deplored?" (Shalem & Wolf, 2011, p. 153). Another reads: "Ye who have been killed & know suffering… Why do you KILL?" (Parry, 2011, p. 18).

Though it is uncommon to find explicitly aggressive or violent rhetoric towards Israel or the Jewish people on the wall, occasionally a "Fuck Israel" or text of similar rhetoric will be seen, such as one text in Ramallah that reads: "NEWS: FUCK JEWS" (Shalem & Wolf, 2011, p. 24). One graffiti piece that appears to be quite hostile in Bethlehem depicts an airplane dropping bombs on Gaza and the West Bank, and between the two locations lies Auschwitz. The text above the plane reads: "Missing the point" (p. 143). In Abu Dis, large text sprayed crudely on the wall reads "Stop the Holocost [sic] in Palestine" alongside a Jewish star being equated to the Nazi symbol (p. 70). Another graffitist scribbled at the base of the wall in Bethlehem "'I was just following orders' – IDF and Nazi" (Cimarosti, 2012).

Other work is more explicit in addressing the Israeli occupation of Palestine exists usually as text or simple symbolic art. A piece near Jerusalem depicts Pac-Man wearing

the Jewish *kippah* about to eat the Palestinian flag. More artwork claims "The only peace

Israel wants is a piece of my land!" (Parry, 2011, p. 126). In Bethlehem, a graffitist wrote

the statement "Zionism is fascism" (Parry, 2011, p. 69). Another mural in Jerusalem shows

the notorious map of Israel-Palestine that shows a timeline of Israeli control over land, with

the final map showing Palestine as only a handful of isolated clusters separated by Jewish

settlements. For another artist, the Israeli flag is posted on the wall with the words "BUILT

ON RACISM" nearby (p. 158). One artist painted in large backwards words as if mirrored

for the Israelis to read on the other side of the wall: "THE WORLD SEES THROUGH

THIS WALL. WHEN WILL YOU?!!" (p. 175). An unknown artist painted a rabbi in a city

labeled as Tel Aviv surrounded by a wall similar to the West Bank Barrier (p. 37).

Jewish symbolism has been used to question Israeli morality regarding how the

occupation of Palestine clashes with Judaism. Some graffiti make references to violations

of Judaic principles and the Ten Commandments, such as in both Abu Dis and Bethlehem

where someone spray painted: "ISRAEL: THOU SHALL NOT STEAL STILL APPLIES"

in reference to theft of Palestinian land (Shalem & Wolf, 2011, p. 158). Another spot reads

"WALL OF WAR + SHAME. O WAILING WALL" in reference to the major Jewish holy

site in Jerusalem, the Western Wall (p. 91). In Ramallah, one author writes: "Take a look at

your Promised Land. Your deed is that gun in your hand" (p. 23). After conducting a

graffiti analysis in Abu Dis, Hanauer (2011) explains the significance of Palestinians using

Israeli and Jewish references in graffiti:

> The use of graffiti which defines Adu Dis [sic] as "ghetto Abu Dis" or compares the
> separation wall to the 'Wailing' Wall argues for the creation of Palestine for exactly the
> same reasons as the Zionists argued for the creation of Israel. In other words, the
> Palestinians are being persecuted like the Jews in the Holocaust and the Palestinians have
> been dispersed around the world just like the Jews in the Diaspora after the fall of the

second temple. Since these arguments have been used by the Israelis to legitimize their own national entity, the same arguments should hold true for the creation of a Palestinian state. Thus the Israelis can either disown their own arguments in which case the justification for Israel disappears or they must accept the logic of the creation of a Palestinian state (p. 315).

Other artists combine themes that are common to both Jews and Christians. A message for viewers reads "Who are you? Catholic, Jew, Muslim?" "A human being…" (Parry, 2011, p. 144). This mini-dialogue challenges the viewer to recognize the humanity in all regardless of religion. One work in Jerusalem combines a white dove, an olive branch, and references to Moses and the Ten Commandments, a graffiti piece that appears to be speaking to a wider audience of both Jews and Christians.

8.5 Christian Symbolism and Biblical Verses

Christian symbolism is used in many ways to point to the injustice of the wall and occupation. One example is an artwork that portrays a woman in hijab holding the body of young man in her arms next to words that call for the ending of killing Palestinian fathers, brothers, and husbands. The work is in the style of the classic Christian image *The Pietà*, with Mary holding Jesus' lifeless body after being taken off the cross. In this image, however, the woman is looking directly toward the viewer rather than down at the man's body, her eyes black and seeming to demand accountability (Shalem & Wolf, p. 22). Bible

Figure 27: Jesus stares down at the viewer from a hole broken through the wall. Credit: Active Stills in +972 Magazine, 2015

verses and references to God and Jesus are also quite common in graffiti that only involves

text. In Bethlehem, some examples include "Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be

comforted" (Matthew 5:4) and "For He shall deliver the needy when he cries; the poor also,

and him that has no helper" (Psalms 72:12) (photograph by researcher; Parry, 2011, p. 57).

Other texts just referencing God include "God ain't a landlord" and "Only God can judge,

nobody else!" (photograph by researcher, 2019). Another piece proclaims "JESUS HE

PAID FOR YOU" at the bottom of a work titled *Freedom Menu* (Shalem & Wolf, 2011, p.

161). Another colorful piece in Bethlehem spells out the word "LOVE" with Jesus' face

with a crown of thorns standing in for the "O" (photograph by researcher, 2019). Nearby

stands a large mural of Jesus' face peering down at the view through a hole broken through

the concrete (Beiler, 2015).

 While Jesus often appears on the wall promoting peace and love, one artist in

Bethlehem depicts more graphic and disturbing imagery of Jesus' suffering in the context

of war and oppression. Cake$_Stencils has painted striking black stencil-like images of war

and suffering along the base of the wall nearby the hotel. One image warns the viewers

"DANGER: AIR OPERATIONS AREA" with a stencil of Jesus crucified to a fighter jet

flying towards the ground. In another stencil, Cake$_Stencils depicts Mary holding the

baby Jesus, halos made from barbed wire and a crosshair directly in the middle of their

bodies (photograph by researcher, 2019). Two slabs to the left is a photo of Jesus' face,

looking upward and crying as his thorned crown causes him to bleed. Most of his face is

covered by the *keffiyeh*, and underneath the image reads "WARNING. WEAR YOUR

KUFIYA OR RISK THE CONSEQUENCES" (Widak, 2020).

 Crucifixion as a theme is sometimes seen without Jesus himself present. In Toenjes'

(2015) graffiti content analysis on Christian themes, she lists an image of a dove near Jerusalem that has both wings nailed to the wall. Toenjes explains that the image "at once suggests the wall as the death of peace in Palestine and likens that process to the crucifixion of Jesus" (p. 61). Further down the wall, more images of a crucified Jesus can be seen (Getty Images, 2020). However, Jesus sometimes appears angry and acting aggressively. In a major mood shift, a furious Jesus can be seen in Bethlehem with an armed soldier thrown angrily over his knee and hand raised high to deliver a serious spanking, suggesting divine disapproval or punishment for the military's role, likely either the Israeli or American military, for the current state of Palestine. (photograph by researcher contact, 2020).

Christmas imagery also makes several appearances along the wall. Some work seems intent on decorating the wall with some positivity, such as a Christmas tree mural in Abu Dis wishing the viewer happy holidays (Shalem & Wolfe, p. 24). Other works, however, use Christmas imagery in a darker way. In Bethlehem, a Christmas tree is surrounded by its own wall, but outside the wall is nothing but a barren landscape of tree stumps. This is part of the *Santa's Ghetto* project, which at this point has been partially painted over. Another large swath of the wall is decorated in little silhouettes of Christmas trees and stars but reads: "Merry Christmas World – From Bethlehem Ghetto" (Alamy, 2010).

8.6 <u>God</u>

God is referenced numerous times in a way in which is less specific to Christianity. In Bethlehem, the popular COEXIST brand is painted using the Muslim crescent, the Star of David, and the Cross as part of the font. Accompanying text reads "If you can't say

something nice, at least make it rhyme. GOD WON'T FORGET" (Liberman, 2017). In

Bethlehem, one graffiti message reminds its viewers "Only God can judge, NOBODY

ELSE!!" while another proclaims "The love of God is unlimited!" Another nearby reads

"A wall in the eye is a wall in the sky. See God in all or don't see God at all." A message of

resistance near the Aida refugee camp reads "Challenging Empires: God, Faithfulness,

Resistance" (photographs by researcher, 2019).

One prominent Palestinian artist, Sliman Mansour, designed a piece (painted by

unknown commissioned artists) that depicts the hands of God and Adam touching, an

adaptation of Michelangelo's *Creation of Adam* as seen in the Sistine Chapel. The original

design is slightly altered to give it a different meaning. According to Makhoul and Hon

(2013):

> The iconic image from the Sistine Chapel of God giving life to Adam through a fingertip
> touch was adapted by Mansour…What we notice first in Mansour's graffiti is the overly
> extended gap between the finger of God and his creation, which emphasizes separation — a
> separation that stalls a creation or even prevents the flow of life. Unlike the surface and
> structure that support the original, we actually want this wall to crumble...(p. 209)..

As to be expected, God as seen in Christian iconography is the most common among the

three main Westernized religions, though more graffiti shows imagery of Jesus rather than

alluding to God. Judaism and Islam keep traditions of aniconism, in which images of God

are considered taboo and can potentially be considered idolatry.

8.7 Political Figures

Painting large murals or creating stencils of political figures is quite popular among

Palestinian artists and international artists. Palestinian artists have painted large murals of

political prisoners and martyrs such as Mahmoud Barghouti and Leila Khaled, and

numerous stencils in Ramallah of Khader Adnan with a lock over his mouth to depict his role in a major hunger strike (Al-Monitor, 2012). The late Yasser Arafat, the widely revered former leader of the Palestine Liberation Organization, is painted next to Barghouti on the wall by the Qalandiya checkpoint. Ahed Tamimi is painted in collaboration between Italian and Palestinian artists on a major tourist point in Bethlehem.

International artists also paint political figures, but often these are international heads of state, prime ministers, and presidents. Donald Trump is painted numerous times along the wall, but these murals are often criticized by locals. Trump can be seen speaking to the Western Wall, smiling next to Hillary Clinton, and being intimate with other political leaders. Benjamin Netanyahu and Vladimir Putin are also popular figures, and some murals depict these figures kissing. There are also stencils of Trump's face with capital letters underneath simply stating "Fuck Trump." It is not known who is responsible for these stencils, but the assumption is mostly international artists and tourists (photographs by researcher, 2019).

Other political figures that were not heads of state also appear. Gandhi appears in various spots as a symbol of social and political reform. Similarly, Che Guevara appears numerous times in Abu Dis and Bethlehem. One area in Bethlehem has a collection of Che Guevara's face stamped in clusters, where a graffitist later added in red text: "Che Guevara won't save you" (Shalem & Wolf, 2011, p. 123). Esack's letter to the Palestinians was painted over 3 kilometers of the wall in A-Ram, and Nelson Mandela is referenced numerous times. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. appears a few times in Bethlehem, usually with his stenciled portrait and a quote from one of his speeches. Quotes from many peace activists and civil rights leaders, such as Bobby Sands from Northern Ireland, appear as

well without imagery.

8.8 Children

Imagery of children is used heavily by both Palestinian and international artists. A painting on a watchtower in Bethlehem signed by local artist Moodi Aballa shows what appears to be a young girl looking towards the sky with a key around her neck. Next to her are English and Arabic text. The English text reads: "From Palestinians in Bethlehem to the Palestinians in Bourj el Barajne," a refugee camp in southern Beirut (photograph by researcher, 2019). Banksy and Cake$_Stencils are the primary international artists for this type of

Figure 28: Art by Moodi Aballa of young Palestinian girl with key around her neck, Bethlehem. Photograph by researcher, July 2019.

artwork, in which children are depicted playing in dystopian settings. This artwork is often a way to emphasize the innocence of children in conflict settings, and how their childhood is impacted by the surrounding hostile environment. Cake$_Stencils specifically takes childhood toys such as jump ropes and turns them into items of danger to emphasize the loss of innocence in hostile environments (Inspiring City, 2019b). There are also numerous references to children's stories, films, and games such as Snow White, Alice in Wonderland, Mickey Mouse, Hello Kitty, swing sets, jacks, jump rope, sand boxes, hoop rolling, and a jack in the box. However, many of these images have been altered to represent danger or some form of a dystopian reality – Snow White with a machine gun, a

jack in the box with a rocket, and Mickey Mouse and Pinocchio without eyes and missing

limbs (photographs by researcher, 2019).

Other graffiti focusing on children shows them interacting with the wall or showing

ways in which to escape. The famous Swedish children's story character, Pippi

Longstocking, can be seen in Ramallah with a pet monkey, back turned to the viewer, while

she is in the middle of spray-painting "ILLEGAL OCKUPATIO…" on the wall (Shalem &

Wolf, 2011, p. 24). One of Banksy's most famous works is a black stencil of a young girl

floating into the air while holding a bunch of balloons, which is still visible in Ramallah

near the Qalandiya checkpoint.

Several graffiti depict children interacting with armed soldiers. Most notorious is

Banksy's artwork with the young girl frisking a soldier against a wall (Ellsworth-Jones,

2012). Cake$_Stencils has one stencil showing children jump roping with an armed soldier,

while another set of children appear to be playing tag with a soldier (photograph by

researcher, 2019). Taqi Spateen shows a child with a pet goldfish being confronted by a

soldier ominously wearing a Klu Klux Klan hood (Sharar, 2021).

8.9 <u>Weeping and Deathly Female Figures</u>

Another particularly dark set of images depict tragic female figures. These women

are often either well known symbolic female icons or unknown or faceless, but still clearly

women. They are usually weeping or come across as deathly or ghostly, with some of these

figures holding a dead male figure, usually a son, brother, or father (as indicated by

accompanying text). The content of these artworks, along with where many of these images

are located (less touristy spots) leads to the assumption that these images are mostly painted

by Palestinian graffitists. The Black Widow in Qalandiya is a series of a ghostly female

figure with black clothing and a white face. She is seen both alone and walking with small

children and is present in numerous locations. (Shalem & Wolf, p. 30). The use of crying

women speaks to the hardships women historically suffer in conflict, including loss of

husbands and sons, economic hardship, and misogyny. Women are more often than men to

be the caretakers of the elderly, disabled and injured, and traditionally, children, all of

whom are severely impacted by conflict, and the motherly depiction in the graffiti shows

the burden women must carry in such situations.

8.10 Animals

The use of animal imagery is quite commonly used by both international and

Palestinian artists. The animals most chosen are often birds, predators such as lions, or

docile, domesticated animals such as donkeys or camels. Predatory animals are usually

portrayed as violent, often eating or tearing into another animal and blood is often present.

The livestock animals often appear to be abused, attacked, or sad. Italian artist Eric the Dog

painted a large mural of a donkey in Bethlehem. The donkey is crying with its ears back

while on roller skates dragging a cart of what appears to be sheets of paper or money

(Shalem & Wolf, 2011, p. 155). Similarly, Banksy's piece displayed a donkey being

stopped by a soldier to have its papers checked. However, the exception to the

domesticated animals being sad or attacked seems to be the pig, which is depicted as

aggressive in several graffiti images. A stencil of The Winged Pig of War can be seen in

Abu Dis with the word for war written in both Hebrew and Arabic (Shalem & Wolf, 2011,

p. 61). Pigs are sometimes painted in dark colors with black eyes and mouths wide open,

and can also be seen occasionally wearing suits, often a reference to the corruption of corporate elites and the authorities.

Predatory and other animals known for constructive or destructive qualities are also painted on the wall. A large snake in Bethlehem is seen crawling along the wall with a full stomach of young children in the fetal position and what appears to be other livestock animals. The snake's mouth is wide open baring its fangs, suggesting an insatiable appetite (Shalem & Wolf, 2011, p. 130). In Ramallah, a bright orange saber-toothed tiger is shown looking wide-eyed at the viewer proclaiming, "I resist!" (Shalem & Wolf, 2011, p. 20). Another large mural depicts a large ant shoving over a line of dominos in Ramallah (Leuenberger, 2011). A rhino in Bethlehem is painted as busting through the wall from the other side, revealing a blue sky behind it (The Christian Science Monitor, no date).

Some of the animals show signs of being in a war themselves, enduring attacks, torture, or other aspects of danger. The Dove of Peace is seen quite commonly throughout the wall's route, including a Banksy piece in Bethlehem. It is typically seen flying with an olive branch accompanying text that calls for peace or flying over landscapes of Jerusalem or the Palestinian flag as the background. However, the Dove of Peace is also often the target of injustice and violence in several graffiti works, often shown bleeding, being eaten, or strangled. One artist painted a mural of a lion eating a dove in Bethlehem. The lion represents "hypocrisy," "money," and "shekels," or Israeli currency (written in Hebrew on the lion's shoulders). The lion is seen biting into the chest of the bird, which lays on the ground with eyes shut and wearing a *keffiyeh*. Text on the white bird reads "Bird of Terror" which looks as though it was added afterward. Beside the mural reads "Stop the Wall" (Shalem & Wolf, 2011, p. 131). Banksy's white peace dove appears wings spread wide

while wearing a bullet proof vest and crosshairs aimed directly at its heart. Another blue

bird in Ramallah is blindfolded and wings tied behind its back and feet tied together

(Shalem & Wolf, 2011, p. 23). One particularly gruesome mural shows two warthogs with

spiked collars pulling a rope of barbed wire in opposite directions. In between the

warthogs, a white dove is being strangled by the wire. The image is entirely in black and

white, except for red blood seeping from the dove's chest (pp. 116 – 117). One of the

newest pieces on the wall as of this writing is by Spateen, whose mural depicts a

magician's hands violently transforming a dove into a white cloth decorated with

silhouettes of bombs (Spateen's Instagram page, Bethlehem, March 2022).

8.11 Graffiti Related to The United States of America

Due to the American government's long-term involvement with the evolution of

Israel as a state, past peace negotiations (most of which have failed, with America's openly

pro-Israel stance being seen as an obstacle), and the current state of Israeli-Palestinian

relations, a lot of built-up resentment, disappointment, frustration, and anger towards the

U.S. government is reflected in much of the graffiti content on the wall and is warranted its

own section in this chapter. Not only are there numerous references to American military

and funding, but also to political and social movements happening today in the U.S. Those

responsible for these graffiti appear to be Palestinians as well as international street artists

and American tourists.

8.11.1 *Negative Imagery of the U.S.A. (and Britain)*

The graffiti about/by the U.S. and Britain (included here due to its own colonialist

past and role in the Israel's and Palestine's history) typically have negative connotations

and reflect feelings associated with criticism, anger, resentment, and remorse. Some graffiti is likely made by locals, where the graffiti is highly critical of particularly U.S. policy towards Israel and Palestine. Much of the graffiti though appears to be by citizens of the U.S. or Britain, equally as critical and often expresses shame for their country's involvement. British graffiti is less common and tends to focus on its history of colonialism. Perhaps the bluntest work referencing Great Britain is one that reads "Britain: Fucking Up the World since 1858," likely referencing the beginning of British rule in India, though the English had been exerting control over other areas of the world, notably Ireland, long beforehand (photograph by researcher, 2019). The 1917 Balfour Declaration is a contentious topic for Palestinians, in which the British government declared its support for the creation of a Jewish State during World War II using the boundaries of Mandatory Palestine. One of the newer pieces by Banksy highlights the 100-year anniversary of the declaration: an engraved portion of the wall that simply reads "Er… Sorry," below the symbol of the royal crown (BBC, 2017).

Negative imagery of the U.S. is far more common, revolves strongly around funding and militarization, and sometimes has a sense of violence to it. Cake$_Stencils depicts a man hanging by the neck from a wad of U.S. dollar bills (photograph by researcher, 2019). Drawn directly on a military gate in the wall in Bethlehem is the silhouette of an armed U.S. soldier under a large $1 bill (Shalem & Wolf, 2011, p. 148). Along the base of the wall is a stencil placed numerous times that reads "MADE IN THE USA" (photograph by researcher, 2019). There is also another stencil directly painted to a watchtower that reads "AMERICAN MONEY. ISRAELI APARTHEID" (Parry, 2011, p. 63).

Nearby someone else scrawled "FUCK THE USA" into the wall, which was later crossed out by another passersby (Shalem & Wolf, 2011, p. 125). Much work regarding the

Figure 29: Statue of Liberty holding the lifeless body of Handala. Photograph credits: American Icons Temple, 2015

U.S. is about American tax dollars and is likely done by American tourists. One such work shows a sideways American flag with the words "America, I want my $ back!" (Parry, 2011, p. 62). Another bluntly states, "Sorry my tax dollars paid for this" (photograph by researcher, 2019). Italian artist Blue created a large mural of a baby on its hands and knees blowing at soldiers who are made of money to bring attention to the U.S. funding of the Israeli military (Parry, 2011, p. 64). American artist Ron English personally rejects his obligation to pay taxes that eventually fund oppressive policies in Israel towards Palestinians. His mural in the Aida refugee camp depicting children on a merry-go-round being bombed by an American pilot reflects this attitude (p. 59). In Bethlehem, a mural of the Statue of Liberty is

Figure 30: "Sorry My Tax Dollars Paid For This" stencil in Bethlehem. Photograph by researcher, 2019.

aggressively raising her torch but is depicted as Death, with skeletal features and angry expression in a dark, abstract background. Her torch carries no fire (Shalem & Wolf, p. 116). Another shot of the Statue of Liberty shows her in cartoon form kneeling with her

hand covering her face and crying with the lifeless body of Handala over her knee (Shalem & Wolf, p. 142). In Bethlehem, Disney's Pinocchio is seen disfigured and shrugging while wearing a vest that reads USA, while a skull in a stars and stripes dunce cap is seen below brandishing an assault rifle (Shalem & Wolf, 2011, p. 158).

Donald Trump is almost universally depicted as a negative figure on the wall. As president, Trump was quite disliked by the Palestinians due to his extreme pro-Israeli stance that was reflected in his actions, most notably moving the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem, recognizing the Golan Heights as part of Israel, revoking funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), and setting the stage for further Israeli annexation of the West Bank with a "peace plan" that allowed for the current settlements to remain and the Jordan Valley to be further annexed for future development. His and his son-in-law Jared Kushner's peace plan map has been graffitied onto the wall with negative commentary, highlighting the loss of more land and the existence of a "Bantustan" state for the Palestinians (Reinl, 2019; BBC, 2020). Much of the artwork depicting Trump includes him kissing other heads of state that many feel that he has been kind to, such as Netanyahu and Putin. Another shows Trump telling the Western Wall, a major Jewish holy site, that he plans to build it a "brother" in reference to the US-Mexico border wall he promised his right-wing base. Elsewhere, his face is stenciled in above the words "DUMP TRUMP" (photographs by researcher, 2019). President George W. Bush was also disliked by the Palestinians, and his face appears on the wall in several places as well. One graffiti is of the logo of Flatline Transmissions, a former band from the US, where the text overhead reads "Bush = one with the blackest heart" (Shalem & Wolf, 2011, p. 24).

One study suggests that in Abu Dis roughly a quarter of the graffiti refers to US policy or the link between the Israeli and American government. According to Hanauer (2011):

> The graffiti which deals with the Americanization of the wall such as "Paid for by the USA" or "The Bush Sharon wall" see the wall and Israel's activities in the Middle East as an extension of American imperialist foreign policy. The same discourse of colonial occupation is present; but this time Israel is a puppet to the bigger imperial power, the United States. In this sense the wall is not only part of an Israeli plan of annexation and population transfer; but rather it is part of a much larger US plan for the Americanization of the world. At the very least the message of this graffiti is that America actively economically and politically supports Israeli plans for expansion. The discourse of imperialism constitutes the wall as part of the wider plan of land annexation and population transfer on the part of the Israelis and as part of a more global plan of extended American political control throughout the world. The wall is seen as a clear physical marker of these expansionist policies by both Israel and the US (pp. 314 – 315).

This graffiti is usually written in English so that not only Israelis and American tourists can understand, but also openly points out the injustices that both countries are inflicting on the Palestinians to the rest of the world.

8.11.2 *Black Lives Matter*

There has long been a connection between the Palestinians, particularly in Gaza, and Black Americans in the United States. This connection thrives on a shared understanding of a history of oppression through racism, police brutality, and equality in terms of access to resources and political representation. After the brutal death of unarmed Minnesota resident George Floyd in 2020, the U.S. was thrown into civil turmoil with nationwide protests that pitted Black Lives Matter protesters and allies against police and white supremacist groups (MacFarquhar, 2020). Some of these protests turned violent with

looting and arson. In the case of Kenosha, Minnesota, another city experiencing intense protests after a Black man was shot by police, two protesters were killed by a 17-year-old teen with ties to extremist groups (Armus, Berman, & Witt, 2020).

At the height of these protests, graffiti referencing Black Lives Matter and George Floyd began to appear on the West Bank Barrier. Taqi Spateen erected a large mural of George Floyd's portrait in Bethlehem with large letters reading "I can't breathe. I want justice, not O$_2$." In an interview

Figure 31: Taqi Spateen's mural of Iyad al-Hallaq. Credit: Seka Hamed, 2021.

with Mondoweiss, a news and opinion site that covers Palestine, Israel, and the U.S., Spateen said that he felt it was important to draw a connection between Geroge Floyd's death and the West Bank Barrier by saying "George Floyd was killed because they practically strangled him, and cut off his breathing… And every day, this wall strangles us and makes it hard for us to breathe" (Patel, 2020). Continuing police and military brutality against Palestinians in the West Bank and East Jerusalem were also highlighted through graffiti during this time. Eyad al-Hallaq, a 32-year-old autistic Palestinian man was shot by an Israeli border policeman who mistook him for a terrorist. This killing took place just five days after the death of Floyd, and sparked unrest throughout the country. In addition to his mural of Floyd, Spateen also painted a portrait of al-Hallaq in Bethlehem with the words

"Not only Floyd. Iyad Hallaq too." Numerous other murals of Floyd's portrait were painted along the wall as well, one of which being painted alongside two murals of Palestinian victims of Israeli violence in Bethlehem. Other murals of Floyd have appeared on building walls within Palestinian cities, such as on the side of shops.

8.11.3 *American Right-Wing Extremism and the Alt-Right*

While the Alt-right originated in an American context and thrives today in response to specifically American politics and perceived "political correctness", it has grown into a loose global movement of international online trolls, anti-Semites, white nationalists, and anti-feminists. The weapon of choice for alt-right internet trolls is the meme, an image accompanied by text that is usually meant to be humorous and "often designed to be quickly and easily disseminated within online space" (Crawford, Keen, & Suarez, 2021). Memes have become wildly popular among Millennials and Gen Z in general, but alt-right internet users have weaponized memes into tools of communication and harassment of liberals, minorities, women, and right-wing figures who are not seen as extreme enough.

Lushsux is the prominent "meme" artist who frequents the West Bank. His online presence is riddled with alt-right memes such as Pepe the Frog and others that have been associated with alt-right violence on the web. He also has painted Rick and Morty from the popular TV show Rick and Morty, which, against creator Dan Harmon's wishes, has a very strong alt-right fanbase (Mumford, 2017). In one episode, Rick manages to turn himself into a pickle to avoid family counseling. Lushsux decided to add some regional context to his mural on the wall depicting this scenario, by having Rick exclaim that he is a "kosher pickle." This was further described in an Instagram post by Lushsux when he claimed that an Israeli soldier urinated on him from an above watchtower while he was painting the

giant pickle (which is wearing a yarmulke), with his post reading: "True story: The guard in the tower pissed on me out the window towards the end of painting this. I happened to notice he had no foreskin on his kosher pickle." His encouragement for his Twitter followers and those who view his work to follow Swedish YouTuber Pewdiepie on YouTube and other platforms has also undoubtedly raised questions, as Pewdiepie has openly made racist, anti-Semitic, and misogynist comments and had become an "idol" for the alt-right and was featured on the neo-Nazi site *The Daily Storme*r (Ellis, 2017).

Spateen has added a new image to the wall of an armed soldier speaking to a small child with a goldfish in a bowl. The man is dressed like an IDF soldier, but he is donning the iconic KKK hood, the extremist group in the US known for its cross burnings, hatred for Black people, Jews and women, and open white supremacist ideology. The soldier appears to have removed his helmet and face guard to reveal the KKK hood underneath. The caption underneath a photo of this mural on Spateen's Instagram page reads: "Sometimes some masks are like the real face, and sometimes it is not necessary for the mask to be worn on the face, it is enough for the heart to be filled

Figure 32: Taqi Spateen's mural of masked soldier and young child. Bethlehem. Credit: Taqi Spateen, 2021.

with what this mask means." To most, any association with the KKK means to be associated with an ideology that promotes violence, racial separation, ethnic purity and superiority, xenophobia, religious bigotry, and nativism.

While considerably on the other side of the political spectrum, the word "ANTIFA" can be seen scrawled onto the wall in Bethlehem (photograph by researcher, 2019). ANTIFA is a loose-knit anti-fascist group of far-leftists that have appeared at various rallies in the U.S. to counter rightwing extremist groups. While their cause is resisting fascist or authoritarian movements, sometimes those affiliated with this group have caused serious property damage and gotten into fights with rightwing protesters. They are particularly known for punching self-proclaimed Nazis in the face on camera at far-right rallies (Lopez, 2017). It is unknown if the author behind the ANTIFA tags on the wall is Palestinian or an international.

8.12 Breaking Through the Wall

Numerous graffiti images depict either what life could be on the other side of the wall or show how to get over, around, through, or under the wall to the other side. There are images of ladders painted all the way to the top of the wall, as well as graffiti that reflects the only way to get to the other side is through the checkpoint (photographs by researcher, 2019). Cake$_Stencils has one piece that shows a large roller coaster on the other side of the wall, with people on the Palestinian side lining up to get through the checkpoint to access the ride (photograph by researcher, 2019). Banksy has multiple pieces that show a landscape on the other side. His works with children playing with beach toys is often accompanied by a large hole in the wall with a view to a beach landscape. Another Banksy work shows a policeman pulling back a curtain to reveal a tropical island setting on the other side (Marco Di Lauro/Getty Images Europe, 2005). Another piece by an unknown artist shows two faceless people standing next to a barred window with a view to a landscape with hills and farmland, with text that reads "a view to peace" (Shalem & Wolf,

2011, p. 91). While windows seem to be the most common gateway to the other side depicted in graffiti, doors are also common. Two pieces in Abu Dis depict doorways to the other side: one is a stencil of an arched doorway showing people walking in the distance (p. 87), while the other is a cartoonish image of a door opening with the Palestinian flag hanging from the doorknob with a sign reading "Home Team" (p. 81).

Other graffiti that does not depict a door, gate, or window instead shows the wall itself having a huge hole in it or a piece missing. One work in Bethlehem shows two slabs of concrete having a large chunk missing at the top with the sky showing through, but with a military helicopter flying

Figure 33: Banksy's image of man pulling back curtain, Ramallah; August 5, 2005 - Marco Di Lauro/Getty Images Europe.

towards the viewer (photograph by researcher, 2019). Spateen recently painted a mural representing UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) #16 in which a judge's gavel had hammered a peace sign through the wall, breaking the concrete enough to see a blue sky and green landscape on the other side (Just Peace Advocates, 2023). A very large mural shows two large hands prying the concrete slabs open to reveal a pathway to a mosque with emerald-green domes (Graduate Institute Geneva, 2018). Similarly, two of Banksy's angels in Bethlehem have found an actual physical gap between two misaligned segments at the top of the wall and can be seen prying the slabs apart (photograph by researcher, 2019).

Not all graffiti leads to a clear pathway to the other side, however. A lot of work depicts the wall being cracked, broken, shattered, or crumbling. One of the longest standing pieces that today has been eroded down is an installation of a mannequin leg protruding from the wall to represent someone's foot smashing through the wall in Bethlehem from the Israeli side (photograph by researcher, 2019). Another large piece on a watchtower in Bethlehem shows a white, bald man simply poking the tower, resulting in the wall shattering like glass (Shalem & Wolf, 2011, p. 141). A mural created by Spanish organization Mujeres Artistas Por La Paz (Women Artists for Peace) shows a graffitied West Bank Barrier cracked and crumbling, with two *keffiyeh*-clad male figures in the foreground flashing the peace sign with their hands (p. 146).

There are also many art pieces suggesting ways of escaping to the other side of the wall. Most of these depict ways over the wall. Ladders to climb over the wall are spray-painted in several locations (photograph by researcher, 2019), which have been used by some Palestinian residents to get to the other side. Other methods of getting over the wall are creative and left to the imagination, like Banksy's stenciled girl in a dress floating over the wall with balloons or a giant zipper opening a huge gash in the concrete (Shalem & Wolf, 2011, p. 126 – 127). In Ramallah, a silhouette-style painting depicts an escalator with a line of people riding it over the wall (Leuenberger, 2011). However, in a change in approach from going over or through the wall, one faceless figure in a *keffiyeh* is painted digging his way under the wall in Bethlehem (Shalem & Wolf, 2011, p. 134).

8.13 <u>Humor</u>

A lot of the work on the West Bank Barrier involves catchy and satirical quips or

poetic sentences referencing the wall. "Make Hummus Not Walls", "Diets, not Riots", "Big Wall Thingy", and "No wars, more doors, God ain't a landlord" are just a few examples of such work, which is done by both Palestinians and internationals (photographs by researcher, 2019). A lot of the work takes on a much darker sense of humor. "Control + Alt + Delete" in Ramallah (Shalem & Wolf, 2011, p. 18) and "Oops your city has been encrypted. To release your city please send \$300 USD to 33iG6woHCf2hrNGVeJh6BXZBQW9xtE4gX9" in Bethlehem are two examples that use digital references to depict the complexity of the wall and its impact as well indicate that there is a way to reset or a way out of this situation, albeit a difficult and convoluted one (photograph by researcher, 2019). In Abu Dis, one artist wrote upside down on the base of the wall: "THIS WAY UP" (Shalem & Wolf, 2011, p. 86). Near Checkpoint 300, someone simply placed a street sign on the wall that reads "Wall Street" (photograph by researcher, 2019). "I want my ball back" is also written a few times in numerous locations (Shalem & Wolf, 2011, p. 42).

8.14 Pop Culture Icons

There is a wide variety of pop culture references on the wall, though it appears to be used in different ways by Palestinian artists, international artists, and tourists. Pop culture is a tool for quickly catching the eye of tourists and having them engage more closely with the wall and graffiti. Internationals often paint icons as they are and maybe add some text, where it appears that Palestinian artists will take the icon and alter it to fit into the Palestinian context. Spateen, for example, takes pop icons and adds imagery that refers to Palestinian life under occupation, such as being under the surveillance of Israeli soldiers in

his Mario mural.

Thus far, pop icons used by international artists tend to depict the icons without political alterations but may include a speech bubble to reference the wall or occupation. Lushsux seems to be the one most likely to use pop icons, such as Rick and Morty, Mark Zuckerberg, Larry David, and Morgan Freeman. His work often depicts contemporary figures saying something ironic or political inside a speech bubble, with the quote sometimes attributed to another contemporary figure. For example, his mural of actor Larry David has a speech bubble that reads "This place would be a fantastic place to come to if Jews were cheating on their wives…", with the quote being apparently attributed to Bernie Sanders, a progressive US senator. He similarly painted a large portrait of American actor Morgan Freeman with Nelson Mandela's quote: "We know too well that our freedom is incomplete without the freedom of the Palestinians" (photographs by researcher, 2019).

Pop culture graffiti by tourists is mostly created with the use of stencils. The most popular stencils depict Snow White and Mickey Mouse, but there is also Batman, the Watchmen smiley face, and various celebrities. Many of these references, however, do not address Palestine or the wall, and if they do, are not explicit. The above-mentioned Batman stencil declares "If Batman knew about this… you would be in big trouble!" Snow White is depicted with an assault rifle above cursive text that reads "Fight Sexism!", an example of feminist art. Other people use corporate symbols or band references. In Bethlehem, the Nike symbol is spray-painted in black with the words "Just remove it" as a play on their slogan "Just do it." Several tourists have made references to Pink Floyd's *The Wall* by simply writing "Another Block in the Wall" in the same font as the album cover (photographs by researcher, 2019).

8.15 <u>Tourist Graffiti</u>

The majority of tourist graffiti lies in Bethlehem between Aida refugee camp, the Wi'am Peace Center and Checkpoint 300, a relatively short stretch of the wall, but heavily trafficked by international visitors. While some of the graffiti content already covered in this chapter was likely done by tourists, the following descriptions of references to other countries, solidarity art, and graffiti content irrelevant to the wall or the occupation are thought to be primarily done by tourists.

8.15.1 *Solidarity Art*

Graffiti showing solidarity is arguably the most common form of international graffiti in the tourist hotspot of Bethlehem. These works are usually a mixture of text or simple imagery of flags and symbols in a wide variety of languages. One graffito reads "Ubuntifada," a play on the word for Palestinian struggle "intifada" and the African term "ubuntu" which is roughly translated as "I am because you are," signifying collective oneness through humanity (photograph by researcher, 2019). Much of the solidarity art attempts to speak to humanity as a collective whole and frame the Palestinian struggle as humanity's struggle. Some of these messages include "We are all Palestine", Dr. King's quote, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere," and the mural *Five Fingers of the Same Hand* by Nash which promotes peace by emphasizing that all religions share the same humanity (photographs by researcher, 2019; Parry, 2011).

Graffiti of flags are widely used to show solidarity. Some flags stand alone and are accompanied by a message of solidarity from that country. Other flags are intertwined with

or melding into the Palestinian flag to show connection and unity. An example of this is a large Scottish flag painted next to a Palestinian flag in Abu Dis, signed by the Scottish Palestinian Solidarity Campaign (Shalem & Wolf, 2011, p. 84). One notable graffiti piece shows the Israeli and Palestinian flag connected by a rainbow heart with an outline of the map of Israel/Palestine in the center. Above the flags is the text "One Love Palesrael," (a combination of Palestine and Israel) and the English, Arabic, and Hebrew words for peace (The Economist, 2009). This image has also been seen at peace protests on banners in the U.S. (Kim, Nawaz, Santiago & Valdez, 2014).

Figure 34:Handala stands in a break in the wall with silhouettes calling for peace with Palestinian and Catalonian flags (Amin, 2019).

Most solidarity graffiti is written text in a wide variety of languages which sometimes is accompanied by smaller images. One large work is at the base of the wall near a watchtower in Bethlehem that reads in French: "Je suis le Palestine. Seul face a dix sionistes!!!" (translation: I am Palestine. Alone against ten Zionists!!!") (Shalem & Wolf, 2011, p. 139). The artist painted a person in a *keffiyeh* in between the sentences. Positive solidarity art, such as "Scotland Stands with Palestine" seems to come from most countries except Britain and the USA. Most positive graffiti witnessed in field research appears to come from Asian and European countries. American and British art appear to have more

negative connotations that criticize both countries' involvement in the region, either historically or presently.

8.15.2 *References to Outside Conflicts*

Another type of graffiti that could potentially be included in solidarity art would be graffiti referencing other walls or other conflicts. These use the wall to point to other areas in the world where there are also discriminatory or segregationist practices. Not only are flags used to show solidarity in graffiti messages, but also indicate the graffiti artist is from a country or region undergoing a conflict regarding autonomy or statehood, territorial dispute, or cultural endangerment, suggesting the artist feels their own experience is like that of the Palestinians. One example of this is a depiction of two flags crossed over each other, one Palestinian, the other a yellow and red striped flag, assumed to be the Catalonian flag, a region fighting for independence from Spain (Shalem & Wolf, 2011, p. 137).

Much of the graffiti referencing other conflicts has come in the form of simple text and stencils. This is especially prevalent in Bethlehem where most tourist traffic is. At the top of the wall painted over one of the "Wall Museum's" posters, someone,

Figure 35: Graffiti parallels the West Bank Barrier with the U.S - Mexico border wall. Photograph by researcher, Bethlehem, July 2019.

likely a tourist, painted a cactus under the words "Next stop: Mexico!" referring to the US-Mexico border wall popular with President Trump and his base (photograph by researcher, 2019). "More Palestinians, More Blacks, More Irish, More Dogs" is seen stenciled in Bethlehem (photograph by researcher, 2019), a rebuttal to a discriminatory sign allegedly found in the 1980's in the UK that read "No Irish, No Blacks, No Dogs" (Lonergan, 2018). Other basic texts along the wall in Bethlehem call for free and independent nations, such as "Free Kurdistan" written in red ink (photograph by researcher, 2019). A stencil of a young Palestinian child waving a South African flag is painted directly across the street from the Walled Off Hotel (photograph by researcher, 2019). The Israeli occupation and the wall are frequently compared to apartheid South Africa and the Berlin Wall. The words from John F. Kennedy's statement referring to the Berlin Wall – "Ich Bin Ein Berliner!" – is seen stretched along a large portion of the wall. This work was done by Dutch artist Joy van Erven (Toenjes, 2015). In another location in Bethlehem, one tourist wrote of the wall "In my previous life, I was the Berlin Wall. The beer was better there" (Lucarelli, 2011).

8.15.3 *Irrelevant Art*

A substantial amount of tourist graffiti has little to do with Palestinian life, Israeli occupation, resistance, solidarity, or the wall itself. Whether this type of graffiti is welcome is a topic of contention for Palestinians on the ground, as noted by the Walled Off Hotel's FAQ page when instructing tourists on their own graffiti by saying to "avoid anything normal or trivial" when painting the wall (walledoffhotel.com). Despite this recommendation, quite a few tourists will paint over existing artworks with their own messages, stencils, and paintings with images they personally desire to see on the wall.

This would include the countless "Happy Birthday" messages from all over the world to a friend that lives somewhere other than Palestine. The typical "so and so was here" is quite common in Bethlehem, along with numerous cartoon characters, smiley faces, and random song lyrics. Sports references are also common, and random poetry snippets and other unrelated statements are scattered ubiquitously among the sea of imagery. Some examples I observed include: "I can share my toys"; "Life is uncertain and that is its seduction" – John Deegan, Ireland; "The love of God is unlimited"; "Baz is a dick"; and "The light is inside you but you haven't met her" (photographs by researcher, 2019). It is unclear what the motivations or intentions behind choosing these particular messages are, but they are not explicitly about the occupation or the wall.

Throughout this graffiti analysis, it can be concluded that the graffiti content painted by people from both local Palestinian towns and international communities is too vast to pinpoint into a few select categories. However, based on direct observation, West Bank Barrier photography books such as Parry's *Against the Wall: The Art of Resistance in Palestine* (2010) and Shalem and Wolf's *Facing the Wall: The Palestinian-Israeli Barriers* (2011), and online content, the themes listed above appear to be the most common types of graffiti on the wall's surface. Through examples of specific creative Palestinian reactions to international graffiti, as outlined in Chapter 5, the following chapter asserts that these responses are acts of *poiesis* and a method of reclaiming the space as one of Palestinian resistance and resilience with the goal of raising awareness of their experiences and building solidarity with the international community.

CHAPTER IX

Discussion

Based on the research conducted throughout this doctoral study, Palestinian creative responses to both the West Bank Barrier and graffiti tourism are a method of non-violent resistance that attempts to educate and influence outsiders, assert and control narratives, and reach a global audience to build solidarity. This chapter will align graffiti as resistance and graffiti tourism in Palestine with *poiesis* as understood in the expressive arts field. Additionally, this chapter will discuss how the case of Palestine can help analyze how graffiti can contribute to the field of conflict transformation by examining graffiti and social change from an organic, grassroots level, the intentions behind such *poietic* actions, and the potential impact on target audiences. It will be argued that graffiti is a nonviolent method in which *poiesis* occurs at transcommunal and communicative levels, further linking it to conflict transformation theory regarding influencing a marginalized group's relationship with the international community.

9.1 Theory of Poiesis Applied to Palestine and the West Bank Barrier

Many of the instances of making graffiti on the West Bank Barrier, whether it is individuals marking the wall as a form of resistance as well as marking over existing graffiti to combat a false narrative or toxic artwork, can be considered *poietic* acts. Such actions could also include other non-artistic methods of marking the wall. Several Palestinians have shaped the wall for their own financial benefit without using graffiti, such

as both @alaa_taxi_driver and the Hasboun family to advertise their businesses. An example emphasizing communication and visitor education is that of the "Wall Museum," which places its posters deliberately in more popular areas for tourists to see, at a considerable height to minimize the risk of erasure and ensure high visibility. Just watching passersby for a brief period demonstrates how effective this tactic can be, as these posters jolt the viewer back into reality amidst the colorful murals and cartoons decorating the wall's surface and command attention to Palestinian stories and experiences. Highlighting the wall's physicality through placing large, noticeable posters sharing stories of separation and restrictions to amplify the Palestinian narrative to the world is a strong example of *poiesis* in that the institution's intent is to shape public perception by physically shaping their environment, in this case, the wall's appearance.

The same is true for graffiti-making on the wall as a method of resistance. Similarly, all the instances of Palestinians defacing, correcting, and adding to artworks can be considered examples of *poietic* responses to international graffiti. In a situation in which one may feel helpless, depressed, or confused, making art visible to large amounts of people could be a way to send a message and share one's stance in an impossible situation, or to make sense of what is happening in front of them. By actively shaping the West Bank Barrier into a vibrant message board calling for social action, local graffitists can potentially shift the perspectives of the international audience, whether participating in graffiti-making on the wall or watching from a distance in their home countries. Fraihat and Debashi (2023) reflect on their experience researching graffiti on the wall from 2018 to 2022:

> If fate has thrown a thick and formidable apartheid wall at the Palestinians, they have turned it into a canvas to express their daily fear and aspirations, hopes, and horrors. Being a witness to the changing images on this wall is being a witness to and for history (p. 2).

Though the wall continues to devastate Palestinian lives, the artwork has acted as a cry for justice, a refusal to be silenced, and condemnation of xenophobia and oppression. It has created difficult conversations about injustice and inaction, marketing conflict, colonialism, and profiteering by international artists. Regardless, graffiti-making may be one step towards healing and making meaning out of chaotic, unjust, or seemingly hopeless situations. It is worth quoting the entirety of Levine's (Levine & Levine, 2011) passage here connecting phenomenology, *poiesis,* and *praxis* as it pertains to social change:

> Art making is itself a sensory effective experience that gives participants an experience of their own capacities for action. Because it affects us through the body and the emotions, art making can provide experiences that restore us to a feeling of being fully alive. And in making the work, by acting within the limited frame of the materials and the time and space available, we recover our capacity to be effective in the world, something that we have lost and in the helpless situation in which we find ourselves. Social change is only possible when people in the community have a sense of their own capacity to act, when they become aware of the resources and see themselves as able to remake the world in which they live (p. 28).

In other words, making individual and collective graffiti on the wall's surface is one method in which Palestinians can rejuvenate the "capacity to act," or sense of agency and empowerment, in response to segregation and living under military occupation. One key goal of graffiti in general is to attract an audience, thus using graffiti to showcase political and social injustice is a common phenomenon around the world. When public and media attention is attracted to graffiti works, it becomes clear it is successful in sending a message. Levine continues:

> The arts are a particular form of making that differentiate themselves by showing themselves as having been made. Whatever art is (and that is certainly a question without any agreed-upon answer). It shows some thing and it shows itself as having been made. We could say that, as some thing that shows, art needs to be seen; we could even say in the sense that art is always performative. Even visual art is "performed" in the viewing of it; it requires an audience in order to be what it is (p. 24).

As previously noted in Chapter 1, Palestinians used graffiti as a method of communication with each other during the First Intifada after media outlets were largely silenced by the Israeli military. The graffiti on the wall, however, is directed more towards an international audience in an attempt to educate and raise awareness of not only the negative impacts of the wall on Palestinian life, but the daily struggles of Palestinian life under Israeli occupation. The graffiti placed on the wall is in a sense a "performance" that causes a chain reaction that eventually attracts a greater number of participants. After the Walled Off Hotel was built, tourists flocked *en masse* to Bethlehem and one can watch the wall in real time change colors as graffiti images compete with each other for space, as art pieces are added, corrected, expanded, or even covered in a palimpsest fashion. It is a performance, with the voices of thousands of people competing to share messages they feel are important or relevant to the situation.

The full consequences and benefits of making art on the West Bank Barrier have yet to be understood in terms of the impact on the conflict as a whole, but its community and individual effects are more visible. Collectively for many Palestinians, making art on the wall is a form of resistance and resilience, and combatting naïve or offensive art by outsiders is a form of empowerment, education, and assertiveness. Ironically, Palestinians can creatively broadcast a narrative on a wall meant to silence them and restrict their movement, giving them the ability to attach their own meaning to the wall by actively

shaping and reshaping its appearance. When describing graffiti on the wall, Fraihat and Dabashi (2023) claim that:

> The analysis of these images has revealed that, while the purpose of building the Wall was to curb and stifle their resistance, the Palestinians turned the Wall into a platform where they express not only their commitment to and engagement with resistance and national struggle against occupation, but also additional aspirations like freedom, justice, love, poetry, commerce, and even telling their own stories (p. 3).

While they are not currently in a position to remove the wall, changing its appearance and using it as a tool for communication gives the Palestinians the chance to assert some level of control by sending their messages out into the world through social media and media outlets attracted to the graffiti. By doing so, *poiesis* appears not only through physically altering the appearance of the wall, but by also actively shaping the conversation being had locally, and especially internationally, about the wall and the Palestinian situation. As Levine (Levine & Levine, 2011) puts it "world-building is self-building" (p. 24) and this can apply to worlds both individuals and communities build for themselves. There is a need by the Palestinian community to accurately educate and represent their situation through various artworks on the wall, including graffiti, posters, and advertisements, as well as offering political tours to internationals.

Applied in this manner, the key point in *poiesis* is the ability to actively *make* sense out of helpless circumstances, and art-making allows for the limitlessness of the imagination to take over when feelings of despair or being stuck deplete our capacity to act. This provides space for communities to collectively expand their perspectives on their situations and work towards solution-oriented approaches to conflict transformation and peacebuilding. In this sense, *poiesis* is accomplished through a variety of art modalities –

examples include community mural-making, theater pieces with youth that are presented to the greater community, installation pieces in public spaces, and complaint choirs.

Storytelling is perhaps one of the most popular and effective art modalities for communities in conflict, particularly ones who are at risk of losing their language, land, or culture. The graffiti displayed on the wall's surface project Palestinian stories of lost connections, historical figures, and hopes for future, all of which are intended to reflect the depth and goals of their culture. In *Trauma, Tragedy, Therapy: The Arts and Human Suffering* (2009), Levine ties storytelling to *poiesis*:

> There are different ways of telling stories; one of them is through *poiesis*, making or shaping. We know something by shaping it, by giving it a form. Art-making is a way of shaping truth, of 'setting it into a work' (Heidegger 1975, p. 39). In so doing, we let the truth of what the work points to show itself. When it does, we have the experience of beauty (p. 26).

He explains Heidegger's notion of *poiesis* and truth, outlining that truth in this context is "not as the correspondence of a subjective judgement to an objective state of affairs, but as an uncovering, a taking out of concealment of that which has been hidden or obscured" (Knill, Levine & Levine, 2005, p. 28). In other words, making art not only helps to actively make meaning, but also can reveal the truth about circumstances through uncovering reality in that meaning-making, or to reiterate Gagliardi's (2020) statement, making graffiti in this sense can be "an assertive act of unmasking" the truth (p. 429). Syjuco describes art as having the ability to "uncover difficult truths" in contentious situations (KQED Arts, 2015). Similarly, local graffiti allows for the more positive narratives of Palestinian experience to appear alongside the imagery depicting loss, resistance, grief, and oppression, themes that often overshadow the vibrancy of Palestinian culture. As Fraihat and Dabashi (2023) noted, Palestinian hopes, aspirations, and stories are also a part of the visual conversation

occurring on the wall, shaping it into a platform for a more holistic and accurate picture of Palestinian life.

The murals that have been placed in the most populated spots for tourists and other internationals to see, such as delegations, politicians, and even the Pope, have been put there deliberately to influence the perceptions of outside actors. This is a *poietic* act in which the wall's appearance is being reshaped by Palestinian graffitists to reveal truths about Israeli occupation. Bishara (2013) recounted seeing graffiti that read "Jerusalem is ours" in Arabic in A-Ram that carried this intention. She also notes how Palestinian graffiti differs from that of international artists and tourists because of their familiarity with the wall:

> Though its visual characteristics and its location would never have attracted the attention of a photojournalist, it turned out that it was presciently well-suited to the circumstances of the building of the barrier. It was on eye level of those passengers in dusty taxis. Palestinians means of protest express an urgency and local knowledge that exceed that of the eloquent and tidy graffiti written by foreign protesters. They reflect a keen sensitivity to the physical qualities of the barrier and to the process of building it. Yet, these Palestinian protests were not always as legible to foreign audiences (p. 247).

There is still a struggle for Palestinians to get international media outlets to accurately portray their stories without becoming subject to the Western lens of orientalism and fear of extremist stereotypes. The deliberate and calculating way in which Palestinian graffitists are using the wall to speak to foreigners is not only a method in which to reveal their struggle to international viewers, but also a method in which to challenge the negative light in which they are portrayed in international narratives and media. Bishara (2013) explained:

> Those interested in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can scroll through online news photographs to see hundreds of images of the wall, graffiti, protest, and incursions, and bombings. It might seem that every inch of the separation wall has been covered by news agency photojournalists. But the apparent thoroughness of this coverage obscures all of the complexity and depth of a visual political culture that has sustained people through decades of oppression and violence (pp. 248 – 249).

One way Palestinian graffitists have approached this problem is by placing graffiti that emphasizes the richness of their culture in places of high visibility for tourists to see, such as Arabic poetry and other art forms and symbols. As Bishara notes, "with such graffiti, Palestinians inscribe their landscape with messages of resistance and steadfastness that evoke a rich Arab literary and political culture" (p. 248).

This is especially poignant in the case of the wall in Palestine. Creating a large, public art piece that more accurately represents Palestinian life can challenge harmful narratives imposed on Palestinians by the Israeli government. To many Israelis, the wall is a "fence" needed for security purposes against violent extremists and downplays the detrimental consequences it poses collectively for the Palestinians. In addition, violent outbursts as a result of frustration by Palestinians trying to get to work after standing in line for hours at checkpoints is often used by Israeli officials to justify the need for the wall, distorting the narrative about collective Palestinian behavior (Griffiths & Repo, 2018). By softening the language used to describe the wall as well as attempting to minimize its appearance on the Israeli side in some places with agricultural murals, there is a sense of an almost "out of sight, out of mind" mentality, one that tries to shift attention away from the impact on Palestinian communities on the other side. The Palestinian graffiti representing stories of resilience, loss, grief, revolution, hopes, and cultural symbols shapes the wall into a tool for international messaging and public resistance, thus challenging the Israeli

narrative and revealing the truth about how the wall negatively impacts Palestinian mobility, access to necessities, economies, and families.

To many activists, potential consequences of international graffiti tourism are cultural appropriation, conflict consumerism, and the overpowering of the Palestinian narrative. The importance of understanding the motives of internationals for putting graffiti on the wall could help with the apparent disconnect between who is actually being represented and why they are using graffiti in the first place. While one assumption is that graffiti tourism is playing a role with the desire for social media attention, the other is that internationals are trying to display support and solidarity for the Palestinian community. Levine (Levine & Levine, 2011) addresses the importance of creatively expressing solidarity in a community:

> One of the things that the experience of making art together does is to restore the sense of a living community, of being part of a whole that is larger than oneself. This is solidarity, the experience of being together with others that is an essential part of being in the world. This solidarity often takes place within a celebratory setting, one in which the joy of singing and dancing together combined a social group in a mutual feeling of kinship, but the arts are also capable of holding the experience of mourning with the individual or group has lost. Mourning and celebration are two essential ways in which art making can touch the essence of being human. (p. 28-29).

One difference in the case of the West Bank Barrier and graffiti participation for internationals and Palestinians is that solidarity does not seem to be speaking to celebration nor mourning. It speaks to the call to action, of a need for awareness and attention domestically and overseas, of accountability, and of resistance. Nor are the international and Palestinian communities boosting cohesion in all cases – while attempts at solidarity by many internationals is apparent, some Palestinians have expressed skepticism, commenting

on the disconnect between traveling to Palestine to paint a message of support on the wall and taking action in their own countries, such as pressuring government officials to support the Palestinian cause or joining the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement. But the intention behind international involvement could reflect more of what Levine is describing in the quote above, in which solidarity bridges the international and local communities through outward expression of support through art-making. Building awareness and solidarity could potentially be an additional essential way in which art making can "touch the essence of being human" through the vulnerable and intimate human emotion of empathy.

It can be argued that *poiesis* appears to occur for internationals making art on the wall as well. Graffiti by many tourists offer messages of solidarity and hope – perhaps this is a way for many tourists to try to form the wall into a message board of support at a time where the Palestinians face dimming hopes of the creation of their own state. Many graffiti images by American and British tourists express feelings of guilt or anger at their own countries for their past or present involvement in the region. Arafah commented on two tourists (nationality unknown) he watched paint the wall: "Consciously they are definitely pro-Palestinian. But unconsciously it is a way of leaving their mark and perhaps of feeling less guilty about the suffering of the Palestinians" (Demoulin, 2017). Shaping the wall into a platform to express regret and apology could also be a form of action for the tourists who disagree with their countries' policies in this fragile region, and perhaps seeing the wall and graffiti critical of their own countries would instill a lasting impact that could influence future solidarity and political action. However, this is assuming tourists take away new knowledge about the conflict and the wall's impact.

However, as it stands, the heavy international presence has come with both benefits and consequences. The surge in graffiti participation by internationals has created a boom in tourism, but at the same time it has essentially boosted the "marketability" of the Israel-Palestine conflict. Based on first-hand observation as well as existing interviews with a few international artists, there is a lack of assessment or interest in terms of what the local population actually finds helpful or offensive. Art is not always harmless, or as Morand puts it in *Art in Action* (2011): "an overly hasty approach to community art making can actually deepen wounds" (p. 229). Since graffiti is produced by a wide range of people from all over the world at different times, it can be said that this does not quite qualify as a cohesive community arts project, though the community impacted by the art are the local Palestinian residents. Some even claim international artwork is being imposed on Palestinians (Demoulin, 2007; Gould, 2014). Levine suggests that *poiesis* may not always be positive, writing that it is "possible to misshape worlds" (Levine & Levine, 2011, p. 24). The re-appropriation of the wall by international artists and tourists could be an example of misshaping the situation, where internationals have laid claim to the space that is the West Bank Barrier mostly without the consent or input of local Palestinians and transformed into it something that speaks a narrative they have created for themselves – a world of solidarity, social media, a unique experience, and an exotic situation.

Palestinians have combatted this phenomenon by altering imagery by internationals. Correcting and adding to existing artwork changes the meaning of the original artwork to convey a more nuanced or alternative message, which reshapes the negative or incorrect narratives internationals are imposing onto Palestinian residents. Correcting the aforementioned Bethlehem to Jerusalem stencil to include the wall's physical obstruction

of free movement reminds the viewer of the true reality on the ground, hence shaping that

art piece to more accurately reflect the Palestinian lived experience. In Bethlehem, a white

stencil at the base of the wall reads "Wall and Peace," a play on the title of Banksy's book

Wall and Piece. A graffitist passed by later and crossed out "Wall and" with blue spray

paint, and underlining just the word "Peace," indicating to the viewer that there is no peace

while the wall still stands (photograph by researcher, 2019). While Banksy's work is

usually spared defacing, several of his works have been altered or corrected. The notoriety and draw to Banksy's work almost guarantees that international visitors and media will see the "corrected" version of Banksy's piece, hence, ensuring that the more accurate Palestinian message will be conveyed to the

Figure 36: "Corrected" Wall and Peace graffiti. Photograph by researcher, Bethlehem, July 2019.

viewer. This is particularly poignant in the example of Banksy's mural of two armchairs

facing a large window displaying a beautiful mountain landscape. Palestinian artists "de-

beautified" the landscape to a brick wall – again, more accurately reflecting the lived

experience of Palestinians today. In the instance of street artist Issa destroying his own

mural in response to consumerism and the repainting of the same mural by an unknown

artist to maintain a popular and profitable tourist attraction could be considered acts of

poiesis, in that both artists shaped this segment of the wall as a response to the environment

around them in order to create new meaning (in this case, consumerism as trivialization

versus consumerism as survival). These examples are all attempts to accurately portray the truth of everyday Palestinian life by calling attention to the ongoing complexities and ramifications of the conflict.

Defacing international artwork that either misrepresents the conflict, clashes with Palestinian values, or promotes violence or toxic rhetoric is a clear example of Palestinians taking back control of their own narrative. By placing anti-Semitic or anti-Israeli rhetoric on the wall, some tourists and international street artists may assume they are echoing Palestinian feelings towards the Jewish people. In reality, there is the risk that this type of graffiti could further inflame tensions between West Bank residents and Israeli soldiers. Defacing graffiti that misrepresents Palestinian beliefs is a way for Palestinians to defend themselves against the risk of being associated with such rhetoric. In other words, it can counter graffiti that could be used as a weapon by the Israeli government and conservative American politicians to further perpetuate the stereotype that Palestinians are extremists and justify the wall's existence.

Defacing anti-Semitic, toxic, and hostile graffiti by outsiders is an act of *poiesis* in that Palestinians are outright rejecting such rhetoric by physically damaging the images that speak on their behalf. Images or text that speak to alt-right, Far-right, or anti-Semitic groups are targeted for defacing. First-hand accounts suggest that many Palestinians do not want the views of tourists or international street artists to be seen as their own opinions. To reiterate Hewafi (2017) as he said best in his article about Lushsux's racially insensitive artwork, "in my opinion, anything on the internal side of the apartheid wall, which is the side that is imprisoning Palestinians, somehow expresses what the Palestinians think, or at the very least what Palestinians accept." By placing anti-Semitic or toxic rhetoric on the

wall in Bethlehem right next to Palestinian shops and homes, Lushsux is assuming that Palestinians share these beliefs, as Hewafi explained: "Therefore, he is saying that all of us are racist, alt-right, and fascist," all of which are labels the majority of Palestinians do not want imposed upon them. Indeed, many Palestinians argue that it is important that their message be specifically against Israeli military occupation and Zionist policies, not against the Jewish people, thus the acceptance of graffiti that criticizes the wall or Israeli government, but not of anti-Semitic graffiti.

That the act of defacing is one way in which Palestinians can maintain some control of unwanted shaping of their own narratives is suggested by Gagliardi. In her study (2020) of the defacing of Lushsux's highlighted "defacement's generative power to create a new face" (p. 426). Gagliardi argues that collective Palestinian defacing of Lushsux's works is "an assertive act of unmasking," and states that "the defacing artists are keenly aware of the deep and dark secrets that lurk within Lush's meme-graffiti, and how their presence on the Separation Wall contributes to an even more grotesque fetishization of this colonial frontier" (p. 429). In other words, defacing is a counter measurement to combat cultural appropriation and misrepresentation, and to protect the narrative in which the Palestinians want projected on the wall.

Interestingly, despite concerns of international participation, Toenjes (2015) and Fraihat and Dabashi (2023) suggest a positive scenario in which Palestinian voices can enter the international arena and boost solidarity between Palestinians and internationals by way of transforming the wall into a platform for justice and global action. Toenjes (2015) claims 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 (p. 57).

This in turn offers Palestinians the chance to creatively interact with the international community on new levels despite their extreme mobility restrictions. Indeed, to Fraihat and Dabashi (2023), the phenomenon of graffiti tourism in Palestine has boosted the potential for solidarity with the Palestinians in a unique way: "the Wall has attracted a strong international presence that has been expressed in terms of solidarity with the Palestinians and the birth of a new type of protest in the region, which has sometimes been called 'struggle tourism'" (p. 3). The active participation by Palestinians, international street artists, and tourists to graffiti the wall with messages of solidarity combined with the appropriate media presence that features local-international collaborative artwork can potentially project the issue of the West Bank Barrier into the international sphere.

Complicating the issue of projecting a positive unified and collective Palestinian narrative is the fact that in many cases, local Palestinian residents do not act as a cohesive unit. There is still disagreement as to what kind of art is allowed and Palestinian murals are often the work of individual artists rather than community collaboration. Though less common, censorship could also be considered an act of *poiesis*. Censorship of the gay pride flag painted by Jarrar (2015) was an attempt by the religious conservative community to prevent the emergence a Palestinian view that promotes acceptance of homosexuality. Alternatively, Jarrar was trying to convey to the world that Israel's LGBTQ+ policies do not actually warrant the praise being given to Israel as a country, while those who

expressed disappointment at the mural's censorship hoped to be included in a narrative that promotes tolerance and acceptance. This is an example of dissonance within the Palestinian community as to what narrative they collectively wish to portray to the rest of the world.

In addition to these disagreements, there are also thousands of outside visitors adding their voices to the same space, and it appears that international graffiti participants have their own individual motives for making street art and different styles of expression, resulting in a chaotic array of messages and images that speak to endless audiences and contexts. It can be challenging to gauge the effects of the graffiti. For some Palestinians, it creates more conflict by marketing the wall, appropriating Palestinian space, and misrepresenting the Palestinian narrative.

Considering such a wide variety of artists and art, messages, and views, with no regulation or restrictions in place, underscores the need for a theoretical framework, like *poiesis*, that can accommodate such a diverse compilation of voices. Such a framework supports the importance of meaning-making and creativity from a relational standpoint. Levine (Levine & Levine, 2011) claims "*poiesis* itself happens only in the world with others. We have made this world together; this means we can make it differently" (p. 29). As previously noted, the interconnectedness of *gnosis* and *poiesis* can explain a desire for meaning-making from Palestinian and international graffiti participants. Often in times of trouble or turmoil, communities attempt to understand the chaotic situations in which they find themselves, and through art-making, they can actively make meaning out of their environments, particularly environments that clash with their worldviews and values. Levine (Levine & Levine, 2011) writes:

> Within the framework of expressive arts, we could say that *poiesis* implies the capacity to respond to the world in which we find ourselves. We suffer, both individually and

collectively, when we find ourselves unable to respond, when this capacity for poetic action is restricted and we experience ourselves as being a hopeless situation (p. 27).

The devastating consequences of the West Bank Barrier could instigate feelings of despair and hopelessness within Palestinian communities, and resentment and guilt for tourists and international artists towards their own countries' actions in the region today. By instead using the wall for education, resistance, solidarity, and business through graffiti, Palestinians and internationals are taking a physical symbol of oppression and shaping it into a symbol of human spirit and resilience, a concrete example of *poiesis* in a conflict setting. The graffiti does not change the fact that the wall is still inflicting considerable damage to Palestinian life, but bringing attention to it through provocative imagery that constructs and portrays Palestinian reality can counter the often-distorted messages from the misappropriation of Palestinian space. This, in turn, could ignite social action overseas and begin the process of sustainable social action.

These intercommunicative aspects create an opening in which *poiesis* as a framework can be applied in the context of both graffiti and conflict transformation. The Palestinian community is aiming their creative efforts outward to impact international visitors and speak to the global community, leading to a more communicative, transcommunal, and even transnational version of *poiesis* that features creative nonviolent resistance, grassroots activism, and revolutionary acts in conflict zones. By aiming their graffiti messages outward to speak to the international community and specific target groups (such as American evangelicals), Palestinians are attempting to engage and shape others' perspectives to make meaningful change for their community and thus their collective future. This can be seen through the messages of their graffiti, the way in which

they are marketing the wall, and the creative responses to international artwork they feel misrepresents them and their experiences. The intent behind this understanding of *poiesis* broadens the community's overall goals from community healing and addressing trauma to concentrate on communicative goals that span transnational spaces. Those goals include influencing the narrative of the overall conflict, revealing truths about the situation, combatting stereotypes, educating outsiders on the nuances of their struggle, and increasing solidarity by appealing to a common humanity, all through creative expression to enact tangible change.

9.2 Graffiti and Poiesis: A Tool for Conflict Transformation in Palestine

In the context of Palestine and the West Bank Barrier, Palestinians are using graffiti to achieve all of these outcomes – marketing and selling graffiti souvenirs, conducting graffiti tours, and making graffiti on the wall all are intended to raise awareness, combat stereotypes, assert/reclaim narratives, reveal truths about their realities, and create tangible, sustainable change. This ties graffiti in general as an act of resistance more closely to both *poiesis* and conflict transformation in several ways. Creating graffiti on the wall and garnering international attention instills a sense of agency – that despite the wall's negative impact, Palestinians will not be silenced and will continue to reach out to the global community through creative means. This connects directly to *poiesis* as it pertains to graffiti on the West Bank Barrier. The ability or capacity to act outlined by Hunter (2021), Bramsen and Poder (2018), and Levine and Levine (2011) is evident by the use of graffiti, social media, and the industry of graffiti tourism to act upon the cruelty of the Separation Wall's impact on Palestinian life. According to Nicholson (2016):

pathways to social agency are created not only through overthrowing structures of power but also biopolitically, in performative flows and rhythms of human and non-human interaction, and the spatial, temporal and material habits of everyday life (p. 250).

This indicates that agency is not only formed at a personal or intragroup level, but that agency is also relational on an intercommunal level. Based on the emphasis in "performative flows and rhythms" of interactions taking place between actors and material, relational and social agency are "experienced and practiced", and therefore, "embodied" (Hunter, 2021, p. 4; Nicholson, 2016, p. 252). As can be seen on the West Bank Barrier, the interactions taking place are not only between the wall and those making graffiti, but also between graffitists who write on, erase, add to, correct, and/or vandalize each other's work. Page and Petray's (2016) definition of agency applies directly to Palestinians' use of graffiti on the wall, as Palestinians continue to "undertake action through the very structures which constrain them, reproducing or changing those structures in creative ways" (p. 5). Thus, *poiesis* by way of transforming the West Bank Barrier's appearance is a strong example of Palestinian agency, one in which they are directly challenging Israel's attempts at silencing them and displaying their stories to those who visit the region.

In this context, it is important to remember that the wall is a reality in the world of Palestinian life, whereas internationals can make art on it and retreat to their home countries. Western media coverage that features international graffiti takes Palestinian reality and projects it into the world from foreign perspectives, highlighting the power dynamics at play that fuel the concerns of colonizing the wall. Regardless of whether tourists make graffiti to show solidarity or to simply have a unique creative experience, this divide in motivation, intent, and perspectives persists, and in some cases is diluting the reason for making graffiti on the wall in the first place – resistance. While tourists and

international artists may or may not have the best intentions, appropriating Palestinian space and symbols, writing platitudes rather than graffiti relevant to the conflict, and taking selfies close-ups with pop graffiti re-appropriates the message of Palestinian resistance. This dulls the message Palestinians are trying to convey to the rest of the world. *Poietic* acts by Palestinian artists and other local graffitists are a unique method in which to attempt to correct the distortion of their message to the world by controlling their own narrative and having the final say about what imagery is appropriate in their space and, ultimately, in their name. Indeed, based on the findings in this research, Palestinians will correct, protest, and deface the works of even Banksy, an artist whose work attempts to show solidarity and carries significant monetary and influential value, to protect their values and ensure their narratives are not misrepresented on the local and global stages. In this case, graffiti adds an informative layer to understanding the Palestinian situation, or as Vogel *et. al.* (2020) put it, graffiti "can make an important contribution to understanding local conflict dynamics, imaginaries, and visions of peace and conflict" (p. 2149). This shows considerable dedication by Palestinian residents to use the wall to assert the narratives they feel are important, yet have been unable to share throughout the history of the occupation.

Palestinians using the wall to raise awareness and bridge the gaps between them and the international community by appealing to the humanity and political sensibilities of tourists is an example of how graffiti can be useful in conflict transformation. To repeat Hunter (2021), the arts have the effect of "animating people to new learnings about themselves, others and the natural systems of which they are a part" (p. 5). On an immediate and personal level, graffiti on the West Bank Barrier is alerting tourists to the reality of Palestinians living under Israeli occupation. This is evident through the few

interviews with tourists, TripAdvisor reviews, and the Bethlehem Unwrapped project, where internationals have said, "I came out [of the Walled Off Hotel] crying, my heart has been hurting for Palestine since. We've learnt so much" (TripAdvisor, July 2023) and "It's daunting imagining living with something like [the Separation Wall]" (Bethlehem Unwrapped, 2014). Tourists are also learning about their own countries' roles in the conflict, and how they are personally tied to it, whether through taxes, such as Americans, or the lasting impact of colonial territory establishment, like the British. For some tourists, it appears as though the graffiti on the West Bank Barrier has had a powerful impact on not only their knowledge of the conflict, but also their sense of humanity. The emotion and pointedness of the imagery speaks directly to Lederach's (2005) suggestion that imagery cuts straight past the barriers of cognitive analysis, therefore offering transformative aesthetic moments that can inspire a viewer in new ways. Haga's statement about shifting neutral allies from passive to active applies here, in that local artists are trying to reach tourists through powerful imagery to encourage them to be politically active in favor of Palestinian autonomy and human rights in their home countries (Lee & Tapia, 2023). As Syjuco (KQED Arts, 2015) suggested, the arts have a way of disarming its audience and derailing preconceived notions, ignorance, and the status quo. In this case, graffiti on the West Bank Barrier is directly confronting its audience with factual statements about politics, morality, and demands for action to promote solidarity.

In this sense, graffiti can have an impact beyond the immediate conflict setting by influencing the perspectives of international actors. Rupesinghe's (1998) proposal to build stronger relationships with groups with political or communicative power, such as the military or the media, can be seen in Palestinians' attempts to appeal to specific audiences

or political actors. The intent for graffiti to reach the Pope in 2014 is one such example of locals attempting to connect to a global leader to gain the support of the Vatican. Similarly, Spateen's mural of Palestinian-American journalist, Shireen Abu Akleh, who was killed by the Israeli military during a raid in Jenin, was an attempt to prompt President Joe Biden during his 2022 visit to the West Bank into publicly condemning the ongoing violence of the Israeli military occupation (Al-Jazeera, 2022). This is an example of what Miall (2004) referred to regarding local actors' attempts to shift the status quo by trying to influence the perspective of an "elite" global figure such as the president of the United States.

Targeting specific tourist groups via graffiti is one method in which to adapt to the phenomenon of graffiti tourism and to shape the wall into a tool for direct communication with those populations that could offer a strong support system of international solidarity. Speaking directly to youth and popular movements, Americans, and Christians is an attempt to appeal to demographics that have power to change policy or public attitude towards the Palestinian cause in their home countries. This power lies in social media and international news, protesting U.S. pro-Israel policies and military spending, and the involvement of the church. By appealing to the grassroots level of these powers, the memes, revolutionary graffiti, national references, and religious symbolism to guilt, shame, and educate all are messages to these demographics to spark social change and build solidarity overseas. Stronger ties to reputable, global NGOs could also be of benefit; however, as is evident in Hafiz and Misbah's experience with NGOs in Ramallah, Palestinian locals should have more control over graffiti projects to avoid the imposition of an outside aesthetic (Lovatt, 2010). As Francis (2000) stressed, it is crucial that "the will for these activities, and judgements about what is possible, come from inside

the situation rather than from outside" (p. 7), thus keeping graffiti projects more in line with the principles of conflict transformation in terms of emphasizing grassroots activity.

The themes outlined by Vogel *et. al.* (2020) that explain various functions of graffiti (resistance, communication, expression, memorialization and commemoration, inspiration, and division) are all present in the context of Palestine. Graffiti on the West Bank Barrier originated as a method of local resistance and political expression but evolved into a means in which to communicate with a broader international audience. This is evident in graffiti that speaks directly to target audiences in an effort to push them into action. Memorialization and commemoration are displayed through images of political martyrs, such as Mahmoud Barghouti, and in a sense, through the loss of place. As access to Jerusalem's holy sites continues to be severely limited, and Jewish settlements continue to annex more Palestinian land, images of the Dome of the Rock, olive trees, Gaza, and geographical maps depicting Palestine as a cluster of scattered villages dominate stretches of the wall's surface. These images portray a sense of grief for connections and land that have been lost since the beginning of the occupation. Divisions at play are highlighted not only by imagery that refers to living in a violent and segregated society, but by the wall itself as a structure of separation. Graffiti that shows the wall being broken apart, references Israeli soldiers, or depicts violence all speak to the divisions between Israeli and Palestinian societies. Yet these images are often counterbalanced by imagery that depicts inspiration for the future, sharing with viewers the hope and ambition for the creation of an autonomous state still embedded in Palestinian society, despite the divisions still imposing serious obstacles to that vision.

As peacebuilding efforts between Palestinians and Israelis continue to deteriorate with no end in sight, Palestinians are attempting to shape their existing relationships with the international community instead. Most of the artwork is directed outside the community towards international viewers to influence their perspectives on the Palestinian situation. The opportunity for foreigners to stay in a hotel that primarily features the wall and its graffiti as well as Palestinian artwork inside gives them an up-close look into the political perspectives of Palestinians and helps them relate on a personal, human level. To reiterate Arouri from Sendamessage: "painting on the wall is an act of peaceful resistance by Palestinian people" and "an attempt to humanize the Palestinian society in the eyes of the world, showing that the Palestinians are not just militants who are violently resisting occupation" (Gray, 2009). This aligns with Mitchell's (2002) assertion that conflict transformation should aim to minimize "stereotyping, dehumanization, and demonization" for the marginalized population in a conflict (p. 8). Additionally, by directing some tourists to choose graffiti relevant the conflict, they are required to learn more about the situation and Palestinian experience and creatively reflect on what is meaningful to place on the wall. This could help build solidarity by giving internationals a way to creatively express themselves that is more in line with Palestinian goals and inspires change, again increasing the impact of their experience.

Though the wall continues to severely impact Palestinian life, the creative efforts of locals have resulted in some tangible change. Palestinian graffiti attracted the world's most notorious street artist, Banksy, to offer his art out of solidarity and use his fame to open the gates to international media attention to the wall's impact. The marketing of graffiti by locals has created a tourism market for graffiti, boosting the economy to balance out the

extreme blow to tourism and free market exchange in Palestinian cities. Palestinian artists, such as Taqi Spateen, have garnered international attention and used this attention to speak about the Palestinian struggle and fight for justice in international circles, thus spreading the message globally. The Walled Off Hotel has created numerous jobs in Bethlehem, while in Ramallah and Jerusalem some individuals make a living as tour guides that feature graffiti. The graffiti is often one of the main attractions, but tourists also get to meet Palestinian farmers, restaurant owners, clergy, and families along the way, an opportunity not offered in the majority of tours given by Israelis. These aspects provide an opportunity for outsiders to get to know the Palestinian people and situation better, despite stereotypes or demonization perpetuated by the Israeli government or international media outlets, thus allowing for stronger, more positive connections to be made. This potentially creates a pathway for building a stronger foundation for what could be more sustainable and energized international solidarity for the Palestinians.

CHAPTER X

Implications for Future Research

Throughout this thesis, Palestinian responses to graffiti on the West Bank Barrier and graffiti tourism have been explored by taking a close look at the statements of Palestinian artists, activists, and other locals, creative reactions, marketing, and events based around the wall's graffiti. Additionally, the documented perspectives of international street artists, tourists, and Israelis have been examined, as well as observing the graffiti itself and categorizing it into themes based on content and how artists engage with existing graffiti. Ethnographic study on the ground combined with a thorough online collection of quotes from Palestinians and other actors should provide a relatively accurate window into the phenomenon of graffiti tourism and how the Palestinian community has responded over the years. Through the case of Palestine, the intersections of conflict transformation theory, *poiesis*, and graffiti have been examined to make the case for graffiti as a conflict transformation tool for communities to build agency, challenge societal issues, shift intergroup relations, and foster stronger solidarity for their causes and fights for justice, peace, and equality.

This thesis contributes to existing knowledge in several ways. Palestinian creative responses to graffiti tourism and international graffiti participation on the West Bank Barrier were explored in-depth, with a concentration on additions, counter-art, corrections, censorship, and defacing regarding existing graffiti. This thesis also extensively examined graffiti content on the West Bank Barrier and how it is received by locals, contributing

more nuanced information regarding how particular content is interacted with by Palestinian artists and other residents. Such interactions, particularly between international artists, tourists, and Palestinians, as well as the perspectives of Israelis, internationally known street artists, and tourists, have yet to be analyzed as holistically and in-depth in most research involving Palestine and graffiti as this thesis.

This thesis also offers an analysis of Palestinian graffiti on the West Bank Barrier through the framework of *poiesis* as applied to creativity in the expressive arts field, and considers how *poiesis* could be expanded as a theoretical framework to include nonviolent grassroots community activism and graffiti as a method to enact social change. Acts of defacing, censorship, additions, and corrections to existing graffiti are interpreted through the framework of *poiesis*, as these are creative attempts to transform narratives and perceptions by shaping the physical environment. Graffiti as analyzed through the lenses of both *poiesis* and conflict transformation theory is also a contribution to knowledge as this thesis highlights specific areas in which graffiti's values as a non-violent method of resistance to build agency, increase solidarity, and communicate can be an entry point for future peacebuilding techniques that feature collaborative street art projects.

However, there are still many unknowns regarding this subject matter, unknowns that could be explored through more thorough and direct engagement with Palestinians, international artists, and tourists with specific questions about their motivations to make graffiti and what kind of impact they believe their graffiti is having on the overall conflict. This project could be expanded beyond online research and ethnography to include in-depth interviews with a variety of actors in this situation. This could include several approaches. One method would be to interview Palestinians, especially those who do not

identify as artists or activists, about what they would find most helpful and harmful

regarding graffiti on the wall. Do they think international artists and tourists should be

involved? Would more collaboration between international and local artists enhance graffiti

messages of solidarity and resistance? What would Palestinians living near the wall like for

tourists to consider before coming to see or make graffiti in Palestine, and what do they

want tourists to take with them afterwards?

     To gain more information on graffiti involvement by internationals, both

international street artists and tourists should be interviewed about their intentions for

making graffiti, their current knowledge of the conflict and the wall, and what content they

chose and why. Questions while interviewing international artists about their motives for

graffitiing the wall in Palestine could include: Do you believe your work has impacted the

conflict in any tangible way? How do you react when you see your work has been defaced?

Interviewing tourists about their motives for graffitiing the wall in Palestine could include

questions such as: How much did you know about the conflict before you graffitied the

wall? Did you speak to or get to know any Palestinians before graffitiing the wall? Did you

spend any time visiting other Palestinian areas or learning about Palestinian culture before

putting art on the wall? What do you hope to accomplish by painting your own message?

Who are you trying to reach?

     The shaping and reshaping of the wall through it being appropriated by Palestinians

and re-appropriated by international street artists and tourists, the wall is a prime example

of a public structure that is being used to broadcast multi-cultural stories and statements out

for the world to see through the actual changing of its physical appearance by those on the

ground. Similarly, interacting with the physical nature of the wall could set the stage for a

study that includes phenomenology at its core along with *poiesis.* A future study that uses *poiesis* as the theoretical framework while asking interview questions that focus on the phenomenological experience of being near the wall and making graffiti on it could offer in-depth insight on what people are trying to accomplish with their art and how that physical experience could have potentially enhanced their experience.

Similarly, interviewing Palestinian graffitists about their use of religious, political, and nationalistic graffiti could provide more insight into their use of such graffiti to reach specific audiences and what they hope to achieve. Is this work to provoke reactions from specific tourist groups to build solidarity and to spark action from those groups? Do you believe your graffiti has impacted their perspectives in any tangible way? American and Christian tourists could be interviewed about graffiti that directly targets their viewership: How does the religious graffiti fit into your Christian perspective? In interviewing American tourists about graffiti that criticizes the U.S.A., a researcher could inquire if that graffiti taught them anything new about the U.S.A.'s role in the region and/or the occupation.

In-depth semi-structured interviews with Palestinians living in the West Bank addressing what they would feel is most helpful and effective regarding getting their message out into the world would ensure that they have control over their space rather than being spoken for by outside NGOs and other arts-based interventions. Interviews with locals should continue to include the more outspoken voices of artists and activists but should also amplify the voices of social and healthcare workers, restaurant and small business owners, gift shop owners, tour guides and volunteers, high school and university students, academic scholars, peace and humanitarian workers, taxi drivers, religious

leaders, and those living in refugee camps. This collection of opinions and ideas could be crucial in developing collaborative projects led by Palestinian organizations that could include outside NGO's, artists, and/or tourists with the goal of boosting overseas solidarity and social action while keeping Palestinian narratives and desires at the core.

Moving forward, getting more in-depth information on community perspectives on the use of graffiti for social change and international participation could lay the foundation for future arts-based peacebuilding initiatives using a wide range of tools available today. One way to boost visibility of the wall's impact on Palestinian communities is through social media. Social media has already been used brilliantly by the Palestinian community, as was evident during the violent clashes and protests in Gaza in the summer of 2021. A cellphone video of a Palestinian woman in Sheikh Jarrah yelling at a Jewish man who claimed that if he didn't steal her house "someone else will steal it" immediately went viral, igniting the internet with outrage and gave Palestinians and allies a concrete example of the Israeli settler mentality to broadcast to the world. This video kickstarted a powerful social media tactic for Palestinians to show the world evidence of what they live through:

> The cellphone video joined a profusion of pro-Palestinian voices, memes and videos on social media that helped accomplish what decades of Arab protest, boycotts of Israel and regular spurts of violence had not: yanking the Palestinian cause, all but left for dead a few months ago, toward the political mainstream (Yee & El-Naggar, 2021).

Through social media, Palestinians were also able to break through the confines of elite Western media outlets, shaking off the media's biases and whitewashing of their experiences. In a New York Times article, media outlets like the New York Times itself are criticized:

> Social media has allowed [Palestinians] to change — or, in their words, correct — the story. Some posts literally take a red pencil to text from mainstream outlets, including The

New York Times, The Washington Post and CNN, crossing out headlines and substituting other words. Users also accused Instagram and Facebook of bias when they started deleting posts about Sheikh Jarrah and Al Aqsa, prompting the platforms to apologize, blaming a technical issue.

"Because we were able to escape the gatekeepers of mass media, because we were able to escape the likes of The New York Times," said Mohammed el-Kurd, 23, the brother of the woman in the Sheikh Jarrah video, "we were able to reach the world" (Yee & El-Naggar, 2021).

These same tactics could be used to "correct the story" being told by the media about the wall and tourism. Palestinians could shape the narrative sold overseas about Israel's security justifications and the tendency for Western media to use Islamophobic undertones when describing the Palestinian community by setting a foundation for expression and agency through creative means. As discussed throughout this dissertation, Palestinian artists and activists are already using social media to document the graffiti on the wall, both international graffiti and their own. What if there was an initiative to include tourists in sharing nuanced information about what they have learned about the wall and Palestinian culture on social media? Would it be helpful to include outside voices and photographs on social media that highlight the wall's impact? Collaborative projects that combine graffiti and social media could potentially make a wider impact in terms of highlighting international solidarity and pressuring institutions to question their complacency regarding the Palestinian situation.

     While this study raises important questions about appropriating Palestinian space, in-depth exploration of the knowledge and awareness of international artists and tourists could reveal gaps in understanding the severity of the wall's impact and the perceived benefits of graffiti participation. Future studies that focus on the motives of tourists and

international artists could reveal how graffiti participation is shaping perceptions about the conflict abroad, and this knowledge could contribute to arts-based peacebuilding approaches that emphasize informed participation and collaboration with local populations. Regarding *poiesis,* interviewing tourists about how the graffiti they see impacts their perspectives or which emotions it triggers, especially graffiti that could potentially be speaking directly to their demographic (such as Americans), would continue to strengthen the tie between *poiesis,* as communicative and transcommunal, to conflict transformation theory. Indeed, Toenjes (2015) refers to the Palestinians' use of graffiti to target outside groups as "tactical framing and the creation of transnational space" (p. 63 – 64) and further outlines a potential benefit to international street artist involvement regarding art that is aimed at tourists, contrasted with art meant specifically for Palestinians:

> ...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 (p. 56).

The inclusion of graffiti artists with international reputations and followings could potentially be useful to Palestinians seeking to bridge their cause to the outside world, though more collaboration between internationals and locals could strengthen this factor. Asking Palestinians, international artists, and tourists how they feel their own graffiti as well as graffiti on the wall in general is impacting Israeli-Palestinian relations, if at all, could point researchers in the direction of creating more effective and powerful projects that genuinely boost solidarity overseas and shape international opinion about advocating for a Palestinian state in ways that have yet to take hold.

It is crucial to understand what communities are doing to shape their own narratives, especially as their spaces are sometimes appropriated by outside parties who may or may not have the best intentions and have done little to no assessment of the potential impact of their involvement. Based on the findings of this project, some conclusions regarding international participation in graffiti-making in Palestine can be made. It is important for outsiders to understand the nuances of a conflict before entering a space and getting involved so as not to cause harm to those who live that conflict daily. Regarding graffiti, this would mean that an outsider should familiarize themselves with the conflict and recognize whether locals are open to outside involvement. More assessment by internationals – street artists, tourists, and NGOs – should be exercised regarding graffiti content and imagery, the potential impact of their work and very presence, and whether their presence is wanted by locals in the first place. Cultural sensitivity should be a priority, considering that many internationals either appropriate or misuse Palestinian symbolism, or paint imagery that is considered offensive, inappropriate, or irrelevant to Palestinians. It would be beneficial for internationals to make a concerted attempt to get to know the culture, speak to locals about their experiences, learn more about Israeli-Palestinian relations, and how the global community is or is not involved. In this effort, internationals would be more exposed to Palestinian stories and perspectives, potentially challenging preconceived notions that many tourists, particularly Westerners, carry about Palestinian culture, and the Middle East generally.

<u>Conclusion</u>

Regardless of the boosts in tourism and attention the wall and its graffiti has brought to Palestine, it is important to remember that the overall consensus is that Palestinians would still prefer the wall be torn down. "We don't want the wall, even if the graffiti makes the wall pretty or interesting," Moodi Abdallah told Media Line (Huddy, 2018). "We want the wall to go down." The graffiti may make the wall less oppressive to look at it for some, but, for now, has does nothing to change the severe restrictions on Palestinian movement, separation of families, lack of access to resources and religious sites, or help to fully reestablish the economy as it was before the wall was built. The graffiti may signify some solidarity overseas, but it has not yet created substantial change in foreign policy or the minds of governments who continue to support Israel's security justifications for continued wall construction and annexation of land, whether through active policy, funding, or turning a blind eye. This could potentially change should graffiti making in Palestine become more organized and/or promote informed collaboration with international visitors and more nuanced international media coverage. Issa made the point to Al-Jazeera (Ashly, 2017) that the wall continues to benefit Israel: "Israel wants to show the world that there is a wall, as a border. It perpetuates other narratives that are to the benefit of the occupier, and the occupier's quest to downgrade the occupied as sub-humans." He also lamented over the market graffiti tourism has created around the wall and worried that the wall could potentially join UNESCO's list of culture sites, telling Al-Jazeera: "Soon, we won't even be able to take this wall down because someone will tell us it's World Heritage." To repeat Amin (2019) from earlier in this thesis, "there is growing concern over the small but dangerous industry of commercialising apartheid, and the fear that it might have a vested interest in actually

maintaining the wall," echoing the concern that the wall may become too valuable to tear down, a notion clearly not shared by Palestinians.

Ultimately, the wall and its deep, negative impact on the Palestinians would need to be removed before any considerable positive change can occur for their communities. Until then, it is important for internationals who choose to visit the region out of solidarity to consider what actions they can take that are both carefully thought out and welcomed by the Palestinian community. Ganivet (2019) asks many crucial questions that international groups – NGOs, street artists, and tourists alike – should consider if they want to make their own art on the West Bank Barrier:

> Of course, artistic interventions can change how people think. But what is the true objective of such a breakthrough? For what new form of awareness, what questions, what meaning? Since Palestinians have been demanding recognition of this 1949 demarcation line from the moment the State of Israel was created, what right do foreigners have to address this issue? Does art make the conflict universal? What is the purpose of producing art in this territory if it is not useful, at first glance, for those who live there? Are good intentions enough? Does this art run the risk of being easily misinterpreted, or even incomprehensible? In an extremely delicate geopolitical environment, what is the role of artistic insight? Who is this work for? (p. 126)

Though this passage is specific to Palestine, these same questions should apply when internationals wish to make art in any contested or turbulent space. International groups and individuals who do not take adequate time to do a thorough assessment of how their art will be received by local communities potentially risk increasing conflict and causing harm rather than sending clear messages of solidarity. It is ultimately up to those who live in these spaces to decide what kind of imagery could lead to peace, promote solidarity overseas, or potentially ignite further tensions. The graffiti may be impactful now, but it is important to imagine how much more effective it could be should outsiders more closely

collaborate with locals not only in graffiti projects, but also spreading imagery across social media as well as related projects in their home countries. What Palestinians would find helpful regarding solidarity and graffiti tourism in the context of the West Bank Barrier – whether this is through creative collaboration between Palestinian and international groups, international artists adhering to context specific graffiti content, or tourists simply not engaging with the wall at all unless invited to do so by locals – is a larger question that can only be answered by the Palestinian community.

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