



Stitching Heritage and Resistance: Palestinian Women's Empowerment Through Cultural Clothing

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Abstract

This paper explores how Palestinian women's involvement in cultural clothing initiatives provides a multifaceted form of empowerment—social, political, and financial. While these activities enable women to achieve financial independence and social recognition, the empowerment they offer is complex, relational, and context dependent. It is shaped by the socio-political conditions in which these initiatives occur. The preservation, promotion, and commercialization of traditional Palestinian clothing are intricately linked to anti-colonial movements, functioning as a form of resistance against Israeli occupation. These efforts transcend cultural preservation; they are a powerful expression of political defiance against cultural appropriation and the ongoing erasure of Palestinian identity. Through their engagement with traditional attire, women assert their agency within a broader struggle for autonomy, using cultural clothing as both a tool for empowerment and an act of resistance against colonial violence.

To provide a comprehensive understanding of these cultural initiatives, I draw on both historical research and qualitative fieldwork. The fieldwork includes semi-structured and in-depth oral interviews with Palestinian women across diverse geographical contexts, including Jordan, the Palestinian Territories, and the United States. This methodology facilitates an intersectional analysis of the gendered, political, and cultural dimensions of the cultural clothing industry. By combining historical documentation with contemporary oral narratives, the paper examines how women's engagement with traditional clothing reflects broader socio-political dynamics and highlights their efforts to navigate complex forms of resistance and empowerment.

Keywords: Palestinian women, cultural clothing, empowerment, Palestine, Palestinian diaspora, transnational communities, gender, resistance