

## **The Separation Wall in the Occupied Palestine as a Canvas of Resistance: A controversial Issue**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The separation wall in occupied Palestine built by the Israeli occupation to isolate the West Bank from other parts of the Palestinian territories has turned into a huge screen for Palestinian and foreign artists to display various kinds of art works, including paintings, pictures, drawings, videos as a means of resistance against the occupation. These visual arts have become a controversial issue among the Palestinians. Some still consider these arts as a form of resistance against the wall and the occupation as well; while others consider them as a means of ‘beautifying’ the wall as perceived by the Palestinians and the people in the rest of the world. Therefore, this paper explores and illustrates selected visual works associated with the ‘separation’ wall in the occupied Palestine to identify the underlying meanings and implications of such works. The descriptive and observation approach was utilized to analyze the selected visual arts. The illustration in this study showed that the visual arts depicted on the separation wall in occupied Palestine have gained ample attention from Palestinians and foreigners. It also showed that the majority of the visual arts associated with the separation wall reflect the ugly face of this wall by presenting its negative consequences on the Palestinians’ life in all aspects. However, other visual arts try to indirectly beautify the wall at the local and international levels by justifying building this wall and presenting its benefits for both the Palestinians and the Israelis. To conclude, the visual arts dealing with the separation wall have multiple references, objectives and

effects on the Palestinian resistance against the occupation and the wall, and also on the people outside Palestine. Such arts should be monitored and examined to serve the Palestinian issue in the desired way.

*Keywords:* Occupied Palestine, separation wall, Zionist occupation

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## INTRODUCTION

Palestine has been under the “Israeli” direct military occupation since 1948. This brutal occupation has committed countless of merciless atrocities against the Palestinians including killing and arresting people, bombing and demolishing houses, uprooting trees, closing academic institutions, imposing blockade, restricting the Palestinians’ movement in their land and depriving them of their human basic rights. One of these unjust activities is building a wall (extending over 772 km) to separate the West Bank from the other parts of Palestine. The construction of this wall started in 2002 and was totally completed in 2015. The wall is made up of a variety of different components, including fences,

ditches, razor wire, groomed sand paths, an electronic monitoring system, patrol roads, and a buffer zone. It consists of 8-9 meter high concrete slab segments that are connected into a wall (Figure 1). The wall has been referred to as a ‘separation’ or “apartheid wall” because it has segregated the Palestinians socially, economically and geographically, and increased the Palestinians’ suffer in all aspects of life. In essence, it is an “open air” prison. In 2004, the resolution of the International Court of Justice in Hague confirmed that this wall is illegal, considered the wall to be a hurdle before the Palestinians and foreigners in all various aspects of life (Al- Arda, 2005, p. 19).



Figure 1. Part of the ‘separation’ wall in the occupied Palestine

As a result of the construction of this separation wall, the Palestinians and foreigners supports have started a non-violent resistance against the wall and the occupation measures such as strikes, daily

and Friday demonstrations, boycott, set-ins in front of international organizations, and using visual art and all of its components such as drawing art, graffiti art, photography art, video art, installation art, performance

art and sculpture art. Nowadays, large parts of this wall is covered by paintings, pictures, drawings and other kinds of art done by Palestinian and foreign artists, mainly those who are in solidarity with the Palestinian issues. It is said that the separation wall has become a living canvas of resistance and solidarity (Sethi and Chitleen, 2010, p. 5). At the same time it is a tourist destination and a popular site of 'pilgrimage' for international artists. According to Al-Nashashibi (2006), the separation wall had provoked the interests of Palestinian, Arab and foreign artists, and became the centre of their focus. Despite of this, these visual arts have become a controversial issue among the Palestinians. Some still consider these arts as a form of resistance against the wall and the occupation as well; and others consider these arts as a means of 'beautifying' the wall as perceived by the Palestinians and the people in the rest of the world. Therefore, this paper explored and explained selected visual works associated with the 'separation' wall in occupied Palestine to identify the underlying denotations and implications of such works.

## **METHODS**

To serve the objectives of the study, the postcolonial theory was the foundation for explaining the collected data. The theory focuses on the outcomes or influences that the occupation desires to achieve when carrying out or allowing any activity (in this case, the visual artworks) on the separation wall in the occupied land (Palestine). The descriptive and observation approach was

utilized to illustrate the selected visual arts (Mayring, 2000). A thorough literature was presented on artworks related to the separation wall in Palestine from magazines, newspapers, articles and TV and video shows. The researcher selected examples of artworks, categorized them and prepared them to explain and to identify their denotations and implications with regard to the Palestinian issue based on five determinants: The first determinant is ugliness; does the artwork contribute to the ugliness of the separation wall? Does the artwork beautify the separation wall? The second determinant is destruction of the wall; does the artwork call for destruction of the separation wall? The third determinant is equalization; does the artwork view the struggle of the Palestinians and Israelis equally? The fourth determinant is Palestinian art heritage; does the artwork belong to the Palestinian art heritage in terms of symbol and sign? The fifth determinant is the Palestinians' suffering; does the artwork show the Palestinian suffering due to the separation wall? In this paper, there are only four kinds of visual artworks, namely (drawing and painting arts, graffiti arts, photographic arts, and video arts) were presented based on real pictures as depicted in Figures 2 to 16.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

This section presents an illustration of selected examples of the visual arts related to the separation wall in the occupied Palestine. Each type is presented separately and supported by real pictures.

### Drawing and Photographing

With the establishment of the separation wall by the Zionist occupation state on the Palestinian land, some international artists geared their works toward the wall and were able to spread contents filled with various incentives, objectives and purposes. Then it was an opportunity for the Palestinian artist to produce artworks that have vast attention for demonstrating his issues and deliver them all over the world; as he could draw all the sufferings and agonies he faces and all his dreams of freedom and dignity of land and humans, return of refugees and bringing back the rights to their beholders.

Having looked into the Palestinian artwork that is accomplished on the separation wall, one can see that they have presence in the local and international art industry through re-drawing the artistic symbols derived from the Palestinian heritage such as: Muftah al-daar (the house's key), *Handhalah* (Palestinian political cartoonist Naji al-Ali); Dome of the Rock and many others. It is worth noticing that the Palestinian artists strive to pass various messages to the people through art and its various fields. In the next lines, the researcher demonstrates some of these direct photographic artworks on the wall with details of their significance.



Figure 2. Palestinian hands are stronger than the separation wall

Figure 2 shows two hands grappling the separation wall making hollow through which Al-Qibli mosque Chapel and some other old houses in Jerusalem are seen. Looking closely at the hands, one can see that they are different in size as one of them is bigger than the other to indicate the participation and cooperation in confrontation. Cracks on the wall are also

visible to show that the power of human is greater than the power of the building. This paint was done on the separation wall in 6 meters width and 3.5 meters height using acrylic colours and spray paint nearby the city of Ramallah. The figure represents the Palestinian artist's attempt to resist the occupier and his oppressive wall which divided the single nation to multiple tiny

clusters. The wall did not only isolate the cities from one another, but also did isolate Jerusalem from the *Ummah* (Muslim nation); the city that has the religious and historical essence to the Arab and Muslim nations. The Zionist colonizer strives hard to disrupt the Palestinian people intention away from the city of Jerusalem through the oppressive separation wall, and through tightening the siege and changing

the appearances by building settlement units within the city. Thus, the role of the Palestinian artists is to tell the occupation that this is not possible, as the Palestinians will not allow the wall and the occupation to stay on their sacred land, and that Jerusalem will return to Palestinians as it is their past, present and future, and the wall and occupation will have to vanish no matter how long they remain (Al-Qablawi, 2005).



Figure 3. Young Yasser Arafat

In Figure 3, this gigantic painting drawn by a French artist Vince Seven is one of the artworks that addressed the separation wall as a material through drawing. It shows the Palestinian president Yaser Arafat in the figure. Some Palestinian figures were drawn on other paintings on the wall and their influence on the Palestinian arena such as Marwan Barghouthy<sup>1</sup> and poet Mahmoud

Darwish<sup>2</sup>. Receivers may think that those paintings (that have figures) serve the Palestinian issue, while the author believes that those figures on the separation wall are the crown on this wall. This is because these paintings are drawn on the separation

North Africa) <https://chronicle.fanack.com/palestine/faces/marwan-al-barghouthi-from-detention-to-presidency/> February 26th, 2015.

1 Barghouthi, born in 1959 in Kobar, near Ramallah, is one of the most prominent Palestinian public figures and an icon of Fatah. He has spent most of his life in Palestinian politics, especially the Fatah movement.

By (Fanack Chronicle of the Middle East &

2 Mahmoud Darwish is a Palestinian poet and author who won numerous awards for his literary output and was regarded as the Palestinian national poet. In his work.

By (CC-BY-SA) <http://www.poemhunter.com/mahmoud-darwish/> 9 August 2008 / Palestinian)

wall; they remain visible to all people for long time, viewing them as they go about their daily business; and these paintings will be the centre of peoples' admiration for its significant content (i.e., symbols, national and revolutionary significance). However, these paintings on the separation wall have become as a controversial issue. The Palestinians may unintentionally develop love for the wall as a result of their love to those figures drawn on the wall. This is what the author does not wish to happen. The Palestinian national figures must be inculcated in people's hearts, and so some memorials should be built to remind people about them away from the separation wall which unfortunately, in most cases, turned into a place for various artworks, or apology paint or a place for announcements and slogans. This surely has led to removing its main ugly purpose which is military in nature. Khaled Jarrar believed that the works of artists on the wall have turned it into a center of attraction and they are not supposed to turn the wall into a beautiful scene that receives acceptance. Kiswani (2010) explicated that many critics and

authors believed that the artworks dealt with the separation wall as material and did not serve the Palestinian issue in any way. This is also indicated by the member of the Popular Committee against the Wall in Tulkarem city, Fathi Baleblah by saying: "the separation wall in its appearance and design looks like the walls of cells of the occupation with the purpose of harming the psyche of the Palestinians; however, the other side of the wall does not reflect the same fact." The author believes that what Baleblah claims is the truth as the occupation government hid the ugly aspect of the wall from the Jews and the settlers by establishing the flourishing gardens and flowers in vast areas of tens of meters to hide the high concrete wall and guard towers. At the same time, we may simply express our intentions on the eastern side of the wall. Therefore, we must strive to bring in hope and constancy instead of despair to our Palestinian people, and support them with the spirit of challenge and persistence so that we may have a Palestinian individual who strives to free his land from the Zionist's hands.



Figure 4. Fun hands

One of the paintings that addressed the separation wall is depicted in Figure 4. For the first time, when you look at the artwork drawn on the separation wall, you feel that you are in a garden or children garden. This work attracts children and brings them joy and pleasure. This type of drawings brings tranquillity to the child and acceptance toward the place while reducing the state of rejection towards it. At this point, the author fears that this work is geared toward children as to make them love the place which may continue to grow till they are matured and get familiar with

it as time goes by. This definitely serves the occupier's belief that elderly people die and children grow and forget. Looking into this artwork, it is obvious that this artwork does not deal with this oppressive wall in its real essence as it does not address the misery and destruction the wall caused; and it does not provoke any sense of pain or danger that the wall has caused to the Palestinians in their land. Therefore, it is compulsory to support confrontation towards the Zionist occupation in our children's minds till the occupation is over and normalization of all types should be rejected.

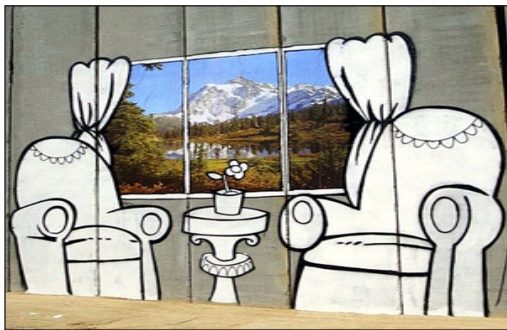


Figure 5. Armchair (original)



Figure 6. Armchair (modified)

The British artist Robert Pancake has lots of artworks on the wall, some of which are (the windows) as depicted in Figures 5 and 6. Pancake accomplished his artwork on the separation wall nearby Bethlehem city, at 5 meters height and 5 meters wide using acrylic colours and sprays. These are the tools Pancake uses throughout his artwork. When looking into the artwork, one may perceive it as a hospitality room that contains a window that reveals attractive scenery outside the room. At the same time,

chairs are seen in white and black colours which indicate that life outside this wall is enjoyable. Some believe that artwork has opened a window on the land which had been blocked from its people by the wall as to preserve it in the memory. This paint was rejected by some Palestinian individuals as in Figure 6, who believe that this paint causes Palestinians to reduce their hostility toward the wall, and it beautifies the ugly wall. It is obvious that Pancake did not address the aggression of the occupation

toward the Palestinian land. Despite the varying stands toward the artwork on the wall, Malu Halasa (2014) pointed, in her artwork (the oppressive beauty), her refusal of turning the wall into a piece of artwork and explained that beauty may be horrible or promising at the same time. Halasa showed the dispute between beautifying the image of the wall and the essence of resisting the wall. As the wall has become an integral part of the Palestinians' life, it is obligatory upon various artists from different parts of the world with different backgrounds and cultures to review back the influence of the wall on their identity and activities related to settling or migrating in some specific places. Despite the fact that this work reflects the atrocities of the scene, carries a lot of significances and addresses the issue of controlling and governing, shares with people in presenting personal issues,

and suggests how to restore control, there are still questions pertaining to turning the wall into mere artwork that is presented in artwork exhibitions. Halasa strives to figure out how art can have the power of debating as some rebel works are created to show their producers' perspective, and explains how it is possible for the art to have greater influence and interpretation of the reality of the building where artists present their viewpoints about it.

### Graffiti Art

Several of Graffiti Art types have been seen on the separation wall as artistic symbols that accompanied the Palestinian issue along the years of occupation and its continuous oppression they include for example, *Handhalah*, house's key, victory signs, hand fists, Palestinian flags, martyrs and others.



Figure 7. *Handhalah*

Figure 7 represents a direct artwork on the separation wall, which shows a boy as *Handhalah*. This artwork carried the signature of Naji Al-Ali despite his death

decades ago; as if the artist who designed it intends to pass the message that: Naji al Ali is still alive in the Palestinians' hearts, and his icon *Handhalah* is still the icon of



return to artists who have been exiled. It also represented the state and identity of the Palestinian people in exile away from their land. Drawing this symbol on the wall informs that this wall represents an

exceptional case in the Palestinian history, and that things will go back to normal when everyone returns to the home country after removing the occupation.



Figure 8. Freedom for the Honourable

Symbols that were intensively used by Palestinian artists in exile returned to interface again. The house's key (Figure 8) is one of the symbols that were created by the Palestinian artists to express the right of returning to homeland, Palestine, from the exile. Two American artists How and Nosh did this graffiti artwork to declare their support for the Palestinian people and demonstrate their rejection of the separation wall. The key represents the dream and hope of returning to the extorted land and that the occupation and its wall will no doubt fade away, no matter how long it takes. It is important to highlight that part of the graffiti artwork drawn on the wall represents several artistic symbols that are away from the Palestinian artistic heritage and the Palestinian issue that dealt with the separation wall. Owners of these artworks believe that they support the humanitarian

rights, whilst Palestinians perceive them as a kind of humiliation for their resistance. These symbols have faced collective rejection by majority of Palestinians, to the extent they have removed them, insisting that these works do not include any hostility toward the occupation (Rojo & Harrington, 2013).

The British artist, Robert Panski did the graffiti artwork in Figure 9. Such artworks are related to the artist's culture and attitude. Some of these works were rejected by Palestinians and asked for removing them. For Robert Panski and other foreign artists, the rat and donkey represent oppressed people according. However, to the Palestinian people, neither such pictures belong to the Palestinian heritage of art nor they represent the Palestinian issue. They have also seen them as a symbol of insult that must be removed.



Figure 9. Ghetto Rat 2007



Figure 10. One love Palesrael (peace)



Figure 11. Five fingers of the same hand

Figures 10 and 11 are graffiti artworks directly drawn on the wall for which the purpose was not only to send political messages but to direct the receivers that the wall represents peace between the two states that enjoy peace and intimacy whether it was intended to be in such way or not. Here, the artist forgot or pretended to forget the destruction this wall caused, and thus, he equalized between the ‘executioner and the prey.’ The artist placed himself as a caller to peace and love between religions which

is one of the noblest things an artist can do, with the condition that this is not done at the expenses of the oppressed people. He should have been unbiased by supporting the oppressed and not disclosing the aggressor away from other considerations (ALAZAH, 2012).

### Photographic Art

It is said that a picture is more expressive than speech, as a single picture expresses thousands of words, and it is a window for

expressing the humanitarian cases with the most honest sense and in various forms (Al-Qablawi, 2005). On the separation wall, there are several photos show scenes

of Palestinians' resistance against the Israeli occupation and the wall as well. This part explains the significance of some photos pertaining to the separation wall directly.

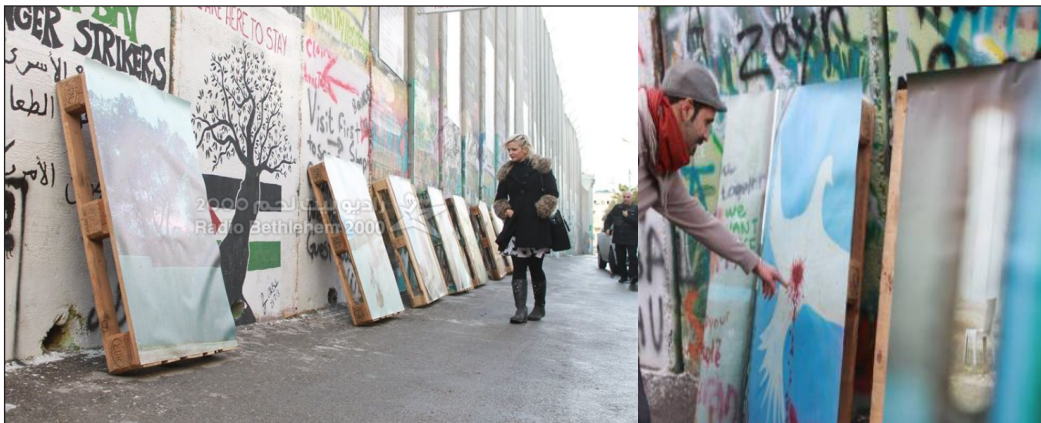


Figure 12. Behind the wall

The artistic shapes represent photos of the wall in the city of Bethlehem by the Palestinian artist, Iliyas Halabi. Al-Halabi tried to document Palestinians' life which is negatively influenced by the wall. In these photos (Figure 12), he took photos for various houses and the surroundings. The researcher believes that this kind of photographic artworks and presenting them to viewers play a vital role. It reminds the Palestinian people of their sacred lands and houses beyond the wall, and contributes to allowing people to view their belongings that were lost beyond the wall, and keeping them in their memory.

### The Video Art

Some artists resorted to modern tools such as the videos art. These videos like other means of arts have their own material and

tools of production and usage. Here we are not referring to technological techniques, but ways of artistic expressions through which an artist strives to pass his message to the world and to highlight what the Palestinian people are facing. With the varying content of various arts, videos are unique in that they address deeply and more objectively the different issues, especially the Palestinian issue as compared to other previous arts. The author mentions examples for this art, and points to issues in terms of its relation to the separation wall.

In Figure 13, the Jewish Simon Beiton, a French national, presented a video about the separation wall directly nearby the city of Ramallah. The show included the resulting state of the wall. The video lasted for one hundred minutes. Since Beiton is a western Jew, the presented material has created some



Figure 13. Against the wall

problems, as it invites humanitarian support against the wall but allows, at the same time space, for the Israeli's view point to express its justifications for building the wall. When one looks at the presented material through the video, one can see that both the

Palestinian and Zionist people are equally sieged because of the wall. Therefore, she makes it acceptable to think that both people are equal which is surely wrong as the executioner should never be equalized to the prey (Yaqeen, 2012, p. 87).



Figure 14. The World Cup of 2010

Figure 14 addresses a video directly on the separation wall that contains a football match in the World Cup of 2010. The figure shows the audience that attended the match

which consisted of various nationalities coming together to watch the match with tensioned nerves and their attention being distracted away from the separation wall

and occupation of the Palestinian land. When one looks into the figure, one may think that there is an event or anniversary for which people come to attend. It is worth noticing that the video did not show the misery caused by the separation wall; did not suggest solutions that may help in bringing it down; and did not even motivate the audience to take initiatives toward the separation wall. Thus, it made the centre of attention of the attendants the presented material only; which team plays and which team is the winner away from the ugly wall.

This makes the wall a material on which everything maybe demonstrated which the author does not wish to happen. Raja' Shahadah, in the book, *Raqib Al-Jidaar*, believed that the way of showing images may affect attitudes, mentality, and thinking of individuals who live in a certain place.

On the other hand, some artists exploited performance art to serve the Palestinian issue and supported the concept that the wall would not continue to exist and that it would be forgotten as in Figure 15 and 16.



Figure 15. Power and challenge



Figure 16. The other half

Figure 15 and Figure 16 present visible performance art for the Palestinian artist, Raedah Sa'adah on the separation wall. This visible art documentary attempts to maintain in the memory of the Palestinian individual his nation, misery and the borders of his place. Raedah Sa'adah combines the subjective and objective dimensions as she makes of herself the heroine in the photos

she takes. She appears as a mysterious character as depicted in Figure 15, where she appears barefoot before the wall with a crown on her head, wearing a white long dress that has two wings at the shoulders. One of the wings appears trapped in the separation wall as an indication for the loss of half of the nation which is unable to fly without the other side. In Figure 14 the

picture of Raedah Sa'adah appears again as she tries to move the separation wall using a rope. The suffering that she is witnessing is not external but also internal. She is facing this suffering with a smile that indicates the depth, power and challenge of the persistent woman who protects her family and memories which have been violated by the concrete walls (Zibawi, 2014, p. 16).

## RESULTS

Back to the problem that was highlighted earlier in this article, the visual arts on the separation wall are a controversial issue among the Palestinians. Some perceived it as a sort of resistance against the separation wall and the occupation. While other believed it was a kind of decoration to the wall. Based on the findings of the study, the author believes that it was a mistake to pass judgement on the artworks as a form of resistance or as decoration because the results of the article showed that artworks on the separation wall varied in their significances. Some of these works promoted resistance, patience and the spirit of challenge while other signified peace, love and harmony. Another portion of these works has totally ignored the suffering of the Palestinians due to the wall and therefore, it was considered to be of a decorative nature and was eventually removed.

## CONCLUSION

The separation wall in occupied Palestine has become as a canvas for local and international artists to display their arts as

a means of resistance against the Israeli occupation and the wall itself. Some Palestinians are supporting these arts for its significant role in their resistance against the wall and the occupation as well; and others are against these arts because such arts are only decorating and 'beautifying' the wall in the eyes of the Palestinians and the people in the rest of the world. This research has showed that these visual have gained ample attention from Palestinians and foreigners. It also showed that in general these visual arts have a role in displaying the negative consequences of the wall on the Palestinians' life in all aspects. Nevertheless, there are visual arts justifying the wall construction by indirectly beautifying the wall at the local and international levels and presenting its benefits for both the Palestinians and the Israelis. To sum up, all kinds of arts associated with the separation wall in occupied Palestine must be monitored and scrutinized as they have multiple references, objectives and effects on the Palestinians and people outside Palestine.

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