THROUGH THE EYES OF PALESTINE CULTURAL INFORMATION MANAGEMENT IN CONFLICT CONTEXT FOCUS: DOCUMENTATION OF EXCAVATED SITES AND FINDS

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Abstract

This paper briefly addresses selected, though fundamental theoretical and practical concerns on the management of cultural information in conflict contexts. The basis of this discussion is Palestine, which is used as a case-study of the challenges and success of a newly founded antiquities department to control the knowledge of previously documented information. The focus is on specific aspects of recorded culture, (1) archaeological excavations and (2) associated finds.

This research argues, in more depth, that the management of cultural information on Palestinian antiquities and sites, prior to the 1990's foundation of the Palestinian Department of Antiquities, is largely conditioned and predetermined by *external* and *pre-existing* actors and factors, independent of the efforts of Palestinian institutions. Furthermore, this paper delves deeper in these issues, through the discussion of a collation of concrete examples that 'deal' with Palestinian antiquities. It equally discusses simple yet needed ways to bring this data closer to native and foreign researchers, from an archaeological, but also an ethical and 'good practice' point of view.

Definitions used in this paper:

(1) **Palestine**: As a geographical, apolitical term, in its broadest application, it can be used to refer to 'ancient Palestine', an area that includes contemporary Israel and the Palestinian territories, as well as a part of Jordan.

(2) **Palestinian Territories**: the state of Palestine as defined by the United Nations Security Council Resolution 242 (S/RES/242) adopted unanimously by the UN Security Council on November 22, 1967 in the aftermath of the Six Day War and adopted under Chapter VI of the United Nations Charter[1].

(3) **Israel**: A state that was gradually created from the early 1900's through intense colonisation and land confiscations from neighbouring countries, including Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and Egypt.

(4) **Levant**: The wide geographic area covering south Anatolia, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine/Israel, Jordan and the north Sinai.

(5) **West Bank**: The landlocked area between Jordan and Israel, west of the Jordan river and east of Jerusalem.

(6) **Gaza**: A coastal district administered by Palestine which borders with Egypt.

INTRODUCTION

Considerable quantities of data concerning excavated sites and finds within the Palestinian territories and Israel are the self-proclaimed property of a variety of institutions within Palestine/Israel and abroad. For archaeological research, the quality and sometimes sensitive nature of this data can answer key archaeological questions pertaining to cultural evolution and systemic change in archaeological interpretations of the Levant as a whole. This obstruction is frequent since archaeology in Palestine has been stigmatized throughout the history of archaeological exploration by a long colonial past, which has resulted in the excavation and survey of sites at an extraordinary pace. This is the case for many of the source countries of the east Mediterranean. Yet Palestine *is* the most extensively excavated territory in the entire Mediterranean.

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[1]http://domino.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/361eea1cc08301c485256cf600606959/7d35e1f729df491c85256ee70 0686136!OpenDocument

As analyzed, gradually from theory to practice, the major obstacles in the management of information on sites and finds within the Palestinian territory include, but are not limited to:

(1) The fact that in theory and in practice, archaeology in Palestine is still seen from the interior and the exterior through a culture-historical and biblical lens.

(2) The current political situation within the Palestinian territories makes not only management, but also access to sites and finds challenging.

(3) There is a major lack of documentation projects that adopt a truly post-colonial approach to information access, even on the digital level, thus enabling the Palestinians and other researchers to have adequate access, regardless of their research scopes.

Each point is addressed individually, through concrete examples, while several possible solutions are proposed to boost the quality of this data and to bring it closer to current research needs.

THE CULTURE-HISTORICAL AND BIBLICAL LENSES

The entire state of affairs and all subsequent discourses on the status of archaeology in Palestine cannot bypass the discussion of the enormous impact that culture-history and religion have had over reconstructions of the past of these lands, over the last two hundred years. The very birth of archaeological research in the south Levant and especially in Palestine is primarily to 'illustrate' the Biblical accounts of the 'promised land'[2]. Further, it is and continues to be used, as an instrument for the justification of the state formation of Israel based on 'God's promises' from the bible (Silberman 1982). In everyday life, this vision is expressed through colonial land claims and apartheid rule principles. The on-going political situation has had an impact in the theory, and the practice of archaeology in Palestine. As a consequence,

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[2] See comments by H. Taha http://www.dandavidprize.org/pr/2006English_SmithMagFinkelstein0606.html

archaeological interpretations are always conditioned by religious doctrines and current political struggles (see Trigger 1993: 174 ff.)

In practice, as Hanbury-Tenison (1986: 108) expressed in Trigger (1989: 178) the biblical emphasis on archaeology in Palestine:

> *'Has helped to create an individual discipline measurably unaffected by methodological and intellectual developments elsewhere'.*

The scope and goals of archaeological investigations as undertaken by selected Israeli and foreign archaeologists, especially in the Bronze and Iron Ages (ca. 4000-600 B.C.E), as well

as the late historical periods (ca. 600 B.C.E – C.E) is still largely culture-historical[3]. Yet, this is to be differentiated from innovative up-to-date research undertaken by leading Israeli archaeologists, whose research marks an exception through the quality of the research questions and data gathering/analyses and presentation in the early prehistoric periods, who practice a scientific oriented archaeology (see generally works by Bar-Yosef, O; Garfinkel, Y; Yoffee, N.).

In the former though, the quality of the research questions guiding excavations and subsequent interpretations of overall stratigraphy, regional chronology and finds are directed and often funded by individuals or bodies interested in proving the biblical accounts[4]. Among many examples that could be cited is the adamant interpretation of Iron Age sites in the Coastal Plain of Israel and the Gaza strip as 'Philistine', mainly by Dothan and Dothan (1982, 1992). This is a clear case of the one-dimensional use of pottery as a 'cultural marker' following the old culture-historical approach that pots=peoples, to *prove* that a peoples referred to in the Biblical tales as the 'Philistines' are of Mycenaean origin!

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[3] http://sscl.berkeley.edu/~teldor/, http://faculty.biu.ac.il/~maeira/
[4] http://www.rehov.org/, http://megiddo.tau.ac.il/

The culture-historical approach to archaeological questions is concretely manifested in Israel's nationalistic archaeological policies. Although excavations pertaining to the so-called Philistine sites have been published, the majority of the archaeological finds from Ashkelon (now Israel) and Tell el-Ajjul (Gaza) are withheld in what has been rebaptized as the 'Rockefeller' museum in east Jerusalem. In the facts, this museum is the **Palestine Archaeological Museum**, which is Palestinian property and was seized during the 1967 war by Israel along with east Jerusalem. The Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict of 1954[5] explicitly stipulates that:

'Any High Contracting Party in occupation of the whole or part of the territory of another High Contracting Party shall as far as possible support the competent national authorities of the occupied country in safeguarding and preserving its cultural property' (Occupation, Article 5, par. 1).

Although Palestine is not a high contracting party, Israel signed and ratified the convention in 03/10/1957. Yet until the war of 1967, the Palestinian territories were under Jordanian rule, belonging to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan who in fact has also signed and ratified the convention in 02/10/1957, which means that activities after 1957 and even during 1967 are subject to the Hague Convention and are applied to the Palestinian territories as well. The confiscation of a Museum, in international criminal law, is known as *theft*, which is the illegal taking of another person's (be it moral or physical) property without that person's freely-given consent. Especially in war contexts, the appropriate term is *looting*, the indiscriminate taking of goods by force as part of a military or political victory.

Information within this museum can only be accessed by Israelis and selected foreign researchers who control interpretation and current historiography. For example for the UCL Petrie Palestinian Museum in London[6], which regrettably involves no leading Palestinian researchers, has had access to data from the Rockefeller Museum,

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[5]http://portal.unesco.org/culture/en/ev.php-
RL_ID=8450&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html
[6] http://www.petrie.ucl.ac.uk/

where another part of the Petrie collection is kept. This was even granted to undergraduate and graduate research students. As for the Palestinians, there are no access rights foreseen at the 'Rockefeller', even for simple consultations, thus further alienating them from this corpus of cultural information.

Not only has the 'Promised Land' theme been applied to the types of archaeological questions and excavations in Israel/Palestine, but is also applied to seize Palestinian cultural heritage. By changing not only the identity of the land (i.e. Stager 2001 'Forging the identity of ancient Israel'), but also the legal owner of this corpus of heritage. This strategy also accomplishes to segregate researchers of Palestinian or other origins who do not fit and comply, or wish to take no clear position, towards this ideology.

This has instituted a regime of parallel dialogues within Israel and Israel-friendly scholars, with very little challenge from the exterior. Whenever voices are raised against unfair practices within Israel and towards Palestinian cultural heritage, such are considered anti-Semitic. Among the most outspoken scholars are mostly reformed theologians, such as Davies 1992, Lemche 1998, Thompson 1999, Whitelam 1996. These voices are necessary, if not as specialised as desired, since cultural heritage is not merely an issue of preserving and interpreting stones.

On the contrary, it is a purely humanitarian issue. It is important to commit to memory that the origins of cultural heritage protection laws are linked to early humanitarian law efforts of institutions like the Red Cross and the UN. The preamble of the 1954 Hague Convention affirms that heritage is worth defending, especially in situations of conflict, by:

Recognizing that cultural property has *suffered* grave damage during recent armed conflicts and that, by reason of the developments in the technique of warfare, it is in increasing danger of destruction;

Being convinced that damage to cultural property belonging *to any people*

whatsoever means damage *to the cultural heritage of all mankind*, since each people makes its contribution to the culture of the world;

THE POLITICAL SITUATION, MANAGEMENT, DATA CONTROL AND ACCESS, IMPACT ON HISTORICAL VIEWS OF THE EAST

Laying down the background and these key principles opens the way to the discussion of who actually detains the *effective* control of cultural information within this conflict context, in order of influence. First and foremost, the information is controlled by the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA) who controls information on archaeological excavations and finds in Israel and even within the Palestinian territories that have either been excavated for so-called 'salvage excavations'[7] (due to Israel's partial ratification of the Hague Convention) or have been extensively surveyed (Dar 1986, Finkelstein, Lederman & Bunimovitz 1997, Finkelstein & Magen eds. 1993). The IAA has and continues to regularly publish data and provides some basic digital access to on-going archaeological activities[8].

Second, important quantities of data are controlled by colonial archaeological institutions. Such institutions often, if not exclusively, focus on 'religious studies' aiming at exploring questions of ethnicity and political legitimisation of what has currently become to be known as the state of Israel. Although at the origins these institutions were less biased towards the internal conflict, their dependence on the IAA for excavation permits and services has tilted their overall disposition to archaeological research to preserve their status.

Profiting from the fragility of the political situation and the daily tragedy both Palestinians and Israelis experience, famous archaeological institutes such as the American Allbright Archaeological Institute[9] or the French 'Ecole Biblique et

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[7] http://www.jerusalemquarterly.org/issues-pdf/33issue.pdf
[8] http://www.antiquities.org.il/home_eng.asp
[9] http://www.aiar.org/

Archéologique de Jerusalem'[10] often manage to negotiate with current and past authorities to keep a strong grip of this data, which has gradually become a sort of 'collective memory' of the existence, function, self-legitimation and fund-raising of these institutions. The British Kenyon Archaeological Institute in Jerusalem has opted for a more intermediate position to the issue of archaeology in the conflict context, with limited activities after the War of 1967[11].

An example that speaks volumes on the effective control on finds from the West Bank is the issue of the Dead Sea Scrolls. They were discovered in 1947 near 11 caves around the Wadi Qumran[12]. They are Palestinian property and under international law belong to the Palestinian National Authority because they were discovered within their territory. Yet, an important part of these scrolls (ca. 40%) were withheld by the Ecole Biblique who controlled access and study, which excluded consultation by non-Christians and most non-Westerners. Finally, most information and photos of manuscripts managed to 'leak' (Israeli 2008) past the long-instituted 'secrecy rule' and were partially published in 1995. The scrolls constitute one of the most important archaeological finds for the history of the Middle East and are thus an integral part of Palestinian cultural heritage.

Third, an important corpus of data concerning sites and finds even within the Palestinian territories, often withheld or even 'forgotten' abroad, is now emerging in virtual form. This includes diaries, displays of archaeological landscape images and associated finds (i.e. Tell Nasbeh temporary archive of images from the 'Pacific School of Religion' at the 'Badè Museum for Biblical Archaeology)[13].Until recently, access to the image archives from Tell Nasbeh and finds were granted to Dr. Zorn from Cornell University [14], who 'reinterpreted' these excavations within the Palestinian territories. This which was suitable to be done by a Palestinian scholar.

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[10] http://www.ebaf.edu/
[11] http://www.cbrl.org.uk/kenyon_institute.shtm
[12] http://www.museum-security.org/97/july22.html
[13] http://bade.psr.edu/image/tid/8
[14] http://www.arts.cornell.edu/jrz3/index.htm

One perspective of this issue of control of information that this paper wishes to highlight, through the aforementioned examples, is that such institutions act like *cultural states* with mutual or diverging interests, and uncontrolled within the larger cultural landscape not only of Israel, but also of the state of Palestine.

This has resulted in the gradual availability of a variety of scattered 'databases'[15], 'image collections'[16] and 'private digital archives'[17]. This corpus is vital to current research. Yet the lack of up-to-date documentation, display and access standards, as well as policies of 'selective consultation' rights, or 'intentions' to create massive all-encompassing databases, makes the majority of this data, in practice, challenging and often impossible to use and incorporate as objectively as possible in current scientific archaeological research.   In addition, it is either ignored by field specialists, or accidentally misconstrued to reinforce religious beliefs and current political positions, which result in interpretations of the past history of Palestine which could at best be considered provisional.

A self-documented example of the aforementioned misuse of a rampart collection of data is the book by Dever (2003) *'Who were the early Israelites and where did they come from?'*. This work draws on vague salvage excavation reports and unreliable surveys whose standards and data quality are bellow average. Yet promulgated through the right channels, it has nevertheless managed to target a lay audience and influence world views on the early history of the West Bank, as inhabited by the so-called 'Proto-Israelites'.

This type of literature is in concurrence with the overall tendency of western historiography in its construct of an 'alternative' Oriental past - and its drawing of new 'road maps'. This has been highlighted in historical discourses of the Orient by the late distinguished Palestinian scholar, Edward Said, in his famous book 'Orientalism' (1995) but even earlier by Venturi (1963), Cannadine (2001) and Turner (1994). This issue has also been addressed more globally and in much depth

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[15] http://www.mnemotrix.com/arch/
[16] http://oi.uchicago.edu/museum/highlights/palestine.html
[17] http://near-east-images.blogspot.com/

by Goody (2008) in *'The theft of history'*. Goody draws attention to the fact that the east is by no means inferior. Through its settled civilization and its deep roots in tradition, it continues to exist despite successive conquerors.

Especially within the West Bank, the role of the IAA in controlling cultural information with the Palestinian territories is strong. It has gone as far as including the West Bank, using the terms 'Judea' and 'Samaria' under its auspices. In the facts, it trespasses the Palestinian territories since it follows state policy and considers it *de facto* as 'The' land of Israel. After all, the foundation of Zionism is based on the famous slogan that Palestine was: 'A land without a people for a people without a land'. This ignores not only the cultural heritage, but also an entire nation which is now systematically obliterated from the map of the Middle East. This is attested to in detail in the famous work of courageous and persecuted Israeli historian Ilan Pappe *'The ethnic cleansing of Palestine'*.

Despite this unfavourable background and disadvantage of access to data and site management control, the Palestinian National Authority has managed the unmanageable. It has established its own antiquities department, which has rightfully been described, in lectures, by the present Antiquities Deputy Minister, Dr. Hamdan Taha as a 'momentous even in Palestinian archaeology'. The ministry is based in Ramallah and was created following the 1994 Oslo accords. It boasts modern facilities and its staff is among the most educated Palestinian field archaeologists. Although Palestinians are among the poorest nations in the Arab world, they probably have the highest education level in the Arab world (Shaath 1972). With exceptional manpower, the Ministry's main activities focus on detailed data basing of major archaeological sites and finds within the territories and has created up-to-date GIS maps and surveys of its most important sites, thus slowly regaining control of information not only on excavated sites, but also on finds and generally Palestinian cultural heritage[18].

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[18] http://www.thisweekinpalestine.com/details.php?id=1959&ed=133&edid=133

Parallel to this, UNESCO and the UNDP[19], as well as private NGO's, the RIWAQ[20] and the Welfare Association[21], among others, support major conservation and subsequent data basing projects.   Up-to-date mapping and data gathering have marked specifically the projects of the rehabilitation of Hebron Al-Khalil[22], and the rehabilitation of the old city of Jerusalem and Bethlehem[23], which have been targeted through the extensive building of Israeli colonies.   Salvage excavations are undertaken as the West Bank manages territorial accretion and recent publications attest to the standards of this work, as in the case of the Khirbet Bal'ama archaeological project (Taha, Pol&Kooij 2006).

One of the fiery obstacles in the effective control of cultural information in Palestine is the building of the Apartheid Wall[24]. Furthermore, since the construction of the Wall surrounding the West Bank, the cultural landscape of Palestinian has changed rapidly. The Department of Antiquities, Birzeit University, and al-Quds University have surveyed and recorded the damages. The construction of the wall and its impact on Palestinian Heritage has also been condemned by the WAC (World Archaeological Congress)[25].

The Wall according to the recommendation of the ICJ (International Court of Justice) has been characterized as illegitimate and in clear breach of international law[26]. This view is also supported by the UN[27] and even the Israel High Court[28], ruled that it is partly unconstitutional. Towards this direction many Israeli headed NGO's, such B'tselem see this and proclaim it as a violation of a number of basic human rights[29].

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[19]http://www.palestine-family.net/index.php?nav=6-24&cid=11&did=163&pageflip=1,
http://www.undp.ps/en/newsroom/publications/pdf/focus/04v1.pdf
[20] http://www.riwaq.org/index.php?lang=en&page=about&color=bgc5
[21] http://www.welfareassociation.org/english/semi.htm
[22] http://www.hebronrc.org/
[23] http://www.bethlehem2000.org/cchp/index.shtml
[24]http://www.stopthewall.org/activistresources/12.shtml,
http://www.palestinemonitor.org/spip/spip.php?article4, http://www.auphr.org/thewall/,
[25] http://www.archaeology.org/0403/newsbriefs/wac.html
[26] http://www.icj-cij.org/docket/index.php?p1=3&p2=4&k=5a&case=131&code=mwp&p3=4,
[27] http://domino.un.org/unispal.nsf/Special%20focus%5CSeparation%20barrier!OpenView
[28] Ruling 'Docket H.C.J. 7957/04 International Legality of the Security Fence and Sections near Alfei Menashe September 15, 2005
[29] http://www.btselem.org/english/Separation_Barrier/index.asp

Even though issues like archaeological sites and features are not raised in detail, they are included under the umbrella of general goods and losses. Not only Israel should stop building the wall, according to par. 153:

> 'Israel is accordingly under an obligation to return the land, orchards, olive groves and other immovable property seized from any natural or legal person for purposes of construction of the wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. In the event that such restitution should prove to be materially impossible, Israel has an obligation to compensate the persons in question for the damage suffered. The Court considers that Israel also has an obligation to compensate, in accordance with the applicable rules of international law, al1 natural or legal persons having suffered any form of material damage as a result of the wall's construction'.

Barghouth and Jaradat's study from the University of al-Quds (Jerusalem) concludes that:

'Jewish settlements in the West Bank have directly annexed over 924 archaeological sites either now or through future expansion plans. This number will rise, however, to 4,264 sites and archaeological landmarks, 466 of them major archaeological sites, once the wall is completed. This figure equals **47 percent** of all known major sites in the West Bank including East Jerusalem, from a total of 1,084 sites according to 1944 British maps that surveyed archaeological sites in the West Bank'[30].

The building of the separation wall and the hundreds of checkpoints has by largely been accomplished. They make not only transportation and every-day life humiliating and difficult, but also have a direct impact on the effective control of cultural information within the West Bank. The wall itself has confiscated land and archaeological sites, some of which have been excavated or surveyed, which clearly belong to the Palestinians. The close link between land confiscations and

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[30] http://world.mediamonitors.net/content/view/full/9409

archaeological site seizing is obvious in the case of The Palestinian village of Ni'lin[31], near which are the sites of Al-Natof, Zebda site and the famous Natufian Shuqba caves (12,000-10,000 B:C:E), which figure in the *Inventory of Palestinian Cultural and Natural Heritage Sites of Potential Outstanding Universal Value* (Taha & Rjoob 2005). Jerusalem is especially targeted by Israel who attacks not only standing monuments, but monuments of sanctity to both Christians and Muslims[32]. Its most famous activity is the bulldozing of a 5th century Byzantine monastery and Basilica, in the Palestinian city of Abu-Dis (Bethany)[33], which it then decided to honour as a 'salvage excavation' and appropriate itself of the finds, including mosaics[34]. As for the territory of Gaza, which is alienated geographically from the West Bank, site and finds management is hindered by the constant state of *daily* bombarding and the *unrelenting* humanitarian crisis.

THE NEED AND REASONS FOR DOCUMENTATION PROJECTS THAT ADOPT A TRULY POST-COLONIAL APPROACH TO CULTURAL INFORMATION ACCESS; THE POTENTIAL OF DIGITAL ACCESS TO INFORMATION ON SITES AND FINDS WITHIN THE PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES

In the usual discourse of relativism, it is often heard, that in theory, it is a practical reality that all the data and objects from excavations within the Palestinian territories cannot be returned to their legal owners. This is usually based on the assumption that the Palestinian National Authority cannot (1) look after them 'properly', (2) is 'biased', 'ethnocentric' and 'Islamic' towards their interpretation, and (3) under these and current political conditions not enough people will visit them, because (4) the PNA cannot guarantee their security.

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[31] http://palestinemonitor.org/spip/spip.php?article439
[32] http://www.isesco.org.ma/english/publications/Protection%20of%20islamic%20and%20chrestian%20holy%20sites%20in%20Palestine/p17.php
[33] http://state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2004/35499.htm
[34] http://www.msnbc.msn.com/default.aspx/id/3226793/

The validity of this claim, as a bulk, should at best be considered an oversight of basic legal principles, such as Article 1 in both the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)[35] and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)[36], both of which stipulate that:

'All peoples have the right of self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development'.

In principle, the mere conduct of archaeological activities and excavations within the Palestinian Territories, by others than Palestinians, are in breach of international law. Any property, being physical or intellectual taken away without the consent of the owner, and especially if this generates any 'income', is for the least suspect. I do not argue that all museums, institutions and private collectioners must return all finds and data to every single source country. Yet, what I do wish to highlight, is that the right of retention should not remain with the thief and the theft banalised.

(1) The Palestinian Authority can look after its own cultural heritage. Denying this ignores the important budget allocations that poorer states receive in their battle to hold on to their history and subsequently their identity from bodies such as UNESCO and the UNDP more generally.

(2) As for the argument of the possible bias of 'nationalism and Islamic thought in archaeology', it is weak. As Goody (2008:5) explains: 'All human societies display a certain measure of ethnocentricity which is partly a condition of the personal and social identity for their members'. It is expected for the Palestinians to be somehow nationalistic, especially since their identity is denied in theory and in the practice of ethnic cleansing. At the bottom line, are not such arguments hidden eurocentric ethnocentricity? Islamic interpretation of finds and sites can logically only be applied to sites of such character. Denying this would be denying interpreting a Basilica as Christian or a synagogue as Jewish. In practice, within the Palestinian territories, I

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[35] http://www.hrweb.org/legal/cpr.html
[36] http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/a_cescr.htm

cannot fathom how Pre-Pottery Neolithic sites could fit the above 'risk'. Palestine is a land of amazing diachronically cultural and religious diversity.

(3) The argument of the lack of opportunity to visit sites and to see collections of Palestinian artefacts has been remedied by the active role of the PNA and external NGO's and philanthropic institutions, or even individuals in making this possible. To date, the Palestinian territories host many museums, exhibition sites and facilities that promote cultural heritage. Examples of the above include, but are not limited to, *just* for the city of Bethlehem (ca. 30,000 inhabitants), The Artas Folklore Center's Palestinian Ethnographic Museum, the Badd Jaqaman Museum, the Bethlehem Folklore Museum (Baituna Al-Talhami), the Folklore Museum of Beit Sahour, the Palestinian Heritage Center, Turathuna Library, the

International Nativity Museum, the Museum of the History of Bethlehem[37]. Even if the construction of the wall and the checkpoints around Bethlehem and its cutting off from Jerusalem make its access difficult, tourists still visit. As in any country though, such institutions are made first and foremost to teach locals about their heritage and *second* to communicate this richness with others.

(4) The security of data and finds from Palestinian sites and areas of archaeological interest is their sovereign right. To the best of their capacities and the unfavourable circumstances, as well as the internal and external political pressures, the Palestinians have proved *on the ground* their skill in negotiating relative security for the abovementioned. The fact though is that they are deprived of absolute control over their territories by Israel and its allies. Yet the burden of these results should not be put on the Palestinians, since it is not them who violate international law.

A proposed beginning for the possible rapprochement and reconciliation of diverging interests in Palestine's cultural heritage, does not begin with implementing all-encompassing modern digital databases with ample images of finds, or simply publications of excavation reports. It needs in its earliest stages to incorporate the component of *truth* as in 'Truth and Reconciliation' as applied in a wider political

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[37] http://www.bethlehem.ps/museums/

view in the Apartheid of South Africa. Palestinian data on sites and finds are under an Apartheid system of control.   This needs to be *recognized* and although present institutions that do hold this information are not responsible for the acts of their predecessors, they can take actions and express reactions to earlier regimes and pave their future trust relationships with the Palestinian Authority.

The potential of digital access to information on sites and finds within the Palestinian territories is an important first step in re-integrating what has become 'private' cultural heritage and 'institutional memory' heritage, into public and accessible knowledge on the land's cultural heritage. Institutions that withhold such information can use digital access to their information as a 'ticket' to **joint projects** with the Palestinians in co-operation and mutual respect, giving Palestinian experts a fair say and interpretation weight on this data, as in any successful partnership.

It is imperative that discourses on Palestinian sites and finds evolve from those imbued and obsessed with 'control', or moral lessons of how Palestinians should conduct cultural heritage business, to long, complex, and ever unpredictably evolving, yet time-enduring research and human relationships. In lack of, both parties remain poor and research pays the price through stagnation and parallel dialogues. My estimation is that if practiced, overseas research bodies might still have a chance to participate in this dialogue. And if the over mentioned conditions seem excessive, as Kahlil Gibran once said: *'I prefer to be a dreamer among the humblest, with visions to be realized, than lord among those without dreams and desires'*.

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