

ESSAYS

The Future of Art in the Age of Militarized De-Production

Re-Thinking Cultural Development in Palestine

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Tawfik Gebreel, *Father and Child*, 2014.
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The culture of violence^[1] imposed by Israeli militarism disrupts and constrains creative practices in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT). Israel's recent war of aggression against Palestinians in Gaza since early July, serves as a brutal reminder that Israel is in full control of accelerating the future of Palestine's cultural de-development. Since the launch of Operation Protective Edge, the

homes of artist Raed Issa[2] and that of the poet Othman Hussein[3] have been destroyed; Samar al-Hallaq[4], a coordinator for the Palestine History Tapestry Project has been killed; the decimation of the Shujai'iya neighbourhood has obliterated notable cultural and religious sites including the Mahkamah Mosque[5] that dates back to 15th Century; the Islamic University of Gaza's[6] literature and creative writing department (including its library) has been reduced to rubble; and across Gaza an estimated 230 schools (90 UNRWA and 140 government-run)[7] have been targeted at a time when its students should be celebrating the results of their Tawjihi examinations. In Palestine, the announcement of examination results on the radio and television are as much a part of cultural life as the visual arts, plastic arts, literature and heritage sites, as they provide a platform to articulate and perform the stateless nation.

Yet, despite the terror weighing heavily on Palestinian life, the dominant Israeli logic will continue to state that these cultural destructions are the unfortunate outcome of the Hamas government's policy of using civilian infrastructures to house weapons. It will argue without evidence that Gaza's civilian population is being used as human-shields. It will ignore its eight-year imprisonment of Palestinians in Gaza through an ongoing cultural and economic blockade that has kept the population captive to Israeli control. And it will attempt to dislodge the fate of Gaza from the wider context of the Palestinian anti-colonial struggle by applying a false liberalism that frames this current aggression as a democratic war against terror. Within this logic, Israel is able to commit disproportionate violence against an entire population, including its edifying and cultural institutions, by claiming self-defence and its own cultural preservation.

Yet, these 'recursive power dynamics'[8] between the occupier and occupied are not unique to Gaza. Earlier this month, at the start of Gaza's assault, the Ramallah-based artist Khaled Jarrar, was subjected to a 'day of humiliation'[9] and denied a visa permit by Israeli authorities to attend a screening and discussion of his work *Infiltrators* (2014) as part of the *Here and Elsewhere* exhibition at the New Museum in New York. Jarrar is from the West Bank – the 'other' Palestine – and therefore does not fit the 'punishable enemy' narrative that is working to devastate Gaza. Indeterminable security reasons were given instead.[10] And earlier this year, the UK Foreign Office applied similar restrictions when it denied Nabil al-Raei, the artistic director of the Freedom Theatre in Jenin, from participating in a speaking tour of the UK. On this occasion, the UK official in charge did not believe al-Raei would return to Jenin after the event (both a patronizing and unsolicited accusation) and that his reason for travel – 'business' – was not legitimate enough. This was the same reason given to two authors from Gaza, Ali Abu Kattab and Samah al-Sheik, who were invited to perform at the Mayor of London's *Shubbak Festival* in 2013.

Generally, donors, cultural organizations and artists in the wider international artistic community rarely challenge these arbitrary structures of legitimation, and (uncritically) accept a narrow political script that prevents true artistic connections from occurring between artists in the territories and those outside. But for Palestinian artists and cultural practitioners working in a global context, the inherently racist logic that works to silence their voices is all too clear. As al-Raei stated: 'I was rejected because of who I am, and this rejection is also part of why we are struggling for our rights and freedom.'^[11]

Thus, if Palestinian culture is to serve as a critical site of resistance within the international community, the frameworks of intelligibility need to shift in order 'to change the conditions of reception'[12] that afford Palestinians cultural autonomy. And, given Palestine is understood as a highly polarized and contested issue, how – in the words of Judith Butler – do we create a 'space for legitimate public debate, free of intimidation'?[13] In this essay, I want to suggest that framing Palestinian cultural production through a culture of violence – rather than the hackneyed frames of conflict or resistant – can help highlight the overt and covert 'infrastructure of unjust distribution'[14] that problematizes the development, distribution and reception of Palestinian culture within a global context.

Visualizing violence: towards a new cultural logic

If we take Ranciere's notion that 'Politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has that ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time',[15] power is inextricably bound to a visible and concrete presence. It is no surprise that for decades, Israeli censors have worked to erase any form of visual or cultural expression that asserts Palestinian nationalism, or that suggests that Palestinians are a nation with a cultural past. One of the first laws Israel enforced following the annexation of East Jerusalem in 1967, for example, was for all cultural and biblical sites to come under Israeli administration. It was a process of deculturalization that historically rooted the Israeli connection with the land while simultaneously dislodging the Palestinian historical narrative.

The ongoing fragmentation of historic Palestine by separation barriers, and the archaeological expropriations already undertaken since 1967, also work to visually alter the historic landscape so as to reinforce the Jewish right to the ancient Holy Land.[16] As such, Israel is better able to safeguard its historical perspective within the political arena, which is why the international community are often willing to accept Israel's securitization narrative at the expense of the Palestinian cultural narrative.

This is no longer a deterrent for many Palestinian artists who are working to challenge Israel's colonial undoing of historic Palestine. Take, for example, the work of visual artist Kamal Aljafari's *Port of Memory* (2009), in which layered images of Jaffa (past and present) are presented in a synthetic attempt to narrate the city's complexity as both part of Palestine's history and Israel's present. Another project that challenges Israel's spatial impositions is Larissa Sansour's 2011 *Nation Estate* – a video and photo installation that imagines a future Palestine as a vertical construction, in which occupied cities and expropriated cultural spaces are reclaimed and unified across different levels that can be reached by an elevator. But these creative responses have not escaped criticism or censorship, with Sansour's project serving as an example of the discriminatory logic Palestinian artists face once their work enters the international culture industry, albeit to varying degrees. Despite *Nation Estate* being shortlisted for the Lacoste Elysée Prize in 2011, it was later removed because the work was deemed 'too pro-Palestinian' – a ludicrous charge that reaffirms cultural biases. Whilst the gallery representing her criticised this decision, and the prize sponsors withdrew their funding, it is a judgment

(whether explicitly stated, or subtly implied) that continues to pacify and depoliticize Palestinian cultural expression.

The notion that Palestinian works of art must act within the (ambiguously defined) political comfort zone of an art industry, or risk losing financial and developmental opportunities narrows Palestinian culture into a binary of rage (against the rules set by the occupation) and cooperation (within the rules set by the occupation). Such logic fails to understand the weight of Palestinian suppression at the hands of military culture, and falls somewhere between political unawareness and what Pierre Bourdieu has called 'false and hypocritical neutrality',^[17] which misinterprets Israel's cultural violations as the inevitable fallout of a cultural conflict. Yet, these contested national narratives based on ethno-religious differences rarely allow for a parallel history to emerge. Israel has been able to maintain force by perpetuating a 'clash of civilizations' narrative, presenting themselves as civilized, Europeanized and democratic leaders who must protect themselves against violent, backward and uncivilized Arabs. It is a cultural framing through conflict that intentionally overlooks the asymmetries of power that exist between the two cultures, locking Palestinian cultural narrative within the same cat-and-mouse scenario that inevitably stalls cultural production.

At this critical juncture, the dominant visual rhetoric in Palestine is increasingly one of horror: photographs of dead and injured civilians, of destroyed homes, and of public institutions reduced to rubble, are being circulated online and amongst media outlets; info-graphics produced by organizations such as Visualizing Palestine work to contextualise the current attacks on Gaza within the 66 years of Israeli state oppression^[18]; and artistic responses from within Palestine/Israel and internationally, highlight the extent to which the ongoing occupation deters Palestine from engaging in the globalization of culture. This is best captured in the latest work by New York-based filmmaker Jacqueline Reem Salloum and the Israel-based Palestinian musician Suhel Nafar of DAM^[19] who released a video montage titled *Everyday is 1967* (2014) on the online platform Art for Freedom, days after Israel began its assault on Gaza. As the title suggests, Israel's domination over the Palestinians since the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza has rendered Palestinian life unchangeable - a message that is reinforced by a sequence of flashing iconic political and cultural images to signify progress and change taking place globally from 1967 to the present day, alongside recurring images of Israel's decades-long domination over Palestinians. In moments of accelerated violence, as with Gaza now, it is crucial to ask what potential these images hold for understanding the collective fate of Palestine, and whether the visibility of violence can shed light on the invisible structures of power restricting future development of Palestine.

As the architect and scholar Eyal Weizman has argued, Israel's 'intentional destruction of property and infrastructure ... should be understood as eruptions of violence that sustain the threat of even greater force'.^[20] In the same way that Israel is fixing a visual terror onto the landscape of Gaza to warn Palestinians of their inevitable erasure, it is important to engage with the images of death and ruins not only as a spectacle of exception. Rather, we should read Gaza's scorched earth as a metaphor that lays bare the edifice of Israel's policy: one of inevitable destruction and the denial of an autonomous Palestinian future. Moreover, framing culture through violence frees discourse from the

anxieties of cultural inappropriateness that often hinders direct criticism and opens up space for a new cultural discourse to emerge; one that enables supporters of cultural freedoms to express opposition to political domination without facing charges of being culturally biased. While it may seem odd to suspend cultural specificities when speaking about a given nation's cultural development, it is a first step in removing the blockages that dominate cultural logic – including ethno-religious conflict – and allows us to better read the Palestinian cultural narrative.

Decades ago, Gramsci argued that political inquiries are 'insoluble' when 'disguised as cultural ones', and nowhere has this been truer than in the history of Palestinian cultural intervention.[21] The historian Ilan Pappé has suggested that defenders of Israel's colonization have 'hidden behind the cloak of complexity in order to fend off any criticism of their quite obviously brutal treatment of the Palestinians'[22] – in which conflict resolution becomes yet another deferral tactic to inflict more violence for military expansion. For Palestinians, this cultural narrative 'has been a relatively straight-forward process of colonization, dispossession, resistance and suppression'.[23] Framing Palestinian culture through 'conflict' obscures the strikingly obvious colonial power over artists and cultural workers, and so any form of resistance to the status quo opens up Palestinians to spurious labelling such as anti-Semitism,[24] or failing that serves the function of being culturally divisive.

Whilst the majority of arts organizations and funding bodies have remained silent to the recent attacks on cultural life, the London-based Tricycle Theatre is one of the few cultural organizations to hold the Israeli government accountable for their bombardment of Gaza. The theatre refused to host this year's UK Jewish Film Festival owing to the organization's refusal to give-up the small percentage of Israeli embassy funded money. In doing so, the political economy of cultural development rather than cultural content was made punishable. Yet, after taking this stand, the Tricycle Theatre and the UKJFF issued a joint statement that highlights the persuasive power of political opposition to the Israeli boycott and the malleability of such stances when cultural funding is in question:

Following lengthy discussions the Tricycle has now withdrawn its objection and invited back the UKJFF on the same terms as in previous years with no restrictions on funding from the embassy of Israel in London.[24]

Nevertheless, such instances as this, and the consequent (and seemingly divisive) debates regarding cultural funding and the political stakes attached to it points to the tensions between the inherently political nature of cultural funding and the idea that culture can move beyond politics to 'build-bridges'.[26] But as the recent statement by members Palestinian Performing Art Programme (which includes eleven Palestine based organizations) reads, the most urgent role for the international art and culture community to play is one of resistance to the occupation and apartheid of Palestine by supporting the Palestine Cultural and Academic Boycott of Israel (PACBI).

Between negation and neoliberalism: the economic warfare on culture

The image below by the artists Tarzan and Arab – twin brothers Ahmed and Mohammed Abu Nasser from Gaza now working in exile from Jordan – was produced in the early days of the escalating violence in Gaza. The image is a satirical appropriation of the 1936 'Visit Palestine' tourist poster, originally designed by the Israeli artist Franz Kraus to brand the idea of Palestine for an emergent Zionist audience. The original image has become a site for Palestinian artists – including Amer Shomali and Larissa Sansour – to express the changing mechanisms of control Palestine has been subject to. But in this latest interpretation of the poster, a more urgent reality is made visible. Here, Gaza has become synonymous for all of Palestine, in which total destruction at the hands of Israeli warplanes serves as one of the only cultural and economic images of Palestine presented to the international or 'visiting' community.



Tarzan and Arab, *Visit Gaza*, 2014.
Copyright the artists.

The employment of the '1936 Visit Palestine' tourist poster holds a double irony when thinking about the future of Palestinian cultural development within the global economy today. As a redundant city-brand, Gaza is unable to fit the 'logic of marketability'[27] that has become a central tenet of neoliberal cultural policies in which countries, cities or regions able to brand themselves as key players in terms of political, economic and cultural output are rewarded with funding and development opportunities. Additionally, it shatters the Israeli myth that states Gaza could have been 'the Singapore of Middle East' had it not chosen the path of resistance. Blaming Gaza for its failure to develop the region as a touristic site of economic and cultural development is a delusion at best, and overlooks Israel's intensified economic and political control over the region.

After all, though it may be true that Hamas does 'the bare minimum for creative development'[28], the hermetic siege by Israel has resulted in limited cultural flows that ensure Gaza's residents remain in complete isolation from the wider international community. Access to culture – both offline and online – is strained by shortages in electricity and fuel supplies. In declaring Hamas a terrorist organization in 2007, Israel along with two of the largest funders of the 'peace process' – the US and the EU (and in collaboration with the Palestinian Authority) – suspended direct aid to the Hamas-led government. It was a way of punishing the Palestinian people for exercising their political autonomy in a fair and transparent election process, and has since created a binary logic between an 'enemy' government and its 'captive' people. As such, Palestinian artists from Gaza who are understood as oppositional to Hamas, are more likely to gain recognition within the international arts market. Yet, this is not the fault of the artists, but rather points to how Palestinian culture is packaged for the international market, not to mention the unequal dynamics of power Palestinian artists face in a global context.

Indeed, there have been attempts by the Palestinian Ministry of Culture to lead on cultural policy in the region as indicated by the *Culture Sector Strategic Plan* (2011-2013).[29] But owing to a very limited budget (less than 1% of the overall PA budget) the implementation of cultural policy has not been realized at a national level. This ensures that the Palestinian cultural economy remains highly dependent on international aid, which is channelled and administered via Israel, resulting in the fact that Palestine's strategic (de)development is ultimately in the hands of their occupiers. Israel's 'colonial management'[30] over culture, with unwavering backing from the US and often silent complicity from the EU, allows them to punish the Palestinian population any time it deems necessary, by suspending aid flows into the occupied territories. What Israel constitutes as necessary punishment is the very possibility of Palestinian self-determination.

Hence when Palestine was admitted as a full-member into the UN Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) in 2011 – a move that legitimized the idea of a Palestinian national heritage and as such marked a symbolic recognition of Palestinian state-hood by a supra-national organization – the US, along with Israel, condemned the organization's decision and responded with the suspension of funds, which to date amounts to \$240 million (around 22% percent of the organization's total budget). According to the US state department, UNESCO's decision undermined the 'shared goal of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace' – a statement that aims to assert the

logic that Palestinian-led cultural and political initiatives are an obstacle to peace, while US and international intervention is the only solution to resolving the 'conflict'. Furthermore, it relies on a discourse that leans on liberal registers to obscure the horrors and brutalities of occupation by wrapping it in a 'for-the-greater-good-of-world-peace' package. As such, the Israel-US monopoly in global cultural policies[31] must be understood as a form of economic warfare that poses a sizeable threat on the funding mechanism on which Palestinian cultural development is dependent.

This leads us back to the poster by Tarzan and Arab alluded to earlier, which employed the touristic trope so as to highlight the destruction of Gaza as a redundant city-brand that was punished for not fulfilling the cultural identity laid out for it. Since the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza in 1967, Israeli occupation forces have worked to fragment Palestinian society into separate units that interrupt the collective will for national unity. Through advanced militarism, Israel's spatial re-ordering of Palestinian society into Gaza, East Jerusalem and the West Bank, has come to be 'accepted as given – legitimized as the focus of political negotiations, financial aid packages, and development strategies', which significantly favour Israeli expansion and control over the OPT.[32] This has created a highly political economy of uneven development across the region, which is exemplified by the stark contrast between Ramallah, which is informally branded as a 'five star prison' and Gaza, often referred to as the 'the largest open-air prison in the world'.

Yet, while Ramallah has been able to leverage its (paradoxical) city-brand to acquire more international funding for the development of its cultural scene, its seemingly autonomous economic and cultural development must be considered alongside Israeli expansionism and Gaza's rapid de-development. Ramallah's acquiescence to Israeli capitalist policies has created a veneer of autonomy at the expense of cultural unity across Palestinian borders. As Joseph Massad commented a while back:

Ramallah proper (excluding the surrounding villages) continues to be what many now refer to as the Palestinian Green Zone, sheltering, in addition to the intelligence staff of Israel and Israel-friendly Arab countries, those Palestinians who are paid and protected by the Oslo process, whether the Oslo bureaucracy, its technicians and hired intellectuals, or the business and middle classes recently habituated to the new name-brand consumerism that the Green Zone can offer. The opulent life contrasts with the life of the rest of the Palestinians outside Ramallah who live in misery, hunger, and under the bombardment of the Israeli's and the attacks of savage Jewish colonial settlers, not to mention the harassment by Fatah[32].

Ramallah is perceived by many as a paradoxical 'enclave city' whose 'sights are oftentimes more fixed on the global rather than the national level', which hints at a duplicitous strategy.[34] Culturally speaking, investment has had a relatively positive effect in terms of establishing a developing arts infrastructure with several multidisciplinary arts venues, including Al-Karmel Centre for Culture and

Arts, the Popular Art Centre, Art School Palestine, The Edward Said National Conservatory of Music, The International Academy of Art Palestine. The development of these spaces of course encourages increasing connections with the international arts community but seemingly evades the political realities on the ground. Take the funding discourse of the EU Cultural Programme in Palestine, as an example, which seeks to promote 'dialogue, cultural exchange and intercultural cooperation between the European Union and its partners'[35] – yet seemingly ignores the very real spatial limitations governing the region, at least at the level of discourse.[36]. Given the problems around audience and artist mobility, the funding discourse is at odds with the international cultural aims of encouraging diversity, internationalism and plurality that have become recognised as central ideas within the global cultural field.

This is not to delegitimize the longstanding efforts of Palestinian-led cultural and education initiatives that are working to develop the arts in the region via these funds, especially as these organizations continue to successfully work within the limitations of the spatial fragmentation across the OPT. For example, in the most recent iteration of the EU cultural programme for 2014 an estimated sum of just under 1.5 million Euros of funding has been allocated to heritage, visual arts, music, dance projects, the majority of activity is either based, or administered via organisations based in Ramallah and the surrounding area of Bir Zeit; however, Ramallah-based organisations such as the Ramallah Contemporary Dance Festival perform in cities across the West Bank and have worked with the British Council to bring in audiences from Hebron and Bethlehem to events in Ramallah.[37] Moreover, a sizeable sum of the 2014 EU Cultural Programme has been allocated to the Performing Arts: A Pathway Towards Self Expression and Democracy programme, to be administered by the AM Qattan Foundation – a not-for-profit organisation that works to develop cultural and education programmes in Palestine and the Arab world - to provide over twelve cultural organizations across the OPT to develop their music, theatre and arts programmes. Additionally, the AM Qattan Foundation 'will spend over \$3m this financial year alone (2014-15) on its Culture and Arts Programme which works throughout historic Palestine and Lebanon' in addition to funds for the Qattan Centre for the Child in Gaza and the Qattan Centre for Educational Research and Development.[38] Though it is not uncommon for national cultural centres (or in the case of Ramallah, the de facto administrative capital of Palestine) to dominate arts spending, for smaller-scale cultural initiatives and independent artists in there is a perception that the distribution of foreign funding can oftentimes empower certain arts groups and exclude others from the cultural dialogue. As one cultural practitioner working in the Ramallah area told me: 'there is a monopoly on cultural production by key organizations, which is at odds with the needs of the independent artists.'[39] This critique was not aimed at specific organisations, and it cannot be taken as representative of all, but an over-reliance on foreign funding is not without problems. This perception is further problematised when Palestinian artists who are seeking to make international connections with artists and organisations outside of the region are all too aware that the mutuality of exchange is not always upheld.

Ramallah's unique position within the 'occupation's spatial regime' has engendered its separation from the national Palestinian majority. Yet, it simultaneously stands as the de-facto 'political and cultural centre of the West Bank'.^[40] This places it paradoxically as both a symbol for a cosmopolitan

Palestinian nation and for the Palestinian de-nationalization process – a foil to Gaza's representation today, and in the poster of Tarzan and Arab, as an image of a defeated nation. As such, the supporters of Palestinian nationhood – who recognise the importance of Jerusalem as their capital – will never buy into the 'Ramallah-brand'. After all, allowing Ramallah relative autonomy is a Machiavellian strategy of consensus that works to pacify the idea of Jerusalem as the capital for a future Palestinian state, which Israel also claims as its national centre.

Of course, there have been cultural attempts in the past to redirect this emergent spatial order, but they have been met with heavy censorship. The Arab Culture of Capital programme that named Al Quds (Jerusalem) as the Arab city of culture was a symbolic recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of a future Palestinian state, which – though well intentioned – was a politically naïve intervention. Inevitably, the initiative was met with disruptions and closures. First the logo was banned; then the opening night Nazareth venue was issued with a permit that prohibited use of the site; and Israeli soldiers raided the Jerusalem site and confiscated the venues. The wider-political situation of Israel's attacks on Gaza in 2008/9 also problematized the notion of a celebratory cultural event and yet there is no recorded legacy of the event, and no statements by the funders – the Arab League and UNESCO – condemning these acts.

Moreover, to host an initiative that deploys the logic of city-branding as a cultural tool of solidarity and interconnectedness for Palestinians across the splintered territory – when the city is itself annexed and its cultural venues subject to arbitrary laws – pointed to a political naivety that achieved nothing more than a gestural nod. Yet, if a genuine and mutual cultural unity is desired, across borders, we have to avoid symbolic gestures in favour of committed action. What all supporters of culture can unite against is a common enemy: the culture of violence that leads to the invisibility and silencing of Palestinian culture. There should be an implicit consensus amongst art communities that ensures the visibility and development of culture. As key players in the development of cultural life in Palestine, the EU, British Council, UNESCO and other foreign funders with international remits have thus far done little to shift the regional imbalance, with the most widely held criticism being that these organizations are complicit in sustaining the occupation on Israel's behalf. Indeed, with the UN declaring 2014 as the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, it remains to be seen whether this will be yet another ineffective, symbolic gesture.

But as guardians of cultural policy, investors, funders and practitioners should extend their cultural governance to critically exposing and indeed policing the deliberately unclear and arbitrary rules set by Israel that silence Palestinians. It is about breaking bad habits that are institutionalised but not unchangeable. Indeed, real cultural intervention would be to lobby an international arts community to pressure Israel over these closed borders, as this is not an issue for artists and organizations alone to resolve, though their work is vital to challenging the social order in the absence of political cohesion.

Conclusion

In the absence of resistant intervention by the large funding organizations, the role of artists in Palestine has always been about intervening into the public sphere to reclaim critical and collaborative spaces for artists, activists and audiences working to deconstruct Israel's 'matrix of control'.^[41] The Al Quds Underground, for example, is a cultural festival supported by the A.M. Qattan Foundation and the Netherlands Fund for Performing Arts. It was launched in 2009 in reaction to the above ground interruptions that took place during the Capital of Culture, which brought artists and audiences to underground cultural spaces across the historic Old Town of Jerusalem. These included disused tunnel spaces, domestic spaces and outdoor rooftops: overlooked spaces restored through culture that provide a temporary respite from the structures of power that pervade daily life. The work of the Decolonizing Art and Architecture (DAAR), led by a team of artists, architects and residents in Palestine, works critically within public and urban spaces set by the occupation 'to imagine "the morning after the revolution".'^[42] By working within the logic that the occupation will end, DAAR mobilizes new ways of thinking about space, which becomes an act of decolonizing the mind. And in Gaza, despite spectacular violence reigning over its people, the continuation of creative practices by artists Tawfik Gebreel and others have turned the images of bombs into artistic representations – an affirmative visual gesture that runs against the negation of Israel's remorseless war machine.

But no matter how big or small such cultural disruptions or interventions are, which work to reclaim the Palestinian cultural narrative from a history of cultural disruptions and violence, they are no match against the real political, economic and military restrictions that prevent culture from developing. As Shareef Sarhan, co-founder of the Windows from Gaza Contemporary Art group, told me in March 2014:

...the appreciation for the visual arts has grown in Gaza with larger audiences attending openings and one-off exhibitions. Despite this, the siege and economic situation in Gaza continues to limit opportunities for artists, largely because there are no Palestinian institutions to provide funds, and there are limited venues to showcase work, which leaves the arts and artists facing a vulnerable future.

His cultural 'pessoptimism';^[43] offered as much certainty back then, as the dire humanitarian situation in Gaza today, despite the fact that new cultural initiatives that will better help Palestinians engage with their cultural past, present and future, such as the privately funded Palestine Museum opening in 2015, are indeed emerging. Yet, until the 'infrastructure of unjust distribution'^[44] – both in the OPT and in the wider cultural field – is dismantled, the future of Palestine, its culture, its history and indeed its nationhood, will inevitably be deferred.

[1]For further discussion on the cultures of violence with regard to Arab-Islamic cultures, see Lila Abu Lughod speaking at UN Women Panel [m.youtube.com/watch?v=4hLOos5yJn8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4hLOos5yJn8) which emphasises the importance

of addressing the cultures of violence rather than addressing specific ethno-religious categorisations.

[2]Sarah Irving, 'Gaza home destroyed by Israeli bombs', *Electronic Intifada*, January 16th 2014

<http://electronicintifada.net/blogs/sarah-irving/gaza-artists-home-destroyed-israeli-bombs>.

[3]Sarah Irving, 'Israeli shelling destroys poet Othman Hussein's Gaza home', *Electronic Intifada*, July

19th 2014 <http://electronicintifada.net/blogs/sarah-irving/israeli-shelling-destroys-poet-othman-husseins-gaza-home>

[4]Ben Davis, 'Gaza Cultural Worker Among Sunday's Dead', *Huffington Post Art and Culture*, July 23rd 2014 http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/07/23/samar-alhallaq_n_5610442.html

[5]Donald Macintyre, 'Life among the ruins: ten days inside the Gaza Strip', *New Statesman*, August 13th 2014 <http://www.newstatesman.com/2014/08/inside-week-s-new-statesman-10-days-inside-gaza>

[6]'Israel Strikes University in Gaza City', *Al Jazeera*, August 2nd 2014 <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/08/israel-strikes-university-gaza-city-20148283821707200.html>

[7]OCHA Occupied Palestinian Territory: Gaza Emergency Situation Report (as of 15 August 2014, 0800 hrs) www.ochaopt.org/documents/ocha_opt_sitrep_15_08_2014.pdf

[8]Nimer Saltany 'Repetition and Death on the Colony: On the Israeli attacks on Gaza', *Critical Legal Thinking*, July 11th 2014 <http://criticallegalthinking.com/2014/07/11/repetition-death-colony/>

[9]Ben Davis, 'Palestinian artist barred from attending New Museum show', *Artnet News*, July 14th 2014 <http://news.artnet.com/art-world/palestinian-artist-barred-from-attending-new-museum-show-61214>

[10]Sarah Irving, 'UK denies Visa to Palestinian Theatre Director', *Electronic Intifada*, March 16th 2014 [Intifada http://electronicintifada.net/blogs/sarah-irving/uk-denies-visa-palestinian-theater-director](http://electronicintifada.net/blogs/sarah-irving/uk-denies-visa-palestinian-theater-director)

[11]Ibid.

[12]Butler, Judith. *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. Verso: London, 2004.

[13]Ibid.

[14]Weizman, Eyal. *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation*. Verso: London. 2012.

[15]Ranciere, Jacques. *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*. Ed. And trans. Gabriel Rockhill. Bloosbury: London, 2013.

[16]Weizman, Eyal. *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation*. Verso: London. 2012.

[17]Bourdieu, Pierre. *Political Interventions: Social Science and Political Action*. Verso: London, 2008, p.387.

[18]For examples of Visualising Palestine infographics see www.visualizingpalestine.org

[19]Jacqueline Reem Salloum and Suhel Nafar, *Everyday is 1967*, published on July 14th 2014 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tF5D9QV4URo&sns=em>

[20]Weizman, Eyal. *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation*. Verso: London. 2012.

[21]Antonio Gramsci quoted in David Harvey. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2003.

[22]Illan Pappé quoted in Weizman, Eyal. *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation*. Verso: London. 2012.

[23]Weizman, Eyal. *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation*. Verso: London. 2012.

[24]Butler, Judith. *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. Verso: London, 2004.

[25]More details can be found here: <http://www.tricycle.co.uk/16748/the-tricycle-theatre-and-the-uk-jewish-film-festival/>

[26]Dorian Lynskey, 'Tricycle Theatre and Israel: the politics of the cultural boycott', *The Guardian*, Thursday 7th August 2014 <http://www.theguardian.com/culture/2014/aug/06/-sp-tricycle-theatre-row-is-cultural-isolation-ever-right>

[27]Sarikakis, Katherine. 'Cities as Geopolitical Spaces for the Global Governance of Culture in Isar, Yudhushtir Raj and Helmut Anheier ed. *Cultures and Globalization Series 5. Cities, Cultural Policy and Governance*. SAGE Publications: London, 2012.

[28]Interview with Yasmeen El Khoudary, a cultural practitioner working on cultural heritage projects at the Mathaf Museum in Gaza, March 2014.

[29]The Ministry of Culture devised Culture Sector Plan informs part of the Palestinian National Plan, thus emphasizing the role of culture as a priority on the Palestinian national agenda. Developed with artists and cultural organizations in the region, it marks a significant shift in a Palestinian-led national cultural policy, that articulates a broader view of culture and recognizes the need for a flexible infrastructure to ensure increased connections between the OPT and Palestinian artists and audience in the Diaspora. Yet in the absence of financial and political autonomy its delivery is problematized.

[30]Li, Darryl. 'A Separate Piece? Gaza and the "No state solution"' in *Jadaliyya* [http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/8762/aseparate-piece_gaza-and-the-"no-state-solution](http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/8762/aseparate-piece_gaza-and-the-)

[31]In 2013, following the suspension of aid and refusal to pay its dues, both the US and Israel lost UNESCO voting rights in November 2013. Whilst the two nations were penalised by the organization's rules (which states voting will be suspended if payment is not made within 2 years) it nonetheless created a significant dent to the cultural budget and consequently the cultural programme. For more info see 'US Loses Voting Rights at UNESCO', *The New York Times*, November 8th 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/09us/politics/us-loses-voting-rights-at-unesco.html>

[32]Hanieh, Adam. *Lineages of Revolt: Issues of Contemporary Capitalism in the Middle East*. Haymarket Books: Chicago, 2013.

[33]Joseph Massad quoted in Taraki, Lisa. 'The Paradoxical Case of Ramallah/ al-Bireh', *Journal of Palestinian Studies*, Vol. 37, No 4 (Summer 2008)

[34]Taraki, Lisa. 'The Paradoxical Case of Ramallah/ al-Bireh', *Journal of Palestinian Studies*, Vol. 37, No 4 (Summer 2008)

[35]See EU Cultural Programme website: http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/westbank/documents/news/2013/2014_0130_culturetable_en.pdf

[36]As Eyal Weizman points out, 'our political understanding of the conflict to a physical, geographical reality' has been well-documented in scholarship and the media, so for organizations to overlook this in funding applications, is arguably more than just a poor consideration (262). Moreover as the largest donor and a key stakeholder in the peace talks, the European Union is all too aware of the different territorial fragmentations.

[37] "The rising popularity of contemporary dance in Palestinian society", *British Council*, April 16, 2014, <http://blog.britishcouncil.org/2014/04/16/the-rising-popularity-of-contemporary-dance-in-palestinian-society/>

[38] Conversation with the Chairman of the Board Omar Al-Qattan, 11 September 2014.

[39] Several of the people I interviewed preferred to remain anonymous which points to a self-censorship amongst cultural workers that is present in the cultural sphere.

[40] Taraki, Lisa. 'The Paradoxical Case of Ramallah/ al-Bireh', *Journal of Palestinian Studies*, Vol. 37, No 4 (Summer 2008)

[41] Weizman, Eyal. *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation*. Verso: London. 2012.

[42] Quoted from Decolonizing Art and Architecture (DAAR) website, see www.Decolonising.ps

[43] A satirical term taken from the Palestinian writers Emile Habibi's novella *The Secret Life of Said the Pessoptimist*, to describe the paradoxical state between optimism and pessimism in which the Palestinian finds himself.

[44] Weizman, Eyal. *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation*. Verso: London. 2012.

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