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Original

The Israeli West Bank wall: iconographic storytelling / Netti, Rossana; Mansour, Osama. - In: DISEGNARE CON... - ISSN 1828-5961. - ELETTRONICO. - 13:24(2020), pp. 1-16. [10.20365/disegnarecon.24.2020.19]

Availability:

This version is available at: 11583/2850923 since: 2020-11-03T12:20:56Z

Publisher:

Università degli Studi dell'Aquila

Published

DOI:10.20365/disegnarecon.24.2020.19

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The Israeli West Bank wall: iconographic storytelling

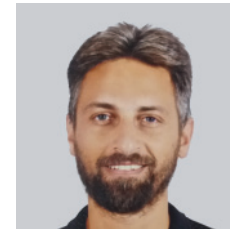
After the Arab Spring, in the early 2010s, street art burst onto the urban scene filling meters and meters of walls in the major cities of Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Syria and many other Arab countries. Specifically, our focus is on a very particular case: the Israeli West Bank wall (better known as the Israeli Security Fence/Palestinian Apartheid Wall). This study aims to examine how a wall that was born as an element of separation, closure and marginalization, over time has become a means of openness and communication, but above all the manifesto of a condition and a social malaise visible to the eyes of the whole world. All thanks to the messages traced or engraved on the wall that ordinary people, local artists and international street artists wanted to leave to express their thought and communicate them in a context that is certainly not trivial. The messages that follow one another, mostly iconographic, are often intertwined with slogans purposely written

in English that refer to international events or personalities. Graffiti techniques merges Western influences with a distinct national heritage, recognising local history and shaping a future open to new influences.

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Keywords:
Arab Spring; Islamic art; separation wall; iconographic messages; visual rhetoric

1. INTRODUCTION: THE ISRAELI SECURITY FENCE/ PALESTINIAN APARTHEID WALL

In 2002, the Israeli government has approved the construction of a barrier in the West Bank and its surroundings, with the declared aim of preventing violent attacks by Palestinians [1]. The wall was built along the Green Line, a territorial demarcation established within the framework of the Armistice Agreements of 1949 which concluded the 1948 Arab-Israeli war [2]. On February 20, 2005, after several changes made in the previous three years, the Israeli government published a new map marking the wall path in the West Bank (fig. 1). To date the wall is unfinished, once completed, it will cover about 700 kilometers exceeding the Green Line length, about 320 kilometers long. Only a small part of the wall is on Israeli soil: 85% is in the West Bank. The wall has an average height of eight meters and it includes a barbed wire system, ditches, wide track paths and lanes for tank patrols on each side (fig. 2).

Since the early stages of the wall's construction, the habit of writing, drawing and painting on the front towards the West Bank has developed as a sign of protest and opposition to the Israeli oppression of Palestine. The artists who have left their mark on the wall over the years include local Palestinian citizens, political movements, children and even internationally renowned artists such as the British Banksy.

2. THE ICONOGRAPHY: FROM THE ALMOST TOTAL ABSENCE IN ISLAMIC ART TO THE WIDE USE IN STREET ART

One aspect that has attracted our attention is the use of iconography, that is the representation of human or animal figures. Why in the street art, unlike Islamic art in general, iconography is almost omnipresent? Isn't it prohibited by religion?

In Islamic art, human or animal representation is discouraged. However, a declination to figurative art has been found in all eras and in many countries, even if, mostly limited to the painting of miniatures and the decoration of objects and non-re-

ligious buildings. Much of the figurative art in the Islamic world belongs to the private sector and to painting related to the restricted area of illustrations of scientific treatises, novels and epics. In this regard, a significant example is represented by Ali al-Hariri's literary work *al-Maqamat* [3], realized between 1101 and 1108 (fig. 3). In the architectural field, figurative art remains marginal and cannot compete with other forms of decorations. It found space in Muslim architecture only in the presence of particular favorable conditions which are generally determined by external cultural contributions or by the survival of local elements and this is due to the legal attitude of Islam, contrary to human and animal representation.

There are no verses in the Qur'an that explicitly prohibit the depiction of life forms. The only reference in this regard refers to idols in use among pagans as an object of worship [4]. The prohibition is based on acts and hadith or speeches of the prophet Muhammad, according to which the representation of the living being would be contrary to the divine will and therefore to be condemned [5]. The Arabic verb indicating "to model" or "to form" is a synonym with that to "create". Therefore, the imitation of living beings is dangerously close to being in blasphemous competition with God. According to another tradition, those who represent iconographic images in the religious field will be asked by God on Judgment day to give life to the fruit of their work and, in case of failure, will be sentenced.

Hence the total lack of iconographic representations in mosques and their presence instead in the decoration of objects and noble palaces. During the Umayyad period there are numerous mosaics, wall paintings and statues that adorn the palaces of the caliphs and princes. The Arab rulers insert the figurative repertoire of the Greco-Roman tradition of the Middle East and the imperial Christian or Sassanid iconography into the decoration of their palaces. An example is found in the floor mosaic or the figures modeled in the stucco of the Castle of Khirbat al-Mafjar, dating back to the 8th century AD. Near the city of Jericho. Another example is found on the walls and vaults of the castle of Qusayr al-'Amra (Jordan, early 8th cen-



Fig. 1 - Map of Green Line and Israel/West Bank wall. The part of the wall analysed is that close to Bethlehem Checkpoint 300. Image from <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/west-bank-security-fence-route-map>.



Fig. 2 - Part of the Israeli West Bank wall near Bethlehem Checkpoint 300, with control tower and checkpoint (photo by O. Mansour, 2019).

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tury), adorned with frescoes of different origins. In the Qasr al-Hayr al-Gharbî Palace, near Palmira, there is a fresco that will have a long following in Islamic art. It represents the figure of a knight who hunts an ibex with a bow (fig. 4).

Under the Abbasid caliphs wall paintings embellish the palaces of Baghdad and Samarra. Figurative ornaments that present stylistic and iconographic constants can also be found in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, with diffusion in a geographical area ranging from Spain to Iran. However, the figure appears only occasionally in small scenes enclosed in vegetable weaves or contained in ceramic tiles.

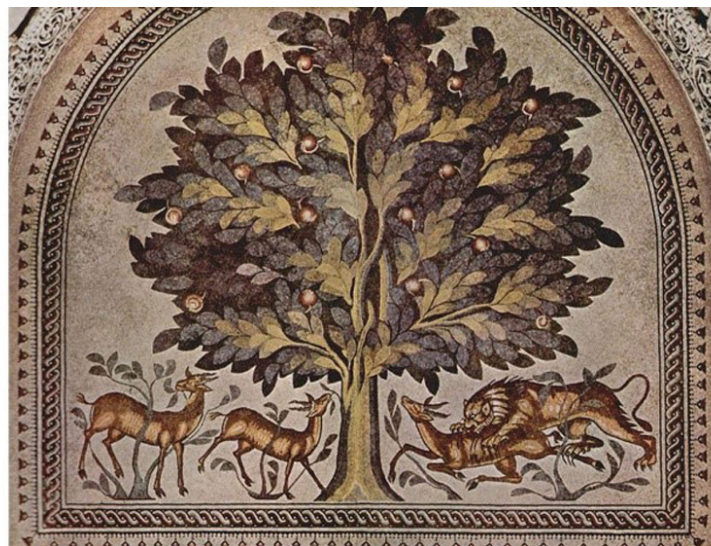
The interest in the representation of animals, which returns in particular in the Seljuk architecture, is often related to cultural traditions imported by the Turkmen populations who settled in Anatolia in the 11th century. Another hypothesis is that these reasons can be traced back to ancient Middle Eastern civilizations. The great Mosque of Diyarbakir (Anatolia, 12th century) offers an example of this type of decoration, where two images representing a lion knocking down a bull are carved on the two sides of the portal arch. According to Richard Ettinghausen (Ettinghausen, Grabar, Jenkins, 2003, p. 157), it could be an astronomical symbol representing the domination of the constellation Leo over the constellation of Taurus which symbolized, in the Assyrian and Achaemenid eras, the most important day of the Zoroaster calendar, the beginning of the Iranian solar calendar called "Nowruz". This symbol has become a symbol of power. Over time, the rejection of images became more widespread in the Arab world and there was a return to figurative architectural decoration in the last three great Islamic empires: Safawid Iran, Mughal India and Ottoman Turkey (Clevenot, De-george, p. 126).

3. STREET ART AS A FORM OF EXPRESSION DURING REVOLUTIONS

What changes with street art? It should be noted that before the Arab Spring, street art was not considered a recognized and legalized activity; on

Fig. 3 - Two drawings taken from the literary work *al-Maqamat* by Ali al-Hariri, made between 1101-1108 (Grabar, 2003).

Fig. 4 - Left: floor mosaic depicting musicians and a knight who hunts an ibex with a bow, Umayyyad palace, Qasr al-Hayr al-Gharbi in Palmyra (Syria, 8th century); centre: mosaic depicting a lion hunting gazelles in the Umayyyad castle of Khirbat al-Mafjar, Jericho (Palestine, 8th century); right: fresco depicting a dancer inside the castle of Qusayr al-Amra, Jordan (Source: <https://histoireislamique.wordpress.com> and <http://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2012/Byzantium-and-islam>).



the contrary, it was constantly monitored by the regimes to avoid that it could somehow harm the politics and management of population control. Intellectuals, writers, artists and the general population had to submit to the rules of those in government, otherwise they risked imprisonment or even death. The revolution was the spark that blew up millions of spray cans of all colours to express thoughts, messages and images as a form of rebellion and opposition to the dominant policy. It is not the first time that a revolution has led to such results. After the 1917 revolution in Russia, efforts were made to involve all sectors of the Soviet population, including artists, in the reconstruction of the country. Lenin developed a plan for monumental propaganda in the streets. As Tolstoy notes (Tolstoy, Bibikova, Cooke, 1990), the plan was inspired from the treatise entitled *Civitas Solis* by Tommaso Campanella, who described an ideal town whose walls would be decorated with frescos, to provide young people with a visual education in natural science and history and to arouse civic feelings. Lenin decided to take this idea on board and put it into practice with certain changes. The essence of his idea consisted in the fact that short but expressive inscriptions should be placed in various significant places, on suitable walls or on special constructions. These inscriptions should contain the most basic Marxist principles and slogans as well as, perhaps, tightly worked out formulations evaluating one or another great historical event. Painters, sculptors, architects, producers, musicians and scenery designers participated in the creation of the artistic aspects of the revolutionary art. The artists' creations were not displayed in enclosed museum galleries or exhibition halls but on the open spaces of squares and streets where they were seen not by individuals or small groups but by the broad masses. Whole cities were decorated with different forms of artifacts and temporary structures of ephemeral materials and there were thousands of participants in the crowds. For the countryside the sides of trains, trucks, and river boats were painted. It is important to mention also the Mexican mural movement which began in the early 1920s few

years after the Mexican Revolution (1910–1917) with the organization of the Syndicate of Revolutionary painters, sculptors and Engravers. The idea of mural art that can reach the masses – a technique used by the Mayan and Aztec ancestors – was suggested by Jose Vasconcelos to General Obregon, the incoming president. As Secretary of Education, Vasconcelos commissioned Mexico's best artists to paint murals throughout the country. José Clemente Orozco, Diego Rivera, and David Alfaro Siqueiros "Los tres grandes", became the internationally known leaders of the mural movement (Charlot, J. 1963). Though different in Style and temperament, all three believed that art, the highest form of human expression, was a key force in social revolution. In spite of the close collaboration, the work of each one was very distinctive. The government set no limitations, so each painter was free to work in his own style with his own techniques and views. The techniques included the revival of ancient techniques such as fresco, painting on freshly plastered walls and encaustic or hot wax painting. Others used mosaics and high-fire ceramics, as well as metal parts and concrete layers (Desmond R. 1998). In the late 1920s, Orozco painted the first murals in the United States at Pomona College in Claremont. Rivera, criticized as a "false revolutionist" in Mexico, moved to the United States in 1930 where he was considered the leading figure in Mexican muralism. He painted murals from San Francisco to New York before returning to Mexico in 1934. Siqueiros, the most controversial of the three, was exiled in 1932 and moved to Los Angeles where he painted three murals, including "Street Meeting" at the Chouinard School of Art and "Tropical America" on the Italian Hall at Olvera Street. (Laurance H. 1989). In the 1930s, President Franklin D. Roosevelt established the Works Progress Administration to provide employment during the Great Depression (1929-1933). Through the WPA, the 1933 Public Works of Art Project allowed 3600 artists to create murals and sculptures for public buildings, mostly were painted and created indoors. The influence of the Mexican muralists on public art as an accessible and socially-relevant movement

can be seen in the works of many movements in the following years as the Chicano art movement that emerged in Los Angeles between 1969 and 1977 (fig. 5).

If we analyze the political and social situation of the United States in the sixties and seventies "when the youthful phenomenon of writing or graffiti art develops in the poorest and most degraded neighborhoods of the main American cities", we find that even in that case there had been a sort of revolution, particularly during the period of President Lyndon B. Johnson, successor to John F. Kennedy. The reform called the "Civil Right Act" finally declared illegal the unequal registration in elections and racial segregation in schools, workplaces and public facilities in general. When the law became executive, it produced far-reaching effects and had a huge long-term impact across America. We are in the era of the birth of civil rights and the war on poverty; in the same years the war in Vietnam was going on and traveling on the moon was no longer a utopia.

Unlike street art in Russia or murals in Mexico, street art in the United States in the sixties and seventies, as Robert Sommer notes (Sommer 1975), did not start in the wake of a government program, but from an idea born locally. Sommer identifies various groups that are part of street art including the Black muralists, Chicano murals and white muralists. The primary goal of Black street art is to instill ethnic awareness, respect and pride within the community by depicting historical events or famous people, as in the case of the "Wall of Pride" made in Detroit by the artist Jim Malone and other African American artists (fig. 6) or in several murals painted by the Chicano mural movement directed by William Walker. The movement was born in 1967 with the "Wall of Respect" in Chicago which was a sort of national symbol of the African American struggle for liberation in America.

Walker, considered by many to be the creator of the mural movement and compared by art historians to Diego Rivera, moved from Chicago in 1968 with the Chicago mural movement, making Detroit the center of a kind of "revolutionary art", consistent with the murals of Rivera, author of the



Fig. 5 - Left: Marcos Raya, 1972, Homage to Diego Rivera, Chicago (Sommer, 1975); right: Diego Rivera, later version of the Rockefeller Center mural, National Palace of Fine Arts, Mexico City, 1934 (Hurlburt, 1989).

Detroit Industry Murals made between 1932 and 1933 which can be found at the Detroit Institute of Arts (Jeff, 2020). The "Wall of Dignity" displays glorious ancient African civilizations and portraits of African American leaders, such as Malcolm X and Marcus Garvey together; scenes depicting blacks in slavery and liberation and paintings by other artists (fig. 7).

The Chicano murals are influenced by the Chicano art movement, which first emerged in Los Angeles between 1969 and 1977. The movement was active for social equity and cultural visibility within an emerging global city and looked to the city's historical Mexican origins and the current Chicano cultural practices as a source of inspiration. The murals are identifiable by their bright colors and bold outlines, the frequent appearance of feathered snakes, skulls and skeletons, unborn children, the snake eagle and the prickly pear and is stylized with icons of Mexican, Spanish and Indian origin (Sommer 1975) (fig. 8). The murals of the time were a source of inspiration for street artists

in the slums, ghettos and barrios of the United States. These artists in turn influenced street art in Arab countries.

4. ICONOGRAPHIC STORYTELLING OF THE ISRAELI WEST BANK WALL

Creating graffiti on the wall that separates Israel from the West Bank has revealed two contrasting schools of thought regarding the impact that this particular form of artistic resistance could have on the general political situation and world public opinion. Among Palestinians there are those who are in favour of these practices because they are seen as an example of artistic innovation and at the same time of non-violent protest against oppression and those who instead criticize the use of graffiti because the side effect of "embellishment" of the wall would distract attention from what should be seen only as a symbol of war and marginalization.

The use of graffiti as an expression of resistance is not a new phenomenon for Palestinians, but it is

undoubtedly a practice employed since the creation of the Israeli State in 1948, which had greater emphasis during the First Intifada, from 1987 to the early 1990s (Peteet, 1996, p. 148).

The assumption that graffiti is used as a form of resistance to exclusion is directly applicable to the case of the Israeli West Bank wall, which dramatically embodies the idea of physical separation between Israel and the West Bank. The construction of the wall actually created a blank canvas for the artistic transposition of messages.

The majority of these artistic "episodes" reported on the wall is politically encouraged, in order to attract attention through a peaceful, non-violent and creative approach. Graffiti can be seen as a cultural medium, through which to manifest resistance (Eidelman, 2011, p. 106).

Graffiti is also used as an expression of self-determination by Palestinians to promote a culture and history systematically repressed during the years of Israeli occupation and expansion. According to Charles Tripp, Palestinian artists, through their



Fig. 6 - Up You Mighty Race, from "Wall of Pride" St. Louis Missouri (Sommer, 1975).

Fig. 7 - Bill Walker, Eugene "Eda" Wade, Edward Christmas, Al Saladin Redmand, others, Wall of Dignity (As it looked circa 1973), Fairview Gardens, Mack Avenue and Fairview Street (Jeff, 2020).



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Fig. 8 - "Arise from Oppression"
Henry Street Settlement House,
New York City (Sommer, 1975).

works, manage to convey the identity, memory, rights and aspirations of their people (Tripp, 2013, p. 281). Ultimately, this style of graffiti - although focused less on the Israeli occupation and more on the cultural history of Palestine - can be classified as resistance in promoting Palestinian identity (fig. 9), Arab nationalism and the corresponding rejection of Israel. Graffiti on the wall, therefore, plays an important role in cultural production which, in the case of Palestinians, is inextricably linked to the struggle born of decades of displacement.

It is difficult to see most of this graffiti in a different context from that of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, because every single character, every single slogan and every single story expressed through the murals, refers to the condition of oppression and condemnation to the marginalisation of Palestinians. Particularly emblematic is the graffiti depicting a young woman who died during the clashes between Israelis and Palestinians. Her soul is pushed towards paradise, symbolized by the plants and flowers that envelop the girl's mortal body (fig. 10). We don't know the author of the graffiti, so it is complicated to trace the creative process and the

techniques used. The only analyses and reflections can be perceptive and interpretative (with references to Islamic art and religion [6]). Analyzing the figure of the girl it is clear that the parts of the body are not well proportioned: we notice it from the oversized head and the arm too short compared to the rest of the body. This could be related to the fact that iconography is not very widespread in Islamic art and therefore local artists are not very familiar with representing the human figure. The chromatic aspect also has a symbolic value in the reading of the mural: the lower part, in shades of grey, represents the darkness of death, but at the same time the oppression caused by conflict. The transition from the grey to the white background takes place in correspondence with the coffin, to accentuate the theme of the passage from death to life beyond death, in the paradise of faith. The dark red of the flag and the name of the girl "Myriam" written in Arabic, symbolizes blood and therefore sacrifice.

Among Banksy's works on the wall, there are a provocative version of the dove of peace wearing a bulletproof vest, with an olive branch in its beak and the viewfinder aimed at the heart (fig. 11) and the flower thrower (fig. 12) and the angels who fight for peace (fig. 13).

The dove of peace, however, is one of the few works not made on the separation barrier, but on the wall of a civilian building and represents a dove dressed in a bulletproof vest, which has an olive branch in its beak and the viewfinder aimed at the heart. The message, which could only be an appeal for peace, is in this case very powerful, underlining the cruelty of war. The flower thrower has as his subject a young man who seems to be involved in a clash: he wears a handkerchief to cover his face and is caught in the gesture of loading, armed however with a bouquet of flowers instead of a molotov cocktail. The only colourful element that stands out are the flowers, a sign of purity and hope beyond destruction. The third graffiti depicts two small angels (symbols of peace and brotherhood), one Palestinian and the other Israeli, trying to break through the wall with force, decision and a crowbar. A desperate, ironic but also tender

Fig. 9 - The Israeli West Bank wall: a mural symbolizing the promotion of Palestinian identity (photo by O. Mansour, 2019).





Fig. 10 - The Israeli West Bank wall: graffiti depicting a young woman who died during the clashes between Israelis and Palestinians. Her soul is pushed to paradise, which is symbolized by the plants and flowers that wrap the deadly body of the girl (photo by O. Mansour, 2019).



Fig. 11 - Banksy, "Armored Dove", 2005 (wall of a civilian building, near the Israeli West Bank wall). A provocative version of the dove of peace, wearing a bulletproof vest, in the beak an olive branch and the viewfinder pointed at the heart (photo by O. Mansour, 2019).

Fig. 12 - Banksy stencil, Flower Thrower, 2005 (Israeli West Bank wall). The original work in black and white is from 2003 and it is located in Jerusalem (photo by O. Mansour, 2019).

Fig. 13 - Banksy, Angels, 2017 (Israeli West Bank wall). Image taken from: <https://www.ifrattempidellamiavita.com/graffiti-muro-betlemme-banksy/>.



message for a peace that still appears to be a mirage. The artist's works are highly communicative, comparable to advertising posters, understandable by the masses. The technique most used by the artist, considered as one of the main contemporary interpreters, is the stencil [7].

The same technique has been used on the wall by many other artists, with a view to launching very strong and incisive messages related to the conflict and the confinement of the Palestinian people (fig. 14). Most of the time these are simple iconographic images, which have the courage to express sharp notes of social denunciation.

The symbol par excellence of Palestinian resistance, depicted everywhere and therefore also on the wall, is the little Handala: a poor child, dressed in rags and with bare feet; he keeps his eyes stubbornly turned to his land and turns his

back to those who have turned them to the pain of the Palestinians. An intense and particularly significant representation of the little Handala is that performed by the Bethlehem graffiti artist Moodi Abdalla. His design combined the symbol of Palestinian resistance with the famous heart-shaped balloon designed by Banksy in the work "Girl with balloon", which together with the words "there is always hope" is one of the most beautiful and meaningful works of the famous English artist (fig. 15). The Handala represented by Moodi sees his balloon fly away beyond the wall and the barbed wire: the message of hope is enclosed in the quotation of the balloon, the only colored element of the drawing.

Another famous quote on the Israeli West Bank wall is the revolutionary mural by the artist Vin7, clearly inspired by Eugène Delacroix's painting *The freedom that guides the people* (fig. 16). The painting depicts all social classes united in their struggle against the oppressor, led by the personification of France, the Marianne, symbol of Liberty. Marianne is caught in the moment when she advances safely on the barricade, waving the French Tricolore with her right hand and holding a bayonet rifle with her left to suggest her direct participation in the battle. Emulating the French painter, the local liberators are clothed with the emblems of Palestinian struggle: the rural jabiyya, the checked kefyeh, the catapult, gun and keys of former homes, as well as the symbolic flag. The caption "Revolution[s] have started here...and will continue until..." is an attempt to interpret the uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya as heirs to Palestinian revolutionary activity and, at the same time, as a hope for the future Palestinian liberation (Larkin, 2014, p. 147). The fresco is completely made in black and white, the only colours are those of the Palestinian flag.

Kilometres and kilometres of wall, on whose walls follow images of men, women, children and animals, often accompanied by slogans written in English. Almost all the graffiti allude to the will to resist the Israeli occupation. Whether it is a written quotation, an elaborate mural or a vivid stencil, each depiction is imbued with allusions to the con-

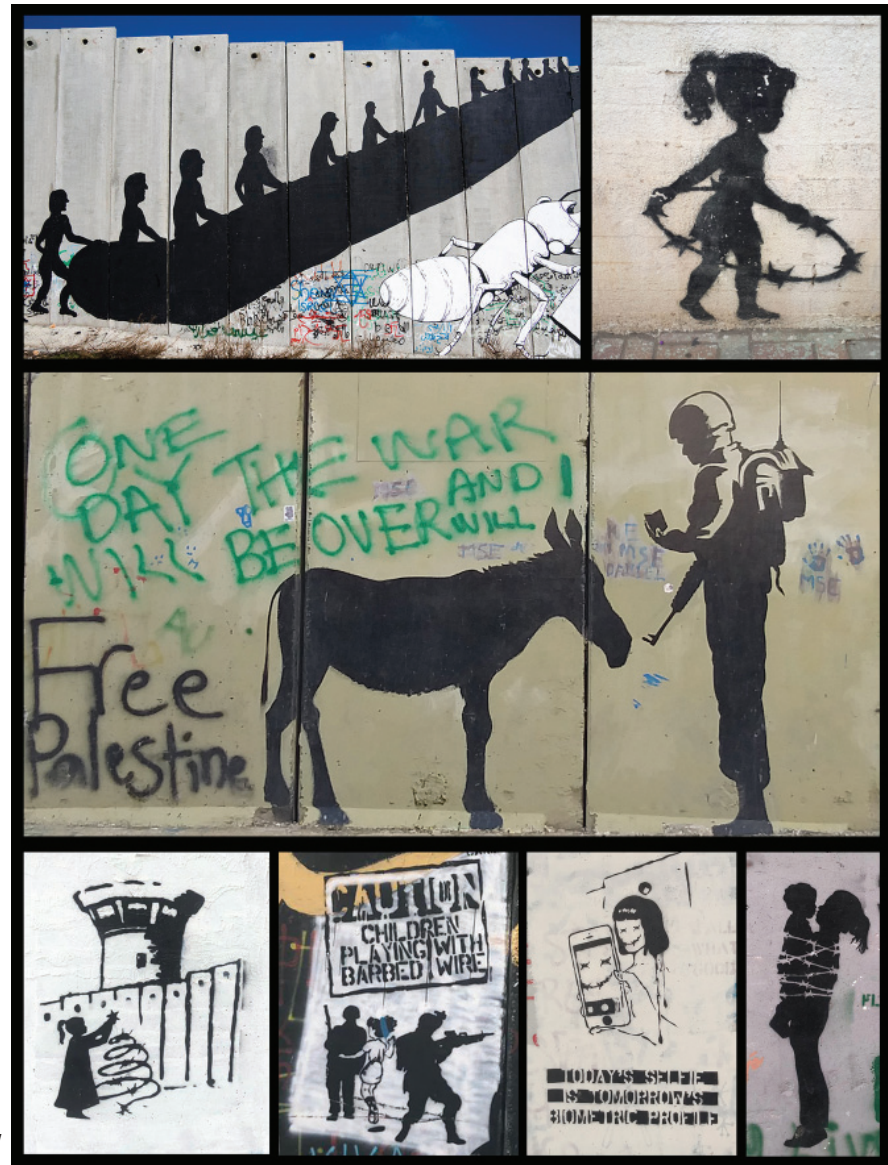


Fig. 14 - Some of the graffiti on the Israeli West Bank wall made with the stencil technique (photos by O. Mansour, 2019; graphic composition by R. Netti).

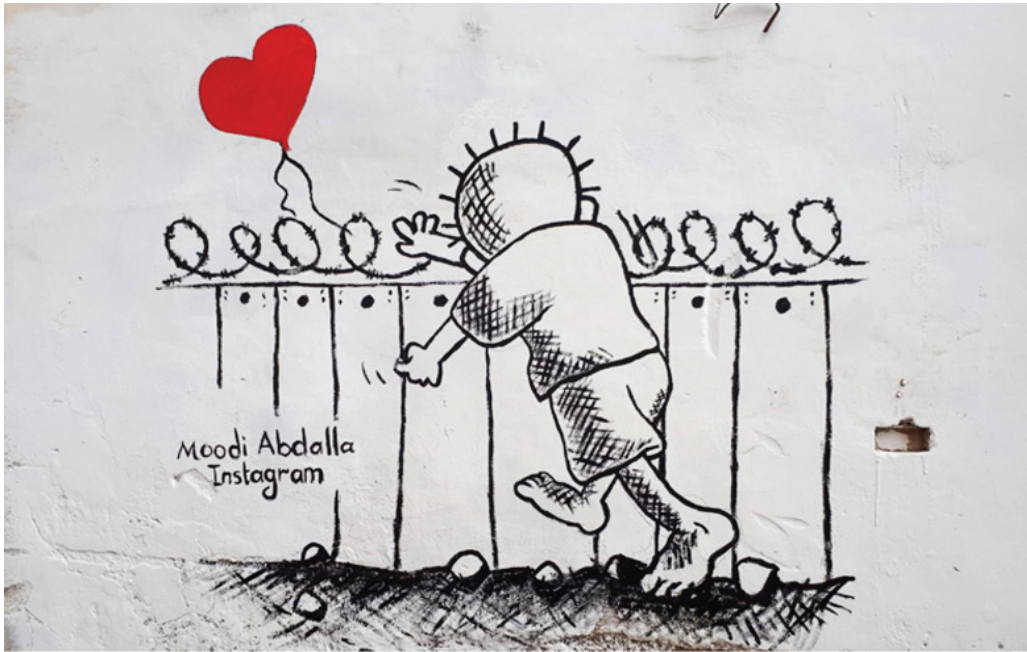


Fig. 15 - Above: the Israeli West Bank wall, the little Handala, symbol par excellence of Palestinian resistance (photo by O. Mansour, 2019); bottom left: the original Handala, created by the Palestinian artist Naji al-Ali; bottom right: "Girl with balloon" one of Banksy's most popular works.

flict (fig. 17). Although this is a feud that has been raging for decades, it remains a priority not to abandon hope of peace between the two factions and to continue to raise public awareness of the plight of thousands of Palestinian refugees who exist as a result of this war. Graffiti is one way to achieve this. As a universally practiced and recognized art form, street art manages to have a much wider resonance than other art forms and this allows it to easily overcome the boundaries and barriers created by hatred and conflict.

However, there remains a minority of Palestinians who do not approve of this type of demonstration, because they understand the use of graffiti as a form of "embellishment" and therefore of automatic legitimization of the wall (Thomas, 2010, p. 63).

It is certainly true that graffiti represent a showcase towards the outside and therefore towards the rest of the world, however, this does not always happen for the right reason. Banksy himself, a famous British street artist, has received heavy criticism from Palestinians for having described the wall as "the ideal tourist destination for graffiti writers" [8] (Eidelman, 2011, p. 107). Such an observation would seem to support the thesis that the true nature of the wall has disappeared. His interventions on the wall evoke in a more or less overbearing way a political message, but the fact that his images are defined as "aesthetically beautiful", contrasts with the hostile view of the wall. In response to this consideration, a work by Banksy has been deliberately modified, in order to make it less beautiful (Apel, 2012, p. 210): we are talking about the mural that depicts the living room of a house with a window overlooking a mountain landscape; the window has been covered by a barren brick wall (fig. 18). In many other cases, the obliteration of graffiti or parts of it occurs through the now widespread phenomenon of "vandalistic graffiti", which con-



tributes to increase the sense of degradation and insecurity of the context (fig. 19).

5. CONCLUSIONS

Representing figures is certainly more effective and incisive than communicating a message only through a text. This is why street art has always communicated through images rich in rhetoric. Most of street artists in the Arab world did not therefore deny the iconography, which remains the main form of representation and communication in graffiti wall. Retracing and narrating the images that follow one another on the long Israeli West Bank wall, through a real iconographic storytelling (and not only) we can surely assert that the mission of the wall is now other than the real function of separation.

We are faced with what we could define, borrowing Duccio Dogheria's words, «an expressive bulimia not free from formal rigour which cannot avoid to refer to numerous seasons of the "revolutionary muralism", from the Mexican of Orozco, Rivera and Siqueiros» (Dogheria, 2008, p. 18) to the Russian one, up to the American one.

«The wall is an object that constitutively calls into play the interweaving of space and social relations. Walls are inherently material and semiotic, material-and-immaterial. They manage space and define mobility fluxes that impose conduct and restrain freedom of movement, but they are also constantly challenged because of the symbolic meanings they assume: they can be reassuring as well as oppressive, they can be irritating as well as inspiring. Most interestingly, they can be built for an aim but deflected to many another» (Mubi Brighenti, 2008, p. 8).

The wall can be understood as a support of visual rhetoric that exploits cultural values charged with a dual emotional weight: in particular, the cultural value of security from an Israeli perspective and colonialism and apartheid from a Palestinian perspective. Regardless of their perspective, those who observe the wall transform these visual rhetoric into myths and meta-signs that serve as a communicative function to shape the identity of a positive message that transcends inequalities and unites in separation.



Fig. 16 - The Israeli West Bank wall: fresco inspired by the famous painting Liberty Leading the People (La Liberté guidant le peuple) by Eugène Delacroix, 1830, Louvre Museum, Paris (above right), (photo of the wall by O. Mansour, 2019).

NOTE

[1] In April 2002, after a wave of attacks by Palestinian groups, the Israeli cabinet decided to build a long barrier consisting of fences and walls in three areas of the West Bank considered the most vulnerable to penetration by armed Palestinians: the Umm El-Fahm region and the villages divided between Israel and the area Baka and Barta'a, the Qalqilya-Tulkarm region and the Great Jerusalem region. In June 2002 the Israeli government started to build the separation wall (source: <https://books.openedition.org/obp/4560?lang=it#illustrations>).

[2] The 1949 Armistice lines (known also as Green Line) are referred to the demarcation lines between the Israeli forces and those of neighboring Arab countries: Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan and Syria, defined by the agreements that ended the 1948 Arab-Israeli war. Actually, these lines served as the state of Israel borders until the 1967 Arab-Israeli war (source: <https://books.openedition.org/obp/4560?lang=it#illustrations> - note 13).

[3] Ali al-Hariri, (Basra 1054 - Basra 1122) he was an Iraqi Arab scholar, writer and philologist. With his most famous work, al-Maqamat, he has contributed to spreading the fashion of a new literary genre. Al-maqama, it is a work of entertainment in rhymed prose, which consists of the narration of anecdotes, which the author admits to be works of fantasy.

[4] For example, in sura V, verse 90 we read: "O you who have believed, indeed, intoxicants, gambling, [sacrificing on] stone alters [to other than Allah], and divining arrows are but defilement from the work of Satan, so avoid it that you may be successful". Another example in sura VI, verse 74, Abra-

ham reproaches his father Azar for worshipping idols: "Do you take idols as deities? Indeed, I see you and your people to be in manifest error!". Or in Sura XXXVII, versetto 95 and 96, Abraham reproaches his people: "Do you worship that which you [yourselves] carve, While Allah created you and that which you do?".

[5] When the prophet entered Mecca he ordered to destroy all the statues or images found in the Caaba. Simultaneously to this act we read in a hadith "Angels do not enter a house where images are found". In another hadith the prophet says that "on the Judgment Day the people who imitate his creatures will be among the most tormented".

[6] In Sura III Āl 'Imrān, verse 169 we read: "And never think of those who have been killed in the cause of Allah as dead. Rather, they are alive with their Lord, receiving provision".

[7] The stencil technique makes use of a negative mask of the image you want to create, using a rigid support (paper, cardboard or wood); the Writer has only to place the template on the wall surface that you have chosen to paint and spray the color in the empty spaces. In this way the speed of execution is reconciled with a great meticulousness and the possibility of serializing the work. (www.treccani.it).

[8] Banksy achieved international fame when, in 2005, he painted nine images on the Palestinian side of the wall built in the West Bank, in protest against the oppression represented by the barrier. With a good dose of his trademark black humor, he said: "The Israeli government is building a wall around the occupied Palestinian territories. It has been declared illegal by international bodies. And into a favorite destination for graffiti artists

in search of challenges" (Source: <https://www.lifegate.it/persona/news/banksy-biografia>).

[9] Please note that the research activity was carried out by the authors in full sharing of analysis, objectives and methodologies; all the photos of the wall are by Osama Mansour; the editorial responsibility of this essay is divided as follows: paragraphs 1, 4 and 5 by Rossana Netti and paragraphs 2 and 3 by Osama Mansour.

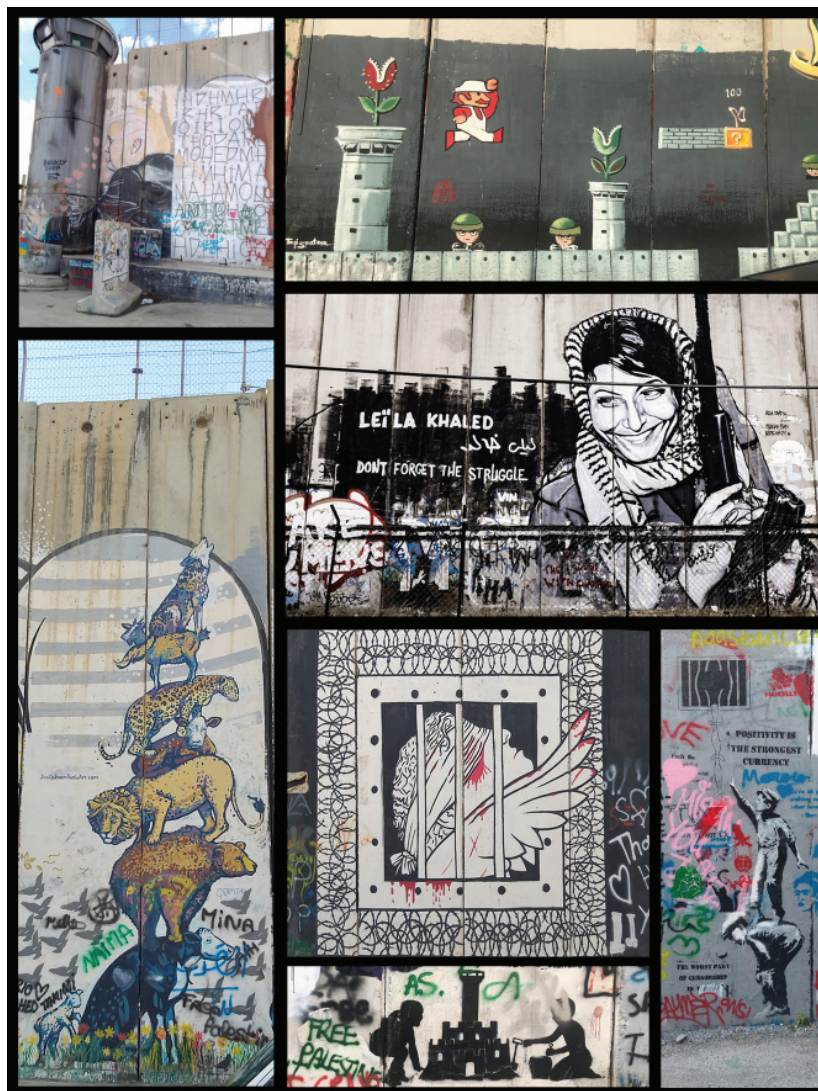


Fig. 17 - Iconographic storytelling through some of the most emblematic graffiti on the Israeli West Bank wall (photos by O. Mansour, 2019; graphic composition by R. Netti).



Fig. 18 - The Israeli West Bank wall: Banksy, living room scene (Chad Holt, 2017).

Fig. 19 - The Israeli West Bank wall: above, "a drawing of a woman waving the Palestinian flag between protesters and occupation forces" (Jegic, 2019 - photo 2016); bottom, the same drawing partially covered with vandalistic graffiti (photo by O. Mansour, 2019).



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