

# **THROUGH THICK AND THIN: A STUDY ON CULTURAL HEGEMONY IN PALESTINE AND ISRAEL – A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Hegemony, simply put is the authority of one group over another achieved primarily through consent. Attributed to Antonio Gramsci, a founding member of the Communist Party in Italy and an outspoken opponent of Benito Mussolini, he was imprisoned in 1926. While incarcerated, Gramsci wrote on the concept of 'hegemony', a "unifying thread" in his writings (Bates, 1975, p.351). Hegemony is achieved through consent and coercion – those in power will continue to enforce their beliefs on the general masses through their public and civil institutions until their worldview is secured and perceived to be the norm by society. (Bates, p. 352). While hegemony only benefits the dominant class, it is never fully realized – there will always be opposition to a governing ideology.

Eurocentric in its conception, Gramsci's theory of hegemony has been a source of inspiration for many Middle Eastern scholars – his ideas are often adapted for their ability to "stretch" and "travel" (Salem, 2020, p. 79). I too am interested in engaging with Gramsci's concept, in this instance, in the context of Palestine and Israel - two countries inextricably linked through a colonizer-colonized axis. Israel is a 'strong' and centralized state whose government is heavily involved in the political, economic and cultural arenas (Ben-Ami, 1996, p. 195). A sovereign state, it claims to be a Western democracy – although others view it as a "muted democracy" (Schejter, 2009, p.xii) or "ethnic democracy" (Jamal, 2008, p. 287; Payes, 2003, p. 61). In contrast, Palestine is a weak, non-sovereign 'quasi-state', it exhibits some features of a state as it is "subjected to a military occupation and ongoing colonization" (De Cesari, 2020, p.2). It is in large part decentralized – not necessarily because it wants to empower its citizens but because of the government's shortcomings, which partly arise from the political and historical contexts in which it was conceived. Ramallah-based artist, Yazan Khalili describes Palestine as a "state of waiting" – "not yet a nation-state, not yet post-colonial" (De Cesari, 2010, p. 627) – it is always in a state of becoming.

Culture –religion, language, the arts, heritage, education, and the mass media - is continuously under threat in Palestine and Israel. Looking at the concept of hegemony (and counterhegemony), I would like to explore the roles the state and civil society (in particular non-profit government organizations) play in producing hegemony to answer the question: How and why does hegemony shape culture in Palestine and Israel?

## **GRAMSCI'S THEORY OF HEGEMONY**

Antonio Gramsci was a Southern Italian Marxist whose most influential work, 'The Prison Notebook' was comprised of hundreds of fragmented notes in an attempt to understand how inequality is formed at different levels in society (Salem, 2021, p. 81) – not just through its "modes of production" but through its "superstructure", that is its "juridico-political structure" and "ideological structure", which include legal, political, religious, philosophical, and cultural institutions (Harnecker, 1971, p.32). Gramsci's theory as disjointed as it may be is considered to be an important contribution to Marxist thought. His theorization

on hegemony while Eurocentric – he is a Southern Italian intellectual from Sardinia grappling with not only his country's Fascist policies but with the position of Southern Italy as an “internal colony” on the periphery of Italy's center (Salem, p. 83) – may allow us to perhaps adapt some of his ideas to Palestine as a periphery to Israel's center. Indeed, Gramsci's ideas have been adapted by scholars from the Middle East (Salem, pp. 83-85), a region on the fringes of the world's center.

Hegemony is the ability to lead primarily through consent by the “diffusion and popularization” of ideas (Bates, 1975, p. 351). It is developed at the political and civil levels. “In reality civil society and the state are one” (Salem, p. 87; Gramsci cited in Thomas, 2009, p.68). The “political society”, tantamount to the “state” is composed of “public institutions such as government, courts, police and army – which exercise ‘direct domination’”; and “civil society” comprised of private institutions such as schools, places of worship, clubs and unions, and non-governmental organizations (Bates, 1975, p.353). Both exercise control over society but in different ways. As Thomas Bates notes, “civil society is the marketplace of ideas, where intellectuals enter as ‘salesmen’ of contending cultures” – that is to say every class in society has its own intellectuals and each compete with one another for control until a dominant ideology is formed (Bates, p.353) This does not necessarily mean a single ideology of one particular class overrules all others but can also mean different interests of different groups are consolidated to reach a unified ideology (Chalcraft and Noorani, 2007, p.3). Hegemony is then about class struggle. It is an ideological battle for “political, moral and intellectual unity” – primarily shaped through discourse, compromise, persuasion and education (Chalcraft and Noorani, p.3). The role of civil society is to spread the worldview of the intellectuals of the ruling class and to ‘freely’ secure the consent of the masses. If civil society fails, those in power will revert back to the state to achieve consent through other means, coercive if necessary (Bates, p.353).

Hegemony, produced through the state and civil society, uses both consent and coercion, two concepts that are often misunderstood as opposites when in fact they are related and can be used together: consent is used by civil society and coercion by the state (Salem, 2021, p.87). Coercion, however, cannot outweigh consent in a hegemonic state where both civil and political societies must work together (Salem, p.90). It can also never be complete or fixed, there will always be some form of resistance to any prevailing ideology, from “out-and-out assault, to manipulation, counterculture and subversion” (Chalcraft and Noorani, 2007, p. 16). It is an “unstable” “open-ended” practice, that is susceptible to ruptures and can be “exploited by intellectuals and subaltern groups and other political subjects” (Chalcraft and Noorani, p. 16). To counter a hegemonic worldview, for Gramsci, does not mean the collapse of one worldview for another but it is a slow and measured process of “transformation”, “reform”, and “attrition” that ultimately results in a “new collective will” (Chalcraft and Noorani, p. 16).

## **PALESTINE: A ‘THIN’ HEGEMONY**

### ***National Cultural Policy***

Sara Salem writes: “Colonial states are first established through coercion and violence even if institutions are later constructed to create consent among specific segments of the population. Local leaders through which colonial rule is constructed are always in a complicit relationship with imperialism and thus –

through a series of processes – become isolated from vast segments of society”. This is why colonial states cannot “create a fully hegemonic system”, coercion will always overshadow consent. (Salem, p. 90-91). Hegemony, however, is never complete, and full hegemony is unattainable by all states – hegemonies are always contested by different groups within a society. It can, nonetheless, exist in degrees. Colonial states can be “partially hegemonic” (Knight, 2007, p.25); and hegemonies can be “thick or thin” in their description (Chalcraft and Norrani, p. 16).

Palestine has been colonized by Israel through multiple wars and violent conflicts over the past century. It shares some features of a state. In 1988, it was declared as a state by the PLO at the United Nations and has since been acknowledged by 139 of 193 U.N. member countries. In 2012, it was granted “non-member observer status” following full membership in UNESCO in 2011. It is a semi-autonomous state: it does not have sovereignty over its land; it does not control its own borders; it cannot form a military (although it is allowed to have an internal security force to police its people); its economy is controlled by Israel; and culture is also under Israel’s overarching control. Culture has historically been overlooked by the Palestinian government giving urgency to more pressing concerns. The end result is a weak state, cripplingly dependent on its colonizer, it is characterized by an ineffectual government with limited administrative capacity and an ever-expanding bureaucracy. Government and civil society are not united but often clash and are sometimes in opposition with each other – producing a “thin” hegemonic ‘state’.

The Ministry of Culture was founded in 1994, following the so-called Oslo Peace Accords – a now widely recognized failed process that only served to strengthen Israel’s control and divide The Territories into fractured zones: Area A, falls under Palestinian administration and police control; Area B shares security control with Israel; and Area C, which covers 60% of the West Bank is under Israeli control (ARENA, n.d.). It is also when the Palestinian National Authority (referred to as PNA moving forward) would take administrative control and transfer the responsibility of culture to the Ministry (Farhat, 2010, pp. 157).

The Ministry’s primary role is that of facilitator rather than regulator (Farhat, 2010, pp. 152). From the outset, it was (and remains) confronted with several challenges: its inability to formulate a clear identity for itself or to act as a main player in the cultural sector - it is often plagued by ministerial changes that make it incapable of forming sound and consistent policies; its budget is restrictive, making it unable to financially support an already strong and vibrant civil cultural sector, which is often viewed as a rival rather than a partner; and it lacks sufficient technical expertise (Farhat, 2010, p. 152). Cooperation among the different ministries, inter-governmental agencies, and municipalities is regarded as weak with little coordination between them (Farhat, p. 154-155).

However, attempts to formulate a Palestinian national cultural policy have been undertaken: ‘The National Strategy of Palestinian Cultural Policy’ (2005) spearheaded by art practitioners and activists, was ratified but never implemented (Farhat, 2010, p.157-158). ‘The Strategic Plan for the Cultural Sector’ (2011-2013), initiated by the Ministry of Planning and the private sector; and more recently ‘The Sector of Culture and Heritage Plan’ (2014-2016) – the latest version was generally viewed as a positive step forward (Abdulrahman, 2015, pp. 4-5). However, the plan was perceived to be unrealistic in its expectations and beyond the Ministry’s capacity; it also lacked “practical, operational and evaluation mechanisms” with no indicators to measure success – all weaknesses that were found in previous

policies and which remained unaddressed (Abdulrahman,2015, p.6). Cultural policy is often described as “not systemized” (Farhat, 2010, p.157) and an “unorganized model that tends mainly to replace the official authority with the non-profit sector” (Abdulrahman, 2015, p.3).

Cultural funding in Palestine is achieved primarily through private rather than public means. In 2021, for example, only 2.6% of the general government budget was allocated to ‘Entertainment, Culture and Religion’ (Citizen’s Budget, General Budget, 2021, p.2). The percentage assigned exclusively to culture is not provided. To develop the Ministry’s funding capacity the Palestinian and Norwegian governments established the Palestinian Cultural Fund (PCF) in 2004 – these contributions however, are regularly under evaluation and are predicated on the PNA’s ability to conform to European (and Israeli) interests (Farhat, 2010, p. 156). In 2020, Norway’s legislature withheld \$3.4 million to PCF for “failure to reduce incitement to violence against Jewish Israelis in its school curriculum” a curriculum they perceived as “devastating to the peace process and the development of democracy in the region” (Edmunds, 2020). Nonetheless, NGOs and the cultural sector as a whole are heavily dependent on international funding and grants, which are always conditional: recipients are not free to independently plan their projects; they are regularly evaluated and are subject to financial and administrative auditing (Farhat, 2010, p.156).

### ***Role of NGOs***

Civil society (my focus is non-profit organizations, NGOs) is often mischaracterized as counterhegemonic to the state and emancipatory in nature, in reality they frequently “fall into a process of hegemonic reproduction” (McSweeney, 2014, p. 277, 280). Simply put, they are both dependent on each other and are one and the same. Gramsci believed that “state and civil society are mutually constituted rather than separate, autonomous entities” and saw the latter [civil society] as “an arena in which hegemonic ideas concerning the organization of economic and social life are both established and *contested*” (McSweeney, p. 278 from Bebbington et al, 2008, p. 6). For civil society to become truly counterhegemonic, they must achieve “structural changes” and advocate real strategies to challenge and displace the dominant structure of the state in order to transform society rather than just reform it (McSweeney p. 278-280). Indeed, NGOs in Palestine are counterhegemonic to the ‘state’ – they not only challenge the PNA and affect structural change but the government is sometimes dependent on them to perform functions it cannot. Alternatively, NGOs and the state in Israel are hegemonic with civil society playing a reproductive role in its support of government and its policies –even if civil society does not agree with them.

NGOs and the PNA/Ministry of Culture, in fact, are “rival hegemonies” (Knight, 2007, p.24-25) – always struggling for authority with the government’s hegemony at risk. Culture in Palestine is the prime responsibility of NGOs; they are considered the “backbone of the sector” (Farhat, 2010, p. 162). As the Ministry consistently attempts to rework and reconstruct an effective cultural policy, civil society in the cultural sphere is active and often seen as an alternative to government, a position that NGOs refute (they continuously call on the Ministry to do its job) as they simultaneously defend their powerful position (De Cesari, 2020, p.8). In the past, the PNA has attempted to delegitimize and publicly defame NGOs as “fat cats” who exploit donor funding for their own advancement and has attempted to legislate laws to

restrict civil organizations' rights and freedoms by creating "governmental NGO networks" "loyal" to the government – NGOs developed and passed legislation to counter such actions (Hammami, p. 6; 18).

NGOs in Palestine are politically skilled at developing partnerships and participating at all levels of the global network including the World Bank, International Council of Museums, International Council on Monuments and Sites, UNESCO, World Heritage Center, Agha Khan Foundation and the Ford Foundation (Hammami, 2000, p.27; De Cesari, 2020, pp. 7-8). They attract transnational funding from Europe, the United States and the Arab region, which the government sees as a threat to its "financial hegemony" (Hammami, p.17). Heavily reliant on international donors, NGOs are often forced to follow donor agendas rather than Palestinian interests, since operating without these donors would be almost impossible (De Cesari, 2020, p.7). NGOs such as Riwaq, A.M. Qattan Foundation and Shouman Foundation are key players in legislating cultural policy (Farhat, 2010, p.137). They are also perceived to be efficient, dedicated and professional with high levels of knowledge and expertise (Hammami, p.27; De Cesari, p.7). NGOs are also considered the "employment sector of the economically privileged", they provide high salaries in relation to the rest of the public sector, which makes them a desirable workplace for a new generation of professionals, a point that has created an uneasy relationship within segments of the Palestinian communities – they are sometimes accused of elitism and being disconnected from grassroots communities to whom they once belonged (Hammami, p. 16, De Cesari, 2010, p.633).

In Palestine, heritage is instilled with a sense of urgency. The need "to preserve the remaining fragments of a vanishing landscape, one whose physical, demographic and social features have been radically altered by the Israeli colonization project" is seen as a form of resistance, steadfastness (*sumud* in Arabic) and a key element of its collective national identity (De Cesari, 2010, pp. 628-629). Riwaq Centre for Architectural Conservation, thought to be a model for all NGOs, often behaves like a "shadow ministry" – in 2006, for example, it produced the *Registry of Historic Buildings in Palestine*, the most accurate survey of its kind in The Territories, it documents over 50,000 structures across the West Bank and Gaza (the Ministry attempted a similar database but was unsuccessful) (De Cesari, 2010, p.628-629; De Cesari, 2020, p.4). Riwaq also plays an active role in planning preservation and conservation (De Cesari, 2010, p. 629; De Cesari, 2020 p.4) and in cultural policymaking: the Ministry commissioned the NGO, in partnership with Berzeit University) to draft legislation and develop policy for the heritage sector (Farhat, 2010, p. 154). It is important to note that heritage NGOs are responsible for "modern" architecture, structures that belong to the "recent past" and relegated to so-called 'the vernacular' while "biblical archeology" (De Cesari, 2020, p. 631) is "controlled, excavated, protected, and preserved (or neglected) by the Archaeology Unit of the Israeli Civil Administration, that is, the military government of the occupied territories" (Cesari, 2010, p.5).

The ongoing "war of position", the struggle over functions and responsibilities between the PNA and civil society together with the Israel-Palestinian conflict has severely shaped the cultural field in Palestine (De Cesari, 2020, p.6). They are at once rivals – both challenge each other's hegemony, with civil society counterhegemonic to the state – and partners, with government recognizing the civil sector's value and expertise and its realization that it cannot function without them. Alan Knight writes: "The mature revolutionary regimes" (of which the Palestinian government was once perceived and is no longer) "may retain its self-proclaimed revolutionary credentials, but as its leaders age, as vested interests are created

and as new forms of inequality are introduced or old forms are enhanced, so the 'revolutionary' claim begins to ring hollow. At this point, hegemony may fail and the regime may falter. Or the regime may build an alternative (weak/thin) hegemony, based on self-interested patronage and clientelism rather than revolutionary ideals" (Knight, 2007, p.25). Palestine's lack of hegemony (its thin/weak state) is attributed not only to its aged, out-of-touch politicians who rely on authoritarian rule to maintain power, (civil society is more popular and seen to endorse a more democratic system) but it is also the result of its colonized state with a colonizer (legitimized by its allies) who only seeks to maintain Palestine's fractured hegemony. Where perhaps hegemony does exist more fully (where state and civil society come together) is in their anti-colonial stance.

## ISRAEL: A 'THICK' HEGEMONY

Hegemony in Israel is high. Political and civil societies work together to establish an "all-inclusive universal" worldview that preserves and benefits the position of the "original ruling elites, ethnic and national groups" as it attempts to "shape the interests and needs of subordinate groups" (Kimmerling, 1998, p. 49;51). Its hegemony serves to legitimize its "ideology, culture and social order" (Kimmerling, 1998, p. 51). Israel possesses a complex cultural policy structure, strictly overseen by the government and has control over its civic institutions. It can be described as a "thick" hegemony - seemingly invulnerable to crisis and disruptions, its ideology is eagerly endorsed by most, reluctantly accepted by many and contested by a few (Knight, 2007, p.40). While civil society's role is to *contest* hegemony, challenging the state is difficult; cultural policy regulations and funding structures (extremely dependent on government) forces civil society to play a largely reproductive role in perpetuating the national ideology.

Israel's 'worldview' is based on Zionist philosophy, or what David Ben-Gurion called *mamalakhtiyut*, a doctrine that establishes the centrality of the state and whose basic features are: "Israel is the state of the Jewish people; that Israel belongs to all the Jewish people, not just to its citizens; and that Israel is a modern 'Western'-style nation that requires Jews who do not share 'Western' values to 'modernize' through 'melting-pot' apparatuses" (Schejter, p.10). *Mamalakhtiyut* is a form of hegemony that serves Zionist-Ashkenazis (Jews of European or American descent) and marginalizes non-European Jews (referred to as *Mizrahi*) and the Palestinian minority, who according to the Israeli Zionist narrative do not have a national identity or collective cultural rights (Schejter, p.11;17). For this reason, Israelis refer to Palestinians more generally as "Israeli Arabs", "Arabs in Israel", "Arabs of the inside and Arabs of 1948" and often "non-Jews" (Makkawi, 2008, p.25). As a ruling ideology, *mamalakhtiyut* has clear implications in the cultural sphere in that it marginalizes all contributions that contradict the status quo. For example, in 2016, Minister of Culture, Miri Regev, proposed 'The Loyalty in Culture Bill' that would deny funding to cultural organizations that are critical of the "State of Israel or emphasize the Palestinian national narrative" (Bishara, 2018). The minister described Israeli citizens – Jewish or Palestinian – whose artistic work challenges the status quo of Israel's Jewish nationalist hegemony as "de-legitimizers" (Zonszein, 2015). Regev was quoted as saying, "As promised, the Culture Ministry will only support cultural institutions that are loyal to the state's laws" (Newman, 2016). The amendment failed to receive sufficient support and was not ratified.

## ***Cultural Policy in Israel***

The government of Israel, through its Ministry of Education and Culture, the Knesset (Israel's parliament) and its intergovernmental agencies, assumes full responsibility of the cultural field (including financially) -- a heavy-handed involvement that results in a highly regulated sector with the state in political control over its activities (Ben-Ami, 1996, p. 195; 204). The Ministry's agencies include: The Public Council for Culture and Art, which sets policy and allocates funds to artists and arts institutions (Ben-Ami, p.200). Intended to operate like an 'arm's length body', the government has maintained tight control over the Council's activities, "making the country's arts and culture anything but insulated from politics" (Ben-Ami, p.208); The Department of Culture principally executes policy and funding recommendations, the entire culture budget is in fact at its disposal; The Culture Administration responsibilities are to "ensure the proper operation of the cultural and artistic establishment", "to raise the artistic level and encourage excellence", "to educate a new public to consume culture", "to provide an expression of the cultural heritage of the various ethnic communities", and to "ensure freedom of creativity and performance in Israeli arts"; The Corporation for Promoting Art to the People, better known as *Omanut La'am* promotes Israel's arts and culture to Jewish immigrants, primarily in "development town" or Israeli settlements (Ben-Ami, pp. 201-202). *Omanut La'am's* structure and activities and its "paternalistic approach" to culture has come under criticism – the agency selects what cultural performances and activities its public *cannot* see – a decision that not only affects marginalized groups in Israel, but is also an attempt to control content that the government deems 'offensive' to Israeli ideology (Ben-Ami, pp. 206)

"Purported to be a democracy" (Schejter, 2009, p.xi), one that is based on Western political systems that constitutionally uphold basic freedoms such as political representation, equal rights, free speech, and a free press, Israel in reality has a "restricted perception of democracy" (Ben-Ami, 1996, p.216), a "muted democracy" that is "designed to serve a power structure that promotes a hegemonic interpretation of [its] culture and identity" (Schejter, 2009, p.xii). While it may give the illusion of free speech for example, an inalienable right of a Western democracy, it is in fact not guaranteed under Israel's constitution, a permanent position unlikely to change as this ensures the State's control of its policies and cultural agenda (Schejter, pp. xii;xiv). Furthermore, Israel's "flawed" and "illiberal" form of 'democracy' (Schejter, p.15 from Peleg 2007), and its "cultural policies [which] do not fit those of a 'liberal' society, [even though] it may identify itself as such" (Schejter, p. 15 from Gontovnik, 2004, p.641) are "rooted in the oppression of the Palestinian people both within Israel's borders and beyond them" (Schejter, p.15 from Barzilai, 2002). The mass media is a case in point: Israeli policies prevent broadcasts in the Arabic language from public and leading commercial channels; the time allowed for programming in Arabic has over the years decreased from 18% to only 5% - none of which are aired during primetime hours; and finally, Palestinians are not provided with Arabic-language professional news programs (Schejter, 2009, p.133).

## ***NGOs in Israel and their relationship to the state***

The relationship between NGOs and the Israeli state is vastly different from that of Palestine. Government assumes a central role in developing cultural policy and is the main source of funding – control over these two spheres is designed to preserve hegemonic hierarchy (Feder and Katz-Gerro, 2012, p. 360). While

funding is available through local governments, the country's public lottery (*Mifal Hapais*) as well as private donors and non-governmental agencies (indirect support such as tax exemptions or donation are not available options) – the national government plays a critical role (Feder, Katz-Gerro, p.363). Government funding is allocated using three criteria: First, a major portion of funding goes to Jewish artists and organizations who preserve the Jewish ideology; Second, art drawn on European and North American art forms is given priority. This “hegemonic cultural preference” is conditioned on artists’ proficiency in Western art forms and prioritizes Ashkenazi-Jewish groups, thought to be the legitimate national culture– leaving Jewish artists of Eastern decent (seen as “Oriental” and “low-brow” as opposed to Ashkenazi “high-brow” culture) at a great disadvantage; Finally, financial support is provided directly to organization making funding decisions susceptible to political interests (Feder, Katz-Gerro, 2012, p.363-364). This direct form of support not only serves to exert power over the cultural field and aids in advancing Israel's interests and hegemonic ideology but it also creates a severe dependency. It is a form of coercion. Organizations are unable to set their own agendas and programs, which in turn limits public participation among subaltern groups, but they also sometimes resort to self-censorship in fear of retaliation (loss of funding for example). This compels organizations to adhere to the status quo, ultimately placing culture under threat.

Support of Western (Ashkenazi) culture cannot be overestimated. As part of Israel's nation-building process it built “central culture producing institutions” such as theater houses, opera, ballet companies, choirs, philharmonic and other orchestras, museums and galleries – all cultural institutions found in important metropolises around the world, their number is in fact high relative to the country's size in comparison to other countries (Kimmerling, 1998, p.60). Taking the performing arts as an example – government funding represents 90% of total support, creating a sever dependency on the state that these institutions cannot easily compensate (Feder and Katz-Gerro, 2012, p.369).

The exclusive attention offered by the state to Western culture, results in the exclusion of Mizrahi culture, which generates a hegemonic struggle between the two groups – Mizrahis attempt to challenge the dominant hierarchy in order to assert their rights as the privileged group continues to exert its power to exclude and limit their access to protect their own hegemony (Feder, Katz-Gerro, 2012, p.361). Ashkenazi groups not only seek to marginalize Mizrahis but also the Palestinian minority who are perceived by Israel as the “enemy within” and are effectively denied the right to express their collective identity or to be “equal participants in the process of building a national culture” (Schejter, 2009, p.115). Palestinian NGOs in Israel are continuously under threat. In 2020, for example, directors of the Edward Said National Conservatory of Music (ESNCM) the Yabous Cultural Center, and the Jerusalem Arts Network were all arrested and their institutions raided on claims of “tax evasion and fraud”, and “suspicion of money laundering [and] funding terror” (Saurez, 2020). More recently, the Israeli government prohibited Palestinian flags from public places (The Guardian, 2023) – a directive that has been given several times since the country's establishment.

In addition, Israeli-Palestinians are denied their collective identity through the education system. Imposed on them by the Ministry of Education, hegemony is maintained through “inferior allocations in terms of physical facilities, teacher training and curriculum development” – these allocations poor as they may be are used by Israel as a form of “sublimation”, a mechanism to prevent conflict and confrontation (Schejter,



2009, p.115; Makkawi, 2008, p. 33). Curriculum development is also under government's tight control, its "colonizing function" designed to "instill feelings of self-disparagement and inferiority in Arab youth; to de-nationalize them; in particular to de-Palestinize them; and to teach them to glorify the history, culture, and achievements of the Jewish majority" (Makkawi, 2008, pp. 27; 31-32 from Rekhess, 1988, p.37). It is not until students enter Israeli universities, which remain under the tight control of the Jewish political system and ideology that Israeli-Palestinian students are able to publicly and "actively reject the Israelization process imposed on them and reassert their Palestinian national identity and culture" (Makkawi, 2008, p.30) – although not without fear of discrimination and recrimination.

Nevertheless, Palestinian-Israeli NGOs (PINGOs) strive to shape a "collective life" for their community— although they attempt to promote their interests and influence policy with limited outcomes, they have not been able to realize any real "structural reform" or achieve "democratization" to Israel's policies (Jamal, 2008, pp. 284-286). Their potential is further diminished because of internal "fragmentation, personalization, sectarianism" and their tendency to affiliate themselves with Arab political parties – whom are excluded from the "major junctions of power" and are seen as illegitimate partners when forming governments. (Jamal, pp.285; 292). While the number of PINGOs is on the rise, their total number in 2008 was 1,1517 (476 fall under the category, 'Culture and Leisure')— this is only 5% of all NGOs (Jamal, 2008, p.290;296). One critical reason for the increase is the availability of foreign funding – predominately from American, European and Canadian sources (Jamal, p.296) – an explicit strategy intended to assert hegemony on the group. In fact, funding Palestinian culture is not managed through traditional channels as Jewish NGOs (Culture Administration Department and Public Council for the Arts) but is rather achieved through "a special section in the Department of Culture and receives funding through a separate category in the cultural budget" (Feder and Katz-Gerro, 2012, p.369) – information on which I was unable to obtain.

Transnational donor organizations are in fact an important source of funding for PINGOs (Haklai, 2008, p.585). In 2008, transnational Jewish donors comprised between 20 and 30 percent of total grants received and come second in importance only to the Ford Foundation and a number of other European-based donors (Haklai, p.585). These funders are "driven by genuine normative concerns, liberal motivations, and a desire to assist in [Palestinian] development, coupled with a strong commitment to Israel" – this group of donors perceive funding as not only important to improving relations but also as essential to Israel's security (Haklai, p.596). PINGOs, Jewish NGO's (similar to NGOs in Palestine), and the world over, encounter similar challenges - donor funding comes with 'strings attached' and contingent on certain criteria and are more often than not obligated to reflect donor priorities in grantmaking applications, which limits their potential to affect change.

## **CONCLUSION**

Hegemony is the consolidation of power by both the state and its civil society. It is never complete but always contested albeit to different degrees; it is never fixed but always moving, shifting and even when it seems secure with the dominant ideology in control, hegemony always needs to be worked at (Knight, 2007, p.24).

The creation of Israel is based on a Zionist ideology. It purports to be a western democracy when in fact it is a muted form of democracy - muted doesn't mean silenced (Schejter, p.xii). Highly regulated, its cultural policy is constructed to limit, restrict and censor freedom of expression and to maintain a "non-egalitarian undemocratic order" (Schejter, 2009, pp. xii; xix) – that serves its national ideology and its ruling class, dismissing the contributions of its minorities. Civil society in large part reproduces the country's national ideology, with little room for resistance. As a colonizer, the fullness of its hegemony is dependent on suppression of Palestinian cultural rights inside Israel, in Palestine and internationally. On the global stage, for example, Boycott Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) a social movement that has materially altered the conversation on Palestine, has been a source of great frustration for Israel and its supporters (in fact Israel views BDS as an existential threat) so much so that this week a wholly undemocratic bill has been proposed in British parliament providing immunity (and therefore protection) to Israel from BDS (Middle East Monitor, 2023). Results of the debate on the bill is not yet known but it leaves little doubt of Israel's hegemony, inside and outside of its borders.

Palestine is a state under colonization by Israel – as I write these concluding remarks, Palestinians in the West Bank are under attack in what is considered one of the biggest Israeli military operations in the past two decades. As they struggle for freedom from a violent occupation, Palestinians are disillusioned by a government that has consolidated its power over its own people (with its occupier's consent) and prevented internal challenges to its hegemony – at least politically. Its cultural hegemony, however is actively contested through its civil society, creating a hegemonic struggle. With a weak and faltering government unable to shape or implement a viable cultural policy nor provide adequate funding, the civil sector has assumed the government's role and is sometimes seen as an alternative. Civil society in Palestine is popular (even if it is sometimes accused of elitism), has a democratic vision (as opposed to the 'state's' authoritarianism), thought to possess expertise, and is attractive to transnational donors (the reason for this attraction is perhaps two-fold; civil society's high-capacity levels and a weak government may be the ultimate goal for donors). Staying in the international arena, PNA's hegemony is further diluted by BDS -- the movement has been very critical of the Palestinian government's collaboration with its colonizer and supportive of its civil society further diminishing an already weak\thin hegemony.

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