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# Contextualizing Palestinian Hybridity: How Pragmatic Citizenship Influences Diasporic Identities

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Contextualizing Palestinian Hybridity: How Pragmatic Citizenship Influences Diasporic  
Identities

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## **Abstract**

Palestinians are one of the largest diaspora populations in the world, with members in the Middle East, Africa, Europe, and the Americas. How are the individual diasporic experiences of nationalism similar and different to one another? This research examines the creation and maintenance of Palestinian identity in diasporic contexts through ethnographic analysis and a series of interviews conducted in Chile, Jordan, and The United States. The results show that despite Palestinians maintaining Palestinianness as a dominant characteristic of identity in all three settings, there are contextual influences on how people integrate that identity into their lives. Within Jordan, Palestinians experience conflicting national identities and economic disparity while sharing language, culture and geographic proximity with Palestine. In The United States and Chile, Palestinians experience cultural and spatial separation from Palestine and are influenced by local political and economic situations. Evidence also shows that the identities of most of the participants in the three countries demonstrate various levels of cultural hybridity.

## **Key Words**

Palestine, identity, diaspora

Locating our identity is centrally tied to understanding where we are from. Whenever one is asked the question, “*Where are you from?*” the response tells a story that situates the questioner and respondent in time and space (Myers 2006). Answering this question shares details of the spaces that are central to our understanding of self-meaning. The relationships that individuals establish with people and objects are shaped by the environments they inhabit. The experiences and behaviors within a social space create what Harold Proshansky (1993) calls “place identity.” Individual identity is developed through the collection of memories of spaces previously inhabited and the meanings that those spaces have for social and biological development (Proshansky 1993). The stories that elicit one’s place-identity show an individual’s comprehension of self, and as researchers we must seek out and interpret these stories.

For over a hundred years Palestinians in diaspora have been navigating these questions of identity, belonging, and citizenship emblematic of today’s global and mobile world (Baeza 2014). Much study has been dedicated to exploring the intricacies of Palestinian identity (Khalidi 1997, Massad 2001, Said 2003) and Palestinian identity within diaspora (Allan 2014, Baeza 2015, Mavroudi 2008), yet few studies explore the similarities and differences of Palestinian identity in various diasporic contexts. Each diasporic context presents a unique set of challenges and opportunities for migrants and refugees, but what connects each of these diasporic experiences to one another? Analyzing a collection of different displays of Palestinian identity around the world gives us insight into the commonalities of national identity and its distinctive contextual manifestations. This research examines the creation, retention, and transformation of Palestinian identity within Chile, Jordan, and the United States. I argue that various versions of what one interviewee called ‘Palestinianness’ arise within each diasporic site; however, there is a central Palestinianness that connects Palestinians to Palestine regardless of spatial or temporal

separation from their homeland. Here Palestinianity can be understood as the characteristics of Palestinian identity that are unique to specific diasporic contexts. Palestinianness, on the other hand, consists of the overarching symbols, ideas, and representations that are generally accepted as Palestinian on a global scale. In this paper, I explore the similarities and differences in Palestinianity within multiple diasporic sites, extrapolating which characteristics are exemplary of each context and which characteristics define a general Palestinianness.

Palestinian identity, in general, is based on memories and stories passed down through generations in an effort to legitimize and maintain the Palestinian struggle within a global context (Suleiman 2016). Within the diasporic contexts, however, statelessness and questions of belonging and citizenship are also central to identity formation. Chile, Jordan and The United States provide migrants the needed benefits of state membership in addition to presenting them with various nationalisms. What is of particular note in the Palestinian diaspora is that individuals and communities retain their Palestinianness for generations while simultaneously experiencing hybridization of identity and culture. In all the environments in which I conducted interviews, I saw hybridity and interchange in culture, politics, economics, and social relations. In the following analysis, I define the concepts and theoretical framework that I use to understand identity, citizenship, and diaspora. I then use interview data and ethnographic analysis to explore the similarities and differences in Palestinian diasporic experience in Chile, Jordan, and The United States. I conclude with the implications of this research for recent conversations on globalization and transnationalism.

### **New Approaches to Diasporic Identity**

Identity is constructed through the accumulation of factors that have shaped an individual's environment and interactions. To use Clifford Geertz's (2000) metaphor of "webs of

significance,” individual identities are composed of channels of meaning that push and pull on one’s conception of self. Understanding identity’s dynamic roots means tracing the threads of these webs of significance outwards towards the origins. The work of understanding identity is, therefore, less a systematic search for answers and more an interpretation of meanings.

Furthermore, identity is constantly changing. The social pressures and the context of a time period constantly shape and alter identity (Hall 1992). As Stuart Hall points out, “identity [has] become a ‘moveable feast’: formed and transformed continuously in relation to the ways we are represented or addressed in the cultural systems which surround us” (Hall 1992; 277).

Individuals take elements from a pool of influences and embody a multifaceted identity. In a sense, this complex expression is both a conscious and unconscious Goffmanian performance of identity (1959). An individual’s identity, however, is not entirely individualistic given that their surrounding community constantly influences ideology, culture, and politics. Provided with unique social environments, the web of significance or feast of influences (whichever metaphor appeals to you more) is adjusted to fit the social situation both by the individual and by their surrounding community. This becomes all the more relevant when considering the concepts of diaspora and membership.

Diasporic individuals seek membership within diasporic communities, which in turn must exist within nation-states. These communities navigate inclusion and exclusion within these states and their national identities (Brubaker 2009). In light of the recent increase in hybridity and nationalisms, current studies have tried to understand the dynamics of ethnicity, race, and nationalism by tracing transnational movements, diasporic identity formation, and notions of “foreign” versus “indigenous.” Nations, nationalism, and nationhood are being redefined to fit the new case studies and to address globalization (Brubaker 2009). Homi Bhabha argues that

“the ‘middle passage’ of contemporary culture... is a process of displacement and disjunction that does not totalize experience. Increasingly, ‘national’ cultures are being produced from the perspective of disenfranchised minorities” (1994: 5-6). These marginalized histories resist dominant and exclusive narratives and instead push cultural hybridity to the forefront of national discourse (Bhabha 1994). Many authors have argued that Palestinianness is maintained within diasporic contexts (Allan 2014, Khalidi 1997, Mavroudi 2008, Said 2003). This retention is persistent through multiple generations of Palestinian descendants. Diana Allan (2014) explains that Palestinian identity consists of a commitment to the acquisition of a right to return to Palestine for all Palestinians, a collective memory of Palestine before the creation of Israel in 1948, and a dedication to *sumud* or steadfastness. The retention of Palestinianness is consistent throughout the global diaspora, but it has a variety of individual, contextually specific, manifestations and consequences.

New modalities in the conception of nationalism and state-individual relations are also central to understanding the construction of national identity. Eve Darian-Smith (2015) argues that new ways of comprehending the concepts of “state” and “individual” are needed in order to think past the accepted notion that people trade nationalistic allegiance for state support. The state’s influence on national culture and its role as a supplier of state benefits—once thought to be unified—are growing increasingly separated (Darian-Smith 2015). Will Kymlicka (1998) furthers this argument through the analysis of the influence of immigrants in many modern states. Multiple ethnic groups live side by side while having distinct cultures, challenging the notion that states must homogenize citizen nationalism to facilitate coexistence. Kymlicka claims that these minority groups seek *differentiated citizenship*, which calls for cultural diversity in addition to political unity. While minority groups advocate for cultural cohabitation, state forces

often pressure immigrants to integrate or assimilate into a homogenous national culture (Mintz 1996).

Given that the differentiated citizenship model is contradicted by the disparity in the requirements of minority groups and the state, we must establish what new citizenship models are relevant to this analysis of Palestinian diaspora. One model is *flexible citizenship*, which suggests that the most important elements in defining citizenship for migrants are economic factors (Nagel and Staeheli 2004). As globalization studies expand our understanding of transnationalism, we see that political shifts and economic hardship become central reasons for migration. Similarly, Nagel and Staeheli (2004) demonstrate the incongruity of the role of nation and state by explaining that individuals can be deemed legal citizens of a state but still not claim to “be of” that country. Belonging, therefore, does not equate to legal membership.

Many migrants within the Palestinian diaspora seek out citizenship for the economic and cultural motivations discussed above. Yet, the model that I will draw most heavily from to discuss citizenship is the concept of *pragmatic citizenship*. Pragmatic citizenship entails legal membership in one state concurrent with a sense of belonging to one, two, or more nations (Mavroudi 2008). This is the case with individuals and communities of diasporic Palestinians, who experience Palestinian statelessness along with a residency in another state and yet maintain Palestinianness as central to their identity (Suleiman 2016). Going back to Geertz’s “webs of significance,” there is a Palestinian thread in the web that connects members in diaspora by providing nationalistic inspiration, but not pragmatic state benefits of citizenship.

Elizabeth Mavroudi’s model of pragmatic citizenship is based on a study conducted with diasporic Palestinians in Greece and serves as a foundation for understanding diasporic citizenship. However, this model requires additional development in order to understand that



while Palestinians maintain Palestinianness—a *universal* sense of being Palestinian—in every diasporic place, Palestinianity—or what it *contextually* means to be Palestinian—uniquely manifests in different diasporic places. Because Mavroudi only looks at one site for her analysis, she fails to account for the diverse influences that variations in context have. Using a multi-site analysis, in this study I aim to address the limitations of Mavroudi’s approach by demonstrating how all diasporic Palestinians experience pragmatic citizenship, while simultaneously experiencing cultural hybridity with the host nation.

The sense of belonging that migrants experience is often manifested in a hybridity of identity between their membership state and their diasporic nationalism. This hybridity is brought about through the intersections and contact between relatively different populations, characteristic of what Sheller (2006) calls the “new mobilities” of our time. Hybridity is a characteristic of our era, and as Peter Burke states, it is one “that assists globalization while being assisted by it”(2009: 2). At the merging points of various races, languages, and ethnicities, the consequences of this mixing are still not fully understood. Given the complexity of historical, linguistic, and geographic diversity, debates about the nature of cultural hybridity center around dominance versus pluralism (Kraidy 2005). For instance, while in some circumstances hybridizing communities share ideas and demonstrate egalitarian interchange, in other cases one group commodifies and decontextualizes another’s culture. Hybridity can mean cultural coexistence, yet it can also indicate the loss of local roots and tradition replaced by homogeneity. Cultural hybridity means different things in different contexts, and it has unique influences on objects, situations, and terms, which I address in my research (Burke 2009).

## History of Palestinian Diaspora

Palestinians are one of the largest diaspora populations in the world, inhabiting many countries in the Middle East, Europe, Africa, and The Americas (Baeza 2014). In order to understand how various diasporic communities embody similar or different characteristics of Palestinian identity, we must consider the experience of individuals in a variety of areas. Each context in which Palestinians have settled presents a unique and expansive site of study. However, in this paper, I conduct a multi-site analysis of three locations of Palestinian migration: Amman, Jordan; Quillota, Chile; and Saint Paul-Minneapolis, United States. Below I have included a short historical context for these three sites, followed by general details about the study's methods.

Many Palestinian migrants fled the Ottoman rule in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century and moved to other parts of the Levantine region while also traveling as far as Africa, Europe, and the Americas (Baeza 2015). During the post-WWII creation of the Israeli state and subsequent violent conflicts between Israel and Palestine, many more Palestinians fled or were forced out and joined existing diaspora communities around the world (Pappé 2006). Israel's seizure of land and implementation of settlements, checkpoints, and a border wall have taken the autonomy of governance and citizenship administration away from the Palestinian leadership. Border movement, land ownership, trade relations, security surveillance, military control, water flow, and agricultural production are just some of the examples of goods and services within Palestine that are controlled by Israel (Halper 2015). Jeff Halper (2015) calls this form of domination the Israeli "Matrix of Control" over Palestine. It is a phenomenon that highlights Palestinian statelessness, which is also seen in the United States' and Israel's failure to recognize Palestine as a state within the UN, and the struggle for the right to return for many Palestinians in diaspora

(The United Nations 2012, ICAHD 2016). According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, in 2010 roughly 1.5 million Palestinians lived in Israel, 4 million within Gaza and the West Bank, and 5.5 million in the global diaspora.

The largest destination of the Palestinian diaspora is Jordan, with over 3 million individuals registered as refugees with the UN Relief and Works Agency (Minority Rights Group International 2016). The history of the Levantine region, which encompasses modern-day Jordan and Palestine, extends further back than I can address in this study, but the history of separate nationalisms between Jordan and Palestine begins around the Sykes-Picot agreement in 1916, in which French and British leaders divided the Middle East into countries to be held under their control (Massad 2001). Prior to this agreement, the modern-day understanding of national boundaries in the Middle East did not exist. Today, however, these national boundaries are significant in political and social conversation, and the national identities associated with these boundaries are well established. In 1948, in the wake of the creation of Israel, Jordan annexed the West Bank. Hundreds of thousands of refugees left Israel and the West Bank for Jordan's borders. Palestinians were given citizenship within Jordan, yet many were critical of Jordan's political relationship with Israel and worried about their ability to return to Palestine. The tension between Jordan and Palestine peaked in 1970 with the advent of Black September, during which violent clashes broke out between the forces of the Jordanian King Hussein and the leaders of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) (Massad 2001). The Palestinian Territories separated from Jordan once again in the aftermath of Black September, creating the modern borders. Today, the lineages of Palestinians and Jordanians in Jordan are extremely intertwined, and both groups share cultural, linguistic, and religious traditions. Yet, Jordanians of

Jordanian and Palestinian descent still discuss the intricacies of nationalism and the specifics that distinguish Palestine from Jordan (Massad 2001).

Outside of the Middle East, the largest number of Palestinians in diaspora can be found in Chile, with a population around 500,000 Palestinians out of a total of 17.5 million Chileans (Baeza 2015). Many Arabs left the Middle East entirely during the early 1900s, often fleeing the rule of the Ottoman Empire, and headed for the economic and political promises of the Americas (Hernandez 1994). Syrian and Iraqi migrants landed on the Eastern coast of South America and began to settle within Brazil and Argentina. Palestinian migrants traveling afterwards were met with heavy competition within the major businesses and industries and so continued westward, crossing the Andes into Chile (Baeza 2014). Chile proved a practical destination for this migration, given its abundance of natural resources available for cultivation and a set of relatively lax immigration policies. Early Palestinians adjusted to Spanish and a new culture within Chile and became successful merchants in early textile, fishing, and copper industries. Most of the Palestinian migrants were Christian and had little trouble adjusting to the predominantly Catholic Chilean society. Muslim migrants arrived later in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and set up mosques in major metropolitan areas, such as Santiago and Valparaiso (Agar 2009). As the Palestinian presence became more familiar and accepted by local Chileans, Palestinians acquired new positions in local government, business, and schooling. Given significant endogamy and communalism, the descendants of these early Palestinian migrants continue to inhabit many of the same spaces today, but they have lost much of the language and culture of their parents' generation (Muglia, 2015). Given the current conflict in Iraq and Syria, many more Palestinian refugees have fled their homes and met family and friends within Chile, keeping the networks between Chile and Palestine strong. Palestinians have continued to be well-received legally and

socially within Chile, marked by continued economic freedoms and liberal citizenship laws (Plumb, 2015).

As in the Chilean context, Palestinian immigration to the United States began in the early 1900s with migrants in search of economic and political freedom and continued during the beginning of the Arab-Israeli conflict (Christison 1989). Unique to the United States, however, migration stagnated during the Great Depression and then rose to its peak in 1967 after the Six Day War (Christison 1989). Today there are estimates that put the Palestinian-American population at around 200,000-250,000, though exact numbers are difficult to come by because few of the early Palestinian migrants listed Palestine as their country of origin and because a third of the migrants who enter the United States with Israeli passports are originally Palestinian (Cohen 1994). Most Palestinian immigrants to the United States originally opened successful small businesses along the East Coast but soon moved westward into the Midwest and West Coast during the WWII manufacturing boom (Hammer 2005). Large Palestinian communities still exist in many American cities, including Dearborn, Michigan; Houston; Washington, D.C.; and Los Angeles. First- and second-generation Palestinians adjusted to English and succeeded within American political and educational systems. Much like in Chile, Religion was not a barrier for Christian Palestinian migrants, originating from Palestinian towns like Beit Jala. However, many Muslim Palestinian migrants struggled within a largely Islamophobic American context, especially after the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001. Furthermore, many migrants (Muslim and Christian) felt certain levels of persecution and alienation, due in part to the large American pro-Israel lobby within the United States, and thus groups including the American Anti-Arab Discrimination Committee were created (Hammer 2005).

Many forces have contributed to the migration of Palestinian refugees to Chile, Jordan, and the US, including war and violence, economic opportunity, and preexisting networks of Arab and Palestinian migrants. The histories of the Palestinian presence in diasporic contexts shed light on interactions between diaspora communities and their areas of residency. This historical context demonstrates how Palestinians have been integrated into, or excluded from, the economic, social, political, and cultural spheres of host countries, and establishes a basic picture of these communities for the data that follows.

### **Methods**

In order to explore formations of Palestinian identity within various contexts of diaspora and displacement within various sites of Palestinian migration, I conducted a series of interviews in Quillota, Chile; Amman, Jordan; and Saint Paul/Minneapolis, USA, accompanied by ethnographic observations within the sites. Each of these cities has experienced extensive Palestinian migration over the last one hundred years, creating networks among first-, second-, third-, and even fourth-generation Palestinians. Living and carrying out research in these areas gave me the opportunity to learn about a spectrum of perspectives from older immigrants and newer Palestinian arrivals.

In each site, I conducted roughly 15 interviews and spent time living in each city, which allowed me to observe the commonalities and disparities in Palestinian experiences. I visited mosques, Palestinian coffee shops and restaurants, universities, cultural clubs, newspaper headquarters, and high schools, and I met with Palestinians with a diversity of professions, status, age, and gender. I conducted these interviews in Arabic, Spanish, and English, or a combination of languages, depending on which language participants felt most comfortable using. In order to approach my research question on identity in diaspora, I asked interviewees in

each context questions centering on three general themes. These themes focused on how Palestinian identity is created, how that identity is influenced by diasporic experiences, and what it is like living as a Palestinian in diaspora. The findings of this paper are divided into three sections focused on these themes while including analysis of belonging, citizenship, and cultural hybridity. Within my discussion of the findings, I compare and contrast examples from the three cases to show where diasporic experiences were similar and where they differed.

### **Experiences of Citizenship and Belonging in Palestinian Diaspora**

Given the expansiveness of the Palestinian diaspora, this paper aims to highlight some of the similarities and differences in the influences of unique host environments. What follows is the description of three main topics stemming from my interview questions: What constitutes a Palestinian identity? What is it like being a Palestinian in diaspora? And how do the diasporic contexts influence Palestinian identity? The first two sections aim to answer these questions by exploring how Palestinians in each case experience pragmatic citizenship—how they receive state benefits while maintaining their individual and collective Palestinian identity. The last section then explains how Palestinianity is manifested in Chile, Jordan, and the US, and how diasporic identity is pushed, pulled, and hybridized with the host culture.

#### *The Formation of Palestinian Identity*

In the Jordanian, Chilean, and American contexts, interviewees reported that they were from Palestine, deeply connected to it, or both. This connection to Palestine, or a Palestinian national identity, was mentioned regardless of the interviewees' spatial or temporal distance from Palestine as a country. In the US, Jordan, and Chile, the concept of *Palestine* is central to the place-identity of interviewees, even though *Palestine* means something different in each place. In Jordan, interviewees highlight resistance and *sumud* as the most important characteristic

of Palestinianness, while in Chile memory plays the same role, and in the US this characteristic is based on family and connections to the land as well as a need to represent Palestine in an American context.

In Jordan, interviewees expressed that being Palestinian means embracing the struggle of the Palestinian cause and embodying that identity with honor. Laith, a second generation Palestinian living in Amman, states:

My family explained to me that Palestine is our land, and we can't forget. They told me I am Palestinian and you need to fight for that. They emphasized to me that they feared that the older generations will die and the new generations will forget their histories. This is why it is important to remember.

Another interviewee echoed the significance of Palestine by saying, "Palestine is the soil of the earth. What we have left are memories, and this is what ties us to the land." Here we see that the *struggle* for Palestine is a large part of what it means to be Palestinian. It is a struggle not only for a homeland (the "soil" and the "earth") but also a struggle to retain the memories of the way Palestine was experienced by older generations. The ability to retain this identity and the memories of Palestine was sometimes expressed by the use of the Arabic term *sumud*, or steadfastness. Interviewees maintain *sumud* through memories and the familial retention of identity. Within Laith's family's council, we see how important memory is to resistance and how fragile that memory is under the threat of extinction. Remembering the histories of their parents or grandparents and fighting for the political and social rights of Palestinians is one way that interviewees embody the Palestinian identity and keep the Palestinian cause alive.

Embracing the Palestinian identity is rooted in a powerful connectedness to Palestine regardless of the spatial or temporal distance from the country itself. Nearly all (13 of 15) interview participants in Jordan stated that they were *from* Palestine, despite only one person having been born in Palestine and two others having ever physically been there. This connection



was present not solely in first or second-generation migrants, but also amongst interviewees who were the grandchildren or the great-grandchildren of migrants from Palestine. When asked where they were from, the answer of "I am from Palestine" was always given, followed up by the answer, "I grew up in Jordan." The presence of two answers shows how more than one identity is important to the participant: the first answer situates the location of *identity* the second situates the *physical* location. In the responses that I obtained, most interviewees highlighted Palestinianness first and more frequently than Jordanianness. Jordan was always mentioned as a space in which interviewees lived, but not as space they were from or called home. One participant explained, "I was born and raised in a country that I don't belong to. I have roots in Palestine, and I'd like to go back." Here we see a rejection of Jordan as *home* in addition to the aspiration of returning to Palestine. Even though the participant has never visited or lived in Palestine, he feels that he *belongs* there. Another participant similarly contends, "Jordan is not my country and it is not my home. There is a big difference between Jordan and home." The Palestinian identity was dominant over the Jordanian identity when the interviewees had one parent who was Palestinian and one who was Jordanian. I recall overhearing a young man answering his parents' question about which country he preferred, Palestine or Jordan (his mother was a second-generation Palestinian migrant and his father was a Jordanian Bedouin). He smiled before embracing his mother and saying, "Palestine of course." From these examples we can see how the interviewees' distance of separation between Palestine, both in time and geographical distance, is transcended by the unique and extensive presence of their Palestinian identity.

As in Jordan, allegiance to the Palestinian identity was strong in Chile, but not to the same degree. A smaller proportion of participants (7 of 15) indicated that they were "from

Palestine.” Yet, those who were not direct migrants from Palestine indicated that Palestine was still their home. Every interviewee indicated the relevance of their Palestinian heritage to their identity. They upheld connection to this identity through the maintenance of tradition and the embodiment of Arab and Palestinian culture within Chile. Of all the interviewees, those who were first- and second-generation migrants maintained Arabic as a first or second language, recalled memories of their own or their parents’ journeys to Chile from Palestine, and held strong desires to return to Palestine to visit or live. One participant, an older man who owned a shop in the downtown square of Quillota, reflected on what it means to be Palestinian: “[Being Palestinian] is the most beautiful thing there is. It is blood, it is honor, and it is beauty.” His father had migrated to Chile with him when he was a child, so he was too young to remember the trip. While this participant was born Palestinian, and thus connected to the homeland through lineage, he also sought out ways to engage with Palestinian honor, memory, and identity. He had traveled to Palestine many times and once had dreams of moving there, though those dreams were never carried out. We see here how in Chile ideas of connection and admiration are associated with Palestinianness.

On the other hand, third- or fourth-generation Palestinians in Chile had lost a majority of their Arabic fluency and forgotten some of the traditions of their parents, although they were proud of their Palestinian last names, followed Palestinian politics on the news, and maintained many Palestinian cultural practices. For most participants, the more time they had spent away from Palestine the less they were notably connected to Palestinian culture. Yet, all the participants were still very conscious of Palestinian identity, and some participants, like Maximiliano, found ways to stay engaged with their Palestinianness. Maximiliano proudly owns a Palestine-themed restaurant in the heart of Quillota which he runs with his brother, sister, and

mother. The store is decorated with Palestinian flags, maps of the country, and memorabilia from the Levant. His restaurant is successful in bringing customers both Chilean and Palestinian to eat lunch and dinner. During our interview, the dining area was buzzing with people. When I asked Maximiliano about what the restaurant meant to him, he explained, “A lot of people have come to my store and asked me to tell them what is Arab food, and what is the Palestinian cause. It is super beautiful when someone who has not eaten Arab food gets here and they try it and like it.” Through food, Maximiliano expresses Palestinianness and integrates that identity into the Chilean context. We see here how cultural exchanges were reciprocal and how social influences are not one-way. Maximiliano was not a unique case, though, as several other interviewees that I met with owned Arab- or Palestinian-themed restaurants. Other participants attended the local “Palestine School,” which was opened by the first generation of Palestinian migrants to the area, and some owned local newspapers that focused on relevant news of the Middle East and Palestine. For all of the interviewees, from first- through fourth-generation Palestinians, Palestine was powerfully present in their identity. The strength of this connection and the ways it was manifested varied amongst the participants but was constantly present.

Amongst the interviewees with whom I spoke in the United States, being Palestinian had a similar meaning to the perspectives present in Chile and Jordan. Many participants mentioned family, honor and struggle or resistance as emblematic of being Palestinian. There is a connection to the people and Palestine. As one interviewee explained:

When I say that I am Palestinian I mean that I am a person who has ties to the geographic area that’s called Palestine. I relate to the people that live there, I relate to the experience. The place that I would go to is Palestine. The place that I feel most comfortable is Palestine.

Yet, unique to the Palestinian-American experience, the Palestinians I interviewed felt called upon to be ambassadors for Palestine and the Palestinian cause within a pro-Israel atmosphere.

Various interviewees explained to me that they are constantly explaining the Palestinian perspective to friends and strangers or being asked to speak on behalf of Palestine in daily conversations and in more formal settings such as university events. Some participants even felt that they had to act a certain way in order not to conform to stereotypes that their friends had about Palestinians or Arabs in general. One interviewee said, "It is as if immediately saying that you are a Palestinian makes it seem like you have to be the more objective one-- like you have to turn your emotions down." Similarly, some interviewees were asked to teach courses about Palestine on their university campuses, while others participated in clubs dedicated to Palestinian equal rights. Almost all interviewees indicated that they had to be more conscious about their Palestinianness while living in the US. Palestinianness within the US is predominantly based on the relations between individuals and family in Palestine, rather than the significance of land to Jordanian-Palestinians or heritage to Chilean-Palestinians.

Within the US, around half of the people that I interviewed were first-generation Palestinians, while the rest identified as Palestinian-American. Similar to the previous two cases, the majority of the interviewees indicated that they were from Palestine and those who did not mentioned Palestine as a "second home." This was not contingent on whether or not they had been to Palestine, as most of the Palestinian-Americans labeled Palestine as home without having been there themselves. Following on the point above about the "ambassador" nature of the Palestinian identity, one interviewee originally told me that she was "just American," yet when meeting strangers or talking to certain friends she would highlight her Palestinianness or introduce herself as Palestinian-American. We see here that how one feels and what one presents are not always identical; there is a hybridization of national identity that manifests differently in different contexts. We also see how definitions of "home" are unique to each interviewee. One

first-generation Palestinian mentioned to me that he had grown up in Saudi Arabia and lived in the United States in addition to Palestine, yet he never feels at home unless he is in Palestine. Growing up, he always felt attached to Palestine regardless of which diasporic context he was living in. While Palestine is experienced as *home* to many Palestinians in diaspora, the image of home can vary from person to person.

### *Being Palestinian in Diaspora*

After understanding the circumstances of life for Palestinians in Chile, Jordan, and the US, we can turn to the experiences of Palestinians within each context. This includes the ways that Palestinians engage with their Palestinian and diasporic nationalisms and the various experiences of citizenship and belonging. I enquired about this by asking about differences in age and degrees of separation from Palestine and what cultural and social activities Palestinians engage within their communities. While Palestinians in Jordan must negotiate the boundaries between belonging and their citizenship status, Chilean-Palestinians are easily accepted as full citizens and are forced to focus on cultural assimilation and the loss of memory and lineage. Finally, in the American case, Palestinians have faced changing immigration and citizenship policies, and members must negotiate between stifling and embodying their Palestinian-American heritage.

Many Palestinians who have been given citizenship within Jordan use their Jordanian passport to travel outside of the country, and specifically to Palestine. The Jordanian ID allows Palestinians to live and work within Jordan, but it does not come without restrictions. Interviewees explained that Jordanians of Palestinian descent are not allowed in certain jobs, are not qualified for certain university scholarships, and cannot be in the Jordanian armed forces. On a less formal level, too, Jordanian families often find it hard to accept marriages with Palestinian

families, though this is often restricted to upper-class families. One interviewee described the difference in citizenship to me in another way; they claimed that the formal structure of bureaucracy was not rigid in Jordan. Jordanians simply have more *wasta*, or corrupt, under-the-table power, within political and economic spheres than Palestinians do. Furthermore, my research occurred during an intense period of Syrian migration into Jordan. The economic and political climates, in general, were at precarious levels. One interviewee lamented the situation by saying, "there are no job opportunities for me, and everything is just harder when you are Palestinian!" The stress on the political and economic sectors of this diasporic context emphasizes the relevance of pragmatic citizenship. Palestinians living in Jordan seek out job opportunities and legal citizenship, yet maintain that they are *from* Palestine.

This sentiment is particularly visible within the younger members of the Palestinian diaspora within Jordan. The youth stay connected to Palestine by following the news, staying in touch with their family members in Palestine, and using various social media, including Facebook, Twitter, and Snapchat. Many of the universities within Jordan also have clubs and groups that focus on Palestinian culture or politics. Whenever what one interviewee calls "earth-shaking" events happen within Palestine, Palestinian youth in Jordan know about it in minutes through their social networks. This constant attentiveness to Palestinian politics and identity is a collective responsibility that had been instilled in interviewees as kids by their parents. Additionally, this notion of responsibility spans age and profession, as one participant pointed out, "it wasn't just my parents that told me about Palestine. It was my family, my teachers, friends and whole community that told me about our country." In Jordan, the connection to Palestine is strong and is present in many facets of daily life. This demonstrates how embodying Palestinianness is a responsibility and a resistance to the political oppression facing Palestinians.

The question of citizenship for Palestinians in Chile began early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century when the first migrants were granted entry to the country. Early Palestinian settlers passed on stories—of escaping the persecution of the Ottomans, the British, or Israel and being granted citizenship in Chile—to their children and grandchildren. Interviewees indicated that they were introduced to these stories and Palestinian culture when they were children. Participants who were third- or fourth-generation migrants said that they had mostly assimilated and had been Chilean citizens since birth. First- and second-generation immigrants have gone through the relatively easy process of acquiring citizenship yet still retain many Palestinian customs and still speak Arabic. Many families maintain direct communication with friends and relatives in Palestine and transfer knowledge and news over social media or during visits. Interviewees explained that Chile maintains very open borders and offers paths to citizenship. Many Palestinian refugees in Syria or Iraq now migrate to Chile in order to obtain the Chilean passport. Some decide to stay in Chile, while others aim to use their new citizenship in order to travel and in some cases return to Palestine. Interviewees told me that the Israeli border control will often accept Chilean passports, but not the Palestinian *huwia*, or identity card.

Palestinian-Chilean interviewees, both young and old, remarked on the changes that occur in the Chile-Palestine relationship as younger generations are born into, and assimilate into, Chilean culture. Several of the older interviewees indicated that the Palestinian-Chilean youth have either lost interest in the issue or have taken to it with a new intensity, but never in between. Furthermore, both of these groups, they claim, have lost sight of the traditions and experiences of the older generations. Juan, a third-generation Palestinian in his twenties, remarked, “we maintain the culture to some degree, but it isn’t the same as our grandparents. My grandmother has told me that our colony is very lost.” Juan however, is very invested in the

politics and news of Palestine, Israel and the Middle East in general. While the loss in traditions is characteristic of the second generation within other global diasporas, the reenergized effort that many Palestinian-Chilean youths demonstrate is unique to the Palestinian diaspora and is emblematic of *sumud*, or steadfastness. Juan told me that he was involved in many Arab clubs and organizations that meet to talk about the Middle East, which had been created by other motivated Palestinian-Chilean youth like him. Juan was also in the process of learning Arabic in the university, an activity common to newer generations attempting to revisit their parents' or grandparent's roots. Older generations of Palestinians have become more reserved in their political engagement with Palestine, but the youth within Chile have set up a platform for the revitalization and reconstruction of Palestinian identity. One example of this is the connection between youth in Palestine and Chile. Many Palestinians in Chile trace their heritage to Beit Jala, a town in Palestine, and Palestinians within Beit Jala often connect with Chileans-Palestinian advocacy groups in Chile, creating a cultural and political network.

As we have seen, Chile has always been receptive to Palestinian migration, as has Jordan (at least up until the Syrian refugee crisis). The US, however, has seen fluctuations between leniency and strictness in immigration policies. Many of the interviewees whom I met had temporary student visas, and their future plans were not secure<sup>1</sup>. I asked these participants about their experiences in the US and how they understood American nationalism. One interviewee remarked that he did not feel American and said, "I don't fit in the culture. I don't get jokes about Star Wars, for example. I don't identify with a lot of things that are essential in this culture." While Palestinians living in the US on student visas did not experience belonging

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<sup>1</sup> All of my interviews occurred before the 2016 election of President Donald Trump and the instatement of the travel ban and refugee restrictions. I hope to return to interviewing with Palestinians in the US to consider developments in participant sentiments in the near future.



within an American context, interviewees who were born in the US also identified confusion or complexity in their conceptions of belonging. These participants felt that they were called upon in various social situations with non-Palestinians to embody the Palestinian cause, but at the same time did not identify as “100%” American. American immigration policy will continue to influence the sense of belonging for Palestinian migrants and Palestinian-Americans given its dynamic nature. This is particularly relevant in the uncertain climate post-election, given a rise in anti-Muslim, anti-Arab, and anti-immigrant rhetoric and harassment.

Older generations of Palestinian migrants in the US are often the leading force in passing Palestinianness on to the younger generations, and several interviewees emphasized the role of their parents and grandparents in shaping their knowledge about Palestine. When talking about her Palestinian identity, one interviewee stated, “As I grew up my dad would say, ‘you say that you are Palestinian. That is it. You say that you are Palestinian and you hold that identity close to you.’” These parents also told their children stories about the exact villages they came from and always mentioned the desire that they had to return to that village. We see here the importance of specification of *local* place for memory and belonging, and how these ideas get passed down through generations. Another interviewee explained that the older generation’s Palestinian identity is tied to images and stories of how Palestine used to be before 1948 and the Palestinian *Nakba*. They envision a Palestine that is tied to images of occupation, war, and Palestinian resistance. For younger generations that have never been to Palestine, then, there is an admiration and knowledge of their parents’ histories, but also a distance from these identities. Especially given the political atmosphere in the US, many younger Palestinians are fighting for Palestine in a different set of contexts than their parents or grandparents. While Palestinianness is

definitely passed down through generations, the manifestation of that identity is also being shaped by new experiences and circumstances.

### *Contextual Influences and Pressures*

What differentiates the three case studies that I am presenting in this paper are the various social, political, economic and cultural circumstances that each area contains. These pressures range from the legalities of citizenship and business opportunities to shifts in language, culture, and political ideologies. Each set of influences is unique to the diasporic context and creates a spectrum of questions of belonging and nationalism. In Jordan, a similarity to Palestinian culture and shared language confines the differences between the two cultures to the subtleties in cultural and socioeconomic relations. In Chile, however, the more stark differences in culture and language are well integrated into Chilean society, yet Palestinian culture is often romanticized and commodified. Finally, in the US Palestinians feel targeted by political rhetoric, but often note curiosity and openness in their interactions with friends and strangers.

The Jordanian case is rather intricate, given the similarity of the culture, language, and religion with Palestine, as well as its geographical adjacency. What is more, Palestinians have been in Jordan for many generations, and the distinctions between lineages have become less and less obvious. The majority of the people I interviewed said that they felt well-received in Jordan and that Jordanians and Palestinians were both “brothers” from the same family. Most Jordanians support the Palestinian cause and have welcomed millions of Palestinians into the country, and many political icons in Jordan, such as the Jordanian Queen, are Palestinian. One interviewee explained that the Palestinian presence is deeply rooted and the connections are profound, making the apparently clear distinction between Palestinians and Jordanians significant but

extremely subtle. Another participant explained that the nationalistic divisions only disrupt the existing unity:

Jordan and Palestine have these national stories that are created and solidified as their histories, but they are made up to avoid the reality of the Palestinian situation under Israel. This is the same as what is being done with the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. The narratives are used to suppress the real issues. These are controlling tools invented by really good politicians.

Here we see how many of the citizens in Jordan find the differences in identity not only superficial but counterproductive for both Jordanians and Palestinians.

Yet many Palestinians and Jordanians discern between cultures, and the differences are visible in the tensions of societal relations. Palestinians and Jordanians differentiate between certain cuisine, clothing choices, and word pronunciation. Similarly, within the Jordanian soccer league, Bedouin Jordanians and Palestinian refugees represent the two top rival teams. One interviewee described their participation in protests after a tense match, indicating that people often march behind anti-Jordanian or anti-Palestinian rhetoric. She stated, "there is *Al-Wehdat*, which is a pro-Palestine soccer club within Jordan, then there is *Al-Faisaly* who are pro-Jordanian. There are often fights at the games." On a more profound level, many Palestinians in Jordan feel that the Jordanian government is not doing enough to help the Palestinian cause and too often cooperates with Israeli mandates. Whenever major events happen within Palestine, the Palestinians within Jordan take to the streets, protesting and demanding that King Hussein take action. These tensions are often exacerbated by the history of Black September and the memory of violence that took place. While the two populations share much in common, and the boundaries between what is Jordanian and what is Palestinian are blurred, some social schisms do exist and are expressed in issues of citizenship. Palestinians have formal membership in Jordan, but in practice, they experience difference as a disadvantaged ethnic community.

In Jordan, all of the interviewees had received Jordanian citizenship except for one, who was in Jordan on a student visa. These participants mentioned that Jordan had quickly granted them citizenship, or they had been born in Jordan and received citizenship automatically. Many of the participants either worked within Jordan or attended one of the many universities there. These participants told me that they felt a subtle condescension from Jordanians of Jordanian descent. They said that Jordanians feel as though the Palestinian migrants in the country are only adding to the preexisting competition for good jobs. There is an established but informal hierarchy in which Palestinians dominate the manual labor and blue-collar jobs within Jordan while the Jordanians of Jordanian descent work in white-collar jobs and governmental positions. This hierarchy is visible in public perceptions of status, jobs, and education. The interviewees felt as though the King and the government supported Jordanians more than Palestinians in financial and political causes. The distinctions are subtle, though, given the difficulty separating Jordanians and Palestinians into two neat categories. This division highlights an ethnic favoritism based on loose classification of what is Jordanian and what is Palestinian.

Comparatively, many of the markers of ethnic distinction that reduce Palestinianness in Jordan are well-received in Chile, such that Palestinians there feel welcomed. For example, Palestinian cuisine and culture have been embraced in Chilean markets, and Chileans have integrated the Palestinian style, such as the *kofiyeh* scarf, into their everyday wear. Thousands of Chileans with no connection to Palestine support the well-known Chilean soccer team, *Palestino*, named after the Palestinians who founded it in the mid-1950s. Furthermore, Arab and Palestinian restaurants are a popular destination for many Chileans. One second-generation Palestinian interviewee mentioned to me, “I started this restaurant when I realized that every time I cooked the house filled with people, and not just any people—Chileans!” The Chilean support of

Palestinianness extends beyond the restaurant into political affiliation as well as news reporters: newspapers, and social media within Chile generally defend the Palestinian perspective and condemn Israeli violence and occupation in the West Bank and Gaza.

Furthermore, various Chilean towns and cities have held warm welcoming celebrations for arriving refugees and have helped them settle financially and socially within the country. The Chilean government is very open to Arab refugee populations, and this has carried over into the immigration policies enacted for Syrian refugees wanting to move to Chile. One interviewee explained that the Chilean president, Michelle Bachelet, has opened the borders to incoming migrants as a good gesture, due in part to the Syrian connections to the Palestinian population within Chile. Many of the interviewees highlighted the ease with which they had been able to arrive and seek citizenship for themselves and their children. Chile also provides the necessary education and social services that migrants look for.

Yet, despite the fluid inclusion of Palestinian and Arab culture into Chilean society, some interviewees pointed out the naïve Islamophobia that accompanied that reception. The interviewees explained that some Chileans make racist or anti-Muslim jokes in their presence, revealing orientalist undertones (Said 1979). Similarly, Christian Palestinians have a slightly easier time adapting to the largely Catholic Chilean context than do Muslim Palestinians. Participants explained that these comments arose from Chileans' ignorance of Arab and Palestinian culture, not from a desire by Chileans to be hostile towards immigrants. For example, the common word used by Chileans to describe anyone of Arab descent is *Turko*, meaning "Turk." This oversimplified term stems from the Turkish passports with which the first Palestinians arrived in Chile in the 1880s during Ottoman rule. Yet many Chileans today still struggle to differentiate between the variety of backgrounds of Arab immigrants. This pressure is

similar to the hostility felt by Palestinians within the US but is vastly different from the experiences in Jordan.

Another pressure that Palestinians in Chile face is the difficulty in finding work, especially given the decline of small, locally-owned businesses (characteristic of the workplaces of many Palestinians in Chile) as the number of corporate chains continues to grow. Due to a recent influx of Chinese goods at cheaper prices and the arrival of a Wal-Mart-owned grocery chain, *Lider*, smaller and older businesses and independently owned supermarkets in Chile are quickly being run out. Many Palestinians within Chile are abandoning shops opened by their parents or grandparents upon their arrival to Chile and are forced to adjust to the new economy. During the time that I was in Chile doing my interviews, one interviewee was forced to close his restaurant due to an increase in the price of rent in the area. Palestinians in Chile discussed appreciation for the legal rights of citizenship, but they are worried, like many other middle-class and poor Chileans, about the future of the economy. This example of pragmatic citizenship demonstrates the acceptance of Palestinians within Chile, even given their Palestinian national identity.

Given the numerous cultural and linguistic differences between Jordan and the United States, the differences in Palestinian and American nationalism were quickly addressed by most of my participants in the US. What distinguishes the US from Chile, though, is that the persecution felt by Palestinians in Chile was due primarily to cultural ignorance. Within the American context, however, cultural ignorance is coupled with pressure stemming from the pro-Israel political platform of most Americans. While both Chile and Jordan have shown support for Palestine, many US-based interviewees discussed the large lobby groups within the US that condemn the Palestinian cause. This political separation puts pressure on Palestinian-Americans

in their day-to-day interactions. One interviewee who had been living in the United States for four years mentioned that, “people will look at you when they say something about Palestine, and since I am Arab, I am almost always expected to know or prove what they are saying or to say something opposite.” This pressure makes it difficult to define Palestinian identity in the US, especially for those of dual heritage. Another interviewee who was half American and half Palestinian explained, “My American identity and my Palestinian identity are just in constant conflict with each other, and I honestly don’t know what to do with myself sometimes.” This pressure is not only social. Some of the participants mentioned that their student visas were eventually going to expire, and, given the current American political atmosphere, they were not sure about the feasibility of staying in the US. While the US has historically been similar to Jordan and Chile in providing pragmatic citizenship, the future of that citizenship is uncertain. This isolates the Palestinian experience in the US context and accentuates the differences between the American and Palestinian identities.

Many of the interviewees mentioned the systematic pressures that they faced but also discussed the promising conversations and experiences that they have had with American friends and strangers. Palestinianness seldom creates divides within close friendships and is often ignored as a topic of discussion. With strangers, furthermore, many interviewees mentioned the curiosity people had about Palestinian identity and their willingness to learn about Palestine. Many interviewees took these opportunities to discuss the issue with their friends, though this created a sense of tokenism within classrooms and discussions for many of the interviewees. Many of the people with whom I talked said that they took refuge from tokenization by having conversations with their families, within the United States or in Palestine, who have had similar experiences. There is no need in these conversations to explain identity or Palestinianness in the

ways that interviewees often had to with strangers. One interviewee explained, “What is also really hard is I have never met someone who is half American and half Palestinian. The only person that I can really talk to about it is my sister. With other people, I feel really uncomfortable. I don't feel open about it.” Americans have begun to embrace Palestinian culture in general – seen, for example, in the presence of Palestinian restaurants in American cities, and the growing support for the Boycott Divestment Sanctions movement—but amongst interviewees there was a consensus that there is a gap in knowledge of the Palestinian cause except for in a few circles. Often Palestinians are expected to be ambassadors or perform the *good* Palestinian in social interactions and to align with homogenous American values.

### **Conclusion**

Individuals create their identity by combining the unique influences of various social, cultural, political, and economic forces that have significance in their lives. The Palestinian experience in diaspora is shaped by the contexts in which migrants and refugees are located. Jordan, Chile, and the United States have unique sets of legal and social characteristics that push and pull on the identities of Palestinians. Yet regardless of spatial or temporal separation from Palestine, Palestinians and their descendants persistently embody Palestinianness as a crucial factor in their identity formation. Pragmatic citizenship, in which individuals are able to benefit from state services while retaining nationalistic allegiance to Palestine, is exemplified in Jordan, Chile, and the US. By using a multisite analysis of Palestinian diasporic sites, we can see a similarity what it means to be Palestinian. For the majority of the interviewees in this study, Palestine embodied a sense of resistance, honor, family, and *sumud* (steadfastness). Palestine’s nature as a stateless nation is also a characteristic of diasporic identity and motivates the persistence of Palestinian identity. What is more, examining three different pockets of diaspora



also allows us to expand the model of pragmatic citizenship to encompass Palestinianity or the contextual manifestation of what it means to be Palestinian. This analysis includes cultural hybridity and cultural exchange between host nations and diasporic communities. In each context, there is an array of cultural influences that together create hyphenated identities (i.e. Chilean-Palestinian, Jordanian-Palestinian, etc.). This study analyzes how these hybrid identities fit into global and national notions of belonging and membership in order to answer the questions of where we are from and who we are.

While much previous research has mapped out the dynamics of identity and diaspora, specifically in regards to Palestine, this study attempts to further notions of how diasporic populations form communal and individual identities, and how these identities vary from place to place. Conversations on this topic are critical, considering the shifting paradigms of globalization, citizenship, and belonging. Increasing mobility, war and political pressure, and economic incentives will spur on migration, driving cultural encounters, exchange, and hybridity. These interactions are occurring every day, and future studies must continue to explore the nuances of identity and social communications.

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