



STATE OF PALESTINE  
PALESTINE LIBERATION ORGANIZATION  
NEGOTIATIONS AFFAIRS DEPARTMENT

# LOOMING ANNEXATION

**ISRAEL'S DENIAL OF PALESTINE'S RIGHT TO EXIST**

# CONTENTS

## 4 Foreword

### PART ONE: BACKGROUND

- 8 **Contextual Background with Analysis: Annexation**  
Dr. Saeb Erakat
- 12 **Illegal Annexation Over the Years: Focus on Current Scenarios**  
Fatina Hodali and Ashraf Khatib
- 18 **Analysis of the Geopolitical Aspects of the Trump Plan**  
Dr. Jad Isaac and Suhail Khalilieh

### PART TWO: ANNEXATION & STRANGLING POTENTIAL

- 36 **Opportunity Cost of a Belligerent Occupation and Incremental Annexation**  
Dr. Nabeel Kassis
- 42 **Annexation and Tourism**  
Dr. Hamdan Taha
- 50 **Annexing Air**  
Dr. Sabri Saidam
- 54 **Annexation :The Ghettoization of Bethlehem**  
Rev. Dr. Mitri Raheb
- 60 **Palestine's Water - De Facto Annexed since 1967**  
Dr. Shaddad Al Attili
- 68 **Annexation and Culture**  
Mahmoud Muna
- 72 **Annexation and Human Rights**  
Dr. Susan Power
- 80 **Annexation and Threats to the Two States**  
Amb. Issa Kassissieh

### PART THREE: RESPONSE

- 88 **Defiance and Resilience against Annexation and Subjugation: Palestinian Options**  
Samar Awadallah
- 96 **Looming Annexation: Concerns and Questions**  
Dr. Varsen Aghabekian
- 102 **Analysis : Regional and International Reactions to Annexation**  
Xavier Abu Eid
- 114 **Contributors Bios**

# ANNEXATION AND CULTURE

Mahmoud Muna



## Culture, Identity, and Resilience

When nations are pushed into narrow corners, their identity is challenged, their past is disregarded, their food is appropriated, and their symbols are hijacked. When their land is confiscated, they will turn inwards to their inner soul, to their traditions, norms and beliefs, in other words, they will hold on and develop their culture even further.

Culture serves as a form of entertainment, perhaps a chance for people to engage artistically, or to exhibit an idea or a thought skillfully. In Palestine, culture has always been a vehicle for social and political change, and more so as a strong and steady assertion of identity. For Palestinians, culture has become synonymous with *sumud*, Arabic for resilience and steadfastness.

Therefore, to understand the annexation impact on culture in Palestine, we must look into the challenges that such an oppressive act poses to the general public, and to the culture planners and art producers. We must also study the way people have historically reacted to similar realities, and how they developed the necessary tools to challenge oppression and maintain high moral value, most notably by utilizing and maintaining their identity and culture. As the late Edward

Said noted in his seminal work, *Orientalism*: “Ideas, cultures, and histories cannot seriously be understood or studied without their force, or more precisely their configurations of power, also being studied”.<sup>1</sup>

Palestine is a strikingly good example for studying the relationship between culture and identity. Individuals are living humans that exist by themselves and they often form their identity through introspection. Therefore, it is important not to see them as just a passive part of a community. As everyone needs to feel a sense of belonging to “home” or “nationhood”, individuals collectively develop and construct a shared culture. The fact that the Israeli occupation has fragmented the Palestinians for so long and has produced different realities of oppression, prompted people to respond in various manners to such oppression.

Everywhere and always, the Palestinians have used culture as the last or perhaps the strongest fence behind which they collectively and fearlessly defend the Palestinian identity. While the Israeli authorities have managed (to some extent) to divide the Palestinian people along geographical, political and economic lines, culture stood as the one unquestionable and indispensable denominator that brought them together, at home and in the diaspora.

<sup>1</sup> Orientalism 1978, E. Said, p. 89

Palestinians inside historic Palestine for example, and for the last 72 years, have rejected assimilation and submerging in the colonizing culture. They have defended and successfully maintained their language and traditions, celebrated their



writers and poets, musicians and dancers, and by doing so, have not only kept their identity and national affiliation strong, but have further developed cultural hubs that shine and voice their indigenous identity. Today, the city of Haifa is one example of a cultural focal point in which the Palestinians inside historic Palestine are showcasing the best of being an Arab Palestinian.<sup>2</sup>

In Jerusalem, the heart of the matter, where the Israeli occupation is deploying its “best” practices to maintain an Israeli-Jewish vibrant and lively presence in the city, Palestinian Jerusalemites often look to an unusual avenue for hope: Culture. Banking on the power of culture when forced to live under a culture of power, many consider the arts and cultural engagement as their last defense against forced alienation, fragmentation, and displacement.

In the last 15 years, and while the Israeli occupation has been upgrading its tactics of oppression, the number of cultural institutions has risen, old institutions have revived their work and upgraded their premises, and the total number of cultural activities in the city has substantially grown. In the small squeezed part of East Jerusalem (EJ), a total of eight cultural

institutions are working around the clock: a theatre, a museum, a music school, two art galleries, a multidisciplinary culture center, and a bookshop. Their unwritten joint contract is crystal clear: preserve and develop the Palestinian identity in occupied EJ through culture.

The main cities of the West Bank (WB) have also joined forces to foster cultural initiatives and to incubate festivals. Ranging from music to literature, from cinema to theatre, the agenda of every city in the WB is crowded with events and festivities. In fact, the Palestinians in the WB have found an admirable way to express their fond connection to the land by establishing a series of festivals to promote and celebrate specific fruit and vegetable seasons: the lettuce of Artas festival, the aubergine of Battir festival, the grapes of Hebron festival are all good examples. Furthermore, Palestinians have been organizing and celebrating beer festivals in the city of Tayybah on the outskirts of Jerusalem for years - all in an attempt to further exhibit their strong roots to the land and their love for their life on it.

### Threats of Impending Annexation

Perhaps the biggest challenge for cultural planners and art managers within the first days of annexation and every day thereafter is first how to develop a national, aimful cultural strategy within a further disconnected territory where people’s movement is heavily restricted. Neither artists can move easily, nor can culture goers and audiences roam freely between cities to attend events held at different venues. The network of checkpoints that Israel has invested in throughout the last decades has resulted in severe constraints on the ability of art and culture to be fluid, mobile, and diverse. Hence we have seen a rise in city-specific events and festivals.

The knock-on effect of localized festivals and cultural activities is that it limits the potential of Palestinians to meet and exchanging opinions and experiences. One of the main beauties of culture is that it presents a civilized medium in which diverse people can meet, agree or disagree, an opportunity to express their critique or share their admiration or otherwise. In Palestine, culture has lacked such a privilege for a long time, and with planned annexation, further localization will sever this reality.

In fact, people in the education sector have a similar pain to share. Since the second Intifada and the intense city closures that the Palestinians have experienced, students started to choose local universities, close to home, with less travel and less sleeping away. While universities in Palestine have always displayed pride in having a diverse student

<sup>2</sup> Haifa represents the new blend of Arab culture. Liberal art and culture are produced with a touch of modernity, yet rooted in traditional culture, and mostly in Arabic despite Israel’s attempt to officially downgrade the language. The blossoming Palestinian scene in Haifa is reminiscent of the city during British rule, when a lively Arab cultural life flourished. Much of that ended in the Nakba of 1948.

body and staff, they suddenly became attractive mostly to local students within their district. Furthermore, the ability for a wide range of Palestinian youth to meet, exchange ideas and experiences was halted. The effect of this is even more damaging if you acknowledge the role universities play in providing a place for people to meet, fall in love, and eventually form families - how immoral the occupation is to be interfering with the gene pool of the Palestinian people, controlling and dictating their ability to meet and charm each other.

While Israeli annexation of Palestinian land has been ongoing, the recently announced annexation to be implemented soon is yet another illegal act and a continuation of a series of events under which Palestinians have been living for decades. Such is the situation in which cultural organizers and art producers have been struggling for year after year. It is a huge hurdle to produce a relevant cultural program that tackles real and relevant community issues, one that is directed towards socio-political change and one which also advances awareness of the world, develops understanding of modernity, and builds appreciation of creative art and culture.

To achieve such complicated objectives, planners and producers can use the arguably modular and flexible art forms like theater, literature, and visual art. However, forms like performing art, conceptual art, and music are perhaps more arduous. The long years of experience that current cultural leaders have in the field of their work should encourage them to tackle such obstacles with responsibility and commitment.

Working in areas with potential Israeli presence and military control also presents health and safety challenges to both artists and their audience. We have witnessed in the past numerous incidents whereby the Israeli forces had no regards for Palestinian lives, and have often acted with excessive force to end people's lives. The areas that are threatened with annexation are located within the proximity of bloc of ultra-nationalist illegal settlements. While acknowledging settler terrorism against Palestinians, there is further concern over people lives in these areas during cultural gatherings and festivals.

Although these areas will remain occupied in the eyes of Palestinians and international legal bodies, cultural work and general development projects will be subjected to political dynamics and manipulation. Therefore, it will be even harder to secure funding from local and international donors for art and cultural projects that are already not the top priority on the agenda of donors, and will further exacerbate funding deficiencies.

This added complication will introduce new restrictions as-

sociated with international donors who are the main financial supporters of cultural events. Local artists and writers have often spoken about a feeling of unworthiness and lack of appreciation of their work that has increasingly driven them to seek opportunities for talks, exhibitions, and performances abroad. Adding to this sense rather than encouraging participation in the local cultural sphere, annexation amid a conditional, conventional and donor-driven culture will contribute to the existing crisis of emigration by artists and intellectuals out of Palestine.

Annual religious events are also under threat. The annual Nabi Musa (Prophet Moses) festival on the Friday before Good Friday, and which includes a procession to the shrine, has existed since the time of Saladin. It was stopped following the Israeli occupation in 1967 and later banned. However, in 1997, the Palestinian *Awqaf* Ministry began holding the festival again. The Nabi Musa shrine stands on an area of 4,200 square meters and is located in area currently under the menace of annexation.

Ecological and environmental sites that are ideal for outdoor cultural activities are already suffering under illegal Israeli control and will be jeopardized further under the annexation plan. At the time of writing, the settlement of Betar Ilit is planning a 600-dunam industrial zone to its north in an area known as the English Forest. This area, famous for its springs and terraced agriculture, was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site six years ago. It is adjacent to the Palestinian villages of Wadi Fukin, Battir and Husan, if the project goes ahead, it will endanger the natural springs that Palestinian farmers use for irrigation.

Artists and cultural leaders are known to excel when working in an atmosphere of freedom, loose bureaucracy and little control; these are the ingredients of creative art. It is very unlikely that such conditions will be met in the annexed area under Israeli control. In fact, it is very likely that the Israeli authorities will demand advance applications for permission to hold events or to use public space. Palestinian artists will refuse to apply for such permission from the occupier; hence, the closing of events will be a regular practice (as often happens in EJ). Confrontation and friction with Palestinians is a likely scenario.

We must not forget that Israel, on the other hand, may try to whitewash its crime of annexation by trying to promote cultural initiatives within the areas annexed under its own umbrella. By providing generous financial stimulus and a political agenda of toxic normalization, Israel can appear as if it supports the local cultural scene, perhaps in an attempt to assimilate, integrate or submerge the annexed areas with its surrounding settlements.

Similar attempts have been made in Jerusalem in areas

across the Green Line. Abu Tor is a good example where good neighborhood projects provided Israel with a fig leaf – although only until their true nature was exposed. In fact, Israel has facilitated the funding of organizations like “Roots-Shorashim-Judur”, which claims that: “Despite living so close to each other, Israelis and Palestinians in the West Bank exist in almost complete separation, and both sides have little knowledge of each other’s lives or humanity. Through our projects and workshops we create trust and partnership — the societal foundations upon which future political agreements can be built”. The utter audacity of promoting cultural exchange between Israeli settlers and indigenous Palestinians is beyond belief.

Such projects will certainly not gain traction in the colonized Palestinian areas. They will, however, further isolate those who take part in such normalization activities, and will distance them from their community in which they could find productive political work that exposes Israeli policies rather than whitewashes it.

## Conclusion

Since day one of the occupation, the Israeli government has been involved in what could be described as “culturecide”, erasing not only the existence of people but also their memories, their history, and their past, in urban cities, in remote villages, or even in Bedouin clusters which have not been spared harassment. The challenges posed by the infamous annexation are mountainous and sequential. Indeed, art and culture in Palestine will suffer as the annexation plans progress. However, it will always evolve into the mechanism required to act as an impenetrable barrier behind which the Palestinian identity will foster itself.

People who are concerned with cultural work within these areas should step up to the plate and show the utmost level of commitment and courage. The positive side of the story is that past experiences have taught us a good lesson: culture and identity are inerascable, especially when they are safeguarded by a strong will and a national spirit of perseverance.

Nabi Musa Shrine ©Wafa





STATE OF PALESTINE  
PALESTINE LIBERATION ORGANIZATION  
**NEGOTIATIONS AFFAIRS DEPARTMENT**

PALESTINE NEGOTIATIONS SUPPORT PROJECT (PNSP)

TEL: +970 (0)2 241 1171 - 6

FAX: +970 (0)2 241 1170

[WWW.NAD.PS](http://WWW.NAD.PS)

