

Past Matters - Examining the Role of Cultural Heritage in the Construction of Palestinian National Identity

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The cultural heritage of Palestinians is one aspect of collective memory that remains visible yet is perpetually overwritten by other narratives and other meanings. The American archaeologist Albert Glock argued that external powers have attempted to control Palestine for nearly 4,000 years and, as a result, Palestinians have been forced to flee into exile or bargain for survival with these powers in order to gain historical and cultural fulfillment. At the heart of this is the notion that the Palestinian people, as an ethnic and national community, have been disassociated from their past and restricted in the development of an independent, indigenous cultural heritage narrative.



Yet, today Palestinians are building unique heritage narratives that commingle the history of a distant past with the political strife of present-day occupation and displacement. The result is that Palestinian cultural heritage is actively becoming integrated within the construction and maintenance of Palestinian national identity rather than being entirely subjected to the goals and desires of American, European and Israeli scholars seeking to reaffirm decidedly Judea-Christian narratives. Based on ethnographic field research conducted between 2004 and 2006, this paper will explore how Palestinians are actively constructing heritage narratives that infuses past with present and ultimately wrest control of Palestinian cultural heritage from external powers.

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