

Cultural identity is tough on people in my situation. I was born in Israel, had days off on Jewish holidays, and was taught Hebrew in elementary school. And in this sea of culture that I can't identify with, the words of Mahmoud Darwish are my life-raft. I need to grasp onto the obtrusive noise made as a byproduct of dabke; and the interplaying smells of summac and onion when msakhan is cooking in the kitchen. I am an Arab-Israeli. But more so, and because of these customs, I am a Palestinian.

Anonymous, Haifa

Palestine is known for its literature. We are the proud home of Mahmoud Darwish, Ibrahim Touqan, Samih Al Qasem, and countless other literary maestros. Literature, however, has declined worldwide, and we've unfortunately encountered the same phenomenon. People don't read, and the incredible potential that Palestinians have for literature is now untapped. This is one thing I wish I could change about our culture.

Anonymous, Ramallah

Art, for me, is the act of expressing one's personality through one's hobbies. A person's character is built from the culture, people, and traditions that surround him or her. In my opinion, our culture is still alive as can be clearly seen through our actions, day-to-day activities, and the vibrant art that has survived hundreds of years.

Lour Kuttab, Jerusalem

Art for me is a tool that individuals utilize to express themselves. I believe that since we live in a family-based society, our culture will always play an important role in our daily lives. So the answer is no, we are not losing our culture, instead we are developing it within the parameters of Palestinian and Arab culture.

Loureen Dabeet, Ramallah

Art to me is a way of expressing one's inner and deep feelings; they could be needs, desires, or emotions. Only someone with the same background and experience (love, sorrow, etc.) can pick up the meaning behind the art. When it comes to our culture, I definitely believe that people are more urbanized and modernized, and anything related to culture is considered old-fashioned nowadays.

Tamara Husseini, Jerusalem

Being raised in a family that enjoys and believes in the effect of art on the soul and on one's behavior has been reflected obviously on my spirit and attitude. It's hard to name a favorite artist, but I love good art, regardless of the artist, and I'm mainly affected by music. I enjoy Fairuz, the music of Omar Faruk, and I find Sami Yusuf inspirational. There has been a recent change in the perception and understanding of art within Arabic society, maybe because of Orientalism!

A cultured society is one that has respect for those who are different; one that respects your right to live and choose the path you want to take. It's a society that respects law, yet sympathizes with others through voluntary work and cooperation.

Cultural appropriation refers to the adoption of elements of one culture by members of a different cultural group. Hence the importance of discussion and dialogue.

Throughout history, art has played a major role in political struggle. It's the fastest and easiest language that anyone can use to draw attention to and sympathy for a certain issue.

In the era of social media, no art can be exclusive to a certain society since things spread at the speed of light. Most of the time, however, it's possible to know where a certain type of art originated.

Abeer M., Gaza

Culture is something we inherit. We don't choose where we are born or what traditions our community practices; it is a legacy we hold throughout our lifetime. Each person is free to choose whether to engage in certain practices or not. I believe that nowadays we have many tools that can be used to better our understanding of the importance of culture. Technology and media are used by this generation to become more Westernized, but we can actually use these tools to research our culture, help revive it, and embrace it. I cannot blame only the Westernized generation for the loss of our attachment to the culture; the occupation plays a huge role in damaging our culture. The barriers – both social and physical – that they have put between us and our cities makes it nearly impossible to attend various cultural activities that take place throughout the region, such as olive picking, weddings, and dabka performances. These are all parts of living our culture.

Lubna Habash, Nablus

Our Readers Say ...

Due to globalization and the lack of education of the new generation, it has become less important to teach people how to love the land and embrace the fact that we should be proud of our identity. Falafel and hummus to me are culturally symbolic things that represent a wider range of our habits and traditions. The way to respond is through the power of media. Our national Palestinian dress, for example, can be used in media campaigns to introduce the world to our culture and traditions.

I believe that there is a cultural dimension in our struggle with the occupation, which often puts restrictions on our talents and our sports teams and tries to mess with our historical and cultural sites.

Cultural heritage is an important asset for a country since it helps to define the identity of its people through tangible and intangible heritage. Intangible heritage can be maintained through raising our children and educating them about their culture and history, in addition to ensuring that the school curriculum at all stages includes cultural education and visits to historical sites.

Tariq Abudlhadi, Nablus

Our culture is in definite danger. We are trying to imitate the West daily. We are constantly using social media and media in general to research Western habits, clothing, songs, and social events. We underestimate the power of culture and traditions. The occupation plays a huge role in controlling who we are as Arab Palestinians. We are not allowed to travel across the country, which limits our ability to discover the land and meet new people. Our culture lives through us and we are slowly killing it with our own hands. Regarding the falafel and hummus question, we might think of it as food but it is more than that. Food is a cultural reality that defines us and distinguishes us from other nations. Our culture is who we are. It is a must to keep it and live it.

Carol Sakakini, Ramallah

Our culture is definitely in danger because of our constant urge to blend in with certain crowds who make us lose our attachments to the culture. It is in danger because of the new generations and their misunderstanding of technology. It is important that people not underestimate the power of occupation, which is not only political but also cultural. The occupiers have stolen our music, our food, and some dances, claiming that they are Jewish. We should be proud of our Arab culture and not let go of it because it defines us. Our cultural heritage is our legacy; it is something we should be proud to hold onto no matter what.

Hiba Masri, Nablus