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**Intifada 3.0? Cyber colonialism and Palestinian resistance**

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# INTIFADA 3.0? CYBER COLONIALISM AND PALESTINIAN RESISTANCE

By Helga Tawil-Souri and Miriyam Aouragh

Following in the footsteps of international organizations, including the United Nations, the Internet *Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers*, and the International Telecommunications Union, on 2 May 2013, Google replaced the words "Palestinian Territories" with "Palestine" on all of its sites and products. Israeli deputy foreign minister Ze'ev Elkin immediately sent a letter to Google's CEO urging him to reconsider the decision that "in essence recogniz[es] the existence of a Palestinian state."[1] It was not the first time that an Israeli official took issue with "Palestine" emerging as a recognized entity in the virtual world. In 1998, for example, Ariel Sharon, then foreign minister, personally lobbied the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) against its decision to award Palestinians an international telephone code. He claimed, in terms echoed fifteen years later in the Google commotion, that Palestine is "not a territorial or geopolitical entity," and that

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the "insistence upon the illegitimate use of the term 'Palestine' is liable to unfairly prejudice the outcome of . . . negotiations [at the time]."[2]

Palestine "exists" on Google and increasingly in various other "virtual" ways. But are "Palestine" on Google or the acquisition of the google.ps domain name in 2009 examples of political resistance on the internet? For Palestinian politicians, virtual presence has historical significance. Consider, for example, the Ministry of Telecommunications and Information Technology's (MTIT) suggestion that "ICTs [information and communications technology] contribute directly to the national goal of establishing and building an independent state."[3] Within that context, Sabri Saydam, adviser to Palestinian Authority (PA) president Mahmoud Abbas and a former MTIT minister himself, posited Google's 2013 move as "a step towards...liberation."[4] For Israeli politicians, as quoted above, the emergence of (a virtual) "Palestine" poses ideological and practical dangers. Both camps ascribe power to the internet. Their only disagreement is over the ends to which the internet is a means: The internet is a threat to the existence of the state of Israel or a step toward a future state. At heart, however, both views are a form of technological determinism. They remove the internet from human, historical, and geopolitical contexts, and posit it as agent of political, social, or economic change. We contend that neither position is valid.

Besides overlooking power relations and on-the-ground dynamics, a technological determinist view is inherently ahistorical. It neither contextualizes technological change itself nor the rhetoric around it. In the Palestinian case, the belief that new technologies hold within them positive liberatory powers is not new. In the early 1990s, for example, the internet hype came under the guise of connecting Palestinians, regardless of geographic location (in Israel, in the occupied territories, in refugee camps in Lebanon, and farther away in the diaspora), to each other and the world. And as the politicians' statements evidence, the internet emerged for some as an instrument of economic development under the framework of state-building within the occupied territories. At the end of the second intifada in the mid-2000s, scholars, politicians, and investors were still speaking of technology's political promise, now under the framework of user-generated content (web 2.0).[5] In tech jargon, web 1.0 indicates one-to-many consumption, whereby most users simply download content. Web 2.0 connotes user-created websites, self-publishing platforms, and the many-to-many

interactions available through participatory and social networks. The enthusiasm for online activism raises questions about whether new forms of Palestinian political activism are possible thanks to the convergence of physical and virtual worlds, for example through participatory (blogs, wiki), social (Facebook), and geospatial (Foursquare) spaces. In other words, are Palestinians on the verge of an intifada 3.0? That it has taken more than twenty years to posit that internet activities are connected to the real world highlights the near-sightedness of technological determinism.

In the last two decades, the internet has certainly helped Palestinians cope with their territorial fragmentation, facilitated the (re)unification of Palestinian voices, and helped strengthen pockets of collective identity.[6] These realities demonstrate that the internet *is* continuously "evolutionary" and that new processes *do* emerge. These realities, however, emerge from human decisions and practices, themselves based on historical conditions. In contrast to a technologically deterministic view, we contend that the relationship between technology and politics is nuanced and multivalent. From this perspective, we try to understand the potential of a putative "intifada 3.0" by unveiling the underlying contexts within which Palestinian (internet) resistance is taking place. Hence, we critically discuss what such resistance is attempting to negate and what structures serve to confine resistance online and offline.

While we challenge the claim that Israel's relationship to Palestinians is exceptional, the occupation, and political responses to it, must be situated within the structure of settler colonialism. As the French historian Maxime Rodinson argued, Palestine is not colonized in the "common sense" of the word.[7] Palestine, as a nation in its abstract sense and as a territory more concretely, faces a form of colonial subjugation motivated by emptying the land of its inhabitants rather than "civilizing" the people.[8] Building on this insight, we employ a political economy approach to technology and globalization and build on critical scholarship about our new networked age.[9] Following in the tradition of scholars such as David Harvey and Dan Schiller, our political economic approach contextualizes the diffusion of new technologies as part and parcel of the expansion of global capitalist market systems and hegemonic interests. We analyze issues of ownership, economic inequalities, capital flows, and their relationships

to geopolitical interests as means of highlighting the inequalities within the global capitalist structure.[10]

It is of course imperative to understand the relationship of the internet and politics through on-the-ground practices. In this piece, we think through the relationship between politics and technology by addressing how Palestinian "internet spaces" are grounded in offline materialities. We analyze the structural constraints of internet activism by connecting the internet's underlying neoliberal and colonial political economy and the "real" frustrations of Palestinian cyber-activists. We seek to bolster interpretations of internet activism in the Palestinian (and larger Arab) context through considerations of the materiality of the internet *and* of resistance. In doing so, we mean to expose the economic and territorial structures that shape and seek to negate Palestinian resistance.[11] In fact, the confluence of economic and political interests is clear in the Palestinian internet sector. The overlapping processes of Palestinian elites' capital accumulation, controls of Israeli occupation that deepen economic dependence, and (largely neoliberal) state-building efforts driven by foreign capital interests all structure this sector.

This article aims to assess "internet resistance" in the Palestinian political landscape through a dialectical understanding of both settler colonialism and what we term "cyber-colonialism." Between 2002 and 2012, we studied policy reports and existing literature about resistance and technology. We also collectively interviewed political activists and computer programmers, observed political meetings and "street" demonstrations, witnessed the building of internet centers, spent time with youth at internet cafes, and analyzed countless blogs and Facebook pages. Specifically, our analysis of current political resistance builds on interviews with respondents between the ages of sixteen and forty from different political and geographic backgrounds. Many of these informants are university-educated, with internet knowledge ranging from basic computer literacy to savvy programming skills. We also draw on political campaigns and tactics to understand how current manifestations of resistance shape political expression and organization, and vice versa. Interviews and observations with individuals under the umbrella of "internet development," including corporate officials, civil servants, and political ministers, serve as the basis for our analysis. This article takes a

multilayered and historically rooted approach to understand Palestinian internet resistance and simultaneously "ground" the internet within local and territorial dynamics. The next section offers a brief contextualization of Palestinian activism itself.

## Palestinian Resistance

As widely documented in a corpus of literature, there exist several modalities of Palestinian resistance and an accumulation of political history stretching back over one hundred and fifty years.[12] We posit "internet activism" as a continuation of Palestinian political practices against Zionism and the dispossession it has entailed since the 1880s. Contemporary Palestinian political activism began with opposition to heightened Jewish immigration in the late nineteenth century, and through the British Mandate, the height of which was manifested by the 1936–39 revolt. In the late 1960s armed guerrilla movements in Jordan and Lebanon (popularly known as the *ayyam al-thawra*) continued the struggle for Palestinian national liberation. The grassroots struggles of the first intifada and, to an extent, the second intifada offered examples of modes of resistance to colonial subjugation. Palestinians continue to face colonial oppression related to states, lands, and political rights. Consequently, Palestinian resistance remains (and must remain) a national liberation movement manifested in various forms of political practices. These forms include both violent and nonviolent means of influencing global opinion as well as civil disobedience. Despite the differences in tactics, however, there are challenges Palestinians continue to face: how to organize, how to mobilize, how to unify, and how to overcome occupation and colonialism.

This historical note shapes our understanding of Palestinian activism. Thus, we do not see internet resistance as a separate entity in opposition to other forms of resistance.[13] We consider various and "opposing" forms of political activism possible on the internet as part of larger practices of resistance. These forms include Hamas-produced animated videos, cyber-hacks of official Israeli websites, and even the Facebook page of PA president Abbas that advocates a federational-state solution. In other words, Palestinian politics represents different strategies for liberation and does not synchronously move as a unified body subscribing to an official leadership.

Moreover, internet resistance is not the work of digitally connected youth suddenly emerging from cyberspace as agents of transformative change in the "real" world. As Karma Nabulsi argues, such a view of a "virtual" politics "reframes the issue of justice for Palestine in vacuous and unthreatening terms, casts the method by which change may occur into virtual space, and empties the Palestinian body politic of the thoughtfully articulated demands of its millions of citizens."[14]

Contemporary Palestinian internet resistance occurs in and against a changing political and economic landscape. Structures of oppression have manifested in the "territorialization" of the PA since the early 1990s as well as the PA's role in fragmenting Palestinian politics and its complicity with Israeli occupation. The internet sector highlights the problematic expansion of Palestinian elites' capital accumulation. Together, the dynamics of PA oppression and Israeli occupation, illustrate the ways in which Palestine remains a "central quandary of superpower interests in the Middle East."[15]

## The Infrastructure of the Palestinian Internet

The internet is not an ephemeral network disconnected from (Israeli and PA) oppression or territorial settler colonialism. The political economy of Palestinian internet reveals the PA's complicity with Israeli occupation, Palestinian elites' interests in capital accumulation, and the depths to which Israeli occupation territorially binds any Palestinian infrastructure. Alongside some of its "online" benefits, the internet reinforces a world of contact and influence between radically asymmetrical powers. We call this "cyber-colonialism."

Internet use in the Palestinian territories grew exponentially in the early and mid-2000s. As one researcher observed in 2004, "ICT represents one of the very few hopeful developments in an otherwise hopeless situation . . . . ICT is deeply, and probably irreversibly, integrated into Palestinian life." But he also warned that "like so much about Palestinian nation-building, the ICT experiment is driven by desperation."[16]

Although necessity may have inspired internet adoption in the context of the territorial fragmentation of the early days of the second intifada, sources outside Palestine initially led the growth of ICT. Palestinians were first given permission to own and build their own infrastructures after

the first round of the Oslo Accords in 1993. From that moment onwards, western diasporic Palestinians investing in the homeland and development agencies (Palestinian and foreign NGOs, the World Bank, USAID, among others) stressed the importance of ICT in the new world order.[17] The growth of the internet (and the financial investment which made its expansion possible) echoed the language of "modernization" and "integration into the global economy." The internet thus accommodated the interests of neo-liberal actors and their tacit goal of engineering the Palestinian economy according to free-market values. The Palestinian Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation echoed the discourse common in many parts of the south that ICT is necessary because today's world makes it so. The ministry stated: "A modern and competitive Palestinian economy must be information-based—or risk being neither modern nor competitive. . . . We Palestinians must be part of the global 'new economy' or we're nowhere."[18] This reality in Palestine coincided with a range of external factors such as the global growth of ICT and the changing structures of aid.

The European Union continues to be the largest donor to the Palestinian Authority. ICT development has been under US tutelage, however. This influence includes the premier US government aid arm (US Agency for International Development), private hi-tech firms (namely Cisco, Microsoft, Intel, and Hewlett-Packard), and the heavy US presence in multinational aid agencies such as the World Bank. As has been documented over the past twenty years, the Oslo accords opened the gates for investors and aid. But Oslo funding structures also had to make "peace dividends" obvious in order to garner support from Palestinians for the unequal "peace process." As a result, a "peace funding" matrix that pressed for high-visibility projects with shorter implementation time in order to demonstrate peace's tangible effects grew. The "peace" delineated in the Oslo accords and, equally important, in the 1994 Paris Economic Protocol (subsumed into Oslo 2 a year later), ignored issues of Palestinian economic, political, or territorial sovereignty.[19] The economic protocols established a "customs union," which preserved the lack of economic boundaries and uneven economic relations that already existed. Subsequent funding projects would thus never challenge the fundamental weakness of a Palestinian economy integrated into and dependent on the Israeli economy.

ICT also came with the added obfuscation of promises of job creation,

modernization, democratization, empowerment, and assurances about economic viability fostered by a technologically determinist perspective. US funders emphasized and preferred projects such as technology incubators to create and support ICT entrepreneurship, computer science departments and labs in universities, for-profit training programs such as Cisco and Microsoft Academies, and internet youth centers and refugee camp computer labs. Collectively, such programs help produce future economic partners and markets for US-based corporations, demonstrating the explicitly stated purposes of furthering US foreign policy interests in "expanding free markets."[20] As the Palestinian MTIT minister complained in 2005 in a personal interview about ICT projects: "I don't like to work with USAID projects because I know it benefits them more than us. . . . But we must utilize whatever comes our way. . . . There is no other choice."[21]

The confines of the United States' "unshakable bond" with Israel also shape and limit US aid projects. Consequently, projects that the Israeli government deems unacceptable (for whatever reason) never materialize even if they might meet the objectives of "development."[22] Thus, most aid does not challenge but rather works to foster the economic and political status quo.[23] This problem is evident in the funding matrix after 2006, when the attempt to weaken, isolate, and "overthrow" Hamas came to govern the objectives and outcomes of assistance. Aid maintains, and further institutionalizes, the structural imbalances that characterize Israel's relationship with and control over the territories. Aid structures do not challenge Israel on issues of territorial sovereignty, closures, borders, checkpoints, or settlements, for example, let alone on the structures of economic dependency. Instead of creating structural changes and links, aid projects work around those that have been imposed. Thus, development programs are not able to redress the damaging effects of Israeli policies. At most, the programs may try to mitigate these effects. Within this framework, then, internet projects make for a logical choice for US assistance.

The growth of the internet also represents the strong link between US trade policies, US corporate domination of global information markets, and the needs of transnationalizing capital to invest in new spaces and create new markets. While the internet can offer spaces for political agency, its underlying economic limitations deepen two long-standing features of the global market system: inequality and domination. These two inhibiting

realities are already present in the territories due to Israeli settler colonialism.

In 2003, under the tutelage of US and Palestinian NGOs, an internet center opened in a small rural town in the West Bank. Within months, it quickly ran up an insurmountable amount of debt. As part of its directive, the center was required to hire experts from the United States and purchase hardware only from Intel and Hewlett-Packard (HP), either directly or through their Israeli subsidiaries. One of the managers explained in early 2006:

> We could only buy computers from HP . . . and only from specific vendors. It didn't matter that we could find much cheaper components elsewhere, or imagine that we would want to buy some from a Palestinian company, no way. We had to follow [the project's funders] orders. . . . This meant we paid hundreds of shekels more than we could have had we been allowed to buy on the open market.[24]

Similarly, when technical problems arose, the center could not hire a local (who, ironically, had been trained at the center under the promise of job creation) to upgrade systems and fix hardware. As one team member described:

> They in the US [where the funding agency is located] said, "No, you can't hire a local. We will send you someone." So of course we have to wait for this guy to come here. . . . It takes him five months . . . and then, what, we paid him so much money that it was more than our whole budget for the whole fiscal year! And later, of course, he wasn't here when things broke down again.[25]

Such constraints were prevalent throughout the internet scene in Palestine. The project described above is not the only one that is dependent on foreign hi-tech firms to provide computers for youth centers and university students. For example, both Cisco and Microsoft Academies across the West Bank and the Gaza Strip rely on foreign-trained experts to teach. Hi-tech incubators, such as the newly launched Business and Technology Incubator at Gaza's Islamic University, are wholly dependent on foreign capital. Over time, some political campaigns began refusing donations because of their dependency "clauses." As one interviewee told us, it would have been much better if Palestinians could work with open-source programs. Thus "internet development" limits the economic benefits for Palestinians. Palestinians

are not allowed to develop their own expertise to maintain their computer systems through open-source tools. Instead, they become "hostage" to monopolistic practices and dependent on foreign suppliers.

Palestinian officials and elites championed the status quo in internet development projects. These elites embraced the assumption that growing an ICT industry could happen only through the liberalization of the sector and influx of foreign capital and expertise. For example the MTIT minister Mashhour Abudaka claimed in 2010 that:

> the crux of the matter is that access to the internet is vital to many Palestinians who are imprisoned in their cities, towns, and villages. The internet serves as an important communication tool within the Palestinian communities and with the outside world. Palestinians need reliable, good-quality high-speed internet service at a competitive price.[26]

Abudaka's claim hints at an optimistic (uncritical) espousal of the internet's possibilities and confirms the idea that "competition" and liberalization are the only available economic models. In addition, and as Abudaka mentioned privately in a separate conversation, "If we have a successful ICT story, it will help convince the international community that we have good institutions and that we deserve independence."[27] Thus, a particular model of ICT is causally linked to the possibility of statehood, one that is "deserved" only when external forces say it is. Abudaka's remark is a poignant reminder of Edward Said's argument that "the rhetoric of 'globalization' amongst the Palestinian authority [serves] as an alternative to liberation."[28] Indeed, over the past decades both internet development and development at large have been wrapped in neoliberal structures that impede both the Palestinian economy as well as the possibilities of resisting an entrenched occupation and ongoing settler colonialism.[29] The narration of the internet's necessity as one way to redress Palestinian territorial fragmentation implicitly conveys an inability to challenge Israel's territorial control.

Territorial confinement also determines Palestinian use of the internet. After Israel abandoned the largely debilitated telecommunications infrastructure existent in the territories in 1995, the PA handed it over to the private sector. It was at that point that the Palestinian telecommunications monopoly, Paltel, was born. As detailed in the Oslo accords, Israel would

control all allocation of frequencies and determine where Palestinians could build new infrastructure. Since part of the landline infrastructure already existed, its geographic condition would not fundamentally change. Most exchanges were located in Israeli cities. Thus, all international traffic, initially for landlines and later for cellular and internet lines, had to be routed through Israeli providers. Paltel and its subsidiaries would pay connection and termination fees. Israel prohibited Paltel from having its own international gateway. In addition, Israel prevented Paltel from importing equipment, such as telephone exchanges and broadcasting towers, which would facilitate building a network connecting the Palestinian territories. As we know, Oslo fragmented the West Bank into three noncontiguous territories. Area A, eighteen percent of the West Bank, was in theory under full PA civil and security control. Area B, twenty percent of the West Bank, was meant to be under Palestinian civil control and joint Israeli and Palestinian security control. Area C, sixty-two percent of the West Bank, was under full Israeli civil and security control. This territorial fragmentation also constricted telecommunications, as most infrastructure is usually permitted only within Area A; it is seldom permitted in Area B and never in Area C. In addition, Israel prohibited Palestinians from installing infrastructure in Israeli-defined buffer zones, and, after 2003, all along the security barrier/wall.

Thus, Palestinian internet traffic relies on an infrastructure that is fragmented and dependent on Israeli networks. Hadara, Paltel's internet service provider (ISP), became a monopoly in 2005. All Palestinian ISPs are essentially Hadara resellers. But Hadara itself cannot have an internet trunk switch that would circumvent Israel. Israeli authorities require Hadara to provide limited bandwidth for Palestinian internet use; internet surfing is invariably slower in the territories than in Israel. Israeli providers sell bandwidth to Hadara at substantially higher rates than to providers in Israel, making access more expensive for Palestinian users. Moreover, the Israeli government has enforced limitations on the kinds of ICT equipment permitted. The combination of higher costs, slower speeds, and limited technologies result in a constrained internet infrastructure.

According to Khalil, an outspoken internet campaigner from Hebron living in Birzeit: "You can't really change your subscription because all of [the ISPs] are the same and are therefore forced to provide the same quota. It is monopoly behavior; what Hadara wants gets applied by all companies."[30]

Paltel (Hadara's parent company) benefits from its monopoly status. Both internal and external interests push the sector to liberalize further and open itself to more competition. But without changing the underlying infrastructure under Israel's control, the free-market promise remains the butt of sardonic jokes. In the meantime, Paltel's response is that it:

> has no choice except to abide by those official, judicial, regulatory, and legal orders on the basis of allegations related to competent jurisdictions among those official bodies and entities. Our role is to implement those orders and instructions and not to enter into such matters that the company cannot deal with or accept to be part of.[31]

This kind of behavior has inspired Palestinian discontent and resistance. Some campaigns highlight the need for "internet resistance" to challenge the structure of "indigenous collaboration" that the internet sector so well exemplifies.

Despite various limitations, telecommunications and ICT have experienced phenomenal growth. Paltel and the PA have profited handsomely. Paltel, whose largest investors already wielded substantial economic power, now boasts revenues that amount to more than ten percent of the total Palestinian gross domestic product. Its market capitalization represents more than half the value traded on the Palestinian Stock Exchange and it contributes about one-third of the PA's tax income.[32] Paltel is also one of Israel's largest dependent clients. Thus, the PA and Paltel continue to function as the "subcontractors of occupation," in the words of one interviewee.[33] The "Enough Walls" campaign challenged Hadara's limited bandwidth [see Figure 1]. On the one hand, the campaign moves beyond the cyber-realm in contending with the offline and important material issues of bandwidth and ownership. On the other hand, such activism is misplaced in focusing on Hadara rather than the matrix of Israeli control that goes hand in hand with profit-seeking PA policies.[34] Together Israeli and PA policies form the structures that confine Palestinian internet users.

Our next example addresses the tense relationship between online and offline practices in the context of Israeli territorial control. Palestinian Information Technology Association of Companies (PITA) is a nonprofit organization that aims to boost the ICT sector in the Palestinian territories. It is in the precarious position of bolstering Paltel as the largest ICT firm and

**Enough walls!**

**Please, Keep the Internet Open**

**NO to Internet Quota**

The Enough Walls campaign addressed the limited bandwidth available to Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. (Photo by author)

third largest employer after the government and NGOs. At the same time, PITA also supports the much smaller ICT firms that endorse the breakup of Paltel's monopoly. One of PITA's goals is to connect Palestinian ICT firms to markets in the Arab world by supporting local entrepreneurs' participation in regional trade shows. "GITEX in Dubai, Qatar, Bahrain, Saudi is huge," explains the PITA chair about the largest regional ICT trade show. "But it's difficult to obtain visas.... It's difficult sometimes just [to] get out of Ramallah," he admits.[35] In response to this territorial and political reality,

PITA launched a Palestinian version of an ICT trade show, Expotech. More than ninety percent of the financial support for the trade show came from USAID, Cisco, and Jawwal (Paltel's mobile telephone subsidiary). "Expotech is a big success and we hope we can make it more professional," explained the chair in 2004, after the first fair took place. "Expotech is a response to these political limitations [of not obtaining visas and not being able to get out of Ramallah] and a way to assist local firms."[36] The most striking aspect of the November 2004 conference in Ramallah was that the attendees were all from within the confines of the city. Due to the Israel's multilayered control, there were no Palestinians from Jerusalem, Hebron, Jenin, or Gaza, let alone anyone from Dubai or elsewhere. Here was an attempt to support a "virtual economy" coming up against very "real" territorial limitations.

By 2008, Israel would further confine Expotech. Given that travel between Gaza and the West Bank had become impossible, Expotech began holding simultaneous conferences in both locations. While Expotech may indeed assist and support Palestinian companies and entrepreneurs [see Figure 2], it functions, like the rest of the ICT sector, within a limited frontier of territorial possibilities defined by Israeli settler colonialism. Despite these confines and the stricter constraints of moving around in the territories since the second intifada, the hegemonic appeal of a limitless and deter-ritorialized internet has not diminished. As one entrepreneur who also holds the title of a "Google student ambassador" claims: "It doesn't matter where you are and what you do, you can go anywhere on the internet—the opposite of what's here in Palestine." Another entrepreneur suggests, "I think the internet is very attractive to people in the West Bank because of the ability to export across the border. You can nurture a company only if it's an internet company because all other sectors are blocked."[37] And yet that very same person is barred from traveling the eight kilometers between Ramallah and Jerusalem. Given this reality in which "Palestine" on the ground is fragmented and inaccessible, "Palestine" on Google as some sign of "resistance" is artifice.

In the Palestinian context, the political economy that underlies the emergence of the new networked age demonstrates how politics engenders technological infrastructure (and vice versa), and how the supposed expanded social and spatial boundaries of the internet are confined. The development of the internet in the occupied territories is a striking illustration of the

Collage of Expotech 2009. (Photos by author)

deepening economic power of a small business elite within the context of global capitalism. This is why we refer to the politics of the internet under Israeli colonialism as "cyber-colonialism."

Above and beyond these realities remain the lived experiences of continued Israeli settler colonialism. Novel contributions offered by digital technologies do not translate or map onto Palestine as easily. There is no exhilarating "scoop" because large-scale and extraordinary injustice has been a consistent factor in Palestine that scholars and activists have documented for decades. Israeli occupation is not an "exception," nor is it a secret plot. It happens out in the open and becomes "normal." The "normality" of occupation is why the Israeli soldier Eden Abergi was baffled by the negative response among Palestinians when she posted pictures on Facebook of herself in front of bound and blindfolded elderly Palestinian men. Abergi's relaxed pose and confused reaction showcased the very normalcy of her acts.[38] Moreover, that there was no global outrage demonstrates the normalization of violence against Palestinians made possible by the long history of the dehumanization of Palestinians (as well as Arabs and Muslims, and the conflation of the three) in the international mainstream media.[39]

Ongoing instances of heightened violence also influence Palestinian internet use in debilitating ways and demonstrate Israel's "matrix" of domination.[40] Consequently, the challenge of Palestinian activism is multifaceted: it entails maneuvering between online and offline organizing as well as attempting to circumvent crackdowns on those practices. At times such crackdowns are kinetic and overtly violent, such as when the Israeli army destroys hardware, bombs broadcasting stations, ransacks IT firms, and engages in other acts of "cybercide."[41] Other examples include the May 2012 raid on the Stop the Wall offices, when computers, hard disks, and memory cards were stolen by the Israeli military.[42] In December 2012, the Israeli army confiscated the computer of the prisoners' and human rights NGO Addameer.[43] The sophistication of Israeli remote-control killings of Palestinian protesters is also a reminder of the contradictory consequence of internet technologies, though one falling outside the purview of our analysis here.

Throughout the past twenty years the Israeli army has jammed and hacked telephone, internet, and broadcast signals. Occupation forces have destroyed infrastructure in far less violent moments. For instance, the Israeli army intentionally and repeatedly severs the only landline connection between southern and northern Gaza Strip, most recently in 2012. It also digs up fiber-optic cables in parts of the West Bank, uproots transmission towers, confiscates equipment, and holds up multimillion-dollar purchases while charging Palestinian firms "storage" fees. As Tawil-Souri argues, "The mechanisms of digital occupation are exercised through the disruption of everyday life, not simply during exceptional moments of violence."[44] Thus Palestinian internet resistance must challenge Israeli occupation, while being both dependent upon and constrained by it.

Activists and everyday users alike recognize that the internet is constrained by Israeli military, economic, and "security" policies. For example, there is widespread awareness among Palestinians that their internet use is under surveillance. As one Paltel executive claimed: "How do we know that the equipment that comes from Israel is not tampered with?.... Maybe they make it weaker, maybe they put surveillance mechanisms in there."[45] One Palestinian had to retrieve her pictures and personal files from the Israeli police after the Israeli army raided her technician's storefront. Israeli security forces have also used confiscated personal communications to blackmail others into collaboration. As one Palestinian woman concludes, she has

nightmares "of being imprisoned due to internet use…. How can one live, when everything is under control?"[46] While cyber-activism may provide a certain amount of virtual mobility, it also puts activists back on the state's radar.[47] We asked Daoud, an activist at Stop the Wall, whether internet activism entails extra risk. He answered with a slight ambiguity:

> We don't really worry about it for ourselves; we deal with the internet knowing that everything is being monitored already anyway. But for the foreigners we have some measures, such as not exposing their names online. But for the local community, can it be worse than having your activists arrested on a daily basis already?[48]

Respondents juggled the tactic of "going under the radar," thus avoiding an online presence, and going on-line, regardless of risk. Activist use of the internet is a "negotiated" process. Activists promote or accept internet use in certain contexts and neglect or resist it in others. In Palestine, with its long history of resistance as risk-taking, this careful balancing act is part of a broader set of political ideas and practices.

Cyber-activists were profoundly aware of how these various materialities constrained their political activity. Dirar from Haifa but living in Nazareth explained: "For different realities and aims you need different tools and forms of internet usage." He then demonstrated the acute dilemma Palestinian (cyber-)resistance faces:

> I am against the idea of Facebook as a form of political struggle. We must consider our own tools, which are not restricted to commercial consumption or competition, but are about political action because it is not a matter of quantity but a matter of effectiveness. I believe in the saying that "the master's tool will not bring down the master's house."[49]

Not all activists took such a hard stance, but all touched upon the flaws of a technologically determinist view, as well as the importance of understanding cyber-activism vis-à-vis realities on the ground. Twenty-eight year old activist Misbah, a refugee from Gaza living "illegally" in Birzeit, explained the essence of the flaws of internet freedom campaigns as follows:

> They present themselves as modern and via cultural artistic messages promoted in the media they send the message that "we can live together." But it is not fair to represent Palestinians and Israelis as if

they are the same. They say they look for peace but I don't believe that an Israeli living in my house and says "I'm with Palestinians" makes sense. The first thing he should do is to leave my house. Go out. And then talk with me about peace. It is really illogical that you talk about peace and yet you occupy my land.[50]

As Misbah points out, much of the rhetoric about internet activism fails to address the historical origins and the ongoing character of power relations in Palestine. Historicizing political events and technological innovations is crucial to a critical revaluation of internet activism. An understanding of the grounded opinions and experiences of Palestinian activists themselves, to which we turn next, is also crucial to any critical understanding of cyber-activism.

## The Contempt of Cyber-Resistance

The internet offers parallel spaces for collective community building. On a practical level, there have been many improvements for political mobilization. A call for protest can now incorporate the latest facts and statistics, a well-designed logo, link to pictures on Flickr or videos on YouTube, and sometimes during the action itself, it can live-feed via Bambuser. Stop the Wall's daily activism campaigns are often prepared in such an ad hoc way, sometimes in a matter of mere hours. These methods of political activism may sound like science fiction to the previous generation of Palestinian activists. Compared to the practical obstacles of organizing in the past, much has changed. Despite the multiple limitations discussed above, the internet has become part of the everyday tactics for many Palestinian political groups in unprecedented ways.

In the early 1990s, internet access was practically unheard of. It was in fact illegal until 1993, when the Oslo Accords permitted Palestinians to own and build their own telecommunications infrastructure for land, cellular, or internet uses. Despite the structural limitations described above, statistics have shown that for a long time and certainly until the Arab uprisings in 2011, Palestinian internet usage has been substantially higher than elsewhere in the Arab world. Reports show a systematic increase in household computer ownership from 26.4 percent in 2004 to 49.2 percent in 2009, and an increase in home internet access from 9.2 percent in 2004 to 28.5 percent in 2009 and

to 57.7 percent in 2012.[51] Some have argued that Gaza has the largest number of Facebook users per capita in the world.[52] Whether or not this statement is accurate, there is a correlation between political resistance, immobility, and internet growth. Regardless, increased access and use does not translate into cyber-resistance. In the analysis that follows we focus on how "offline" material realities shape, influence, and constrain resistance, with close attention to the frustrations that emerge in the realm of cyber-activism.

As with all forms of activism, cyber-activists must negotiate multiple impediments. In the Palestinian case, impediments exist across a local and global spectrum, including internal PA oppression, political divisions, and concerns about the positioning of Palestine on a global (media) platform. Cyber-activists must equally contend with the complex landscape of Israeli occupation, territorial fragmentation, and Zionist narratives. These challenges are processes that shape and are shaped by online and offline grassroots politics.

Repression of activists deemed oppositional by the PA has been a reality since the founding days of Yasser Arafat's presidency in 1993. PA forces under President Mahmoud Abbas and Hamas officials in Gaza have harshly repressed activists, curbing what they deem subversive online politics, cracking down on expressions of opposition to Israeli occupation and blog posts as benign as those mocking the president.[53] Activists witnessed a disturbing increase of internal oppression as manifested in the crackdown upon protests against the Israeli military attacks on Gaza in December 2008. Interviewees described the PA as practicing "indigenous collaboration" and being a "subcontractor of occupation," and contextualized the US-guided security apparatus as the process of "Daytonization," in reference to Lt. Gen. Keith Dayton of the US Army, who served as the security coordinator for Israel and the PA between 2005 and 2010. Since the mid-2000s, moreover, activists have faced greater internal fragmentation. In fact, the Hamas-Fatah divide has had an extraordinarily demoralizing effect. These realities further fragmented the Palestinian body politic as it pursued different forms of resistance. Meanwhile, political rallies, face-to-face meetings, a free press, and other platforms for open communication were impossible due to Hamas-Fatah infighting, curfews, closures, military incursions, or exile. On a larger scale, the reality of political constraints on the ground meant that many Palestinians, including political parties, underground militants, and

stateless refugees, were forced to organize outside the confines of "official" politics, and online.

The birth of the second intifada in September 2000 demonstrated a media transformation and an increase of publicly mediated protest that has deeply influenced Palestinian activism. Online media, and in particular citizen journalism during the second intifada, offered the world the ability to "see" what was happening inside Palestine. Indeed, global public opinion is another realm with which cyber-activism contends. But in the ten years that have passed since the first experiences with these forms of internet activism targeted at the outside world, most Palestinian activists we interviewed learned that a negative politics of representation was due to weak Palestinian efforts. Many internet/citizen journalism efforts confirmed that the problem lies more with biases inside editorial boards and the economic interests of particular Western governments. During discussions, cyber-activists often brought up the astonishing new media material produced by activist groups in Palestine documenting Israeli army and settler violence, especially Active Stills and Shooting Back, but disagreed over whether the images of everyday violence tempered soldiers' actions or led to any international reprimands.[54] While debates about the extent and impact of such examples continue, activists agreed that new media in and of itself will never be able to shake the shackles of Israeli occupation off Palestine. In the words of Mahir in Ramallah:

> We can post YouTube clips of soldiers' mistreatment [of Palestinians]. Maybe some of the B'tselem videos [from Shooting Back] make a small dent, maybe Burnat's film [*Five Broken Cameras*] rallies a few foreigners to the Palestinian cause. But these don't stop the ongoing violence of occupation![55]

Many shared Mahir's frustration. Recognition has only hardened new activists and made them more pragmatic about the virtues of the internet. In the dominant media landscape, not everyone agrees that the media should be a target of political campaigns. For example, one activist objected to the focus on media activism. "This public opinion is not a 'friend's' opinion; I don't understand internet campaigns focusing on convincing the 'international world.' Isn't that basically one that has to be resisted rather than desperately recruited?" explained Walid.[56] Walid also touched on the geopolitical selectivity surrounding receptions of popular uprisings. Technological novelty

was the main point in the celebrated reactions to the YouTube videos during the Iranian protests in 2009 or the framing of Facebook as a revolutionary turning point in Egypt in 2011. But if the medium was the main message, then efforts such as those undertaken by Active Stills and Shooting Back would have ended Israeli military and settler aggression.

On a regional level, the Arab uprisings have also had an impact on local revolutionary forces. Certain activists, inspired by their Egyptian, Tunisian, and Bahraini counterparts, have echoed the call for revolutionary change in the streets of Hebron, Nablus, Jerusalem, and Gaza. New grassroots initiatives like the March 15 coalition or the Palestinian Youth Movement, led mostly by youth and in the context of the Arab uprisings, are a direct result of this inspiration [see Figures 3 and 4]. The March 15 campaign attracted attention in the media and inspired initiatives such as the Third Intifada Facebook group. After Zionist mobilization gathered enough signatories that deemed the page inappropriate, Facebook closed it. But numerous mirror groups quickly appeared to protest this silencing campaign. Their main demand was an end of the Hamas-Fatah split and a reorganization of the Palestinian political movements to face a common enemy.



The March 15 Coalition (also known as the Palestinian Youth Movement) was considered a call to action in response to the Arab uprisings. (Screenshot courtesy of activists)

The May 15 protests, revolving around the Nakba Day commemorations, were even more intense and transnationally organized [see Figure 4]. Thousands marched toward the northern borders shared with Lebanon, Jordan, and Syria. Others marched toward checkpoints in the occupied territories, and still others marched toward Gaza from Egypt.[57]

Third Intifada Facebook group, an offshoot of the March 15 mobilizations, generated thousands of followers. (Screenshot from May 2013, courtesy of activists)
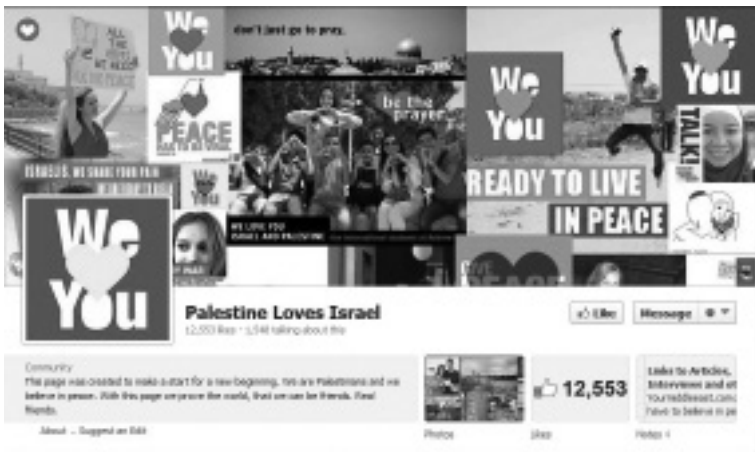


Palestine Loves Israel is an Israeli-led public diplomacy campaign aiming to collect "likes." (Screenshot from May 2013, courtesy of https://www.facebook.com/pages/Palestine-Loves-Israel/209640082469004)

The Arab uprisings have also discouraged sections of the Palestinian grassroots movement, as many felt "trapped" in a deadlock about regional alliances with authoritarian regimes. By 2012, many of the activists interviewed in 2009–10 had dissolved their coalitions due to disputes about the legitimacy of the Syrian uprising. This political divergence spilled over into shouting matches and fistfights at the World Social Forum (WSF) in 2013 in Tunisia, the first WSF held in the Arab world since the Arab uprisings. Palestinian delegates found themselves wedged between rival groups, each trying to elevate its standing with claims of support for the Palestinian cause.[58] Many of these contestations take place online between competing Facebook groups and YouTube posts, demonstrating that cyberspace is as much a unifying and fragmenting force for Palestinian activists as is the "real" world. Thus, regardless of technological developments, Palestinian resistance remains lodged in grounded realities and regional power relations. This interdependent relation has become more tenuous as the uprisings moved into a counterrevolutionary dynamic in Syria and tensions in Egypt mounted in the wake of the Muslim Brotherhood's electoral victory and subsequent overthrow by military coup.

One can hardly think of the politics of Palestine without locating it in broader geographic terms. The realities of those in exile highlight this expansive geography. Our next example demonstrates the internet's use as an enabling tool for those "outside" to reconnect. It is another instance that problematizes the connection between the virtual and the territorial. For example, Palestine Remembered is a website that primarily focuses on Palestine pre-1948 and especially the many "lost" or "erased" villages and cities [see Figure 6]. The website provides historical accounts that include everything from details on land loss, personal biographies, old photographs, and videos of oral histories. The site does not simply provide a space for creating maps of the past and the present. Videos, testimonies, statistics, responses by users, and pictures of historical events or current-day "lost" villages attempt to "re-create" and "preserve" Palestine in the cyber-realm. Such sites are spaces of memorializations that emphasize Palestinians' historical claims. They are certainly forms of what Rochelle Davis names "geographic nostalgia."[59] Yet the very act of mapping the past produces an authority to know and to imprint presence on these lost and interrupted lands and histories in the present and the future.
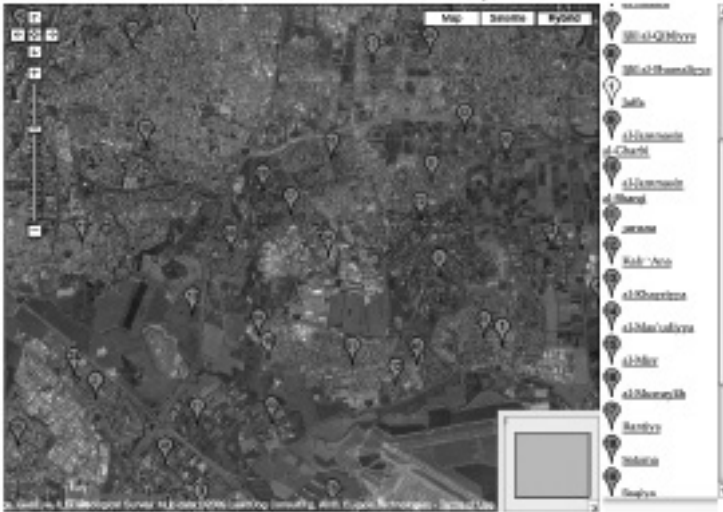
Users preserve their memories and presence on an erased Palestinian village.
(Screenshot from 2005, courtesy of palestineremembered.com)

With respect to cyber-activism, "Palestine" is more than a contested territory; it has also become a virtual space through which people can reterritorialize themselves onto the lost (historical, physical, distant) spaces of Palestine. These sites challenge hegemonic Israeli/Zionist versions of narratives about the land, the people, and the conflict. Palestine Remembered provides Palestinians with the space to visualize and virtually recreate the entirety of Palestine and negotiate its historical erasure. These practices are salient examples of how the internet "opens" Palestine to its diaspora, to those in exile, to those from the past, and to those not "there." To enable an approximation of "Palestine" is to engage in social media in a collective space.

Malcolm Gladwell described online activism as a weak tie, as opposed to high-risk activism that relies on strong ties.[60] Despite the unnecessary dichotomy between weak-strong or online-offline politics that have hampered the debates about internet activism, it is undeniably the latter dynamic that concerns one's comrades, future, and tangible everyday reality in the Palestinian context. Engaging social media can be "empowering" in some cases, but online social networks offer activists less political agency

as corporate algorithms and Facebook monopolism increasingly filter and define the digital world. Open-source or noncommercial alternatives remain largely marginalized in the commercial landscape. The sense of impact based on a selective community (that mirrors one's own) blurs the boundaries between reality and fantasy, creating unrepresentative bubbles. As Pariser argues, political involvement on Facebook creates a form of engagement that is essentially apolitical because one is debating, sharing, and inviting those already on the same side of the equation.[61] For Walid from Jerusalem this engagement "creates a kind of self-rejoicing," and for Ahmad from Ramallah "sometimes it's more about our self-esteem."[62] When pushed on why he was skeptical about online activism, Ahmad said that it was just "online masturbation" that had become the goal rather than a tool for organizing.[63] Palestinian activists have criticized this trend before, but they also relate this dynamic to the absence of offline space or freedom for political practice. As Walid warned, "When we only use these methods we divert our attention. Instead of fighting we are forwarding emails."[64] The subtext of these rough labels is a tendency to indulge in time-consuming interaction rather than partake in physical action.

How online campaigns involve those not online is also a crucial challenge, but even those already on Facebook are not guaranteed to participate on equal terms. Faysal, from a village near Ramallah points out:

> Revolutions come from poverty, hunger, oppression, and so on. There was a demonstration in Ramallah for Gaza on New Year's Eve [2009] mainly organized on Facebook. Some people came straight from parties via these Facebook invitations. Some of them were drunk. It was actually painful to see: where is the anger, the tears, where is the real thing? They behaved as if it's a social gathering. It has become like, "I'm angry, I'll make a Facebook cause, then I'll be relieved."[65]

During the war on Gaza in 2008–9, many Facebook groups appeared with names such as Free Palestine and Electronic Republic of Palestine, as well as additional applications such as the Free Palestine Twibbon, a digital ribbon one can attach to a profile picture. But this growth is also what led 'Ala', active in the Palestinian prisoners campaign, to take issue with the campaigns:

> The potentials of Web 2.0 are great but it also fragments. Look at how many Facebook groups there are now, set up for the same causes.

Hundreds! How are you going to organize properly if it is so frag-
mented? It creates a false sense of mass mobility and they are largely
made by the same people.[66]

Dirar took a similar stance, but also described online protests as
social activities:

For me Facebook is like a big space where everyone can shout and
scream with permission and then go back to reality. In essence, there is
nothing serious about it. Being on Facebook is a private not a political
matter. It's consumption. I never treat it seriously. It is like demonstra-
tions nowadays. I don't think demonstrations are tools of resistance
as they were before, but I do go and I like it. Like Facebook, I consider
it mainly a social means with a space to spread your political ideas.[67]

A large majority of the interviewees cautioned that online experiences
with activism and resistance do not automatically transform into offline
experiences.

The skepticism we heard among many Palestinian activists also stems
from the way corporate social media as a whole treats anything Palestinian,
as the lack of outrage over the Abergi Facebook photographs mentioned above
demonstrate. There has been a love/hate relationship between Palestinians
and Facebook from the very start. Many Facebook users protested online
when Facebook linked "fans" of Palestine to pages about Israel, changed
the location or address of Palestinians' profiles to Israeli cities, and banned
pro-Palestinian and anti-Zionist groups.

Many interviewees recognized a correlation between the *strength* of
grassroots activism offline and what they considered *significant* activism on
or via the internet. For instance, the aforementioned March 15 and Third
Intifada campaigns were new modes of political organizing by a younger
generation creatively merging a strong offline strategy with an online pres-
ence. This is testimony of a new style of transnationally mediated activism
having already incorporated social media as part of everyday life. But it is
mainly and perceptibly the offline determination and demonstration that
has rendered the online dissemination and mediation so significant. The
offline political space is where activists mostly learn these practical and
moral political lessons. The offline political space is also where activists

recognize their activism must take place. Maria, responsible for maintaining the website and online networks of one of the most active grassroots campaigns in Palestine, Stop the Wall, admitted:

> To be honest, it will not affect the wall directly, except that it clearly expresses our message to the international community. The internet is the international tool for mobilization and for raising awareness, so of course you cannot ignore it. But the internet itself is nothing without the activism on the ground.[68]

Intifada 3.0?

The contentious debates over "Palestine" on Google speak to the changing nature of physical and virtual spaces in the age of globalization and the digitization of the conflict. The internet is not a marginal space in the field of cultural production and the politics of resistance. Taken together with other practices, internet practices widen the space for subversive maneuvering. internet resistance allows Palestinians to voice their claims, to perpetuate their history, to mobilize, and to help construct or reconnect Palestinian narratives. "Palestine" is also a virtual space through which individuals imagine, maintain, and negotiate a nation and a state. While the internet affords empowering spaces and can be significant for grassroots activism, the disempowering materiality of technology shapes that very activism. As such, there are extremely important caveats that have been the central focus of the discussions above.

First, the political demands underlying much of Palestinian internet activism are not new, but shaped by a dynamic history. The implications of internet activism should be considered *in relation to* the offline world. As we have shown above, Palestinian activists must tactically avoid their digital occupation. They can use social media to mobilize and inform, but these practices expose them to surveillance and possible arrest. They can launch Facebook fan-based pages, but must abide by the corporations' rules. Facebook posts can receive thousands of "likes," but posts and likes are often unaccompanied by on-the-ground activity. Those in the diaspora can post on sites such as Palestine Remembered and help keep the memory of "Palestine" alive, but it does not help them return to their villages or rebuild what has been destroyed.

Second, although often playing an important role for international mobilization by Palestinian groups, the internet is seldom used as the primary tool in mobilization and campaign strategies targeting internal Palestinian politics. This is not simply because Palestinians experience occupation every day or because other mediums continue to be as important. It is because the power structures that exist in the "tangible" realm do not disappear in the "virtual" realm. The PA's and Hamas's crackdown on internet use mentioned above is a political reality. In the meantime, Israeli firms and Palestinian elites continue to profit from and exploit Palestinians, even in the virtual realm.

Finally, as we have evidenced, the internet faces territorial limitations, which are compounded by military measures and illegal competition by Israeli providers. Israeli official policy limits what equipment can be installed and defines how and where installation can take place. The Israeli military confiscates equipment and forbids its import (or delays approval of equipment requests), and occasionally destroys machinery and infrastructure during military operations. These practical consequences are not divorced from capitalist dogma but strongly shaped by it. Above and beyond that, while the Palestinian economy as a whole is pushed to liberalize, Israeli control, PA and Palestinian capital accumulation, and the hegemonic appeal of neoliberal policies remain unchallenged. Through the internet, new forms of colonialism are extended.

In summary, Palestinian internet resistance not only has to battle oppression at the hands of PA and Hamas, overcome that Fatah-Hamas division, and confront Israeli settler colonialism. It must also contend with cyber-colonialism, whose roots are deeply embedded in local and international interests. Any consideration of a "new politics" has to consider both the superstructure and its base—and the constant interaction in between. Contemporary political formations and identities must consider the content, audience, and flows on the internet, as well as the infrastructures, decisions, and controls that allow, constrain, and forbid these flows to occur. An intifada 3.0 will have to challenge both Israeli settler colonialism and the more seemingly "immaterial" cyber-colonialism. Only then can an intifada 3.0 serve as the model of a new paradigm of resistance in our hyper-capitalist global yet disparate and asymmetrical new network age.

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22    An explanation of the complex rhetoric and practice of development falls beyond the purview of this article. The majority of funding that we are referring to in this paper falls under the institutionally defined matrix of development, which includes assistance programs, foreign direct investments, multilateral trade agreements, the establishment of training centers, and the like. We agree with scholars that have problematized the ideological undercurrents of such development: Gilbert Rist, *The History of Development: From Western Origins to Global Faith* (New York: Zed Books, 2009); and Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995). In the specific context of Palestine, we also agree with Rex Brynen's critique, *A Very Political Economy* (2000), and Sara Roy's analysis of Palestinians being subject to what she terms "de-development." See Sara Roy, *Failing Peace: Gaza and the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict* (London: Pluto Press, 2006); and "US Economic Aid to the West Bank and Gaza Strip."

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# JERUSALEM'S SEPARATION WALL AND GLOBAL MESSAGE BOARD:
## GRAFFITI, MURALS, AND THE ART OF *SUMUD*

By Craig Larkin

All this graffiti that you see on the wall, even when it's not political,
is not an act of adjustment. It's an act of resistance!

*Shopkeeper from East Jerusalem, 9 February 2011*

Israel's "security fence" (*geder ha-hafrada*) or Palestine's "apartheid wall"
(*jidar al-faşl al-'unşuri*)[1] currently covers 708 kilometers, annexes 9.4 percent
of The West Bank, integrates eighty Israeli settlements, and separates about
fifty-five thousand Palestinian Jerusalemites from their kin in The West Bank.
The barrier's construction continues to provoke a wide range of resistance
discourses, international protests, and solidarity campaigns.[2] A plethora of
scholarship and media coverage has sought to challenge the wall's legality,[3]

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