



CONCEPT NOTE

CULTURES OF RESISTANCE THE CASE OF PALESTINE AND BEYOND

**Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies (University of Exeter)
Exeter Center for Ethno-Political Studies
European Center for Palestine Studies**

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Cultures of Resistance: The Case of Palestine and Beyond

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This workshop focuses on different understandings and forms of resistance practiced *in* and *for* Palestine. Mainstream literature on the Israel/Palestine conflict has often focused on formal politics and avenues of participation while scarce attention has been devoted to cultural politics. This is despite the fact that cultural politics functions as a crucial site of political expression aimed at constructing and deploying ethnicised, racialised, nationalised, religious, class, gendered, and other collective identities

More generally, mainstream political theory has tended to disregard ‘culture’ as the binary ‘other’ of politics, therefore failing to recognise and explore the political dimensions inherent in cultural production (and vice versa, the cultural dimensions of politics). Scholars, particularly in the disciplines of international relations and conflict resolution, have often ignored other more creative and non-violent forms of politics, such as art, cinema, literature, music, humour or forms of dress. While in other contexts of colonisation and resistance a burgeoning literature has focused on cultural politics as a revealing site for (re-)thinking identity formation, nationalism and resistance (Paul Gilroy on the Black Atlantic, Stuart Hall on the Caribbean, Arjun Appadurai on India, Achille Mbembe on Africa), the literature on the Middle East remains narrowed on formal politics and classic notions of civil society. The failure of orthodox Middle East scholarship to grasp the dynamics behind the recent uprisings in the Arab world point to this limitation, and thus highlight the importance of studying cultural production as an important field of political expression.

Only recently a few studies have started to address popular cultures in the Middle East as significant sites to grasp political dynamics, identity constructions, forms of power, national projects and the ways in which political and cultural hegemonies are articulated, contested, challenged or reproduced (in new forms of control). By looking at the “aesthetics” of resistance through the lens of informal politics and cultural production we aim to trace the emergence of new political and cultural subjectivities (but also the new regimes of power that accompany these). A workshop addressing the emergence of alternative counter-publics and their potential to initiate social or political change is particularly timely, given the centrality that popular culture (such as street art, music, songs) played in creating collective identities and new political subjectivities in the recent protest politics in the Middle East.

The Palestinian political and cultural landscape offers a rich case study through which to investigate these questions. Particularly now, at a time of serious political, social, territorial and cultural fragmentation of Palestinian society, further research into newly emerging forms of ‘doing politics’ is needed. This workshop therefore aims to analyse the different forms and arenas of cultures of resistance in Palestine and the ways in which they might contribute to challenging traditional Palestinian political cultures and party boundaries, as well as recently emerged forms of sectarianism (clan politics, tribal identities, secular vs. Islamist divides).

For this purpose, we aim to look at the emergence of new constituencies, political cultures and projects, located both inside Palestine/Israel, but also amongst Diasporas. Indeed, cultural politics and political cultures are not territorially-bounded phenomena. Perhaps even more than the realm of formal politics, cultural politics is imagined, produced, consumed and experienced through global and transnational spheres that connect people and ideas across borders.

While the workshop will focus primarily on contemporary Palestine, we are open to widening its scope by encouraging comparative analyses with cultures of resistance both in other Middle Eastern countries and amongst their Diaspora communities around the world. We believe that this comparative dimension would give added value to the event by showing how cultural politics could be a prism to analyse creative

forms of resistance to nationalist hegemonic discourses in the homeland or to assimilationist ideologies and politics in the host countries.

Main questions the workshop will address:

- What are **alternative channels, spaces and practices of political participation** in Palestine today? For example, how are new media, art, cinema, literature, music, humour, forms of dress or other forms of cultural productions contributing to the emergence of new political projects, subjectivities and expressions?
- To what extent and how do such new trends in Palestinian political culture pose a **challenge to classic political identities and formations**? For example, do they emerge in parallel with, or in alternative to, classic party and clan networks and affiliations? Do they contest or creatively rearticulate secular vs. religious political identities?

Subthemes to be explored in paper presentations:

1. Intersectionality

- How do gender, class, generation, legal status and place of residency influence the production of new forms of resistance and political expression? For example, which new notions of masculinities and femininities emerge in cultural productions? Do they open up new spaces for understandings and practices of resistance?
- How do these relate to different positionings in terms of gender, generation, socio-economic and/or legal status (refugee, nonrefugee), place of residency (town/village/camp or inside/outside Palestine)?

2. Space

- What are the mechanisms, channels and modes through which Palestinians accommodate, circumvent, or resist Israeli spatial control?
- Can architecture support the reappropriation of fragmented and occupied social and political space?

3. Transnationalism and Diaspora

- How does living in a Diaspora impinge upon the articulations of creative cultures of resistance? For example, how do Diaspora communities challenge nationalist hegemonic discourses in their homeland and assimilationist ideologies and policies in the host countries?
- Does living away from the material dimensions of the conflict contribute to producing political imaginaries and projects different from those inside?

4. Regional and Global Circulation

- How does the Palestinian case compare to cultures of resistance in other contexts? For example, what new insights can the study of cultural productions provide on the political dynamics of the recent uprisings in the Arab world?
- How do notions of resistance, dissent, solidarity and advocacy circulate regionally and globally, and how are they represented in cultural productions in different context?