

## 'Keys of the Past: Keys to the Future' - A Critical Analysis of the Construction of the Palestinian National Museum Policy as an Alternative Deconstruction of Routinised International Heritage Discourse

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Writing in a recent issue of *The Jerusalem Quarterly*, Doumani (2009) is one of a number of critics who in diagnosing the spread of 'archive fever' in Palestine has made the connection between the growing phenomena of a popular 'archival impulse' and the on-going violences (structural, direct, cultural, among many others) synonymous with the occupation of Palestine by Israel. This paper offers a critical reading of one particular intervention within this turbulent yet vital Palestinian archival and heritage context: the process of developing a Palestinian National Museum Policy (PNMP). I argue that the urgent need to reject 'top-down' formatted models synonymous with the heritage 'Holy Trinity' -UN/UNESCO, International consultant(s) and states-party - is paramount as is the need to foster, support and extend the alternative 'bottom up' approach by drawing upon sustained research into relevant heritage networks and to engage with the issues, agendas, needs and 'voices' collecting around the popular expression of 'archive fever'. As described in this paper the beginnings of such a transformed model emerged from PNMP workshop sessions and related discussions but require more dedicated investigation. Certainly this and other comments reiterated by Palestinian voices address the need for new and alternative forms of heritage and museum development strategies and models in local, regional, national and international contexts. What must be concluded from this experience is that the process of constructing the PNMP likewise offered an effective deconstruction of routinised practice and this is something to take forward as a significant outcome and cause for both recognition and cautious optimism. By doing so, dominant heritage discourse, as a site synonymous with structural violence, can be transformed into a more 'just' space of ethics and shared action.

“مفاتيح الماضي : مفاتيح للمستقبل”  
: تحليل نقدي لبنية سياسة المتحف  
الوطني الفلسطيني باعتباره البديل  
لنمطية التفكك.

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كتب الباحثون في العدد الأخير من مجلة القدس الفصلية ، دوماني (2009) وهي واحدة من عدد من النقاد الذين يقومون بتشخيص انتشار “حمى الأرشيف” في فلسطين. جعلت من العلاقة بين الظواهر المتزايدة من “دفعه الأرشيف”، والعنف المستمر (البنوي والمباشر والثقافي ، و أشياء أخرى كثيرة) مرادفا لاحتلال فلسطين من قبل إسرائيل. هذه الورقة تقدم قراءة نقدية واحدة تدخل خاصة ضمن الأرشيف و التراث الفلسطيني المضطرب والذي ما زال حيويا : عملية وضع السياسات للمتحف الوطني الفلسطيني. أنا أعتقد أن الحاجة الملحة لرفض “من أعلى إلى أسفل” نماذج متناسقة مع تراث “الثالوث المقدس” و اليونسكو ، المستشارون الدوليون ، والدول الأعضاء هو أمر بالغ الأهمية. ودعم وتوسيع النهج البديل، “من أسفل إلى أعلى”، بالاعتماد على البحث المستمر في شبكات التراث ذات الصلة والتعامل مع القضايا والاحتياجات والخطط وجمع الأصوات في جميع أنحاء التعبير الشعبي “لحمى الأرشيف”، كما هو موضح في هذه الورقة ظهرت بدايات تحول هذا النموذج من جلسات ورشات عمل “السياسات الوطنية للمتحف الفلسطيني” والمناقشات ذات الصلة ولكنها تحتاج إلى مزيد من التحقيق المخصص. بالتأكيد ، هذه التعليقات وغيرها من التي تكررت من قبل الفلسطينيين قامت بتحديد وتلبية الحاجة الى اشكال جديدة وبديلة للتراث ، واستراتيجيات التنمية وتطوير المتاحف ، والسياقات الإقليمية والوطنية والدولية. والذي يجب استخلاصه من هذه التجربة هو ان عملية انشاء وتكوين “السياسات الوطنية للمتحف الفلسطيني” ، بالمثل عملت بفاعلية على تفكيك النمط او الممارسة الروتينية . وهذا شيء للمضي قدما في تحقيق نتائج كبيرة والسبب للاعتراف والتفاوض الحذر على حد سواء، ويعمل ذلك ،، يمكن تحويل الخطاب التراثي المهيمن ، كموقع مرادفا للعنف الهيكلية ، الى شيء أكثر من كونه عمل أخلاقي وعمل مشترك.

*Archive fever is spreading among Palestinians everywhere. Whether in Ramallah or London, Haifa or San Francisco, Beirut or Riyad... and this is just the tip of an iceberg whose full dimensions can hardly be imagined.*

(Doumani, 2009: 3)

*It is a question of the future, the question of the future itself, the question of a response, of a promise and of a responsibility for tomorrow. The archive: if we want to know what that will have meant, we will only know in times to come.*

(Derrida, 1996: 36)

*Further to the recent interest expressed by the Palestinian Authority to create museums in the occupied Palestinian territory, namely in Gaza, Jericho, Bethlehem, Nablus, Hebron & Ramallah, and the positive reaction of the International community in supporting this action through ad-hoc co-operation, the need to develop a museum policy has been highlighted.*

(PNMP, 2008: 4)

The contours and conflicts that define Palestinian archival and cultural heritage discourse are inextricably bound up in the gamut of violences, direct, structural, cultural and otherwise,<sup>1</sup> synonymous with the on-going occupation of Palestine by Israel. Those who are part of, or familiar with, the Palestinian context know this all too well and as was made clear in the various presentations given at the WAC Inter-Congress in Ramallah in October 2009 by representatives of the Palestine National Authority's (PNA) Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, by local, regional and international NGOs, and by academics and activists that this is a reality of both the Palestinian past and present that demands recognition.

Similarly, for Doumani the above mentioned strain of 'archive fever' spreading among Palestinians, is symptomatic of the connectivities between this contemporary 'archival impulse' and continued violences: he argues, 'Of course, this is not an unusual obsession for any social group that experiences the traumas of dispossession and displacement on a massive scale as the Palestinians did in 1948. Nor is it unusual that the archival impulse is still strong six decades after that seminal event. After all, 1948 was not a moment, but a process that continues as I write. The appropriation of Palestinian land and control over the movement of Palestinians is a daily reality. Indeed, not a day passes without a Palestinian home full of memories and memorabilia being destroyed by Israeli bulldozers; or without some olive grove, patiently tended and referred to by name across the generations, being cleared out for the building of Jewish only roads' (Doumani, 2009: 4).

In recognition of the above context in which for Palestinians violence is a 'process that continues' and a 'daily reality' – an 'on-going Nakba' - this paper offers a critical reading through these alternative lenses of one particular intervention within the Palestinian archival and heritage context: the process of developing a Palestinian National Museum Policy (PNMP). Here too, it is not only to understand the dehumanising force of such violences and to give recognition to the spread of 'archive fever' as symptomatic of the co-existent and reactive sense of urgency evident in the proliferation of projects that collect around archival and heritage discourse, but also to acknowledge, as Derrida (1996) is clear to reiterate, that the heritage value assigned to the Palestinian past and present are ultimately inscribed as resources for mobilisation in order to secure both the vision and the reality of a 'just' future. In recognition of this fact the PNMP is entitled 'Keys of the Past, Keys to the Future' which

takes up another iconic vision synonymous with the Palestinian experience – the refugee defiantly carrying the keys of their former home – here again an otherwise everyday object has come to symbolise not only the violence and injustice of the past and present but the vision of an alternative ‘just’ future.

## **Modifying Heritage Models**

The PNMP was commissioned by the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) with the assistance of UNESCO. The brief has been to develop a framework for the creation of museums in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. As with all UNESCO initiatives this national museum policy document was undertaken with the ‘support’ of the ‘international community’ (an issue I return to analyse later): it is here that my colleague Sally MacDonald, Director of UCL Museums and Collections, and I, were offered and took up the role of consultants.

The aforementioned alternative critical reading I wish to pursue marks a shift away from the dominant working model that, despite calls for modification,<sup>2</sup> continues to govern the UNESCO/ States Party and consultancy network. Thus what might be dubbed the ‘Holy Trinity’ of internationalised heritage policy-making typically emerges to define itself as ‘top-down’ interventionism and as such a framework of ‘imported’, ‘Western-centric’ structural violence.<sup>3</sup> This routinised engagement of selected ‘elite-professionals’ is correspondingly a technicist-led process based upon identifying local ‘need(s)’ – in this case ‘the need to develop a museum policy has been highlighted’ (PNMP, 2008: 5) – and is one which ultimately seeks to yield technicist solutions (cf. Ferguson, 1994). In more formal language, UNESCO defines its role as, ‘providing the [Palestinian] Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities with Technical Assistance to design a National Policy for Museums’ (PNMP, 2008: 5).<sup>4</sup>

By way of contrast, in this paper I wish to draw out an alternative ‘bottom up’ model which has more in common with an ethnographic fieldwork approach. I therefore want to mark a shift away from dominant conceptualisations of international heritage projects and to explore in broader terms the ‘consultation process’ as a ‘actor-network’ concerned with the inclusion of alternative ‘voices’ and their capacity to modify, reject, subvert, contest and ultimately re-appropriate such models for a more relevant and resonant archival, heritage and museological engagement. What is crucial to recognise, as Doumani further argues, is that the spread of ‘archive fever’ in Palestine reveals the vital role of what he terms as ‘lay persons’<sup>5</sup> and a variety of ‘actors’ or persons, institutions, groups that have become an essentialised part of the archival-heritage networks many of which are located ‘outside’ routinised notions of the heritage profession/ professionals. Therefore, not only is the ‘genre of memorial literature written mostly by laypersons about their families, and towns, among other matters’ highlighted by Doumani but a context in which ‘Until proper archival collections are established, [it] therefore, ... becomes incumbent on individuals, family associations, universities, think tanks, research centres, city clubs, student groups, and a wide range of non-governmental institutions (cultural, political, religious, charitable, and so on) to take matters into their own hands; hence the tremendous expansion in both technological and social spaces of archival activity’ (Doumani, 2009: 5).

## **Heritage Care and Activism**

It is crucial here too that this variety of ‘actors’, of ‘alternative voices’, skill-sets and interdisciplinary approaches be acknowledged and essentialised within heritage policy and the

models of discussion and decision making. It is evident that this popular commitment is bound up in the recognition of the need for strong cultural activism as a form of resistance. Appropriately, it was therefore through discussions and conversations with such constituencies that the working category to describe those involved in archival, heritage and museological worlds was extended by the PNMP document to give boarder recognition to those committed to the 'care for Palestinian heritage' (PNMP 2008: 6). Since professionalism has its own range of embedded structural violences the new diversity of 'actors' within the archival, heritage and museological domain is itself transformational in terms of creating new and alternative forms of action. What has also emerged is that a certain 'archival democracy' as Doumani (2009: 5) has dubbed it, has not only made this endeavour 'everyone's concern' but that the dominant technicist-led diagnostic approach to problem solving has been eclipsed by the prioritisation and conceptualisation of archival, heritage and museum networks as 'social spaces' rather than technicist zones. It is here too that 'new technologies' are being reconceptualised predominantly as part of strategies to secure forms of access and communication to social and cultural networks at a time when the 'everyday realities' of daily life for Palestinians are bound up increasingly restricted mobility.

It was thus very clear that any model of heritage planning and policy -making requires such 'voices' to be a privileged and essentialised part of the process. A selection of such 'carers' – whether individuals, groups, NGOs, charities – were an important inclusion. A number of such organisations gave presentations at and/or where part of the organisers at WAC-Ramallah: for example, organisations such as PACE, the Hebron Rehabilitation Committee and RIWAQ amongst others are currently making a massive commitment and contribution to Palestinian heritage networks by also making their work relevant to contemporary community needs and to defining better futures and making these a reality.

Recognition is therefore made in the PNMP of this varied context and that since it is 'vital to consolidate Palestine's inheritance', then, 'This includes the wealth of collections kept in government museums and stores, universities and private homes and in collections abroad' but also 'Perhaps most importantly it includes the people who are caring for this heritage (whether professionally trained or not) their commitment & dedication often in the face of great hardship' (PNMP, 2008: 7). Having such, 'representative voices', proved of key importance to the PNMP. Thus, in the PNMP it is clearly stated that, 'The development of this policy will depend very much on Palestine's cultural activists, teachers, researchers, historians, scientists, & archaeologists, who can potentially act as powerful facilitators'.<sup>6</sup> It is further explained that, 'This [document] entails a joint work, in consultation with locals and experts, to define the principles to guide the policy draft as well as to initiate pilot activities for the implementation of donor-funded projects' (*ibid.*).

With more detail it was this aspect of developing the PNMP that centred around visits being made to such 'parties' in September 2007 and culminated in the organisation of a group workshop in December 2007. At the latter occasion which was held at Ramallah Museum, an outline version of policy was produced to prompt discussion at the workshop, and was attended by 16 persons while the policy was commented on by numerous others. Thus our visits, for example, to individual collectors, to private heritage initiatives confirmed these to be a valuable and key part of the vibrant and committed heritage context of 'archive fever'. It was this aspect of encountering and understanding the variety of 'stakeholder' or 'interest groups' – or better still 'actor-networks' (cf. Latour, 1993) – within the Palestinian context that proved crucial in eliciting both orthodox and alternative perspectives. Thus while it is increasingly becoming a well established part of the 'international consultancy' format

that UNESCO briefings included various introductions to 'relevant people'<sup>7</sup> in terms of key national, regional and local heritage and museum professionals, however, in the case of the PNMP recognition was made of the need to take this process further by pursuing workshop based consultations and conversations and meetings with certain other individuals and parties. Therefore, not only were officially selected 'locals and experts' present but this initial group of participants was extended further in terms of including other 'interested parties'. This modified format was encouraged and endorsed by the Minister of Culture.

## **Planning Heritage Futures**

To focus more specifically on the development of the PNMP and to draw upon the key workshop meeting, our visits, and also our on-going process of responding to comments on draft copies of the document: - what follows offers a consideration of the core agendas and debates to emerge. There were then many statements made of frustrations of context yet despite, or perhaps because of this, a coexistent and equal enthusiasm and commitment was expressed in terms of outlining visions and giving urgency to action. The meeting and associated discussions were thus vibrant and animated.

What was immediately crystal clear and by now an obvious key concern was the severe impediments to mobility, access and networking in the Palestinian context. This, for example, was evident both in the numerous different accounts of the problems encountered by participants simply in terms of travelling to and from the workshop venue, the inability to see 'colleagues' on a regular basis and was most telling in terms of those, notably from Gaza, who were unable to attend and to be reached.<sup>8</sup>

This in turn underlined the broader sense in which the very nature of planning in a conflict-zone was inextricably bound up in the ability, or more properly the inability, to imagine and create alternative futures. In consequence it was clear that this needed to be a key part of PNMP discussions. The nature of occupation is one in which temporalities and action become compromised and 'the theft of time' and 'loss of agency' become an embedded part of the on-going, daily structural violences. The crux of the problem, as related to the development of the PNMP, emerged as the conflict over twin perspectives. The first was that of creating a document based on the realities of the current occupation, and the alternative, that of creating a document based upon 'thinking beyond the occupation' as one discussant termed it. The participant who used this latter phrase explained that taking up this strategy was a means of expressing resistance to the current situation. The concomitant fear being that without such a statement position the PNMP was at risk of 'normalising' the occupation and as such had the consequence closing down the possibility of making independence a thinkable reality. The decision was therefore reached that the PNMP would both outline the problematic past and present in terms of the limitations on Palestinian archival, heritage and museological development caused by the historical and contemporary context of occupation while in its statements and planning this document would be strategically based on a vision of an independent Palestinian future. Implicit in this too are agendas and projects that are committed to revitalizing Palestinian action and agency in the heritage and cultural sphere.

## **Alternative Heritage Languages**

Similarly, participants made explicit that they had no desire for what was termed as making 'grand statements' in a context in which the use of 'official' international 'policy speak'

had, for many become emptied of meaning and for some an insincerity. A certain sense of weariness and exhaustion was obvious in terms of a context in which the international community and Palestinian institutions are bound up in the circulation of certain languages, metaphors and 'buzzwords' and that these were thus essentialised within UN/UNESCO speak and the latter's associated key heritage policy too. It was explained, for example, that 'peace' (a foundational ideology of UN/UNESCO identity and of its Enlightenment influenced moral-ethical standpoint) had become such an over-used, alienating term for many Palestinians as it has become more synonymous with what was regarded as an exploitative 'peace industry' and at the same time it was far from being a reality in everyday Palestinian life. Likewise concepts such as 'tolerance' and 'reconciliation' (terms that litter international agencies mission statements and policy-making) were similarly felt to have been appropriated by the same 'top-down' powers that were allowing the occupation to continue.

What was therefore a core aspect of the PNMP development was the strategy by which participants would reflect upon the use of discourse: language, concepts, metaphors, 'buzzwords' and rate their meaning in the Palestinian context. Discussions thus revealed the care taken to scrutinise routinised 'policy-speak' as a means to highlight and critically respond to issues of power, to question relevancy of terms and not only to uncover the inequalities of such 'conditions of dialogue' but also as a basis and a means of re-selecting or highlighting terms, statements and concerns that were held to be 'meaningful' and hold 'value' within the Palestinian context. The relationships and the usefulness (or otherwise) of alternative cultural and political languages and discourses to better describe (as they saw it) the realities of the Palestinian experience were also firmly part of the PNMP development process: be they, for example, revisionist historians circulation of terms such as 'ethnic cleansing', 'the on-going Nakba', 'cultural genocide' amongst many others or discussions regarding 'a single-state' or 'two state solution' and how this relates to cultural heritage planning.

### **Visions, 'Living' documents, Beneficiaries**

Interestingly the starting point for discussion was that of establishing a 'vision' for the PNMP document: a key issue that created much discussion and debate. In the context of PNMP it was clear that the participants wanted a:

- Policy intended to be both visionary and practical and a 'living document'.
- Envisages the formation of dynamic and innovative Palestinian Museum Network' (PNMP, 2008: 2)

The vision was encapsulated further as creating:

A dynamic Palestinian Museum Network that engages all Palestinian people, and visitors to Palestine. This network protects the cultural and natural heritage, preserves the collective memory, acknowledges Palestine's historic diversity, and promotes cultural interchange, creativity and prosperity. (PNMP, 2008: 5)

Crucially here by refocusing upon the dynamic of creating a *network* from the policy document was therefore claimed by participants as a means for further consolidating the nature and form of a Palestinian museum and heritage sector and intended skill-sets and profes-

sionalism. The need to identify 'key beneficiaries' was similarly highlighted as a crucial concern and were after much discussion and reflection defined as:

- a) Palestinians of all ages and backgrounds, including refugees and those who have emigrated, with priority given to marginalized geographical areas and social groups, schoolchildren and young people.
- b) Visitors to Palestine, with priority given to 'alternative' and independent tourists (PNMP, 2008: 3).

The category of 'Palestinian people' was purposefully identified as 'all Palestinian people' in order to communicate and respond to the fragmented, diasporic nature of Palestinian communities and identity. It was also a powerful means to call more generally for the recognition of marginalised groups within the wider Palestinian. In this sense marginalisation was understood as a core agenda to both highlight and address throughout the PNMP and synonymous with such variables as geography, social status, age and gender etc... Part of the vision of the PNMP was also concerned with the external image of Palestine and with the need to 'promote a strong, welcoming image of Palestine's rich and diverse cultural heritage for visitors'. Interest was shown both in alternative tourism (this was typically undertaken by visitors supporting Palestinian rights to self-determination) and also 'roots' tourism and thus in attracting Palestinian diaspora groups. It was here that the importance of 'roots' tourism to Israel was pointed out as an example of this phenomena.

Underpinning this broader discussion was that of how to represent the 'Palestinian people' within the PNMP and within the heritage domain more broadly. The question of whether this was truly a 'national document' was pertinent here. Ultimately, it was 'envisaged that there would be regional centres based for example in Jerusalem, Gaza, Jericho, Bethlehem, Nablus etc... with significant outreach activity in centres with large refugee populations, such as Amman, Beirut & Damascus' (PNMP, 2008: 4). However the complexities and conflicts over guardianship and heritage protection in East Jerusalem was much discussed as was the difficulty of representatives, for example, from Gaza being able to fully participate in decision-making. Here too exists that problem that Palestine as an occupied country remains effectively 'outside' UN/UNESCO formatting i.e. as an international organisation it is the 'nation-state' that it credited as the partner in discussions. This issue was also a crucial talking point at WAC-Ramallah. Here the PNA/UNESCO partnership in terms of the nomination and inscription of Palestinian heritage sites – both tangible and intangible – to a 'tentative' Heritage List does show that the modification of certain policy-making can be transformed to give recognition to such contexts as Palestine and to the nature of 'statelessness' nations. This point was clearly made by paper given at WAC-Ramallah by Dr Hamdan Taha and Ahmed Rjoob of the PNA Ministry of Antiquities and Tourism.<sup>9</sup>

### **Memory-work, Commemoration, Reforging Identity**

Despite, or again, perhaps because of the decision to reject 'grand statements' what was significant was the means by which participants identified the increasing value of heritage, archive and museological forms as a key resource in the contemporary agenda to revitalise, restore and 'reforge identity'. It was also crucial that such re forging of identity was regarded as synonymous with, amongst other agendas, building 'self-confidence' and 'fostering an understanding of what it is to live and be human'. As such the PNMP recognized the pluralism of the ancient, historical and recent past along with the desire for this to be forged with

future visions and identity. Thus participants creating the PNMP asserted that 'Museums are vital to the future of Palestine' and it was significant that was through an understanding of memory-work and commemoration (rather than technician-led mantras) that a meaningful 'human' value was afforded to collective identity work.

As the PNMP text has it: 'a truly excellent museum network will:

- Reforge a sense of identity, pride, self-confidence and sense of belonging among Palestinian people
- Promote openness, respect and pluralism, presenting a non-chauvinistic view of the past and fostering understanding of what it is to live and be human
- Ensure that the heritage of minority groups included
- Connect Palestinians worldwide and develop 'roots' tourism
- Create spaces and opportunities for remembering and commemoration
- Develop visions for the future of Palestine that are rooted in its heritage & memory' (PNMP, 2008: 7)

It was here too that the desire to deal with recent history and to create spaces and opportunities for remembering and commemoration was clear. Doumani also highlights this, 'I mention the archiving of the present, not just the past, because Palestinians are still incapable of stopping the continued and accelerating erasure of the two greatest archives of all: the physical landscape and the bonds of daily life that constitute an organic social formation' (Doumani, 2009: 3). The need to network and support the use of both traditional and new technologies within this scenario was clear and again part of Doumani's reflection of the nature of Palestinian archive fever, '... someone or some group is busy interviewing old people and compiling genealogies, searching for photographs and letters, collecting textiles and folksongs, visiting and repairing manuscripts, and compiling information on old houses and destroyed villages' (*ibid.*). The further essentialisation of the internet and digital archives within Palestine's 'constellation of archives' (*ibid.*) was underlined and can be illustrated by many such projects, notably the 'Nakba archive' and 'Palestine Remembered'.<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, PNMP participants were keen to discuss what Doumani has referred to as 'the emergence of an archival democracy' adding, 'Digitalization and the internet have made it possible for the masses, if one may use that term without its usual baggage, to engage in archival activity. Anyone with access to a digital camera and/or sound recorder and a computer can share data files with millions of others and create a dense network of connections that can transcend geography if not always language and class. The possibilities are multiplied many times over for research institutes and think tanks with sophisticated facilities and multilingual researchers' (*ibid.*).

These networks of digital/digitised archives are unsurprisingly focused primarily on the acknowledgment of the need to connect with traumatic episodes of loss. The need to remember and commemorate loss was regarded as an essential part of heritage futures and pursued, for example, by many websites and in more traditional exhibition formats. Whether the Nakba of 1948, and the specific event of the destruction of the village of Deir Yassein, the Naksa of 1967 or the many displacements, deaths, dispossessions including those synonymous with the recent and devastating War in Gaza. Certainly this strongly felt agenda was part of the 'politics of recognition' whether the 'therapeutic aspect' is felt to be affec-

tive or not. Interestingly too university museums emerged as very much part of the cutting edge of museological content and interpretation, the Abu Jihad Museum recently opened at Al Quds University which features an archive of Palestinian political prisoners letters and objects made by such prisoners is a significant addition. So too is Birzeit University's Museums and Collections which host a programme of important exhibitions, a virtual portal and 'real' collections such as the impressive Dr Tawfiq Canaan Amulet Collection and collections of Palestinian dresses and handicrafts. Again those attending WAC-Ramallah had the opportunity of a visit led by the curator and artist Professor Vera Tamari. As such the Birzeit University museum and collections are proving vital to the recognition and 'reforging' of identity. This and other museological initiatives were, for many, held in contrast to the musealisation and memorialisation of Israeli society: notably the on-going 'Judafication' of the Old City of Jerusalem.

A final yet heavily highlighted aspect of heritage and memory-work was voiced as the need to prioritise education within the PNMP and heritage network. The motif of 'museums for every school child' (PNMP, 2008: 8) received the full support of participants as did the need to feature museum and heritage in the National Curriculum. The disruption of education due to conflict and the need for a future generation of children who had benefited from asserting their rights to education was clear. Life-long learning was also regarded as a key agenda. This was linked to the ability to 'Engage Palestinian people in protecting and caring for their heritage' (*ibid.*). The revitalization of traditional crafts and associated skills was again regarded as both important for reforging identity and as part of revitalizing the economy and establishing sustainable forms of future cultural tourism.

### **Reclaiming the Palestinian National Museum**

Participants were thus insistent that this five-year policy should aim to be 'ambitious and realistic,' i.e. to have 'a quick, visible, symbolic impact' while also putting 'down roots for much deeper change' (PNMP, 2008: 5). The question emerged of considering the creation of new museums and reclaiming the 'old'. At a symbolic level the latter subject collected around the future control of the Palestinian National Museum: 'the Rockefeller Museum'. Here the basis of the argument that features in the PNMP is that there is an, 'already existing Palestinian National Museum, the Rockefeller Museum, East Jerusalem, est. 1938 and [the museum] exhibits archaeological artefacts – relating history of Palestine from first appearance of humankind until the early 18th century (PNMP, 2008: 11).

Within the PNMP the 'cause celebre' of 'reclaiming the Palestinian National Museum' became a significant symbolic motif. The PNMP continues:

- Museum under Israeli occupation since 1967. Unknown number of the original exhibits removed to Israeli museums. Excavation sites and dates removed from the interpretation, guidebook states, 'the exhibit focuses on the history of the land of Israel'.
- Access limited only Palestinians with Jerusalem ID' (*ibid.*).

This theme is reiterated, 'This policy asserts the right of Palestinians to reclaim this museum and all of its original contents, and to make it accessible, as part of world culture, to Palestinians, Israelis and international visitors'. Here it was noted too that this should be an issue raised at WAC Ramallah and discussed as part of resolutions issued by WAC.

This policy also calls on:

- The PNA to exert political pressure at the highest levels to ensure control of Museum reverts to PNA, as part of negotiations on the future of the Palestinian state
- As part of these negotiations, to exert pressure to ensure that all archaeological material excavated from Palestinian Territories since 1967 is transferred from Israeli museums to the National Museum of Palestine
- The international museum and heritage community to champion this cause
- Once handover is achieved, a development plan (incl. full audit of collections) essential. The aim is to transform museum into a world-class museum that engages visitors of every nationality and background with the complexity and diversity of past & present life in the region (*ibid.*)

A related aspect of heritage reclamation was also called for in that the PNMP document 'includes the museums that have been occupied, looted or closed, the archaeological sites under threat & the archaeological material that has been transferred to Israeli museums'. Underpinning this is the fundamental need to 'review and publish collections' and the 'audit of all major cultural assets' (*ibid.*).

### **Museum Forms, Professional Networks**

The motif of modification and transformation of dominant heritage, archival and museological models in order to be relevant to the Palestinian context gathered pace. The issue of typologies of museums and the needs of the Palestinian context was significant here. What was inspiring here was the creativity of responses. There was also longing for a network so one could avoid 'reinventing the wheel' and the possibility of visiting and learning from other museum and heritage initiatives. Enthusiasm for realistic yet creative projects emerged including a series of pilot projects rooted in existing practice.

The call was made for specific museum and heritage projects that include the desire for the following:

- Museums concerned with Crafts, Folk Life and linked to Tourism
- Travelling Museums
- Museums for every Schoolchild
- Networking Cultural Provision for Refugee Centres (PNMP, 2008: 12)

Obvious support emerged for 'new' models of museums i.e. mobile museums, virtual collections, the prioritisation of minority groups, of popular or 'folk' culture and of cultural connectivity with the Palestinian diaspora. This in turn led discussion to core issues concerning the creation of a national Palestinian museum network: that of establishing what many felt should be an 'inclusive professionalism',<sup>11</sup> the access to extensive training and the need for strategies for capacity-building within Palestine. As such there was voiced a need to:

- Create a platform for dialogue, exchange and partnership

There was also a concern that this new professionalism needed to be underpinned by the following:

- Audience Research [qualitative]
- A Steering Committee [be provide continuity and sustainability]
- The strategisation of Professional Training and Capacity Building
- That such Palestinian Heritage be available online
- That a Cultural Tourism Policy should offer a means to build up a future in which Cultural Tourism to Palestine is a key part of economy generation (*ibid.*)

### **Anxiety, Sustainability, Conclusions**

Such was the honest nature of workshop discussions that it became clear that despite obvious enthusiasm and passionate commitment to the Palestinian heritage sector there was much anxiety and scepticism vis-à-vis the PNMP becoming a reality, i.e. being the 'living document' envisaged by discussants. Part of the concern voiced at PNMP discussions returns us to the need to radically transform the format of the internationalising of heritage projects. This relates or is related to the effectiveness of UNESCO, the legitimacy of international consultants and the ability of the 'states-party' to give full support and commitment to policy-making. As one participant wearily commented on the UNESCO/international consultant format, "In the last 20 years, hundreds of specialists from many countries have come to the West Bank to help in this respect. However, no real progress was made". The specific role of 'foreign' consultants from the international community and their ability to create any real, consolidated change was another area of heated discussion. The difficulty or challenge for consultants is gathering information in a relatively short space and fully understanding the relationship to existing initiatives and other 'missions.'<sup>12</sup>

Certainly this and other comments reiterate the need for new and alternative forms of heritage and museum development strategies and models in local, regional, national and international contexts. There is an urgent need to reject 'top-down' formatted models synonymous with the heritage 'Holy Trinity' and to foster, support and extend an alternative 'bottom up' approach by drawing upon sustained research into relevant heritage networks. The beginnings of such a strategy was emerging from PNMP discussions but they require more dedicated investigation. As such at the present moment the need is to place archival, heritage and museum policy in the context of, for example, an 'archive fever' and the themes and issues collecting around it 'spreading' in Palestine. And to reiterate the position taken by Derrida and by the 'voices' presented here and in the PNMP: that it is fundamental that archival and cultural heritage discourse is seen to be a 'question of the future'; the ability to create a workable vision of a 'just' future.

At the PNMP meeting the concept and reality of defining 'pilot projects' was agreed to offer a workable way forward in terms of this offering a means for individuals and groups to pro-actively identify their interest in involving themselves in the above areas and initiatives outlined in the PNMP. This call for pilot projects was something I reiterated at WAC-Ramallah and very much hope will continue to gather interest and pace. In a paper discussing the phenomena of 'archive fever' what must be prioritised is the need for action rather than the PNMP and all other heritage initiatives simply creating more documents to sit in the UNESCO-Ramallah and the PNA's archives respectively: this was also a clear agenda that was to

be reiterated by workshop participants. What also must be concluded from this experience is that the process of constructing the PNMP actually in fact offered an effective deconstruction of routinised practise and this is something to take forward as a significant outcome and cause for both recognition and cautious optimism. By acknowledging the transformative nature of centring the voices on the ground this must require a similar transformation of dominant heritage discourse.

Achieving this will allow us to move forward from a site synonymous with structural violence to a more just space of 'ethics and action'. This change is not only urgently required in the Palestinian context but is vital to our visions of 'One World' heritage futures.

## Acknowledgements

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## Notes

- 1 See Galtung 1990 on the nature of direct violence, structural violence and cultural violence.
- 2 I.e. there are many critiques from within and outside UNESCO. See Butler2007.
- 3 The Euro-Western centric nature of UN/UNESCO is part of this import of structural violence.
- 4 'The framework of the Major Programme for Culture, namely 'Support to Museum Policy Development'. See PNMP 2008.
- 5 While the term 'layperson' may be used in some contexts pejoratively in the Palestinian context this is regarded by many as indicative of the popular and committed resonance of archival, museological and heritage forms have at a collective level by a variety of individuals, groups and institutions: whether experts, professionals or so-called 'amateurs'.
- 6 Their names listed are listed in the PNMP 'Acknowledgments' section.
- 7 The reality of consulting 'relevant' individuals and organisations was subject to omissions.
- 8 Gaza was off limits in terms of being able to travel there as part of a UNESCO/PNA project. We did have one participant from Gaza able to make the workshop and had an opportunity at a later date to discuss the project with Professor Moain Sadeq of the Palestinian Antiquities and Tourism Ministry, Gaza.
- 9 It is worth pausing here to place the PNMP in the context of other recent initiatives co-authored by UNESCO-Ramallah and the PNA to see these initiatives as innovative, if not subversive, and certainly synonymous with the modification of the dominant model of heritage planning and policy in order that it be made relevant to the Palestinian context. The crux here is that Palestine as an occupied country is severely disempowered by its lack of official 'nation-state' status and as such the PNA is positioned 'outside' the formal framework of UNESCO schema. This reveals a contradictory context in terms of the primacy of the states-party role within UNESCO frameworks.

However, the presentations given at WAC-Ramallah by Dr Hamdan Taha and Ahmed Rjoob, along with the conference visits, outlined how despite these limitations current initiatives have been mobilised with the objective of nominating Palestinian heritage sites for listing on the UNESCO World Heritage List. The process of placing iconic Palestinian heritage, including, amongst others, the town of Bethlehem, the historical 'Old cities' of Nablus and Hebron and cultural landscapes such as olive terraces on the UNESCO 'Tentative' List. This process of tentative listing has also led to the inscription of a traditional form of Palestinian story-telling the 'Hikaye' as part of UNESCO's intangible heritage programme. These initiatives have been fundamental to the recognition of both the diversity and the prestige of Palestinian cultural legacies both 'nationally' and within the international community while drawing attention to the issue of Palestinian 'nationhood'. This sense of a pro-active networking in terms of the objective of profiling and preserving Palestine's cultural resources and cultural identity has been accompanied by a commitment to address the re-interpretation and re-presentation of Palestinian cultural heritage sites and to reposition these as iconic archival spaces

- 10 Two web-based archives – the 'Nakba archive' and 'Palestine Remembered' are important examples of such resources. The sentiments informing these archival impulses are part of an urgency in terms of the politics of recognition and the project of memorialising the 'Nakba'. This focus on web-based archival-reconstruction within Palestine and in the diaspora is a crucial means by which communities can gain a sense of cohesion and maintain communication. The 1948 'Nakba' is also being increasingly positioned alongside what is increasingly being termed as the 'on-going 'Nakba'' i.e. the on-going 'disaster' in terms of the on-going Palestinian experience of occupation and displacement.
- 11 I.e. this was on the basis of avoiding alienating and instead including 'lay persons', 'amateurs' etc., in the process of professionalization.
- 12 The decision making behind my colleague and I being involved in the PNMP was taken upon the basis of future professional engagements in terms of the Palestinian heritage context and thus of sustainable contact. As such it is envisaged that one pilot project would be linked to the revitalization of historical linkages between UCL/ Institute of Archaeology and the Palestinian heritage context based upon the Flinders Petrie Palestinian collection.

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