SOCIAL MEDIA AND PALESTINIAN YOUTH CULTURE: THE IMPACT OF NEW INFORMATION AND MEDIA TECHNOLOGIES ON CULTURAL AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT IN PALESTINE

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In the last decades Palestinians witnessed a failure to reactivate the peace process, coupled with the expansionist policies of the current Israeli government, the quest of a two-state solution, is fast disappearing. Barriers to development imposed by the continuing occupation and the separation wall. The consequences of the Palestinian condition as a stateless nation, and nonexistence were evidenced in the lack of communication among people, the distance from places of leisure, culture and social disintegration with all the limitations of life that are accompanied with it. The Palestinians had to invent and create an immediate solution to come alive and adapt to the current situation or else run the risk of engendering a well known form of social pathology.

In a country were institutional forms of government are lacking; popular culture has developed on social media platforms free from the governmental authority and power. Facebook provides a free space for self-expression, creativity, civic initiative, anti-politics and the freedom of communication with international society.

Recent statistics indicate that Palestinian youth are one of the largest users of social media in the Arab World, mainly Facebook (PCBS, 2015). The onset of the use of social media heralded an interest, by scholars in re-defining the lynchpins of democracy in Palestine and the importance of social media in that equation. The effect of new media on emotional life, empathy, political participation, and social mobilisation had a major impact on these deliberations. This study shows that social media is vital to ensure a better environment for living that lends itself to social contacts, recognition, and promotion of the quality of the cultural life of Palestinian youth. In many ways, the new social media facilitates the expression, convictions
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and aspirations of the Palestinian youth and thus increase youth political participation and feeling of empowerment. The social media did not outcast any Palestinian; they all have experiences to share on the walls of the Facebook. The Facebook provides a space for the recognition of differences at the socio-political and cultural levels. It is these various forms of political pluralism that are of particular interest to the development of democracy in Palestine.

The overall goal of this study was to examine the associations between Palestinian youth use of social media and the following five domains: (a) cultural; (b) gender; (c) recognition of the Palestinians; (d) intergeneration values; (e) national identity and music. In my view social media and communication cannot change society unless they are accompanied by political, social, and economic actions. The use of social media may imply decentralisation, a horizontal structure, the establishing of contacts, and the creation of a network and not of a system, which could take place of a State.

My ideal is that without interference the promotion of cultural democracy within society can lead to one in which Palestinians can democratically decide on the social and cultural issues which concern them. This means that Palestinian youth can engage in deliberative democracy based on their acknowledged and diverse identities irrespective of the tendency of any reigning political powers to enclose all relationships within dominant power paradigms. The ideal of Palestinian youth claiming their cultural autonomy through Facebook is about their culture, dignity, and identity. Cultural democracy pits creativity and democratic decisions taken at the grass roots against local and traditional power structures. Through Facebook they can assert themselves and assume responsibility for their own lives in the face of outlived political rhetoric. To understand the political possibilities offered by social media, it is important to critically address the idea of political involvement and uncover its significance in the contents of social media.

Method

Participants

The sample was 100 undergraduate students, of whom 30% were males and 70% females. Participants were recruited from courses offered on human rights and democracy, and political science at Bethlehem University. They ranged in age from 18 to 21-year-old (M = 19.73, SD = .93). Geographically, 84% were from the West Bank and 16% from East Jerusalem, representing
various residential patterns, 12% from refugee camps, 57% from urban areas, and 31% from rural areas.

**Data Collection Methods and Procedures**

This study provides a conceptual and methodological framework with a cultural perspective in which the qualitative ethnographic approach was used. Qualitative research provides what anthropologists refer to as an “emic” perspective of a group’s experience. The utility of understanding phenomena from the perspective of group members is emphasised, allowing it to emerge within the context of the researcher’s interaction with the group. Importance is placed on understanding the group’s patterns of behaviour and systems of meaning in naturalistic settings, emphasising understanding social processes rather than predicting outcomes. Preconceived rules and categories for classifying behaviour are de-emphasised, and the analysis of data is inductive (Hughes, Seidman, & Williams, 1993).

As a research method, document analysis was used including Facebook posts and blogs, my personal media diary, classroom observations, and group discussions. In addition, documentary analysis, academic journals and research reports were consulted. Group discussions were subject to a thematic analysis, a method inspired by grounded theory (Braun & Clarke, 2008). Rather than working with hypotheses and pre-existing code frames, the analysis was inductive, or data-driven, and aimed at identifying recurring themes in the transcribed data set of group discussions. In the analysis, five themes were identified, three of which have to do with social media and culture, namely (1) Social media and culture, (2) Social media and gender, (3) Intergeneration values; and the other two themes have to do with recognition of Palestinians and their identity as well as music in protest.

**The Palestinian Context**

Rapid changes are currently taking place in all aspects of the Palestinian life. People are territorially separated, daily life is becoming more difficult and well-established political social and cultural values have been questioned. A feeling of uncertainty about the future and a vulnerability of peoples’ present situation is growing at all levels of society. The web of relationships that were firmly tied to social and local identities are becoming increasingly narrowed, restricted and profoundly altered. Culture as shared within established living spaces, supported by members of a group who pass it on
to the next generation, is becoming less and less a reality. A cultural identity rooted in a common understanding of the past is giving way to contemporary forces of political restriction and a persistent level of conflicting ideologies. Walls separate many Palestinians from their places of work, families and land, forcing them into daily encounters that involve humiliation, delays and uncertainties at Israeli checkpoints that control movement in and out of the West Bank. The 168 kilometers Wall has cordoned off distinct Palestinian communities from each other, making travel and communication within the West Bank a trial in itself (Keshet, 2006). The fundamental and everyday aspects of life such as birth death, marriage, and housing, working access to education, health institutions, culture and religious centres freedom of movement are all determined by the walls and flying checkpoint that may appear and disappear in a day.

Forced urbanisation, centralisation of jobs and activities has transformed the former city of Ramallah and its villages, from a once highly integrated cultural and economic unit to a place that is undergoing fundamental change losing much of its socio-cultural cohesion. Concentrated and integrated ancestral and family groups and individuals are splitting up. Injustice, alienation, social exclusion, unemployment, political violence and repression have become a routine and an everyday aspect of life across the generations. Against that background there are on-going debates about sovereignty and political integration. However, like the rest of the world many Palestinians have benefited from the rapid advancement in the field of information and media communications.

Theoretical Framework

Social media has been a key element in the recent studies for development in Palestine. The use of social media means more access to information that are essential for political knowledge and engagement (Delli, Carpini, & Keeter, 2003) and affects modernisation and political change (Turner, 2005) and it fosters a growing sense of modernity and community (Delli, Carpini,2000; Jennings & Zeitner, 2003; Lee, 2006; Lupia & Philpot, 2005; Zhang et al., 2010). Social media has been perceived by social scientists as a liberating technology that can expand political, social and economic freedom (Diamond, 2010). Other researchers have shown that social media can create more opportunities for radicalisation by enabling connection between like-minded individuals (Gaines & Mondak, 2009), and violent extremists (Berger & Morgan, 2015). The role of the new media in Palestine
is an emerging subject of research interest and discussion. Current studies on social media reflect uncertainty and a wide range of opinions. The importance of social media use has been taken on board by scholars in various fields, including psychology, sociology, education and communication. The most cited among this body of scholarship is Palestine Online by Miriyam Aouragh. She provides empirical data on the connectivity of social media among Palestinians and examines its role in re-configuring relations among Palestinian youth as well as in providing a platform for resistance to the occupation (Aouragh, 2011).

While some studies have recognised the role of social media among Palestinian youth in terms of passive resistance, civic engagement, entrepreneurship and employment (Khoury-Machol, 2007), others have indicated its association with censorship, women’s empowerment, cultural and social development (Arab Social Media Report, 2014). Other research has found that social media provides a new context for racial harassment and violence as well as a new ground for conflict and war (Kuntsman & Stein, 2010). Also, case studies have examined the role of social media in changing the global narrative on the Palestine/Israeli conflict by providing a voice for the disfranchised Palestinians in world politics (Brittain, 2014). In the aftermath of the Arab Spring cultural activism through new social media became more prominent with new narratives showing how the arts, cartoons, satire and music are used by youth protest to break out of the current political scenario (Sienkiewicz, 2012; Thomas, 2015). Other seminal research has revealed how social media reacted to censorship, and how it was used by activists in witnessing, documenting and recording human rights violations (Khoury, 2011).

Research on social media and political development in Palestine has been considered controversial at a number of points. Accordingly, social media could be considered as a sign of ongoing advancement or it might be counteractive to democracy and development acting as politicisation for radicalisation and escalation of violence. My question is has this exposure to new social media transformed the Palestinian society, to a more informed citizens that are able to participate in politics and decisions that will affect their lives? Or is it a response to the Palestinians need to cultural democratisation, access to leisure activities, and wider opportunities and dreams.

Conversely, a lack of understanding of the complexity of political, behavioural, societal and cultural factors that are involved, have frequently led to different understanding of the Palestinian political outcomes. Therefore, in order to understand these outcomes, it is important to critically address the
theoretical framework and to go beyond the existing academic explanations. In particular, the Palestinian specificity makes it difficult to deduce any general features. In many ways social media and culture do undoubtedly contain some elements of democratisation; it facilitates the expression, convictions and aspirations of the Palestinians people. In my view, the popular culture in Palestine conforms to the rules of representative democracy. Such a re-thinking of our theoretical models can help us understand and analyse Palestine more insightfully in the future. Palestinian youth at this moment are aspiring to be recognised heard and treated as humans not as subjects of an ongoing struggle. One of the effects of the social media is that expansion of knowledge and information, and access to sources of leisure activities; entertainment and relaxation become real possibilities for the large section of youth which in this moment have been deprived of such possibilities. The Facebook apparatus is reclaiming the empty space of the Palestinian state, yet can’t take the place of a sovereign state. At this time, it is assigned the task of maintaining social connection, producing and reproducing the consensus, and the collective will which ensure the harmonious functioning of society with its different ideologies.

Social Media and Culture

Facebook users have made changes in social norms that affect the fundamental values and perceptions of a wider Palestinian society. Facebook is allowing users to publish photos, personal information, interests, content and comments. The large number of personal and mobile devices designed to access these sites from anywhere and anytime, have made it possible for our youth to share information about their lives with a wide range of people. This publicity of one’s personal life is changing the nature of public and private spheres as well as individuals’ relationships and interactions with one another. In the past, this information was only shared by family members and close friends. At present, Palestinian youth are living their lives far more publicly than their parents, creating citizens who have different ideas about social and democratic values. This crucial change in personal privacy shows how a new social value can harm the right to privacy which is very important to human rights and democracy.

Today’s Palestinian youth are more likely to value money, image and fame over politics. They frequently express their wish for social, cultural, travel, recreational and religious freedom (Christophersen, Hoigilt & Tiltnes, 2012). Although Facebook offers a virtual freedom, it also introduces new
consumerist and neo-liberal cultural attitudes. The youth have started to compare themselves with each other which add to personal frustration and dissatisfaction due to their lack of resources. This results in rising expectations that cannot be met in the short term which could lead to some form of popular uprising.

The new media is perceived to have a liberating effect and enhance freedom of expression (Wheeler, 2006). However, in reality Palestinian youth are reluctant to express their political views and self-censorship is becoming apparent. Recently, Facebook posts have been used as grounds for possible imprisonment when used to express political opinions. Youth feel under the scrutiny of more than one intelligence service, which might threaten their future and their personal security (Keyes, 2013, Broning, 2011). Therefore, they deflect their energy towards cultural and social participation (Christophersen et al., 2012).

Most of the studies on Palestinian political culture mix between the public opinion on a current political incident and the for basic general values on politics, such as the political cognition, feelings toward politics, levels of partisanship, sense of civic obligation and political efficiency. The Palestinian youth react directly on the Facebook when there is an event, yet there is no continuity or a movement on the web, except for very few attempts such as the Electronic Resistance and other. On the other hand, as a result of the massive amount of information that is exchanged via Facebook on political violence, youth finds it difficult to reflect, analyse, comprehend or react rationally about what is happening in the political discourse, which may lead to an apathy and alienation towards political action (Witkin, Moore, Goodenough, & Cox, 1977). In Palestine, politics on Facebook “is like a movie once the film is over things will go back to normal” (Filfil, 2014, p 46). The study of the Palestinian political culture needs a more in-depth and timing analysis.

In all the counties, people are brought together under a sovereign government, yet in Palestine people are living under more than one sovereign government, or no sovereignty. Therefore the cultural institutions are establishing themselves in a parallel virtual space hypothetically occupied by governmental institutions.

Social Media and Gender

The combination of intimacy and distance on Facebook provides a new social context for social relations among the youth. Wheeler (2006) singles
out the importance of new social media overcoming decades of segregation, allowing more modern attitudes and gender equality to develop and to enhance the possibilities for women’s participation in the public sphere. Contemporary media is providing new ways of being together; however, this mode of communication can also result in a distortion of fantasy and reality among Palestinian youth. Gender relationships via new media have become more possible with 67.4 percent of women aged 10 years and above using social media networks in 2014, 68.2 percent of them were using it for personal acquaintance. Nevertheless, in social reality we witness more sex segregation and more traditional values are prevailing. Approximately 56.2 percent of the females sampled in the PCBS study who aged 15 years and above were married including five child marriages. Also, the participation rate of females in the labour force is 19.4 percent which is considered a very low representation in the Public Sphere (PCBS, 2015). Despite the higher percentage of female students at the university, the female participation in student councils in Palestinian universities and institutes is very low. For example, in Bethlehem University there were no female students’ representations for the last 5 years. Although there is a motivation to be free from the influence of traditional society norms, and the high percentage of education of women in relation to men, the persistence of gender-based inequalities is still recognised and accepted in many areas of Palestinian society; discriminatory gender-based norms, stereotypes and practices continue to impede the participation of women in the economy, politics and the popular culture (OECD, 2015). In the Palestinian society women are obliged, by a subtle interplay of cultural mechanisms, to exercise a regulatory function. The NGOs exerted many efforts to develop sites on women issues using the Facebook as a platform including but not limited to gender equality and women empowerment, yet many posts emphasise certain conventional feminine values, with women becoming more and more the mystical incarnation of the values of patriotism, the family and tradition. For example Palestinian hip-hop group posted on facebook a song “Who Are You? / تنا نفهم” with sights set uncompromisingly on the gender stereotypes and double standards faced by women in their community. At the core of this lies an issue that needs to be resolved, that is, the Palestinian identity under occupation. The voices heard in local and hegemonic discourse reflects the need of Palestinians to express their own national struggle. In reality, the analysis of social media messages whether cultural, political or social content clearly demonstrates a Palestinian preoccupation with consciousness of their political situation and their desperate attempts to preserve their cultural identity.
Social Media and Recognition of Palestinians

New media became imperative in the Palestinian popular culture creating a different landscape than the living reality. On Facebook, Palestinian youth are romancing, breaking old boundaries and experimenting with new cultural identities. According to statistics on the use of social media network, approximately 75.0% of networks users accessed it for acquaintance, 76.5% use it for games and entertainment, 34.2% for religious purposes, 33.3% for cultural topics and 25.8% for political opinions (PCBS, 2015).

For the first time the youth are able to participate, be visible, heard, seen and recognised without any restrictions of borders. Young Palestinian artists, movie makers, musicians are able to showcase and operate their creativity and diversity in a virtual public space without frontiers. They are able to contact people from different cultures yet similar in interests and believes. Social media is the new psyche that youth turn to for fantasy, for its liberating effect and the general joy of becoming part of the international society. On the web they can achieve the recognition that is essential in changing the Palestinian narratives (Brittain, 2014).

Social Media and Intergeneration Values

The impact of the usage of the new social media can be noticed at all levels including the Palestinian family relationships and dynamics. Although, there is limited evidence about the ways in which social media networks are altering family relationships, it is obvious for the observer that it is causing relationship problems largely around privacy, time demands and communication. As in other parts of the world, Palestinians from the old generation are suspicious about the use of social media by young people due to their lack of experience and expertise with the technologies which is affecting family patterns of interaction in terms of cohesiveness and parental styles of influence. Consequently, the political beliefs, symbols and values that were transmitted to young Palestinians through history, religion, folklore and collective political memory are far less applicable now.

While some older Palestinians tend to adopt more liberal and democratic values, some young people are adopting more conformist values, particularly in the domain of religion and the State. Patriotism is no longer unconditional, nor is it related to a certain group or fraction. The youth are connecting and strongly identifying with traditional groups with whom they share
primordial ties such as those of locality, family, tribe, religion, and political beliefs. The social networks that the youth form online are often politically homogenous (Gaines & Mondak 2009), which may limit the effect of these networks on tolerance and engagement. Researchers have frequently argued that the internet creates polarisation because individuals select themselves into information environments in which their views are never challenged and are frequently reinforced. So these processes of selection can lead to controversial and unproductive discussion on Facebook (Wojcieszak & Mutz, 2009). Today the political culture that is communicated via Facebook reveals highly negative attitudes towards politics, and authority. These attitudes give rise to different allegiances such as tribe, locality, religion, and economic alliances which have recently became part of the political culture. The social developments that have occurred affected the traditional society by instilling individualistic attitudes. Although these two forms of cultural development are contradicting, they could add a happy zest to the cultural landscape. Furthermore, the Palestinian cultural industry mediated by the web is becoming the focus of a cultural resistance movement that is steadily growing. Arts and music are fast becoming the critical catalyst for the Palestinian identity formation and nation building.

Social Media, National Identity and Music

In Palestine the inter dependence of popular culture and new social media is now a major component of the Palestinian society. This escalation of cultural interchange, although uneven across cyberspace is reshaping the Palestinian popular culture, creating the prerequisites for the penetration of global culture, while strengthening many features of the indigenous popular culture. The new media is offering a space not only for cultural innovation and the showcasing of cultural products, but also breaking new ground in which the youth can declare their cultural rights as inseparable from their human rights. The engagement of youth in social media may foster independence and liberal citizenship.

To better illustrate how political music plays a significant role in the Palestinian political landscape, I will now focus on specific interpretations of the political messages that are conveyed through Palestinian contemporary popular music. Music in the Palestinian culture is important and most of the youth are engaged in cultural activities that are related to the social and cultural life in Palestine. As a young artist Nai Bargouti puts it “I shall sing and continue what I’ve started. This is the form I have chosen for my
resistance to their oppression. They will not break me!” Music is my form of cultural resistance. Silence is just not an option. This must be why I am here, then. To learn how to become even louder, not to mention more in tune, in defying their attempts to dehumanise us.” I know I must sing, just as I am certain Palestinians will one day be free” (Bargouti, 2015).

It is important to emphasise the cultural role that music plays in fostering public awareness and the political transformation. Numerous music has been produced over the years that challenged oppression and suppression of the rights of the Palestinian people, and contributed to the formation of their social identity. Nowadays, music could provide an important narrative critique that can facilitate democratic discourse and deliberation (Sienkiewicz, 2012).

The development of hip-hop and rap is believed to be a brand new form of cultural expression around the world, whereas in Palestine folk poets used to improvise on the spur of the moment about issues that relates to political protest, their yearning for freedom and protest about injustice. In the present days young hip-hop and rap artists in contemporary Palestinian popular culture are building on this tradition of folk poetry.

The cultural and political identity of Palestinian youth has been discussed in talent shows and has been intervened in social media, mainly on Facebook. To voice their existence and their resistance, rappers showcase their cultural productions through Facebook. For example Rafael Saadeh, a rapper from Gaza, identifies himself to the world as Mac Gaza and in his profile he declares his equality with other human beings “this page is me and my raps and I love all the same things as all my mate sexy women footy and cars the ones from the japs keep the likes coming and I’ll flow and maybe I might make some doe” (Mac Gaza Facebook, October 2015). In his song Law Bairaf (If I know), Saadeh expresses his wish for the unification of the Palestinian people.

Through social media, rappers are re-claiming their lost cultural identity and are creating bridges to go back to their Palestinian home land. In an interview on the BBC Ms Mansour, a British hip hop musician articulates her protest against Israeli attacks on Gaza and the major human rights violations. In her song El Kofeyye [3arabeyye] (Arab scarf) she explains. In this song, I am claiming back its historical, political and revolutionary purpose. Ms Mansour connotes her cultural identity, revealing how existence is a form of resistance. (Donnison, 2010).

Amar Hassan a Palestinian singer rose to popularity around the Arab world after coming second in Super Star 2 in 2004. He was considered a national hero and most of his songs were about freedom and the struggle
against occupation. In one of his interviews he noted that “The war isn’t only being waged with rifles and rocks. The notebook, the paintbrush and the music are weapons too”. Most of the youth posting on Facebook reveal a national pride (Bar’el, 2005). On the other hand there were other posts which criticized using music as a form of resistance. Such as one of posts were by Hamas Islamist group which stated that: “Our people are in need of heroes, resistance fighters and contributors to building the country and are not in need of singers, corruption mongers and advocates of immorality” (cited in Habeas, 2004).

This public discourse on social media with its symbols and rituals presumes that a culture of war implicitly exists among the various Palestinian groups. It also shows how that discourse gets polarised within competing institutions, particularly among Islamists and liberals. Another example of contemporary music is the Arab Idol winner of 2013, Mohammed Assaf who became a national and a Pan Arab hero. Maysoon Zayid, a comedian wrote that “Mohammed Assaf is the face of the Palestinians that Netanyahu and friends refuse to admit that it exists. He is Muslim, but not radical. He is owned neither by Hamas nor Fatah and represents not just Gaza but Palestine as a whole. He humanises a generation of males who have been reduced to terrorist caricatures. This boy who grew up in an open-air prison managed to escape and show the world that, just like the rest of humanity, Palestinians have dreams. Assaf’s voice has become the voice of Palestine. Win or lose, he is proof that we do exist and that there ain’t no mountain high enough and ain’t no army strong enough to keep Palestinians from making their dreams a reality” (Zayid, 2013).

Following his success Assaf was appointed as a diplomat who interacts with the head of the Palestinian Authority and government officials on an equal footing, using his privileged position to further the Palestinian cause. As a matter of fact, he became drawn into the same mechanism that his voters are rejecting. Unfortunately by appointing him a diplomat, the political system turned his capacity from an enabler of political awakening into the declaration of the existing power structure.

Palestinian participation in the Arab Idol of 2014 contest raised the issue of citizenship and the right to movement. For the first time in history, Palestinian citizens living in Israel were presented to a wider Arab audience. Manal Mousa and Haitham Khalaily, two young Arab Israelis had to overcome a great deal of legal and bureaucratic hurdles to follow their dream and participate in the Arab Idol song contest (Yael, 2014). The story of Manal Moussa raises the issue of a young female who tells the story of
a nation, and sheds the light on the identity crisis and the problems that are encountered by Palestinians living in 1948 Israel. Travelling to Beirut, where the Arab Idol song contest took place placed Moussa in a complicated and critical condition. Under the Israeli law the travel to Lebanon is an offense punishable by up to four years in jail; in addition Lebanon bans Israelis from entering its borders. During her participation in Arab Idol in Beirut, Mousa tried to demonstrate her pro-Palestinian credentials on Facebook. She said “I want to pass a message to the yellow journalism that fought me – I am a Palestinian and the Palestinian blood flows through me”. The post gathered more than 4,000 likes and dozens of comments, some were praising her and others were questioning her identity as a Palestinian (Haaretz, 2014). The inner conflict that these young artists experience between striving for success in a music contest and their urge for a national belonging set the scene for Facebook to become a platform for rethinking democratic politics. These Palestinian youth generated media on Facebook are clearly contributing to the development of cultural politics that promote ideas, articulate identities, and create social and political values.

**Conclusion**

The cultural context of social media has enabled Palestinians to critically reflect on the notion of political participation facilitated by the Facebook platform. It is imperative to say that cultural practices promote different forms of political participation. The cultural content of Facebook conveys the collective political ethos of the Palestinian youth and may be conceived as important collective documents in the historical formation of the political culture of the Palestinian people. Therefore, by highlighting the difference between political participation and cultural participation on social media raises several questions that relate to political identity, political participation and contemporary forms of intervention.

Since social media has been identified as the starting conditions for social and political actions, Facebook have been radically changed by social media, means that platforms such as Facebook have become a space to study what Palestinians really want an individual base which is crucial issues unexplored.

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1 The Palestinians in Israel are descendants of the people that did not leave during the years of the state of Israel and during the 1948 war between Israel and the Arab States. Palestinian citizens of Israel comprise approximately one million people, about 20% of Israel's total population. The cultural and political identity of Palestinian citizens put under major pressure by the Israeli state, and expressions of collective identity are regarded as subversive, At the same time Palestinian citizens, living in Israel have often met with distrust within the Arab world.
The youth culture in Palestine is marked by a cultural diversity that is characterised by the coexistence of two vital cultural matrixes. The first is the traditional culture optimised by the anxiety for retaining the old values, and the second is the modernised culture which is necessary for socio-economic development. These two matrixes do not sit easily with each other; rather, they coexist in a relationship of tension, which have an effect on the political involvement. From this viewpoint, the participation that is judged to be revolutionary takes on a different nature as individuals are forced to recognise and take account of the current structures of power, which are ever present in an online context.

The right to privacy, freedom of expression and gender equality are recognised as basic human rights according to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948 and underpin the values of democracy. Yet in Palestine, privacy is regarded as a less important value and the freedom of expression and gender equality are more repressed. These values are becoming part of a new Palestinian ethos that could have negative implications on the development of democracy. It speaks as well to the changing nature of political culture in Palestine.

In a country were institutional forms of government are lacking; popular culture has developed on social media platforms free from the governmental authority and power. Facebook provides a free space for self-expression, creativity, civic initiative, anti-politics and the freedom of communication with international society. This cultural movement is developing strategies to bypass the prevailing authority that inhibits cultural diversity and tolerance. This movement of ideas makes them choose their own forms of popular culture without the interference of the political ideologies of the current political parties. This autonomy has a positive effect on the democratic process, in that it encompasses an independent life of society against the despotic influences of the political order.

The inability of the Palestinian Authority to influence popular culture and politics became clear when they concentrated their efforts in opposition to expressions of popular culture, such as the creation of and transmission of cultural symbols by artists such as Mohammad Assaf and others. These symbols are providing a sense of purpose through an online cultural identity and a temporary resolution to existential crisis. They offer Palestinian youth a way out of the many problems that they encounter in their daily lives, and are representations of political action and power. This form of cultural politics is promising to deliver equality and freedom through the victory of reason. The return of a national hero promises tangible recognition to a nation longing
to restore its pride. It represents an attempt to cleanse a feeling of national humiliation, self-doubt and defeat. It is intensified by a cultural identity that was quite simply denied by a combination of the effects of traditional culture and the occupation, obviously not in any sense equal.

Through the production of these new forms of communication, Palestinians find themselves collectively involved in the construction of a new shared cultural identity. The construction and negotiation of shared narratives and images is central to the process of the development of collective identity which has a sense of multiple belongings.

Different ways of looking at the world and different ways of thinking are indeed challenging and are a source of disagreement and tension that can lead to conflict and violence. These differences could be positively associated with democracy, suggesting the long-term roots of the country’s political culture. The question of what might emerge as populist alternatives to democracy is highly uncertain, as is the implication of such a trend for development or progressive politics. The future is not important, what a matter is the present, with the viewpoint of the future disappearing as the present is continued.

Palestinian culture is not a fixed bounded culture. It is a result of a cultural exchange in a virtual platform, a process of ongoing dialogue with earlier forms of indigenous culture, change and unfinished production. It has undergone an endless process of innovation and invention, and for this reason is a constant source of creativity, a continuous self-understanding and accommodation of differences. Palestine has a unique condition from which it is difficult to deduce any general feature, yet there are salient features which could be outlined, such as the intolerance for injustice, declining of trust in political institutions and parties, creativity in informal structures, alliances with informal networks of organisations, the ideology is shifting from political issues into more concerned with culture and civil society.

Finally, the glue provided by a new emerging popular culture gives young Palestinians a sense of identity and helps to define their place in the world. It is now the leading provider of psychological security. Territorial borders do not currently mark the boundaries of a sovereign Palestinian State; the Facebook walls are becoming an area where the historical narrative is unfolding; where state-ness is contested and questioned. Political democracy has become an illusion. However, cultural democracy strives to give Palestinians control once again over their lives, their time, their space, all of which could provide the means of a new political autonomy.
Compliance with Ethical Standards

Participants were assured confidentiality and the anonymity of their responses. They were told that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time. The study has complied with the American Psychology Association’s ethical standards in the treatment of the sample and ethical approval was obtained from the University IRB. There is no funding for this research and there is no conflict of interest.

References


