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| **THIRD WORLD RESURGENCE**  http://www.twn.my/title2/resurgence/2015/301-302/cover10.htm |  |  |
| **The ghettoisation of Palestine - tourism as a tool of oppression and resistance**  While Israel has employed the most draconian measures to isolate and control Palestine and the Palestinians, there has been considerable creative resistance. Tourism in this context has become a means for connecting Palestinians to the external world and fostering solidarity. *Freya Higgins-Desbiolles* explains.  **Freeing Palestine through travel and tourism**  *'The 21st Century is witnessing the most blatant ghettoisation of a people since the Second World War'* - Australians for Justice in Palestine  THERE is no place like Palestine; a place of unique spiritual significance to some of the world's major religions, a place subject to settler-colonialism in an era in which such actions are antiquated, a place subject to severe oppression and seemingly beyond the provisions of international law and human rights as its oppressor acts with impunity. Such a situation sees travel and tourism used as political tools in a singular fashion, which could inform us not only about the specifics of this conflict situation, but also potentially about the role of tourism in the world we are creating.  Because of the decades of conflict and occupation, the Palestinian people have been under a complex and ever-changing regime of restricted movement which is quite unprecedented for a nation of people. While in the past, Israel's economy depended on cheap labour from Palestine and so movement was easier, it was the two intifadas that saw free movement extremely restricted. Israel's military used the issuance of permits to travel into Israel allegedly as a means to prevent terrorism and violence. In 2011 about 60,000 permits were issued; a token amount for a population of 2.5 million people.  As Ghassan Hage has pointed out, lying behind Israeli actions was a struggle by Israel 'to consolidate a "normal peaceful life" inside a colonial settler state.' built on the permanent dispossession of Palestinian people (for greater detail on the background to Israeli restrictions, see B'Tselem). In fact, it was the failure of the Oslo Process from 1993 and the failure to secure a viable Palestinian state which generated the hopelessness, humiliation and desperation that sparked the violence of the intifadas.  In 2006, Gaza was placed under an Israeli blockade because of the democratic election of Hamas (Europe and the US suspended aid, designating Hamas a terrorist organisation). While Hamas were labelled terrorists, a key factor was that this party was likely to prove less compliant or corruptible than the Fatah party, which was left to dominate the Palestinian National Authority governing the West Bank. This blockade has reinforced the cantonisation of Palestine and undermined hopes for a unified state despite international law declaring such actions illegal.  This is the context of the unprecedented restrictions on mobility which are the focus here.  This restriction of movement is carried out through physical structures, including permanent structures such as the well-known 'Apartheid Wall' (see box next page), numerous gates, trenches, checkpoints, guard towers, earthworks and bypass roads, but also temporary and unpredictable barriers through things like 'flying checkpoints'. These are supported by a complex system of permits administered by the Israeli military, which issues far too few passes for the number of Palestinians who need to travel to other places for work, education, medical care, to visit family or conduct religious pilgrimage, for instance. Some sites of Palestine are becoming almost completely cut off, including Jerusalem and Gaza.  Acknowledging that analysts such as Jeff Halper, with his articulation of Israel's 'matrix of control', and Sari Hanafi, with his concept of the 'politics of spacio-cide', have offered insightful discussions of these developments, what this article offers is an analysis of the role that tourism and travel plays in this systemic oppression, with an opportunity for gathering new insights into the situation.  The issue of the mobility of Palestinians has multiple angles, including the ability of Palestinians to travel within Palestine (under Occupation or into the territories of 1948) and travel on return journeys outwardly from Palestine, and non-Palestinians travelling to Palestine.  **The impediments to travel imposed on Palestinians**  Since the Occupation imposed from 1967, Palestinians have found it increasingly difficult and sometimes impossible to travel within Palestine and conduct return journeys out from Palestine. Understanding curbs to travel gets more complicated with the necessity to then adapt considerations of Palestinians living under occupation in the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza Strip, Palestinians living as citizens of Israel, Palestinians living stateless in refugee camps in the region and Palestinians living in diaspora throughout the world.  The restriction on movements of Palestinians is part of Israel's closure policy and sees such things as inability to travel within the West Bank, between the West Bank and Gaza, to East Jerusalem and into Israel, exit from any point of Palestine, or travel efficiently on public roads or transport systems. Arbitrary impositions include the need for a permit which can be very difficult to obtain, particularly for men of a certain age and with any record of imprisonment (when a majority of men have served time as political prisoners at some point during the Occupation).  In addition to the inconvenience of these obstacles to travel, there are considerable time and economic costs that have damaged the emerging Palestinian economy. For instance, many Palestinians are forced to use the Allenby Bridge to exit through Jordan for international business travel, which extends the length and costs of travel, if indeed travel is permitted.  The Gazan economy has been crippled by the closure of the borders under an Israeli blockade, seeing agricultural produce on which the economy depends rot at the checkpoints. Less tangible but no less negative is the racism underpinning these initiatives which degrades Palestinian lives, such as the highway networks of 'Jews-only' roads that are developed to connect the settlement outposts while isolating and preventing Palestinian movement between places previously very accessible and near.  The impacts of these arbitrary, discriminatory and oppressive restrictions prevent the Palestinians from enjoying the multiple benefits of mobility and tourism. This includes blocking Palestinians from accessing higher education opportunities overseas, which is most pronounced with the blockade of Gaza. As Amnesty International has noted: 'If a student wants to study for a degree that isn't offered in Gaza, or the programmes in Gaza don't meet the individual's needs, the student is expected to overcome a variety of obstacles to travel abroad or forgo academic aspirations altogether.'  Additionally, checkpoints, border restrictions and policies work to undermine an emerging Palestinian tourism sector. For instance, the manager of the Jericho Resort gave a testimonial to the Israeli human rights organisation B'Tselem in 2011 attesting to how the resort has been crippled as checkpoints and barriers have hampered domestic travel, diaspora travel and international travel with the inclusion of Jericho, a significant tourism location, into Area A (areas in the West Bank under full Palestinian control) from 2000.  At a more personal level, Raja Shehadeh's book Palestinian Walks evokes his anguish, as an avid walker of the Palestinian landscape, at the increasing barriers to unrestricted trekking; but even more than that, he records 'a vanishing landscape' under Israeli occupation and settlements. Another example concerns the ability of Palestinians of all categories to undertake 'visiting friends and relatives' forms of travel which are seriously impeded by these policies. B'Tselem captured the story of Nihayah Seif who explained how she is separated from her family in Jordan as a result of marrying a resident of Tulkarm in the West Bank and how she may never see her elderly mother again. With these anecdotes, we begin to sense the imposed immobility and its effects.  A final illustration is found in the more well-known case of the Palestinian soccer team which is the only national team in the world that competes under occupation, thus finding it difficult to get sufficient training together as a team as permits and checkpoints often impede their training and competition schedules; they have also suffered the loss of players in the bombing of Gaza in 2009.  Arguably the worst harm imposed concerns Jerusalem. As Rifat Kassis described it in 2014, Jerusalem represents 'the city we love most and visit least'. As both a religious and political centre, Jerusalem is the most contested site and arouses the greatest passions. With the creation of Israel, Jerusalem was divided and both sides in the conflict have considered it vital for their peoples' future. With the Occupation from 1967, Israel took control of East Jerusalem but went further in illegally annexing it and saying an undivided Jerusalem is its capital.  In East Jerusalem, Israel has committed gross violations of international law. Rifat Kassis describes this by noting how simultaneously Israel works to dispossess the people of Jerusalem by revoking their residency unfairly and settle its own population in imposed settlements, with the effect that 'Israel is not simply trying to find its place in Jerusalem. Rather, it is trying to monopolise Jerusalem … and exclude Palestinian Christians and Muslims from the city'.  Connected to this inability of Palestinians outside of Jerusalem to travel into Jerusalem is the attempt to expel Palestinians from residing in East Jerusalem. The Palestinians of East Jerusalem are in a special legal category under modern Israeli law. Most of them are not Israeli citizens, nor are they classified the same way as people in Gaza or the West Bank; instead they are permanent residents. In recent years, significant efforts have been made to displace the Palestinians of East Jerusalem, in some cases rendering families homeless for the second or third time since the Nakba of 1948.  A World Bank report of 2007 entitled 'Movement and access restrictions in the West Bank' informs us of the impacts of these restrictions. It states: 'While Israeli security concerns are undeniable and must be addressed, it is often difficult to reconcile the use of closure for security purposes from its use to expand and protect settlement activity and the relatively unhindered movement of settlers in and out of the West Bank. Limiting Palestinian access to the important agricultural and tourist potential of the Jordan Valley is one such example.'  This section has only briefly addressed the impediments to free movement of Palestinians. The justifications for such a system of impediments are contradictory, with some claiming they ensure Israeli security and others labelling it a blatant land grab and secret agenda for ethnic cleansing. However, a testimony gathered by B'Tselem from an anonymous Israeli soldier offers a different insight: 'The spirit of things was to make life unbearable for the Palestinians. Stop them, inspect them a thousand and one times so that they won't want to drive that route. It seemed stupid to me. You harm people's livelihood, harm people's life, detain children on the way to school, what good can come from this to the army, or to the country?'  **The impediments to travel to and within Palestine imposed on international visitors**  A different issue to consider is the Israeli ability to determine who can visit Palestine and under what degree of difficulty. It is significant that tourists cannot get to Palestine without passing through an Israeli control point; since 1967 Israel has controlled all entry points to Palestine, including Ben Gurion International Airport in Israel and all land crossings including from Jordan, with access by the Allenby Bridge or Wadi Araba, and from Egypt, with the Taba Crossing. If one is travelling with the clear intent to visit Palestine, it in fact can be quite difficult to pass through such border points.  As the Grassroots Guide to Jerusalem guidebook advises: 'Landing in Palestine can be stressful. Expect to face rigorous questioning about your political and religious affiliations, your recent travels and your plans while in the country. If you have stamps from other Arab countries in your passport you can expect prolonged questioning upon arrival and departure. Keep in mind that social media profiles may be accessed by guards as a condition of entry. Israeli authorities are interested in limiting the number of international activists and visitors to the "Palestinian territories".'  However, it is often even worse for Palestinian visitors with dual nationality, visitors of Palestinian descent as well as visitors of Arabic heritage. There is also no guarantee that people attempting to enter Israel as a gateway to Palestine through any crossing will not be turned back altogether, particularly if they are identified as supporters of Palestine.  Tourists are confronted with a series of impediments to movement into and around Palestine. One can simply be the lengthy and arduous extra border crossings that Israeli Occupation entails. For all but the most intrepid traveller, such impediments, insecurity and uncertainty deter the desire to visit Palestinian areas. Furthermore, if one hopes for the development of reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians, the fact that since 2001 it has been discouraged if not illegal for Israeli citizens to travel into Area A in the West Bank undermines any hope that understanding can develop through cross-cultural contact.  This discouragement of international tourism matters in a multitude of ways. Like many developing nations, Palestine looks to tourism as a source of income and employment, and it should have a competitive advantage with its holy sites, rich culture and unique natural assets. But more fundamentally in a world predicated on globalisation and the interaction of peoples, a country is left in a state of profound social isolation if cut off so starkly from the global community. This may in fact be a key reason why the Palestinian narrative of the Nakba and oppression has so little traction in some quarters against the Israeli narrative of the plucky little Western democracy in a sea of danger in the Middle East.  **Tourism as a tool for resisting enforced isolation**  While Israel has worked very hard to isolate and control Palestine and Palestinians through the measures recounted here, there has been considerable creative resistance. Tourism in this context has become a means for connecting Palestinians to the external world and fostering solidarity. Palestine represents one of the leading sites for solidarity or justice tourism, advanced at a number of levels.  For instance, in reaction to the travel restrictions imposed on Palestinians of the West Bank which block them from the 'simple joys at the beach', a group of Israeli women formed a movement called 'We will not obey' with an aim to smuggle Palestinian women into Israel to visit the beach and other prohibited places. In a newspaper announcement they explained: 'We cannot assent to the legality of the Law of Entry into Israel, which allows every Israeli and every Jew to move freely in all regions between the Mediterranean and the Jordan River while depriving Palestinians of this same right. They are not permitted free movement within the occupied territories nor are they allowed into the towns and cities across the green line, where their families, their nation, and their traditions are deeply rooted.  'They and we, all ordinary citizens, took this step with a clear and resolute mind. In this way we were privileged to experience one of the most beautiful and exciting days of our lives, to meet and befriend our brave Palestinian neighbours, and together with them, to be free women, if only for one day.'  Specifically focused on the Palestinian diaspora, the 'Know thy heritage' programme founded by Palestinian businessman Rateb Rabie, created to reconnect youth in the Palestinian diaspora with their homeland, demonstrates another approach. With funds raised from Palestinian businesses in the West Bank and the US, these tours have had less of a political focus than the Israeli Birthright tours they are compared to and instead focus on economic ties for future investment and state development. While this cannot address one of the biggest issues in the conflict, 'the right of return', what it does do is ensure that Palestinians compelled to live in diaspora are helped to continue their connections to Palestine.  Palestine is also home to a cutting-edge tourism NGO, the Alternative Tourism Group of Palestine (ATG), which has an extensive programme of solidarity and justice tours. ATG Executive Director Rami Kassis has defined justice tourism as 'a social and cultural response to the policy of cultural domination as reflected in the globalisation of tourism'. ATG's work in Palestine occurs on a number of levels, from reaching religious pilgrims by calling on them to hear the 'Living Stones' of Palestine, to solidarity tours aiding Palestinian farmers to undertake their olive harvests, to half-day tours to reach backpackers and the independent travel segment. ATG has modelled best practice in global-local commitment and action, as it models justice tourism practice, participates in policy and planning within Palestine, while also contributing to global action through such initiatives as the Tourism Advocacy and Action Forum.  Additionally, travel and mobility has also been used by transnational solidarity activists as a tool for advocacy, consciousness-raising and tangible action. Prominent examples include the Gaza flotilla and the 2011-12 'aerial flotillas' which were/are aimed at drawing attention to Israel's border restrictions and the impacts of occupation as well as tangibly breaking the imposed isolation of the Palestinian people.  The Gaza flotillas were started in 2008 by a group of Palestinian, Israeli and international activists aiming to break the Israeli blockade imposed on Gaza by bringing in humanitarian assistance and to express solidarity with Gazans. The aerial flotillas followed with a campaign called 'Welcome to Palestine' and involved internationals attempting to fly into Israel to reach Palestine from all over the world. Event organiser Fahdi Tantas stated: 'The idea was for them to come in and say, "We are going to Palestine", to change the discourse and what is required usually from a foreigner coming to Palestine. It is a basic right for them and for us Palestinians to receive our guests.'  However, the dangers of transnational solidarity activism were starkly revealed with the killing of nine activists in May 2010 when Israeli naval commandos stormed the Gaza flotilla ship the Mavi Marmara, sparking international outrage, but little change to Israeli practices.  One final initiative to mention is the 'Open Bethlehem' campaign and the Bethlehem passport initiative of 2005 which had a declared aim of making the city open to anyone in the world. In reaction to the isolation imposed by the building of the Apartheid Wall around Bethlehem and other impediments to access to and from the city, 'the initiative is designed to transcend imprisonment'. As the website stated: 'Open Bethlehem's vision is to support a lasting peace settlement between Palestine and Israel using Bethlehem as a doorway for global engagement. As an iconic city, and a Palestinian city, Bethlehem has both power and responsibility to act and use its global outreach to promote positive change.'  Open Bethlehem built a campaign focused on the Bethlehem passport, 'a symbolic citizenship of an iconic town that stands for Joy and Goodwill to all'. Such efforts are intended to raise awareness and promote solidarity.  However, these efforts represent small niches reaching only small numbers of tourists to the area. It is clear that Israel controls the vast majority of tourists who travel to Israel/Palestine and this has ramifications on the ability of Palestinians to connect with the outside world. As Rifat Kassis of Kairos Palestine stated: 'During the past few decades, Israel has actively prevented Palestinians from taking the initiative in their own tourism industry. Since Israel controls all of Palestine's borders and regulates all movement inside those borders, impeding Palestinian-led tourism is just another tactic employed by a comprehensive occupation.'  Most tourists book with Israeli tourism agencies, use Israeli tour guides, stay in Israeli hotels, and therefore receive Israeli perspectives. In fact, tourists may visit sites like Bethlehem in the West Bank and not even realise they have crossed from Israel into Palestine. When this is added to Israel's capacity as an occupying power to restrict tourism infrastructure and tourism services (such as limiting Palestinian tour guide licences) and to deter the visitor in a multitude of ways, tourism in Palestine remains in an imposed infancy.  Despite this situation, Palestinians are forced to use tourism to the best of their capacities to foster solidarity through the social contact it might offer even in these inauspicious conditions. In fact Kassis has been one of the leaders of the Kairos Initiative which was launched in 2009 and challenged visitors, particularly pilgrims, to 'come and see'. As Kassis argued, these initiatives are based on truthfulness and 'was born of our belief in the significance of tourism as an economic, political, and spiritual force that can effectively and truthfully advocate for the Palestinian struggle and for peace with justice through Palestinian-organised tours'.  **Conclusion**  For better or worse, our world is now characterised by mobility. Those who are mobile are able to better thrive in this era when being connected is everything. This article has looked at how obstacles to the benefits of travel and tourism are used to ghettoise Palestinians as an attempt to break their spirit and block their access to transnational solidarity. Yet, following the dialectics of oppression, travel and tourism are also clearly used as tools of resistance; in fact Palestine has gifted us the example of ATG which has been a global leader in justice tourism.  This holds relevance beyond the borders of Palestine. It asks us to reimagine tourism: rather than being merely the hedonistic activity of modern mass tourism or, worse, the oppressive force of exploitation of workers and destination communities in the corporatised form of tourism, we see in this example the potentiality of a political form of tourism to create bonds of understanding, solidarity and political transformation. Freeing Palestine through travel and tourism may just be a step in freeing ourselves.  *Freya Higgins-Desbiolles is a Senior Lecturer in Tourism at the School of Management, University of South Australia. She has researched and taught in Tourism Studies for more than a decade; using a critical, activist approach, her work focuses on human rights, justice and equity issues in tourism. She is a founding member of the Tourism Advocacy and Action Forum, an affiliate of Equality in Tourism and co-convener of the International Peace Tourism Commission of the International Peace Research Association.*  **References**  B'Tselem (no date). http://www.btselem.org.  Grassroots Jerusalem (2014). The Grassroots Guide to Jerusalem, Jerusalem: Grassroots Jerusalem.  Hage, G. (2003). '"Comes a time we are all enthusiasm": Understanding Palestinian suicide bombers in times of exighophobia', Public Culture, 15(1): 56-89.  Halper, J. (2009). 'Dismantling the matrix of control', http://www.merip.org/mero/mero091109.  Hanafi, S. (2009). 'Spacio-cide: Colonial politics, invisibility and rezoning in Palestinian territory', Contemporary Arab Affairs, 2(1): 106-121.  Kassis, R.O. (2014). 'Jerusalem: The city we love most and visit least', http://www.maannews.com/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?id=689634 (accessed 15 April 2014).  Kassis, R.O. (2015). 'A Kairos perspective of tourism and pilgrimage: Come and see', This Week in Palestine, 204: 22-28.  World Bank (2007). 'Movement and access restrictions in the West Bank: Uncertainty and inefficiency in the Palestinian economy', http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTWESTBANKGAZA/Resources/WestBankrestrictions9Mayfinal.pdf   |  | | --- | | **The 'Apartheid Wall'**  THE 'Apartheid Wall' describes a separation barrier built by Israel allegedly to protect itself from attacks originating in the West Bank. It is particularly controversial because, in places, it goes inside the 1949 Armistice Line (or 'Green Line') and therefore expropriates Palestinian land. It also separates Palestinians from their schools, their fields, their relatives and from each other, and, together with limited crossings with limited opening hours, arguably localises people affected in a way that is more suited to the dark ages. On completion, it will be approximately 700 kilometres in length. Amongst the other impacts of the impediments to movement the Wall causes, it undermines possibilities to harness tourism for Palestinian benefit as it cuts off major tourist drawcards such as the holy site of Rachel's Tomb from Palestinian control.  More significantly, such actions work to negate feelings of autonomy and well-being for Palestinians. Writing inscribed on the wall entitled 'The Wall is on my heart' expressed this: 'After the Wall around Rachel's Tomb was built, I felt terrible. Nobody was walking here, only the cats and dogs. The wall creates a feeling ... the feeling that it surrounds you; that you are not permitted to move. Every time, every day you see the Wall. When I look outside through the window to see the sunrise or the sunset the Wall is in front of me. When I go to the Wall I feel that something closes in my heart, as if the Wall is on my heart … When I see the Wall I also feel ashamed of myself, because it is created by human beings. - Melvina, Bethlehem'  The International Court of Justice made a ruling in 2004 that the 'construction by Israel of a wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and its associated regime are contrary to international law'; and yet it continues to be built largely unimpeded. |   ***\*Third World Resurgence No. 301/302, September/October 2015, pp 43-47*** |  |  |
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