

Women on Wars and Walls: Cultural Poetics from Palestine to South Texas¹

Kamala Platt

I strive never to forget the real world consequences of my decisions.

—Sonia Sotomayor, in accepting nomination to Supreme Court, August 10, 2009

And if they can shake in Georgia, they can shake all across America. And if enough of our voices join together, we can bring those walls tumbling down. The walls of Jericho can finally come tumbling down. That is our hope—but only if we pray together, and work together, and march together.

—Barack Obama, Ebenezer Baptist Church, Atlanta, GA, Jan. 20, 2008²

Evolving Technologies and Strategies: Walls, Wars, Poetics y Las Luchas...

During her time there, Rachel became our eyes and ears of [Palestine] as she told us about the tanks and bulldozers passing by, about the homes with tank-shell holes in their walls, about the rapidly multiplying Israeli army towers with snipers lurking along the horizon, about Apache helicopters and invisible drones buzzing over the city for hours at a time, about wells and greenhouses, and olive groves destroyed, and about the giant metal wall being built around Gaza.³

—“Remarks about Rachel by Corrie family,” read at peace rallies, worldwide, April 12, 2003

Global Positioning Systems (GPS) and geocaching technologies will be used to provide alternative walking tours, whereby for example, the viewer will be able to walk through downtown Olympia and view what they would see if they were walking down a street in Rafah, or viewing the wall on U.S./México border, etc. These locations would be layered upon each other, changing the way great distances are experienced.

—Olympia Rafah Solidarity Mural Project⁴

From presidential candidates to artists and social justice activists, from South Texas to Palestine, people from across social identities join together to reject wall-building and the philosophy of division and domination inherent in political-boundary barriers.⁵ A poetics

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countering wall-building is evoked in poetry, song, sermon, film, narratives, e-mail, webpages, blogs, in artwork, sometimes on the very walls being protested, and increasingly, on Facebook, Twitter and other web venues. Such cultural poesis occurs across the globe where political partition separates communities despite legacies of shared—if at times contentiously—land, culture and environment.

Much of my previous writing on women's work has focused on cultural poetics of environmental justice created and promoted by women; I investigated situations of inequity and violence against women, people of color, people in economic straits, and against those marginalized or disenfranchised by social identity; my focus was on their creative work, activism and study. Such an approach is interdisciplinary, a melding of humanities and social science study. This article uses similar criteria—within the chronicling of poetics is description of hidden facets of misogyny and racism and interventions against such bigotry. With this approach, I hope to address the kind of misrepresentations of lived experience that allowed for widespread acceptance of the "demonization" of Dr. Tiller's practice in Wichita, Kansas and the women he served, his murder one of several events that interrupted—and projected itself into—my writing. While the misconstrued caricatures of the people in the U.S.-México borderlands and those in Palestine and its diaspora differ from caricatures of the Kansas doctor, the misrepresentations serve a common purpose in maintaining power over already disenfranchised groups, groups in which, mimicking society in general, some women maintain a place at the bottom of the bottom, their needs swept, like dirt, under rugs. Yet, simultaneously, these women serve as the proverbial feminine Atlas holding up or letting splat the earth.

Like these issues of power and representation, militarism, domination and erection of walls in borderlands divided by politically-delineated boundaries is not new. What has changed are the tools for warring—technologies (including high-tech) of barrier-building, "homeland security" tactics and toxic weaponry with lethal longevity, and the techno-militarization used by Israel against Palestinians, and by the U.S. domestically, against immigrants and borderlanders on its own southern border, and internationally, particularly in the "middle east."^{6, 7} Longstanding political boundaries have changed, along with the intensity, focus, and nature of U.S. enforcement with its shifting wars and occupations; on the Pakistani border with Afghanistan, U.S. drones and other techno-militarization increasingly threaten civilian communities even as the Obama Administration's first months brought welcome and relatively peaceable overtures in some realms. In these instances of warring and walling where newfangled domination is heralded as improving U.S. security interests, U.S. taxpayers continue to hold the purse, if not the purse-strings, to finance the evolving forms of aggression in which civilians, often women and their children, are frequent victims who suffer the "real world consequences," to use Sonia Sotomayor's terminology.

Yet, the evolving technologies shape new art as well as new militarization tactics. They give 20th century victims the tools to be survivors in the new millennium. As this first section's final epigraph

describes, artists and activists in Olympia, Washington, working in memory of Rachel Corrie, a 23-year-old Olympian killed by an Israeli tank while nonviolently protesting a home demolition in Gaza, use recent technology to collapse the distances between local and global struggle. Their mission and goals statement explains their solidarity mural project: "The images in the mural will articulate how the issues of oppression in Palestine and Israel connect to local and national issues. The goal of the project is to use culture to increase the strength and visibility of a movement that will continue to work for social change in Palestine, the U.S. and the world."⁸ Such projects, which integrate new technologies with more seasoned strategies and long-standing traditions as they intervene in wall- and war-building in politically partitioned areas, will be considered in the following pages.

Throughout this article, my own grassroots work on arenas of war and walls has intervened in the writing process; though largely laptop activism, this has nonetheless contributed to my discussion of women's response to, and experiences of, walls, wars and borderlands. Because of these interconnections, the article evolved simultaneously as a narrative of specific places and events through expressive poetics, and as a series of beginnings, introductions to the topic through the pressing event, crisis, outrageous situation or victory of each day I sat at the computer. Some of the everyday crisis-based writing has stayed intact and some has worked its way into other aspects of my contribution to visualizing the "invisible battlefields" on which women's cultural poetics is found.

When the progressive listservs I've joined sent news that former Congresswoman Cynthia McKinney, Noble laureate Mairead Maguire, and others aboard the boat Spirit of Humanity on a humanitarian mission to Gaza were seized by the Israeli military, I suspended writing to sign a petition for their release and for ending the Gaza siege, adding the comment "The Israeli military functions with U.S. taxpayers' money; as a taxpayer, I am almost as outraged as I am as a compassionate human being with a sense of justice and a yearning for peace and health for this world." I could have written the same sentence substituting for the Israeli military the barrier-building militarization in borderlands from Southmost Preserve, just east of Brownsville west, which, despite promises otherwise, President Obama appears to be continuing. Partially due to Congress's response to moneyed wall-building interests, it is still a particularly disheartening development given Candidate Obama's beautiful riff on dismantling walls that begins the article. My comment could apply to U.S. wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, and now Pakistan. What I write of the borderlands where I live applies to homelands that the U.S. and its allies have marginalized and dominated elsewhere; as Gloria Anzaldúa noted in *Borderlands* and many times thereafter, those who are mestiza, by ethnicity or experience, take our borderlands with us.

From knitting pink squares for the Code Pink comforter that wrapped the White House this Spring, to composing comments on border wall-building for environmental impact statements, to marching along the South Texas border on a warm Spring Break Sunday, to

following Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT) chronicling Israeli settler encroachment on Palestinian villages and their making peace by “getting in the way” in return, my response to these issues has been patchwork, one that feels more like mending a disintegrating system than envisioning transformative patterns of change that the environmental and socioeconomic state of the world demands and that election of Barack Obama once promised.⁹



Collage of Palestinian wall art (from Anna's Baltzer website wall album) in Art Exhibit against the Wall hung on the then most recently built portion of wall in Hope Park, Brownsville, February 28, 2010 and subsequently hung at Galleria 409, Brownsville, TX. The piece is hung on the Mexican side of the wall, while a portion of a Memorial Wreath hanging on the U.S. side is visible in the foreground. On both sides of the border, such wreaths are traditionally erected at the place of death of a loved one. Photo by Emmy Perez.

Invisible Battlegrounds in Borderlands

Four years ago, I described the impact of war and occupation on the lives of Iraqi and Palestinian women as their role oscillates between victim and resistor. I reminded my audience that women are not just passive victims of conflict, even if their contribution to their national resistance movements and to the survival of their families and communities remains insufficiently catalogued.

—Nadine Saliba, International Women's Day Statement, Plaza de Zacate, San Antonio, TX, March 8, 2008¹⁰

Today as I walked on top of the rubble where homes once stood, Egyptian soldiers called to me from the other side of the border. . . . It reminded me of how much, to some degree, we are all kids curious about other kids: Egyptian kids shouting at strange women wandering into the path of tanks. Palestinian kids shot from the tanks when they peak [sic] out from behind walls to see what's going on. International kids standing in front of tanks with banners. Israeli kids in the tanks anonymously, occasionally shouting—and also occasionally waving—many forced to be here, many just aggressive, shooting into the houses as we wander away.

—Rachel Corrie, e-mail from Rafah, February 7, 2003.

The violence against humans and the greater ecological world is illuminated through the cultural poetics of those who—like the writers of this section's epigraphs—stand against warfare, structural domination, for-profit detention of immigrants, and wall-building. Reading cultural expression through a feminist lens, I examine a few of the ever-growing number of cultural texts from the movements against two sets of border walls—one built by the U.S. against México in the frontera, in particular, those borderlands in the Rio Grande Valley (RGV) of South Texas, and one built by Israel against Palestinian communities. Given the world-wide militarization led by the U.S., it is not surprising that walls against México and against Palestine share aspects on a variety of levels including designers, builders and profiteers in common.¹¹ Impacted communities and protestors against these walls also share sentiments of resistance: survival despite political and cultural domination and environmental injustice, a bond with their land, sky, waters, and the ecological communities these sustain, and a grito for local self-determination.

The "invisible battlefields" in "Women on Wars and Walls" are primarily literal or figurative borderlands; hence, this article is a meditation on borderlands beyond or between "normal" comfort zones, places where marginalization and violence are perpetrated based on divisions of lived experience, perspective, and subject position, women whose work is discussed describe a borderland of separation, even exile, from their family's motherlands in Palestine, or in the Americas south of the border. This study draws on work from South Texas and from Palestine, its diaspora and Palestinian solidarity allies; it draws mainly on diaspora and solidarity work. Though cultural poetics of resistance created by women in Palestine exists, the cultural production is restricted by Israeli government repression in comparison to what can be produced in the Palestinian Diaspora. Additionally, access to cultural resistance—from the diaspora, but especially from Palestine—is further limited by mainstream U.S., Israeli and other governments and media. Opportunities for exposure to resistance poetics are being cultivated in cultural initiatives such as Palestinian Film Festivals, which have been flourishing in the U.S. and internationally. The Houston Palestinian Film Festival website explains that organizers hope "to directly expose our local community to the perspective of artists as a first step toward circumventing the many government and media filters that pollute our understanding of Palestine and the wider region."¹² Similar goals are expressed on other Palestinian film festival websites and the growing movement represents a successful means of furthering political knowledge and communication through cultural expression.

Originating in Palestinian civil society, another movement has been growing in significance and support, especially since the Israeli attacks on Gaza in winter 2008-2009. The Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI) was initiated in April, 2004 in Ramallah as part of a Palestinian call for a comprehensive—economic, cultural and academic—boycott of, divestment from, and sanctions against (BDS) Israel until it complies with International Law and Universal Principles of Human Rights. Explaining the boycott, the Campaign website draws connections

with international divestment in South Africa that contributed to the termination of apartheid there: "The Palestinian Campaign is inspired by the historic role played by people of conscience in the international community of scholars and intellectuals who have shouldered the moral responsibility to fight injustice, as exemplified in their struggle to abolish apartheid in South Africa through diverse forms of boycott."¹³ Discussing the BDS movement, Naomi Klein demonstrates the need for a boycott when she situates the push for "security" as countering the interest of "peace." "There already is a huge part of the Israeli economy . . . saying, 'We don't want peace. We want the status quo. We want security, not peace.' There has to be another section of the Israeli economy that says 'No, we need peace.'"¹⁴

This equation of security at the cost of peace is also transferable to a different hemisphere's borderland, as is the movements' need for outside support. On a different scale, and without the level of international solidarity for (or even knowledge of) the struggle there, access to the political reality on the ground in the South Texas-México borderlands through cultural poetics is constrained by factors that, in some ways, parallel those in the Palestinian diaspora: The lack of understanding of borderland lived experience in the rest of the country, especially in Washington, D.C., is perceived as a major hurdle by those in the movement against the border wall. This article is dedicated to the work of "shaking walls" in the belief that increasing familiarity with the activism and poetics of these two struggles, and the historical perspectives they reveal, can aid in deepening trans-cultural empathy with the communities involved, and in so doing contribute to the dismantling of walls and the disarmament and revolutionary reconfiguration of militaries.

Outside the borderlands, the people here have most often been portrayed in the stereotypes used to dominate by colonizing forces worldwide as uncultured, violent, and undeveloped. Inside, as in other colonized places, (post)colonial realities are tempered by ironies and nuances, creating quite different narratives of the sense and historicity of the place; the lack of communication of borderland realities beyond their limits will be only more solidified in the building of walls and the waiving of constitution rights. Yet this is not widely comprehended outside the borderland. Sadly, a poet attending school in the RGV reported that when she contacted Move-On about launching a national internet activism campaign against the wall, she was told it was a "local issue."

These border-homelands are described by women who may or may not consider themselves feminist but who share the tenets of social equity and justice with feminism and, in some cases, do an arguably better job at these tenets than self-professed feminists have. These women are feminist in the sense that they bring their most personal evaluation of the social structure to their political decision-making, and vice versa: they voice their politics through creative expression and intelligent organization and alliance-building as artists, activists, writers, and scholars. I mention women as if the group is homogenous—clearly, it is not. Suffice it to say, my use of terminology implies inclusion and not erasure of those in the bor-

derlands of gendered experience who, like other border-crossers, often and nearly universally, face the cruelest of social barriers. When sites for life on the margins are seen as borderlands, gender itself may be a primary factor in marginalization, as may sexual orientation, expression of belief systems, national origin, gender identities and various combinations of these social identifiers. Nor does it preclude men, many of whom, like the women involved, have worked tirelessly, put their expressive work, careers and lives on the line, faced the crossfire, and even died in struggle against walls and wars.¹⁵ Furthermore, feminists, womanists, *mujeristas*, and their allies have all contributed to the larger constellations of the art, politics, theory and life described in these pages; most, but not all, are also women. My aim is to use gender to categorically focus the discussion, not as a tool of essentialism that blurs the vision.

South Texas: Colonialism and Confluences

The first colonization of the "Americas" by Europe dismembered the land and put in motion a process that wiped out Indigenous peoples and their civilizations. Zionist colonization of Palestine has also dismembered the land and attempted to eradicate the Indigenous people's cultural identity and destroy any sign of their previous presence in the land.

—Nadine Saliba¹⁶

The land is our birthright in this place now called Texas, and its history contains our Gettysburg, our Trail of Tears, the seeds of our culture. The land proves we've been here, we belong here. On these treasured memories, these beloved bones, that dreaded wall will rise.

—Michelle Garcia¹⁷

My analysis of the rhetoric and literal effects of the walling of the Texas-México partition at the Rio Grande stems most immediately from my presence in the South Texas borderlands with Northeastern Mexican, and my involvement in and observations of "no border wall" activism (both physical and online), while employing earlier work in postcolonial and cultural studies theory, in particular, my studies of women's cultural poetics of environmental justice. The following description originated in a statement I prepared for the open comment period of a 2007 Environmental Impact Statement draft:¹⁸

I write from a borderland, famously described by Gloria Anzaldúa, as "una herida abierta," an open wound. But this wound is also a womb, a place of development, growth and nurturance for nature, for culture, for economic growth, and for domination, war-making and intelligence-gathering. (Yes, the wound has metastasized across the country and has been magnified by national press reportage, but examinations rarely delve into it deeply enough to see that it is a wound from which birth is given.) This wound/ wombland is a nexus of criss-crossing migratory routes of birds and butterflies, of workers of all colors of collars, of cultural and corporate flux, the place where, as if in an Escher image, U.S. guns morph into Mexican drugs like a clandestine affair of

goods more intimately conjoined than is admitted openly. It is a channel of birth where human trafficking brings top profits following only those from drugs and guns, where shoppers in the malls and tienditas from both sides cross over for better goods or better deals on necessities and luxuries on the other side, en el otro lado.

Essential to understanding current Texas, or as arguably better reflects history, Tejas perspectives on wall-building on its southern boundary is unraveling the origins of that festering “herida abierta”—the complex of settler colonialism and land grabs and domination through foreign law, ethnicity/race-based structural and direct violence, the political economies of slavery, serfdoms and war—all this and more is housed in South Texas’ colonial history. When read together, Saliba and Garcia suggest that colonization is a backdrop to current physical and technological partition in both South Texas and Palestine. Multiple layers of colonization are part of the legacies of Palestinians, Mexicans and Chican@s, as well as perhaps all indigenous groups in North America to varying degrees. Lands have been taken and settled and peoples displaced. Military occupations and genocides have occurred previously, but the physical and technological partitioning undertaken at millennium’s turning may have little historical precedent in either region.

Planned as a result of the powers Congress gave the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) in the Secure Fence Act of 2006, the Texas wall is an extension of earlier wall-building in California and Arizona that began in the 1990s. In South Texas, the antiwall movement might fit the definition of a 20th century new social movement in that it is a loosely aligned coalition invested in fighting the physical partition and militarization (both physical and technological) in the borderlands. However, like many environmental justice campaigns, the antiborder wall movement synthesizes older social movement concerns about economic well-being and new social movement concerns based in social identity, environmental and social justice issues.¹⁹ Indeed, concerns about drones, computer tracking and other technological apparatus that threaten well-being in targeted ways, as well as issues such as waivers and other legislative or judicial invasions of basic human rights based on social factors, involve both well-being and social identity in newfangled combinations while engaging simultaneously in the old-fashioned colonial violence this section’s epigraphs note.

A strong representation of expressive poetics is being created in this movement to counter the wall building in the Texas-México borderland. In this struggle, indigenous women stand up to intrusion onto family properties that date back centuries to Spanish land grants and to indigenous communities prior to European occupation. Some anti-wall activists renounce plans that could endanger habitat and migration trails for one of the richest and most complex concentrations of wildlife in the U.S. Statements from Indigenous and environmental groups name this wall-building as a degradation of spiritual and material relations with La Tierra Madre. Environmental groups such as the Sierra Club and Defenders of Wildlife have of-

ferred significant contributions to the antiwall struggle including legal action against walls, particularly in ecologically and culturally sensitive and/or distinctive areas. Some antiwall activists, like those in the "Border Ambassadors," have deep concerns about immigrants rights issues such as "for profit" detention centers for the "under-documented," some of which even detain children. They declare "No Wall Between Amigos" and have been conducting "walks" across the endangered border areas to call attention to their declarations.²⁰ The No-Border Wall website is managed by Stefanie Herweck and Scott Nicol, some of the most informed, creative and hardworking of the activists in the RGV; along with others, they provided photographs for selection for this article.

As the wall-building made its way east and Texans became aware of the possibility, and then with the 2006 Secure Fence Act, the probability that walls would encroach on their land, coalitions formed in the dread of and defiance against wall-building. Many in the political and economic power structure from El Paso to Brownsville became involved through the Texas Border Coalition.²¹ Local indigenous landowners such as Eloisa Tamez staved off the wall-building until the summer of 2009 through lawsuits that identified the irregularities and illegal aspects of the DHS's assault, thus initially protecting her rights. Her resistance is described by Margo, her daughter, in another article in this journal. They are among the women involved in the cause I've gotten to know through both online and on foot activism, when I joined both listservs and marches against the walls, detention centers and other border violence. The No Border Wall listserv, and several other progressive listservs in the RGV work as a means of dispersing information, sharing poetics, discussing strategies and promoting related causes.

Initially, the deadline for the wall's completion was to have been the end of December, 2008—mere weeks before the inauguration of a new president and the administration that he or she would appoint. Many activists against the wall believed that if they could not terminate the building of the wall through local activism and lawsuits based on environmental damage and suspension of cultural and civil rights and the failure by the Bush-Cheney Administration and their DHS to follow prescribed procedure to consult local landowners, they could at least delay the wall's building until what we believed would surely be a wiser, less vitriolic administration replaced them. Despite both their votes for the Secure Fence Act of 2006, Hillary Clinton condemned the wall-building and Barack Obama also voiced his condemnation in a rare admission of agreement.²² Both said local communities must be consulted in issues of border security. The RGV welcomed both candidates' attention in February 2008, preceding the Texas primaries, and, significantly, the Valley resembled Washington, D.C. more closely than it did the rest of (red) Texas at the polls in November 2008, when most all in the borderlands voted solidly for "change."

The small but well-voiced attention Obama paid to indigenous rights issues during his campaign was another thread of hope held by some who opposed the wall, a hope that, since, has all but unraveled. Since the Fall of 2007, the Lipan Apache Women's Defense

founded in El Calaboz by Margo and Eloise Tamez has been one of the leading forces on several fronts—legal, media, legislative and appellate.²³ The Lipan Apache Women Defense sent President-elect Obama a statement against the wall and borderland militarization that was signed by many, predominantly indigenous, women in solidarity. Soon after Obama's win, border politicians penned a letter to him calling for termination of the wall and quoting State Senator Eliot Shapleigh's observation that, "Already in churches and homes from Chihuahua to Buenos Aires these walls are called muros de odio, symbols of hatred for which America is now known."²⁴

Tragically, a year after Barack Obama took office, wall-building in South Texas continues; money for the project, while diminished from Bush Era, continues to be budgeted and in summer 2009, the Senate even passed legislation for more "muros de odio." In wall-building, as in many issues, the Obama Administration's plans for a more progressive agenda have been thwarted by both attacks and compromises. The movement against the continued wall-building in the borderlands has seen little support from the rest of the nation despite continuous local resistance and vigilance, student and community trips to Washington, D.C. in Spring 2009 to discuss the issue, and the production of writing, film and other expressive, investigative and scholarly work. Though largely ignored, nationally, the poetics of the RGV anti-wall movement, when compared with the DHS rhetoric of fear, offers analysis of wall-building in the relations between cultures, and between nations and nature that have global, as well as local, "real life" implications.



A mural image from Codepink's image collection online that documents their Gaza Freedom March trips to occupied Palestine; this image (taken December 31, 2009) is from the Gaza Freedom March.

Comparisons and Connections

I'd expected indignation about the border wall. . . . I imagine my ancestors felt the same way oh so long ago, in 1848, after the newly drawn border cut through their lands, marooning them in a netherworld with México on one side, the United States on the other. In the 21st-century version of that alienation, the new border wall may transform once-private lands into a de facto DMZ complete with spotlights and armed patrols.

Land, you see, is everything to us. Our culture is tied to the land. It is passed down as our inheritance, as my father did for me and my siblings, fulfilling his long-held pledge. In these borderlands, the fates of families like mine have hinged on the land. . . . It is, in a deeply historic way, about people like me, people whose identity was forged in generations of struggle over land.

—Michelle Garcia²⁵

I certainly hope Rabbi Block does not equate acts of extremists with the exhausted but resilient spirit of peaceful Palestinian people who suffer, have suffered and will undoubtedly suffer some more. . . . If he does, that would be like the rest of us equating the acts of Israeli soldiers with all the great Jewish people working on behalf of justice for the "unchosen" or someone equating the Rev. John Hagee with all of Christendom.

—Naomi Shihab Nye²⁶

Michelle Garcia evokes a triangle of land, culture and struggle in Chican@ South Texas that might as easily describe Palestinian experience. The quotation from writer Naomi Shihab Nye remarks upon negative response to The Esperanza Center's "Middle East" series: "Uprooted: Tierra, Gente, y Cultura . . . Palestinians and Other Occupied Peoples from Jerusalem to Baghdad"; Shihab Nye's comparisons illustrate that extremist violence of word or deed on any side cannot be equated to the larger group. Could the U.S. government learn this lesson, we would not be at war nor would we be building walls.

Border walls are the logical extension of George Bush's 2001 warring declaration that one must be with the U.S. or with the terrorists. Walls (or in government parlance, "fences") are smokescreens that diffuse the public consciousness of the connectivity recognized by Arundhati Roy, who pointed out in answer to what effectively became the U.S.-under-Bush-Decree-to-the-World after 9/11, that "[t]he world doesn't have to choose between the Taliban and the U.S. government. All the beauty of the world—literature, music, art—lies between these two fundamentalist poles."²⁷ In contrast to the Bush declaration's binary paradigm, the cognizance of connectivity is a common element in feminism, broadly, and is at the crux of anti-partition barrier organizing.

The threat of a literal wall along the South Texas border prompted analysis and historical comparisons among its resisters; the rhetoric of anti-borderwall cultural poesis evokes comparative teachings,

often turning to the past failures of walls to resolve conflict, division and war. Parallels and contrasts have been drawn to contemporary barriers and partitions such as the Israeli wall around and between Palestinian communities. Both come with suspension of rights similar to, albeit even more longstanding, widespread and severe, than, the DHS "April Fool's" waivers that then-Homeland Security Secretary Chertoff put into effect April 1, 2008.

Opponents cite general references to the Great Wall in China to demonstrate that wall building on a magnificent scale does not work. Aerial photos of walls built and maps marked with the proposed wall verify the sense of immensity of wall-cutting across land that is still unequaled outside China.²⁸ Several activists' websites demonstrate the immensity and variety of border barriers being built; one of the most striking and extensive collections of photographs comes from borderland travel taken by the International League of Conservation Photographers.²⁹

South Texas Movement rhetoric usually identifies with the most significant wall of recent European history, a wall referenced in conjunction with the Israeli wall as well—the Berlin Wall—partly because it is a wall whose dismantling they remember or because it is a wall they feel the most citizens in other parts of the U.S. already recognize as undesired and unwise. For many, the concept of cultural division is familiar; they know the wall is cutting across what in the early 19th Century was a part of México—portions of the Mexican state of Tejas, and in the RGV, Nuevo Santander. The division experienced by the two Germanys seems to resonate—people from the same cultural background, and once the same country, find the echoes of a divided Germany in their own fears of divided communities and families.

Others find that in many of its characteristics, this U.S. Border Wall makes an extensive comparison to barriers built in other indigenous communities under domination globally. In some cases, walls are simultaneously physical and political, built under colonial partition and sealed in decades of conflict that emanate with rhetorical division.

The most extensive of these comparisons may indeed lie with what has been termed the apartheid wall, like in South Texas, another Berlin wall, and often, the iron wall.³⁰ Israel's wall-building, begun in 2002, continues with plans for hundreds of miles and several separate arenas of wall-building to block Palestinians from Israel and her other neighbors, and to block Palestinian towns from easy access with each other. With wall-building comes the demolition of homes and fields and the uprooting of orchards and groves. Several international groups monitor the wall's building and have published websites dedicated to their record keeping.³¹ An image search for the Israeli wall produced not only wall shots, but photos of murals, slogans, and even cartoons, some now famous, on that wall.³²

When the South Texas wall was still in planning stages, groups like Fuerza Unida and The Esperanza Center for Peace and Justice in San Antonio³³ both presented cultural/political series on the Middle East, in particular Palestine and the Israeli Occupation. These groups encouraged community understanding the Israeli wall's implications

in terms of the threat their relatives along the border feared. The significance of both walls became more real for the audiences in these discussions when Palestinians and other Middle Easterners discussed the realities of partitions, checkpoints and militarization with Chicanas and Mexican Americans for whom these issues had become more pressing. This was most memorable to me when a Palestinian graduate student in school in San Antonio spoke at a gathering where Austin, Texas-based Palestinian activist and teacher Riad Hamad had brought Palestinian women's needlework and olive oil. The student's grandmother had taught her Palestinian embroidery as a means of economic security as well as continuation of cultural tradition. This had particular relevance for the women of Fuerza Unida, since Fuerza Unida's sewing cooperative is part of their means of survival and legacy. Fuerza Unida is a nonprofit that was formed in 1980 by seamstresses who had lost their employment at the Zarzamora Levi Strauss plant that was among the first to relocate abroad. The Palestinian student spoke of how she felt as far away when attending school within hours of her family home as she did at school in the U.S. because of Israeli rules that did not allow visits, even for her family to see her graduate. She showed images of walls and checkpoints, and in the discussion that followed, one of the Fuerza Unida co-founders expressed solidarity with the young woman's experience based on similar issues for their families who are immigrants and their fear of a then still-unrealized wall in the Texas-Northeast México borderlands.

The Esperanza Center's Uprooted series had begun with an exhibit of artwork by San Antonio-based Palestinian artist, Salwa Arnous. Entitled "They Uprooted the Palestinians. Now They've Uprooted the Olive Trees," Arnous' exhibit portrayed diasporic experience for Palestinians like herself—uprooted, decades back, like the olive trees have more recently been uprooted in the wake of wall building.³⁴ A house key figures prominently in Arnous' paintings as it does in much literature from the Palestinian diaspora; unable to live in the land of their birth, many Palestinians hold a key as keepsake of grandparents and symbol of hope that grandchildren might sometime live in the family home.

Naomi Shihab Nye read poetry at the opening for Arnous' exhibit. As an author and editor of collections of transcultural literature for children and adults, she draws on her own Palestinian diaspora experience in her work; she is an unsurpassed Arab-American writer but also a well-known cultural activist locally in San Antonio. Her statement in this section's epigraph is from an editorial discussing the controversy raised most prominently by Rabbi Block, whom she mentions. She answers calls for city defunding that the Esperanza Center's Palestinian programming stirred in San Antonio by pointing to the absurdity of the attack.³⁵ Success in organizing comes when women such as Shihab Nye are ready to put themselves and their art on the line in places where their professional accomplishments may do little to mitigate their at least superficially unpopular viewpoint.

Not all antiwall organizing sees the connections upon which the San Antonio groups built. The *Rio Grande Guardian*³⁶, a South Texan online daily news journal, published an op-ed during the height of

the antiwall struggle under Chertoff/ Bush. It contrasts the South Texas wall with the Israeli wall in a pro-Israeli-domination appeal that clung to the rhetoric of “terrorism” (i.e. Palestinian) and war, invoking the us-versus-them thinking of the Bush era that Arundhati Roy identified. In such binaries, borderlanders see themselves as threatened by other parts of the world while rejecting the logic of a similar fearful rhetoric in their own backyards. Such examples suggest that while there is cohesion in countering the actual wall erection, at least in “not-in-my-backyard” (NIMBY) fashion, the poetics of protest may run the gamut in terms of adopting, advancing, adapting, challenging, protesting, defying, or attacking the philosophical apparatus beneath the project.

Insular approaches can also be insinuated when wall opponents carelessly quote the fact that no known “terrorists” have entered the U.S. through the southern border. The comparison points out the racism in the U.S.’s more lax approach to Canadian border security; however, xenophobia is not only connoted by the assumption that would-be “terrorists” (a word President Obama initially retired) are “foreigners” or immigrants, but acceptance of the term itself suggests unexamined acceptance of a divisive paradigm of fear. Understandably, borderlanders, and immigrants and Latina/os more broadly, want to distance themselves as different from those who would do harm to the U.S.; however, when the identified differences are based on ethnicity and religion, the distinction becomes mired in “us/them” thinking and becomes a means of profiling and essentializing. When Pakistani American activist and president of the San Antonio Council of American-Islamic Relations, Sarwat Husain, spoke at the “Third Annual Peace and Justice Gathering” on the “War, Islamophobia and the Aftermath of the Fort Hood Shootings” in the RGV in January 2010, the only topic that raised public disagreement was her observations involving the U.S.-supported Israel’s influential role in Middle East politics. Sadly, some progressives, leftists and borderlanders may fail to see common ground in Palestinian solidarity.³⁶

Ecology in a Delta Means Confluence

Through my work, I attempt to represent the universal struggles and personal victories women around the world share.

—Salwa Arnous³⁷

A dove falls against its terrible shape.
Hot midnight glare of bright-lit bulbs reflect down on the
soft, still feathers.

The Wall is Up.

—Adrienne Evans, “Until The Wall Is Down”³⁸

After a class assignment interpreting the lyrics and music, I shared The Flatlanders’ song “Borderless Love” on the no-Texas-border wall listserv; I learned from Adrienne Evans that her partner Butch Hancock and others in the band wrote the song after sitting around the table with her discussing the impending wall. Like the platika at

Fuerza Unida, they responded creatively to their apprehensive anticipation of what the wall would represent and how it would impinge on life. Many of the lyrics are universally transferable. For instance, bringing to bear Naomi Klein's assertion that "peace" and "homeland security" are at cross purposes parallels the sensibility of the last line of the lyrics, "A wall is a mirror that can only reveal/ One side of a story that passes for real/ But break it all down, it all becomes clear/ It's the fearless who love and the loveless who fear."³⁹

Both in South Texas and on Palestinian land, the physical effects of wall-building negatively impact ecosystems and create barriers to centuries-old cultural exchange. The most long-standing effects of wall-building are upon the land, whether natural or cultural ecosystems. Among the most moving cultural poetics of environmental injustice are photos and other images of uprooted olive trees. They provide visual proof for the widespread cultural knowledge concerning recent years of wall-building by the U.S.-financed Israeli government. The Israeli government has gutted, uprooted, and in some cases transplanted, into Israeli settler-occupied land, olives trees that have for centuries been fundamental not only to the ecosystems but to the Palestinians' sense of place.⁴⁰ In some cases, the trees being torn out to make way for the wall building are centuries old. The destruction of olive trees, as Salwa Arnous explains in discussing her paintings, must be by uprooting because nothing less will destroy the tree. This is evoked again and again in poetics, and activism for the act of uprooting may be the most egregious environmental justice issue in the conflict. Olive trees are so slow-growing, indestructible and long-lived they are planted not for oneself but for one's grandchildren. They are the economic, agricultural and ecological foundation for the Palestinian people. Even as they are uprooted, the olive trees live in the cultural expression of the diaspora, but many Palestinians have lost this living legacy that was their security for future generations.

While there is global awareness of the Palestinian olive tree uprooting, the broader scope of environmental and environmental justice issues Palestinians face is not so widely known. In May 2003, women wanting to remedy this brought Jon Reese, an activist hydrogeologist and environmental consultant, to San Antonio to discuss environmental injustice in occupied Palestine. Reese illustrated the environmental impact of Israel's occupation of Palestine, including contamination of water, pollution of towns and farmlands, and destruction of olive trees. Working with the International Solidarity Movement (ISM) and the Palestinian Hydrology Group (PHG), Reese collected information for the Palestinian Environmental NGO Network's first report on the Israeli Apartheid Wall. Ironically, the event, scheduled at a local university, had to be rescheduled at branch libraries when the educational institution refused to allow his presentation on campus. He visited during a trip lecturing across the U.S. on occupied Palestine's ecological situation from an environmental justice perspective.⁴¹

Like occupied Palestine, the counties that make up the RGV are culturally and ecologically among the richest places on the continent. Geophysically a delta, this "Magic Valley" has latitude, longi-

tude, and altitude effects that create a twelve-month growing season in which the intense, dry summer heat may stretch into December. The history of continents and oceans converges in the soils and flora where monte or chaparral meets coastal plains and where bodies of water take shape as resacas—bows of river, contained and isolated from its flow—as rivers, lakes, wetlands, bays, and finally the Gulf itself. In many ways, bodies of water bring people together and the great river has been the place of that convergence for nature and for culture. Rare or endangered mammals such as ocelots have a habitat range that crosses the river, as do migrating birds like the hawks that do not cross the gulf. In ironic comparison, several species of hummingbird migrate across the gulf and need food and habitat immediately upon reaching land. As habitat is destroyed for wall-building, these birds and animals are threatened. The extent of damage incurred in DHS wall-building varies with the type and number of walls and roads put in, but may be effectively fathomed in photographs taken by a group of photographers from Conservation Photographers. Their images show the breadth of the wall and the many habitats it crosses. In parts of previously completed walls in the southwestern U.S. (such as San Pedro wilderness), the wall encroaches upon ancient but precariously-balanced ecosystems that have often already suffered the scourge of unconsidered development and the violence of land treated exclusively as a quick profit producer. The environmental effects on the land in the RGV inspired much of the protest arising in the civic arena—courts, legislature, media, protest walks and acts of civil disobedience—and as correspondence with the Obama Administration with whom, despite all the backsliding, small hope for dismantling border violence still resides.

Rippling Waivers

One hopeful thing to come out of these tragedies is that the Palestinian people seem more unified than they have been in a long time. In the West Bank, demonstrations in solidarity with the people of Gaza continued, even after a protester was killed in the village of Nil'in. The Palestinian hip-hop group DAM, based in Israel where they live as second-class citizens, immediately put out a new song for their brothers and sisters in Gaza.

—Anna Baltzer⁴²

National attention and education/ information on the ecological and cultural impacts we will experience in the borderlands is absolutely crucial. The issue is framed by border wall proponents as some small regional/individual sacrifice (if even that is acknowledged) for a common “security” for which they offer no credible grounds. Ecological and cultural practice and wisdom suggest such an invasive structure will diminish the commons (both cultural and ecological) that are most apparent here because they come together in the Texas/Northeastern Mexican borderlands. However, via migration and immigration, these commons reach to the ends of the American con-

tinents (and in many instances, beyond). It would be the most mean-spirited continental irony to diminish the commons at the main point of confluence, but that is precisely what is proposed.

—Kamala Platt, written to publicize Public Comment Period for one of the Environmental Impact Statement drafts for RGV “fence” 2007

In the Texas borderlands, as in the Palestinian context Anna Baltzer describes, groups employ solidarity among what may otherwise be divergent interests. Most of the leading forces against the wall base resistance in global paradigms that connects walls—both physical and virtual—with the increasing militarization of the borderlands, the profit-driving of multinational corporations involved in the projects, and the backlash against immigrant communities that is represented in checkpoints, ICE raids and detention centers, some of which, in Texas, imprison even children. This structurally-invoked violence reverberates across U.S.-México relations at all levels. Rather than shaking walls as Obama’s sermon calls for, such violence shakes the very foundation of our *amistad*, or cross-border friendship. That *amistad*, most remarked upon by the Border Ambassadors, is one of several forces of cultural survival in border culture.⁴³

I wrote the above epigraph passage to spread the word about a Public Comment Period on environmental impact of the so-called fence. Due to waivers, the final Environmental Impact Statement was never produced. What amounted to little more than greenwashing while public comment periods and circumscribed, town hall meetings were scheduled as perfunctory rituals to include local input. However, many local people were vocal about their exclusion from decision-making. A bad situation for the South Texas delta’s ecological habitats only became worse, for the Environmental Impact Statement’s process became obsolete in light of the April 1, 2008 waivers of NEPA and thirty-six other laws.

One of the most egregious, dangerous and least publicized of the borderland wall-building’s side effects is the list of thirty-seven waivers of rights, some endorsed by law in Acts of Congress dating back over two centuries. Many of the waivers undo environmental protection on the borderland, and several lawsuits have responded to this suspension of caretaking. Chertoff’s waivers also directly attack Native American religious freedom in the waivers’ only specific and obvious attack on a group’s religion. Such focused termination of constitutionally guaranteed rights evokes comparisons, albeit to different degrees of repression, to the ongoing denial of rights for Palestinians under Israeli Occupation and in recent history, to Black South Africans under apartheid. Sobering, but necessary to consider, is the fact that the often-drawn comparison of Israeli occupation of Palestinian land to the U.S./European occupation of indigenous land and cultural genocide in the Americas is not just a historical comparison on our continent. The sense of the unprecedented revoking of rights imbedded in the South Texas waivers had been raised initially by Dinah Bear, former General Counsel of the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) who administered the National

Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). She came to the RGV to lend her well-earned wisdom to the campaign for a borderland without walls which was sadly overshadowed as the physical threat of wall-building became more imminent.

Hoping to create a “visual legal retrospective on what’s been lost on the border” a fellow activist and I initiated a blogspot where we began posting essays that examined the Acts waived from the perspectives of their historical significance; though uncompleted, the project prompted me to ponder the vast breadth of human rights and environmental law that has remained rooted in the borderlands. I composed a found poem of Chertoff’s words, hoping that heard in the context of art, they might register more broadly. Knowing that waivers, more so than walls, can be very easily spread from one community to the next once the precedent has been established, I sent the piece to an exhibit in a friend’s gallery in Brooklyn.

E. Elizabeth Garcia, Crossing Borders for Justicia y Paz

Well we started like about a year ago, when we first heard that [the wall] was coming this way; I had experience with the border wall when I was in Arizona, San Diego, Palestine with the . . . wall between two cities, so I’ve seen and I have experienced first hand, the devastating effects of the wall among the community; it’s hard for me to describe it because if you’re there . . . it’s a strong feeling.

–E. Elizabeth Garcia

The violence of poverty is pervasive for many border neighborhoods with four digit per capita incomes on the U.S. side, and much less money in many Mexican colonias. E. Elizabeth García, an activist from Matamoras living and working in the U.S. for decades, brings the economic situation of Cameron Park, the Brownsville colonia where she lives and works, into focus when she speaks of residents’ average annual income of \$3,000. As a seasoned activist and an immigrant herself, she brings local wisdom, an exuberant creative approach and a transnational awareness to the organizing work she has done against the border wall in South Texas. She is also one of the few in the region who has seen the effects of the Palestinian wall in person. When asked in November 2007 about the No Border Wall Campaign⁴⁶, Garcia immediately drew the comparison quoted in the epigraph beginning this section. She continues,

so when I hear that they were planning [a wall] here . . . I start talking to people and then I learned of other organizations also worried about it, so I went and contacted them and so we started forming a movement against the wall, and so we’ve been getting different kinds of events. People are getting very creative in doing these protests, along the river, doing a human chain, representing the positive way of resolving problems, the people kayaking from El Paso all the way here, heading up a huge pachanga, where the Bishop for the first time came to our event and [it] became historical event in itself be-

cause the Archdiocese finally said something. . . . We're having a lot of events, and they've been good to raise a lot of awareness, and to educate the people. Now what? What are we going to do now? So now we're working with this petition of registered voters that are against the wall, and so our hope is to collect 15,000 signatures from registered voters for the next elections in March. . . . Maybe somebody will pay attention and say, "Well maybe these people deserve to be listened to."

Garcia explained that previously through the pressure of the vote, Cameron Park was able to get the ear of local politicians who could improve their basic living conditions. In spring 2009, she took the Coalition of Amigos in Solidarity and Action (CASA) of Brownsville to ask the Obama Administration and Congress to "suspend all border wall construction until the merits of the project can be thoroughly reviewed."

Sponsored by part-time community organizing work and living frugally, Garcia can maintain her activism through work that contributes to it. Though few I've encountered do as much with as little, her accomplishments suggest the vital contributions that could be made were activists and artists supported as the more-than-full-time workers they are.

This brief description of the RGV activists, artists, organizers and others involved in work against borderland walls and militarization only begins to touch some of the reasons the border wall has inspired more resistance along the Rio Grande than most other border sites where physical partition creates similar disruption of community and habitat. This resistance and poetics, while contextually-specific, speaks more generally of the impulse to build walls: it suggests that they create false binaries, reduce complexities, erase nuances—one's presence on one side or the other, in conjunction with one's history, here or there, before or after, marks one indelibly, sets one's fate vis-à-vis forces of power and in so doing creates violence and domination, prejudice, racism and inequity. Similarly, attention to a Palestinian-American artist's work, also deemed "controversial," underscores the "real life consequences" for people who have lived with partitions and wall-building impulses.

Emily Jacir: Where We Come From...: Everyday Life

My first direct experience of Emily Jacir's multimedia installation exhibit "Where We Come From" was in Wichita, Kansas. Before the chance to see her art exhibit, I'd been exposed on the internet to the obstacles, which the local arts, women's studies, Palestinian, and other academic and activist communities responsible for bringing her exhibit, faced. Wichita was not alone in the flack perpetrated in anticipation of the exhibit; the juxtaposition of the accusations seemingly following the exhibit schedule against the art was disconcerting, though the art, itself, awed me with its quiet power. What jarred was the incongruence, the lack of rationality in response. Jacir combined photography and storytelling in two languages to eloquently document a chronicle of experience that was at once conceptual and literal.⁴⁷

The performed aspect of Jacir's work was based in a trip to Palestine. Before beginning her trip, Jacir put out the question to Palestinians in the diaspora: "If I could do anything for you, anywhere in Palestine, what would it be?" She then gathered responses and set out to complete the missions, mostly everyday experiences such as "drink water in my parents' village" that the requesters could not complete because of their restricted access to their homeland. Jacir's documentation in photos, texts and DVD projection, shows the process of completing the requests; the exhibit is composed of this documentation. Requests ran the gamut from ritual: "Go to my mother's grave in Jerusalem on her birthday and place flowers and pray" to civic responsibility: "Go to the Israeli post office in Jerusalem and pay my phone bill" to the familial: "Go to Bayt Lahia and bring me a photo of my family," "Visit my mother, hug and kiss her and tell her that these are from her son." There were those that evoked a sense of place/nature and a sense of ironic humor; for instance, the preceding request does both as it continues: "Visit the sea at sunset and smell it for me and walk a little bit . . . enough. Am I greedy?"

Some who made requests had never been to Palestine, many had parents who were exiled in 1948, some had been exiled themselves, as had Salwa Arnous at the age of two; such was the case for Marie-Therese from New York, who requested that Jacir "Do something on a normal day in Haifa, something I might do if I was living there now." Jacir notes that she "spent the night with a group of girls living in an apartment in Haifa. We drank coffee and talked about life, marriage, careers. We also compared living in Haifa to living in Ramallah and Jerusalem. We stayed up talking until early into the morning."

Art documenting everyday experience that is forbidden—that which is rarely spoken—may closely bond the spectator to the subject in ways that undo the misrepresentations and prejudices by which war and walls are whipped up. This dismantling the rhetorical power of manipulation is what makes Jacir's work powerful, and possibly what those who protest it fear most. Or possibly it is their own misinterpretation of what she is doing that raises their ire. While not overtly political, the piece is a powerful commentary on the nature of life for Palestinians under Israeli rule. When Jacir went to visit the mother's grave for her son who had been denied a permit, she found herself next to tourists visiting Oskar Schindler's grave. At the same time, she sees many Christian graves that have been damaged by extremists; further irony, which Jacir does not comment upon, is raised when the viewer considers how fundamentalist U.S. Christians who support Israel's Occupation would process Jacir's observation of this cemetery visit. Jacir's genius (both artistic and political) comes in the ways she reveals underspoken consequences.

The everyday effects of walls are reflected in the work of several artists and activists who observe the border wall in South Texas in ways that resonate with Jacir's project in Palestine. A San Antonio-based artist who, like Jacir, uses multimedia installation is Anne Wallace.⁴⁸ She was sponsored by an Artpace residency in 2004 but has documented violent infringement on the U.S.-México border life for several decades on film, in sculpture and other media. Her Artpace

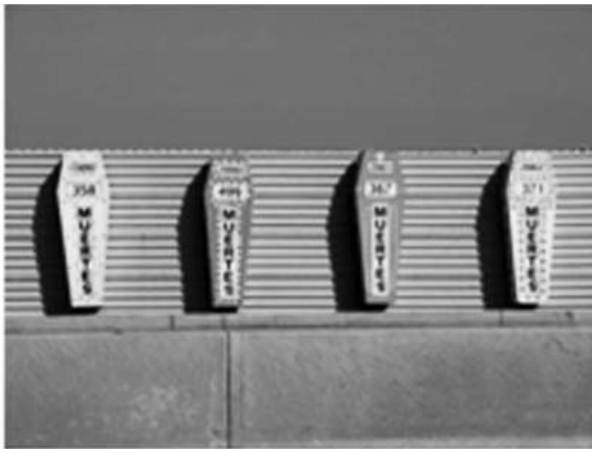
webpage describes her process. Wallace “gathers material from her immediate surroundings and recontextualizes it in community-based projects, videos, sculpture, and sound pieces that fuse personal and collective issues . . . and empathetically explores an issue intimate to the artist and of broad social concern.”

When I saw her installation piece “el otro lado,” it was set up on a spiraling staircase in a historic building where the Walls Symposium was occurring. I sat on the stairs transfixed while the black and white video installation, the piece that captivated my attention, played through several times. Her webpage explains,

For her Artpace project, “el otro lado,” Wallace focuses on the U.S./México border. Through research and driving the two thousand mile boundary, she gathered stories from the river, desert, and walls of both sides of the frontera. The material gathered has resulted in a video and sound installation exploring the projected fears, desires, and politics of the constructed barrier, and reflecting on the unnecessary difficulties it creates. . . . An image from this project [shown below] shows four caskets resembling bar graphs on a section of wall, with the number of immigrant deaths for each year on the corresponding casket.

As in Jacir’s work, I was most struck by the portrayal of collateral damage from militarization and repression as it impacts everyday life for civilians who get in its way.

**And What Can be Said Specific to/by/of Women?:
Computer, Connections, Conclusions**



Anne Wallace, *el otro lado*, 2004. production still; Originally commissioned by Artpace San Antonio Photo credit: Wayne Dow; see: <http://www.artpace.org/aboutTheExhibition.php?axid=161&sort=title> for other images in the series.

In this context, peace is a threat. Because if these companies can't claim that they are protecting Israelis from an endless irrational enemy that they can never talk to, but yet they are still able to keep Israelis relatively safe, then actually they lose their market.

— Naomi Klein, "Lecture in Ramallah."
Posted by ROR Coalition, July 10, 2009.

Justice O'Connor has often been cited as saying that a wise old man and wise old woman will reach the same conclusion in deciding cases. I am also not so sure that I agree with the statement. . . . I would hope that a wise Latina woman with the richness of her experience would more often than not reach a better conclusion than a white male who hasn't lived that life.

— Sonia Sotomayor, quoted in *Time*, June 8, 2009²⁹

The truth lies naked in the infernos of Palestine and Iraq, but in the noise of your corporate media and on the cadaver of your newspaper, you prefer it with clothes on.

—Nadine Saliba, March 8, 2008

While drafting an early version of this article, I heard that Dr. George Tiller was shot in Wichita, Kansas, where his medical practice serving women had been under verbal and sometimes physical attack for decades. Having spent most of my childhood and college years in a small town north of Wichita, I, like others with Kansas ties, wrote in shock on the NARAL pro-choice blog the evening of Tiller's death. We experienced a mixture of horror and shame—horror at the spiritual disconnect we felt—a feeling that brought women from a spectrum of perspectives on abortion to a common sense that Tiller's murder was senseless and deeply wrong—and shame that our home state was implicated by the geography of the crime. But more deeply than either horror or shame, I felt a less-easily named emotion, something akin to fear but not so superficial as what masquerades as fear on today's newsstands; my fear was akin to the preverbal utterance that reverberates in the misogyny of the act, despite the gender of the victim in this case. As I wrap up my article revisions, Dr. Tiller's killer was in court, his defense an argument for "manslaughter" because he claimed he was compelled to kill by his perceived obligation to save unborn "babies." Although he did not receive this lesser charge, an appeal is expected.

In this quick sidebar regarding Dr. Tiller's death lies a trajectory that gets us close enough to recognize both the broad complexity and precise counter-intuitive aspects of gender experience, power and war and other violent solutions. Men are most often the proscribed warriors, make up combat troops almost exclusively, at least officially, and as such are the sanctioned victims of war; women's intended experience of war may be less direct, but arguably often more violent in a personal sense, in the affront to their daily lives, and in the invasion of what has usually been almost universally deemed their (domestic) space.

Across the nation, Tiller had become a household name vilified by the Right but respected for his courage by most progressives. In

popular culture media's representation of the third trimester abortions Tiller performed, the doctor's work was misrepresented in such a horrible way that perhaps only his death feels more wrong-headed. My memory of hearing radio interviews on New York City's WBAI with women who had undergone third semester abortions at the time when bans were being discussed, with little concern for those facing the experience, remains sharply painful to me; I felt pain in emotional vividness—these women had been faced with choices of crisis, not convenience—and pain in the intellectual disconnect between their narratives and the anti-abortion spin masters' urban legend. And at the basis of those misrepresentations, many women's lives lie in the balance—women about whom we know little or nothing.

The misrepresentation of Tiller's practice, and its vital function in the service of women's health, is part and parcel of the same phenomenon of creating imagined threats to mainstream security that generates the impetus for both walls and wars in places like Palestine and South Texas, and, recently, the Pakistan-Afghanistan borderlands. And in all these instances, in situations that vary greatly, woman is represented as an invisible perpetrator of evil; the seeker of abortion who has no conscience; the nurturer of "terrorists" or perhaps a terrorist herself, her clothing hiding the violence she carries; the immigrant, likely pregnant (here the immigrant's fetus is hardly protected but is transposed to further demonize her—her family will surely take goods from citizens). She is the pawn that serves her "evil-doer"—be he deemed god, man or both. Cultural poetics, such as the radio program I heard over a decade ago but remember like yesterday, that voice the on-the-ground experience of women may be the best antidote to the spread of misrepresentation in that they give voice and vision to simple intellectual and emotional truth as lived experienced. That in itself is memorable. When it acts as a corrective, it can transform the discussion and thus the trajectory of history to which we commit.

The anti-abortion movement chose Wichita as a strategic "ground zero," and their activism and violence have ebbed and flowed for decades there. Locally, women were fortunate to have relatively easy access to good reproductive health and safe abortions, even when tragedy struck late in their pregnancies; many treated anti-abortion protestors as an inconvenience and an intrusion; some saw them as an embarrassment. For most of us, there have been more pressing issues, locally, nationally, and/or globally, with which to contend. Dr. Tiller's death caught us off guard, emotionally, after feeling some reprieve from the necessary, constant vigilance of the Bush years. Charges came out on *Democracy Now!* the week following his death that the FBI had ignored warnings of a threat when summoned by Tiller's office, but for most progressive women the issue is not about vigilance vis-à-vis attacks from the extreme right, per se; it is a much deeper issue, one that is at the heart of "Women on Wars and Walls": we—both as women, and as individual progressive activists, academics and artists (in our chosen issue/field/medium) and riding whichever wave of feminism is currently rising—have failed to closely enough watch each others' backs and the backs of our al-

lies. We have failed to keep tabs on how deeply misogyny is ingrained in the structural interactions of the daily lives of billions of us, and we have failed to examine each issue for the sexism and for the feminism in its folds and facets; we have failed to identify the inequities and hatreds that often fuse bigotries to fear-mongering. Through the work of women involved deeply in struggle and art, I hope to have rejuvenated questions that may offer work toward restoring maintenance and clarifying the complexities of women's experience in lands of partition, and in a time when even bodies are subject to partition—in instances where women and allies are subject to attack on multiple layers, where we are survivors of multiple, unexpected attacks in our daily lives, where, despite all, our work survives.

Yet, the flip side and silver lining to vigilance is celebration. Celebration, the day the No-Texas-Border-Wall Listserv was brimming with exclamations over the redressing of immigrant detention center conditions and the end of detaining children. That evening I drove to Wichita for a meeting in conjunction with summer work at Meadowlark Center in Kansas. A "Wise Latina" walked into the room in a bright red T-shirt that said who she was. During introductions, she explained that she'd just come from a celebration held by the state representative, another Latina who had ordered the T-shirts, at Frida's Mexican Restaurant—named after Frida Kahlo, the Wichita folks explained—great food and supportive of progressive politics.

I returned home to my e-mail inbox, where I'd been forwarded a message from Rabbi Lynn Gottlieb endorsing CODEPINK's new boycott of AHAVA, "an Israeli cosmetics company that is violating the basic principles of international law and Jewish ethics by profiting from the occupation of Palestine. Using resources from the ancient waters of the Dead Sea, AHAVA manufactures beauty products in an illegal Israeli settlement in Occupied Palestine." Rabbi Gottlieb tells us "AHAVA means love in Hebrew. But there's nothing loving about profiting from occupation. There's nothing loving about stealing resources from our neighbors." She gives us her own history in conjunction with the changes she's seen: "For over 40 years, I have been working to promote justice and reconciliation in the Middle East. I have watched more settlements, walls and checkpoints being built, and more Palestinians arrested and ground down by poverty, hunger, illness and oppression. After decades of working for peace through dialogue, I've come to believe that it's time to apply new tactics. It's time for us to listen to the Israeli and Palestinian peace activists who are calling on us to boycott Israeli products made in Occupied Palestine. It's time to take the profit out of the occupation."

Naomi Klein voices similar sentiments in her address to an audience in Ramallah and goes on to apologize for not signing onto BDS earlier. She describes her experience planning the trip to Israel in conjunction with BDS organizers and in so doing she articulates a clear argument that a boycott need not cut off communication, that indeed it enhances it:

It's been a learning experience and one of the things that we have learned is that one of the criticisms of [. . .] ap-

plying a boycott strategy, is that it cuts off communication. “Don’t we all want to communicate more?” and “Shouldn’t we all communicate more if there is to be peace and justice in this world?” Well, let me tell you, when you actually try to put BDS into practice in your life—when you try to figure out how to write and publish books and produce culture and do business while supporting this call, you have to communicate all the time. We have built new networks. We have made many new friends. We have had many new meetings. We have chatted incessantly across all kinds of religious, ethnic and national boundaries. So this is most certainly not cutting off communication. It is forging new forms of communication because that’s what happens when you build movements.⁴⁹

Rabbi Gottlieb began her letter with a Jewish teaching: “Thou shall not derive personal pleasure or benefit from any product created through exploitation.” Such a maxim asks us to, like Justice Sonia Sotomayor, pay heed to the everyday repercussions of what we do, and to, as Klein describes, build networks and break boundaries. To suppose that even those who are strangers are our sisters, have connections to our lives. To shake and crumble the walls that divide us. It is our choice which connections we chose to embrace, which to disconnect from, boycott, divest, sanction, which poetics to make visible, which to hear, and which to endorse and to celebrate.



Hope Park, Brownsville, Art Against the Wall Exhibit. Ladder Artist: David Freeman*, February 28, 2010, Photo by Kamala Platt.

Notes

¹ Shorter versions of this article were given at the MLA Convention in December, 2008 (San Francisco, CA) and at the Walls Symposium (see: <http://1.salsa.net/peace/walls/>), in San Antonio, TX and a further condensed version was blogged at Latina Lista (<http://www.latinalista.net/home/>) (both in February, 2009).

² From *Remarks of Senator Barack Obama: The Great Need of the Hour*, given at Martin Luther King's Church in Atlanta, GA, January 20, 2008.

³ <http://rachelcorriefoundation.org/2006/10/183>, "Remarks about Rachel by Corrie family" read at peace rallies, worldwide, April 12, 2003, weeks after she was killed (March 16, 2003) posted October 2, 2006.

⁴ The Olympia Rafah Solidarity Mural Project website explains: "Inspired by Rachel Corrie, an Olympian killed in the Gaza Strip in 2003 in a non-violent act of civil disobedience, the mural serves as a reminder of the thousands of lives lost in Gaza and elsewhere, and as an inspiration for those who carry on the quest for justice, unity and peace—symbolized by the olive tree. ORSMP expects to be the largest Palestine solidarity mural, worldwide. (<http://olympiarafahmural.org/>)"

⁵ Since DHS's parlance naming it "a border-fence" has been more thoroughly rejected in Texas than in any other state, I refer to the boundary barrier as the movement does, as a border wall, in Spanish, *muro*.

⁶ Among the new weapons used by the Israelis (first in 2006 against Lebanon and then against Gaza, are dense inert metal explosive (DIME) weapons, which produce amputations, and later cancers. See: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=keygeiOAVAg>. Depleted uranium, widely used by the U.S. as a weapon, was found in victims of Israel's January 2009 attacks on Gaza. See <http://www.presstv.ir/detail.aspx?id=80443andsectionid=351020202> among other media sources in early 2009.

⁷ Nadine Saliba's article "Resistance through Remembering and Speaking Out" in *La Voz de Esperanza* (May 2006, pgs. 7-10), in conjunction with the series, historicizes the connections between walls and explicates the use of small letters for "middle east" based on the fact that it is a necessary identifier, but not one that is truly accurate, or chosen by the communities it names. She states: "The very term 'middle east,' used in the title of the series, is a hotly disputed label. I use quotation marks and lower-scale letters to underscore its contested nature. I employ it, reluctantly, because it is convenient. The term is familiar to a U.S. audience but, at the same time, it raises some confusion and ambiguity."

⁸ <http://olympiarafahmural.org/what-we-do/mission-goals/>.

⁹ Codepink website, see <http://www.codepink4peace.org/>. For CPT website, see <http://www.cpt.org/>.

¹⁰ Subsequently published in *La Voz de Esperanza*, April 2008, p 4.

¹¹ Naomi Klein relates the two walls in the following passage:

Both of those issues are challenged by the explosion of the Homeland Security sector in Israel which is of course intimately connected with the infrastructure of apartheid in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Because these technologies—the surveillance cameras, the walls that allow biometric identification—all of it is run by private companies. . . . We see this very dramatically in the fact that we see Israeli companies that have built the apartheid wall here, are going and selling their expertise to the U.S. government. They call it the virtual fence. It's also a two billion dollar project between the U.S. and Mexico, and also the U.S. and Canada. It's a whole network of sensors and guard towers and electrified fences

and so on. The two billion dollar contract went to Boeing, but the main subcontract went to Elbit [Systems] which is one of the two main Israeli companies building the wall here. So it isn't just about the economy here, in Israel. It's about saying "We know how to do this. Look at what a safe world bubble we have managed to create surrounded by a sea of enemies."

<http://www.bdsmovement.net/?q=node/465>. "Transcript of Naomi Klein Lecture in Ramallah." Posted by ROR Coalition July 10, 2009. Accessed February 2, 2010.

¹² See <http://www.hpff.org/about/>.

¹³ Quotations from <http://www.pacbi.org/etemplate.php?id=66> and <http://www.pacbi.org/etemplate.php?id=868>, respectively. Both webpages are part of the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel website. Posted December 21, 2008. Accessed February 2, 2010. The movement calls upon people of conscience worldwide, including in Israel, to join the BDS. Israel has launched its own cultural whitewashing campaign in an attempt to represent itself as open and humane.

¹⁴ <http://www.bdsmovement.net/?q=node/465>. "Transcript of Naomi Klein Lecture in Ramallah." Posted by ROR Coalition July 10, 2009. Accessed February 2, 2010. Klein explains, "[...] I won't be spending time here today talking about the material in my book [where] I have an article on Israel and Palestine as a kind of laboratory for the Homeland Security sector. But I do want to talk about that just in the context of economic pressure. . . . [W]hen a society ultimately gets tired of war, its because people begin saying 'I just want to lead a normal life.' And also, because the business sector starts to put pressure on the government so that they can engage in normal trading. Because it is so very difficult to have a thriving economy in the context of war. You can have a thriving military economy, but a broader economy is very difficult to have in a conflict situation.

¹⁵ The list of those from all walks of life, both women and men, who have contributed to these struggles is long. However, two men are so integral to the stories I relate that their mention is essential. In the Rio Grande Valley, John Jay Johnson Castro issued some early words and footfalls—he began walks to call attention to Texas detention centers (including those, like Hutto, detaining immigrant children) and proposed walls—. Castro's listserv email an hour ago (as I write) reads simply "We won on Hutto today!" (8/6/09) No less resolute and passionate in the struggle for Palestinian's wellbeing—especially the children's—was Riad Hamad, who initiated events such as Fuerza Unida's series; after his tragic death in Spring 2008, following FBI harassment, friends, with respect and affection, name him a martyr.

¹⁶ The quotation continues, "It wiped over four hundred Palestinian villages and dispossessed their residents turning them into stateless refugees in the lands of exile and outsiders and strangers in their own land. The Southwest was subjected to another wave of colonization by American settlers. This act of imperialism divided the Mexican people between two sides of an artificial border." -Nadine Saliba "'middle east' series at the Esperanza Center: Resistance through remembering and speaking out" in *La Voz de Esperanza*, May 2006, pgs 7-10.

¹⁷ Quoted in Michelle Garcia, "On the Texas Borderline, A Solid, if Invisible, Wall" Special to *The Washington Post*, May 24, 2008, CO1. Garcia is in production on a film "Tell 'em Who You Are" as a follow-up to *The Washington Post* essay and has written about the Moroccan wall (Time.com) as well as the one in her homeland. For in-process film trailer, see: <http://www.telegraph21.com/search/node/Michelle%20Garcia>

¹⁸ A slick book of maps with hasty research of environmental impact was created in draft form, however presumably due to the April 1, 2008 Waivers, a subsequent final impact statement has not materialized.

¹⁹ Little scholarly work has discussed anti-border wall activism to date, however, recognizing the U.S. México partition-building and related issues—such as Homeland Security Waivers (April 1, 2008)—as environmental justice and borderlands issues, comparative discussion of their characteristics as relevant to a New Social Movement may prove insightful to theorization of the concerns of the movement.

²⁰ See <http://www.borderambassadors.com/>.

²¹ See www.texasbordercoalition.org/. Betty Pérez, a ranch-owner is one of the few progressive women on the coalition. Her statement at the border hearings held by Senator Grijalva in Brownsville in Spring, 2008 drew together ecological and human rights concerns in border-wall construction. She “walks the walk” keeping her ranchland as balanced native habitat, and hosting gatherings and field trips with her partner Susan Thompson who operates a native reforestation nursery on the property.

²² See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t2toox5J7AA> for the point in the debates where agreement is concurred. See also <http://www.grist.org/article/obama-and-clinton-discuss-border-wall-in-last-nights-debate/> for an example of the political analysis at the time in Glenn Hurowitz article on Grist blog.

²³ For more information gathered by The Lipan Apache Women Defense, see <http://lipanapachecommunitydefense.blogspot.com/>. Please also, read Margo Tamez’s article in this volume of *Works and Days*; the Lipan Apache Women Defense has played a major role in resistance to the South Texas border wall, and my small mention does not do justice without Tamez’s discussion.

²⁴ See http://www.riograndeguardian.com/rggnews_story.asp?story_no=4# “Shapleigh denounces DHS plans for border wall in Marfa,” January 23, 2008.

²⁵ Quoted in Michelle Garcia, “On the Texas Borderline, A Solid, if Invisible, Wall” Special to *The Washington Post*, May 24, 2008, CO1.

²⁶ In a San Antonio Express-News editorial August 22, 2006.

²⁷ See: <http://www.commondreams.org/views01/1023-12.htm>

Roy, Arundhati. “Brutality Smeared in Peanut Butter: Why America Must Stop the War Now,” *Guardian of London* October 23, 2001. (Later published as “War Is Peace,” 2002) The passage is an often-quoted excerpt from an article in which Roy speaks out against U.S. aggression—that eerily echoes in President Obama’s build-up of military might in Afghanistan and its extension into bordering communities in Pakistan. I don’t equate the two situations but acknowledge a similar warphile mentality that constricts less violent ways to resolve conflict, in lieu of military force; I have yet to see theorizing of Obama’s militarism that adequately takes up its complexity though Vincent Harding’s letter begins this work.

²⁸ For a sampling of border barrier variations as well as links to websites discussing them see: http://images.google.com/images?hl=en&dq=border+fence=pictures&um=1&ie=UTF-8&ei=QGfS--PM4fKQOcgMmCBQandsa=X&doi=image_result_group&ct=title&resnum=1&ved=0CBAQsAQ. Accessed February 2, 2010.

²⁹ See <http://www.ilcp.com/?cid=151>. Also see, for instance, <http://www.notexasborderwall.com/> and <http://lipanapachecommunitydefense.blogspot.com/>

³⁰ The film *The Iron Wall*, directed by a Palestinian living in San Antonio, Texas and premiered in San Antonio, is one example of cultural expression using the term. See <http://www.theironwall.ps/> and <http://www.palestineonlinestore.com/films/theironwall.htm> for more on this film, directed by Mohammed Alatar. The website explains the title in a 1923 quotation from Vladimir Jabotinsky, which advocates living behind an iron wall “which the native population cannot breach.” <http://www.theironwall.ps/aboutfilm.html>.

Also, see Palestinians for Peace and Democracy website <http://www.p4pd.org/> for discussion of the film and of the organization. Palestinians for Peace and

Democracy have been involved with many of the San Antonio events mentioned, as have many other groups and individuals, especially Latina and women of “middle eastern descent; this study is in no way exhaustive.

³¹ See http://www.vtjp.org/background/Separation_Wall_Report.htm and, for humanitarian concerns, see <http://electronicintifada.net/bytopic/apartheidwall.shtml>. In researching the many websites monitoring the Israeli wall, one that specifically referred to women, womenspeacepalestine.org, noted that it was nonexistent but “coming back soon.”

³² Fuerza Unida’s homepage (<http://www.lafuerzaunida.org/>) states: Fuerza Unida’s mission is to empower women workers and their families to achieve social, economic and environmental justice through education, organizing and advocacy. The Fuerza Unida vision is for workers and their families to actively participate in society by voicing their opinions and concerns while keeping their cultural traditions and values.

The mission statement for The Esperanza Center at <http://www.esperanzacenter.org/> states: The people of Esperanza dream of a world where everyone has civil rights and economic justice, where the environment is cared for, where cultures are honored and communities are safe. The Esperanza advocates for those wounded by domination and inequality—women, people of color, lesbians and gay men, the working class and poor. We believe in creating bridges between people by exchanging ideas and educating and empowering each other. We believe it is vital to share our visions of hope... we are esperanza.

Both of these predominantly Latina-led organizations see social justice as both a local and global concern and both groups use cultural poetics to strive for that justice.

³³ Salwa writes of her art: “I spend much of my time painting about my people and where I come from. There are two sides to every story, and the Palestinian people rarely have their story told. I have tried to talk about the Palestinians’ suffering, loss, sorrow, and hope for a better life under the Israeli occupation. Many Palestinians fought for their homes and died to protect their families from harm. The Palestinians have suffered tremendously and their suffering must not go unnoticed and must be heard...I hope my art in some way becomes a voice for the people of Palestine.” To see artwork by Salwa Arnous, visit: <http://orelitrev.startlogic.com/v3n1/OLR-arnous.htm>; <http://www.sawhistle.com/tri-faith/salwa-arnous/index.htm>; <https://www.blogcatalog.com/search.frame.php?term=arnous&id=c9858822fec531c1dabb3a2cc8559d08>.

³⁴ Without space here to develop the assertion, I suggest this is often based on mistranslation and cultural misunderstanding.

³⁵ Quoted in *Oregon Literary Review* Vol.3, No.1, at <http://orelitrev.startlogic.com/v3n1/OLR-arnous.htm>.

³⁶ When I put out a call for poetics on the evening before presenting an earlier version of this paper at the Modern Language Association Convention on the West Asian Literature Panel, I received a lengthy poem from fellow listserver, Adrienne Evans, cofounder of the No Wall-Big Bend Coalition. With and elegant simplicity, “Until The Wall Is Down” describes the impact of wall building on communities and habitats.

³⁷ See <http://www.songlyrics.com/flatlanders/borderless-love-lyrics/>

³⁸ See The Ultimate Earmark, U.S. Military Aid to Israel by Kathleen and Bill Christison in *counterpunch*, edited by Alexander Cockburn & Jeffrey St. Clair, March 5, 2009. <http://www.counterpunch.org/christison03052009.html>. Israel has long received the most foreign aid of any country; over half of it is military aid, received with the best conditions—as grants with the stipulation that 75% of the money be spent on U.S. military products and services. This means that the weapons used against the Palestinians, as well as the money spent to purchase them, in most cases, comes from the U.S.

³⁹ See www.seattlecan.org.

⁴⁰ E-mail: Anna in Palestine: "What May Come Of The Tragedies" February 6, 2009. Anna Baltzer is a Jewish American woman who works in solidarity with Palestinian Rights groups, learning and offering solidarity in Palestine and traveling and educating people, especially other young people in the U.S.

⁴¹ Regarding related struggles as threat to amistad, see, for example, Jay Johnson Castro's notice at Texas Civil Rights Review <http://texascivilrightsreview.org/phpnuke/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=737>.

⁴² See <http://dhs waivers.blogspot.com/>. Kudos to Nat Stone for tremendous beginning essays.

⁴³ The portion of my found "Waivers Poem" that names the waivers follows. By transposing Chertoff's repeated phrase "high illegal entry" to follow each of the waived acts, I hope to reflect on the "illegal entry" into the territory once protected by the (now-waived) Acts.:

The National Environmental Policy Act: high illegal entry

The Endangered Species Act: high illegal entry

The Federal Water Pollution Control Act; commonly referred to as the Clean Water Act): high illegal entry

The National Historic Preservation Act: high illegal entry

The Migratory Bird Treaty Act: high illegal entry

The Clean Air Act: high illegal entry

The Archeological Resources Protection Act: high illegal entry

The Safe Drinking Water Act: high illegal entry

The Noise Control Act: high illegal entry

The Solid Waste Disposal Act, as amended by the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act: high illegal entry

The Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act: high illegal entry

The Archaeological and Historic Preservation Act : high illegal entry

The Antiquities Act: high illegal entry

The Historic Sites, Buildings, and Antiquities Act: high illegal entry

The Farmland Protection Policy Act: high illegal entry

The Coastal Zone Management Act: high illegal entry

The Federal Land Policy and Management Act: high illegal entry

The National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act: high illegal entry

The Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956: high illegal entry

The Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act: high illegal entry

The Administrative Procedure Act: high illegal entry

The Rivers and Harbors Act of 1899: high illegal entry

The Eagle Protection Act: high illegal entry

The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act: high illegal entry

The American Indian Religious Freedom Act: high illegal entry

The Religious Freedom Restoration Act: high illegal entry and the Federal Grant and Cooperative Agreement Act of 1977: high illegal entry

⁴⁴ My gratitude to Louis Mendoza for the transcript of his interview with E. Elizabeth Garcia in November 2007 in Brownsville from which her discussion here is taken; hers was one of many interviews Louis conducted with and/or concerning Latina/o immigrants during his recording of "Journey Across Our America: Observations and Reflections on the Latinoization of the U.S." See his blog documenting his trip at <http://journey-acrossouramerica.blogspot.com/> and forthcoming book *Voices across our America: Conversations on the front lines and fronteras of Latinoization in the U.S.*

⁴⁵ For description and images of Jacir's "Where we come from" exhibit see http://images.google.com/images?hl=en&client=safariandr1s%3De-nandq%3Demily+jacir+&tbs=isch%3A1&sa=1&q=emily+jacir&aq=7&aql=&oq=Emily+Ja&gs_rfai=.

⁴⁶ See <http://www.artspace.org/> for several of Anne Wallace's works, including two photos of installations directly on a section of wall. In "el otro lado, 2004" mounts caskets resembling bar graphs on a section of walls, with the number of immigrant deaths for each year on the casket.

⁴⁷ <http://www.bdsmovement.net/?q=node/465>. Transcript of Naomi Klein lecture in Ramallah. Posted by RORCoalition July 10, 2009. Accessed February 2, 2010.

