



# Ecologies of Integration: Palestinian Socio-Cultural Activism in Sweden

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ARTICLE

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# Ecologies of Integration: Palestinian Socio-Cultural Activism in Sweden

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## Introduction

The influx of refugees into Europe currently generates a great deal of heated debate in the public and the political spheres. Sweden has often been posited as Europe's preeminent example of a country with an official multicultural policy (Borevi, 2013; Castles *et al.*, 2001), which can be explained by its connections between its commitment to successful integration and generous immigration policies/laws and its etiquette of a refugee-friendly nation and humanitarian model (Borevi, 2011; Wiesbrock, 2011). Sweden has been developing a specific approach<sup>1</sup> and the model that emerged in the 1970s is based on the integration of migrants into the welfare system, combining its universalism with multiculturalism, through the development of an economic integration of migrants and the active promotion of cultural diversity (Vabre, 2004; Khayati, 2008; Eliassi, 2010; Borevi, 2014). However, the 1990s marked the death blow to Swedish social democracy (Vidal, 2010) and a real breakthrough in challenging the multicultural model (Borevi, 2013, p. 148).

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1. In the post-war context, the Swedish integration policy was based on an assimilationist logic (Diaz, 1993; Jederlund, 1998; Johansson, 2005) that was not aimed to assimilate migrants to the Swedish mainstream norms and culture, but more to the tangible structures of the society such as labor market and social security (Khayati, 2008, pp. 183).

With an unprecedented 163 000 asylum applications in 2015 (Migrationsverket, 2016),<sup>2</sup> the Swedish immigration policy has been challenged by an important influx of refugees. Following the adoption of restrictive measures by the Swedish Parliament in 2016, migration flows declined considerably but with many people having arrived over the last few years, migration and integration are top issues on the political agenda. In addition, there has been a dramatic political shift in the discussion in the last four years: while 2014 is remembered for the Prime Minister Reinfeldt's "open your hearts to asylum seekers" speech, migration has become a highly salient issue in domestic politics and features prominently in Swedish public opinion.

While Sweden has often been quoted as a model of integration, recognizing cultural diversity and encouraging migrants' associations to develop their own agenda through the *folkhemmet*<sup>3</sup> (Khayati & Dahlstedt, 2014, p. 59), migrants also face potential stigmatization and the country is struggling with issues concerning housing segregation, discrimination and integration of migrants into the labour market and into society (Borevi, 2013; Bevelander, 2010). In the Swedish context, multiculturalism refers to the ethnic make-up of the population and political ideologies as well as strategies (Borevi, 2013). In this sense, integration has mainly targeted migrants, in a one-way dialogue established by the State on a top-down basis. Moving beyond the three conceptualizations of integration established by Westin (2017)—integration as identification, integration as participation and integration as cohesion—there is a need to reflect about on what is meant by integration as migrants' action.

Thus, in the current context characterized by negative perceptions on migration among some segments of the public opinion (Bohman & Hjern, 2014) and marked by the elevation of migration and integration to the top of the societal challenges list of the European Union member states (Kaivo-Oja, 2014; Skey, 2011), the established integration models of European societies need to be reconsidered, re-evaluated and reconceptualized. Sweden deserves specific attention, questioning its exceptionalism and its adaptation (or not) to this comprehensive European integration policy trend. A more comprehensive understanding of integration needs to be considered, including a better analysis of

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2. In 2015, Sweden welcomed more asylum seekers per capita than any other European country.

3. These movements have enabled the establishment and development of an integrated ideological, political socialization as well as popular mobilization, giving particularly the voice of minorities and migrant communities that can invest the Swedish society.

the role that migrants can play in this process. The analysis of the involvement of Palestinians in Sweden, through an exploration of the functional roles that arts and culture play, helps in understanding the creation of a new integration process.

Based on the analysis of the Palestinian migratory trajectories, this paper explores strategies that migrants develop, allowing them at once to be included in European societies, while at the same time retaining a sense of their own identity, and a pride in their cultural roots. In doing so, it reinvigorates the current debate about immigration by looking at integration as a bottom-up process, exploring features of socio-cultural practices from the Palestinian diaspora with established strategies in a Swedish local space.

In this respect, it is important to highlight that Palestinian migrants became a specific case in regards to their reasons and motivations for migration during the second half of the twentieth century (Abu-Lughod, 1995). Sweden thus constitutes the last stage of a complex migratory journey for many Palestinian migrants that has often been punctuated by short or long-term stays in other countries, and by expulsions due to the legal vacuum concerning their status and an unrecognized nationality, but also by an impossibility to return to the country where they migrated from. In addition, there is a scholarly need to analyse the contribution of Palestinian migrants into the process of integration due to historical spatial and political implantation of this community in the country.

Different regional and international events shaped the lives and experiences of Palestinian migrants from 1948, a date that signifies the tragic episode of the Nakba,<sup>4</sup> until more recently with regards to the Syrian conflict. The first group of Palestinians arrived in Sweden in 1962 (Lindholm Schulz & Hammer, 2003, p. 82) and were mainly students originally from Jordan, Lebanon, and the West Bank. In the 1970s, many Palestinians left Jordan, fleeing the repression of Black September (1970) to join northern Europe and Sweden (Lindholm Schulz & Hammer, 2003, p. 84). In the 1980s, many Palestinian refugees arrived from Lebanon, fleeing the civil war and the Israeli attack in 1982. Some of them had already family members who were settled in Sweden and others arrived under the refugee status or as guest students. Most of the arrivals were holders of Lebanese or Syrian travel documents. But once they got the opportunity to reside in Sweden, the names of their previous host territories have not been recorded in the statistics kept by the Swedish authorities (Abdul Ghani, 2005, p. 44). After the invasion of Kuwait by the Iraqi government in 1990, a certain number of Palestinians decided to come

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4. The Nakba/Catastrophe refers to the events of 1948 when Palestinians were displaced by the creation of the State of Israel.

to Sweden. In the 2000s, many Palestinians from Gaza chose to come to settle in Northern Europe and recently, a significant wave of Palestinians from Syria arrived in Sweden.

No reliable immigration or census figures exist in Sweden for Palestinians, which makes it difficult to pinpoint them numerically. Population statistics in Sweden are based on the total population register, including all persons registered in Sweden, that is to say, who have a residence permit in the country. The database contains information on the country of birth and the country of citizenship (which are the two variables used in census statistics of the Swedish population), but no information is given on the ethnic origin or the nationality. Statistics remain uncertain to the extent that Sweden does not register refugees according to a criterion of ethnic identity but according to the country from which they migrate. In this respect, most registered Palestinians (except Palestinians from the Palestinian occupied territories, recognized as a State by Sweden in 2014 and who arrived in the Scandinavian State after this date) are considered “stateless” or with an “unknown” citizenship. Moreover, some Palestinians have been granted Swedish citizenship after living in Sweden for several years and others have been provided with permanent or temporary residence permits according to the country they have migrated from and the date of arrival in Sweden.

Various interviews with the Migration Agency [*Migrationsverket*] and the Swedish Government Agency of Statistics as well as with different political parties involved in the Palestinian issue allowed me to statistically establish the following estimations. In 2016 there were around 30 000 Palestinians living in Sweden, and among them 5 000 were based in the city of Malmö. Concerning their geographical location in Sweden, Palestinians mainly settled in metropolitan areas and university towns, such as Stockholm, Uppsala, Malmö, and Gothenburg, and are active throughout different areas of economic activity. The arrival stories of the current Palestinian community in Malmö show four main patterns: family networks/friendly links, love stories, university programs, economic reasons or seeking asylum as refugees.

### *Theoretical framework*

Within a growing literature on the meaning of integration, there is no single accepted definition, theory or model of migrant integration (Ager & Strang, 2008, p. 167; Castles *et al.*, 2001, p. 12).<sup>5</sup> When conceptualizing integration, Penninx

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5. Hotly debated and with many interpretations, the origin of conceptualizing integration dates back to the mid 1970s as immigration started to be conceived as a problem by European countries, ARRIBAS LOZANO *et al.*, 2014, pp. 557-560.

(2004) goes beyond the accommodation process, stressing the need for migrants to be accepted as part of society, namely in three analytically distinct dimensions: the legal-political, socio-economic and cultural/religious. The debate about integration has become polarized between two main theories—which are both in crisis (Roy, 2007)—that of assimilation and of multiculturalism. In accordance to the first model, migrants are expected to melt into the mainstream culture (Gordon, 1964), leading to the gradual disappearance of migrants' own cultural traditions (Petersson, 2006, p. 13; Zhou, 1997; Rumbaut, 1997). On the other hand, the multiculturalism approach is, broadly speaking, built on social equality, participation and cultural recognition (Vasta, 2007; Algan *et al.*, 2012).

In the field of migration, culture has typically been analysed as a factor that either facilitates or hinders migrants' "adaptation" to their new lives and social environments abroad. Cultural factors shape migration experiences insofar as, on the one hand, migrants bring with them values, practices and stories that enable their mobility, as well as different forms of membership and belonging (Levitt & Lamba-Nieves, 2011, p. 2). On the other hand, migrants and the members of receiving societies interact to varying degrees. While some of their prior ideas, values and cultural practices may appear to remain unchanged, migrants may also incorporate some ideas, norms and values from the receiving societies into their own cultural repertoires. This might ultimately lead to new ideas and cultural practices to emerge as a "blended" repertoire.

Against this theoretical background, this paper addresses the highly topical theme of migration and the vitality of diasporic socio-cultural/artistic practices through the prism of integration. Thus, this paper engages with the following main question: how can the socio-cultural and artistic practices, initiatives and strategies of migrants help with their integration process? By taking integration as its specific focus, this article seeks to contribute to ongoing theoretical and empirical debates within migration studies. In this respect, focusing on the role of the Palestinian diaspora in Sweden allows us to explore more positive and multi-faceted types of migrant stories. Palestinians in Malmö are inspired by their experiences of migration illustrating the fact that they wish to retain many symbols of their own culture and integrate them with the host society. Socio-cultural strategies of Palestinians in Malmö perform political functions in the redefinition of the integration process. On the other hand, the analysis of less conventional forms of political participation highlights the importance arts play in the Palestinian diasporic agenda, providing a plural sense of belonging.

While most of the studies focus on policies and eclectic bricolage that host societies develop in order to integrate migrants, little attention has been paid to the varied settlement experiences of migrants and the ways their solidarity activities



challenge and influence a new definition of integration. With the aim of providing an insight into the obstacles, opportunities and integration challenges on a local level, this article examines the crucial contribution of Palestinian migrants to culture in Sweden and the challenges posed by integration perceptions that arise from human mobility. It sets out to discuss:

- . the ways migration has an impact on integration, opens and develops intercultural dialogue;
- . the contribution of migrants to understanding the integration process through creative strategies and artistic initiatives;
- . the need for an understanding of integration challenges in a Swedish local context (city of Malmö) from the perspective of Palestinian migrants and discuss initiatives in increasing agency among them/“in their community”.

In addition, the analysis warns against romanticizing Palestinian resistance and instead uses resistance in the framework of its cultural strategies to understand the broader dynamics of unconventional forms of political participation and integration in the host society. Challenging our senses, generating new affects and political imaginaries, but also expressing a plural sense of belonging, the analysis of the Palestinian culture and arts can bring new insights in our understanding of the concept of integration as a bottom-up process initiated by migrants themselves. Thus, this paper aims to bring a level of complexity to our understanding on how Palestinian diasporic socio-cultural practices in Sweden can shed light on the transformative potential of integration that activates affective and resistant ties by disrupting hegemonic imaginaries and sensibilities.

### ***Material and methods***

The main empirical findings are based on the local experiences of migrants in Malmö, the third biggest city in Sweden that holds one of the highest share of migrant population in the country. Walking through the city, looking at (non-)formal places where Palestinians organize activities, many questions arise from the existence of demonstrations, small graffiti and from conversations about refugees. Providing an overview of the Palestinian diasporic communities in Malmö, a multimodal research has been performed in order to understand how and why people use different modes to make and orchestrate meaning, such as the analysis of visual, oral, embodied and spatial aspects of the interaction and the environment.

I carried out 76 interviews<sup>6</sup> with Palestinian activists in Malmö (from Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and the occupied Palestinian territories), who experienced a wide range of migratory trajectories and life stories. Participant observations of community event have also been conducted in Malmö to reflect the heterogeneity of these diasporic constellations. I participated in different socio-cultural events and demonstrations, I attended diverse artistic performances and I enrolled in the meetings organised by the Palestinian youth group in Malmö. This fieldwork has been conducted between 2015 and 2016, and the results of this study are part of my doctoral research that deals with the political mobilization of Palestinians in Sweden. The participatory action research implemented this way, allowed me to conduct fieldwork among Palestinians while not Palestinian myself. Covering a whole range of socio-cultural and artistic sectors, many activities focus on telling the stories of refugees but another common thread is encouraging the sharing of experiences between refugees and host communities. For me, as a non-member of the Palestinian community, information was difficult to access; therefore, an intensive network aimed to gain the community trust has been developed in order to collect testimonies.

### **Malmö vitality and dynamism: Palestinian strategies and initiatives**

Sweden used to be often lauded for the wide range of settlement programs offered to immigrants (language training, funding assistance for housing and employment, access to healthcare and education). Less well measured and therefore less well understood are the socio-cultural processes that shape the settlement experiences of migrants, including their own initiatives related to arts and culture. Swedish public policies, political agenda and the socio-cultural landscape create a specific environment (Grjebine & Laurent, 2008) in which Palestinians develop activities. The Swedish politics of consensus (Aucante, 2013, pp. 134-135) can thus help Palestinians in the creation of socio-cultural organizations and activities, allowing an important degree of political and socio-cultural freedom of expression.

Giving an important weight to observations, I analysed how Palestinians in Malmö gather and negotiate their identities in order to better understand the process of their integration. My immersion into different organizations by examining multiple events, discourses and behaviours highlights that through

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6. These semi-structured and informal interviews have included Palestinian males and females, all ages represented, from a diversity of home contexts and from different backgrounds. Due to the collected results on the field, this study does not include a gender analysis.

intercultural and interfaith dialogue, Palestinians in Malmö seek to build integration. A set of specific initiatives are suggested, such as the creation of music centres, the development of cultural festivals, the use of the creativity of the local community, fostering partnerships between local organizations and activists, treating people as subjects rather than objects of policies. These practices highlight the existence of common cultural features and a collective consciousness of being Palestinian in Malmö.

***Collective engagement through Palestinian organizations and networks***

Palestinska Kulturföreningen i Malmö is the name of the Palestinian Cultural group that has been created in 2014 by a Palestinian from Gaza who was born in 1973 and who arrived in Sweden in 2007. This man used to be the manager for a cultural house in Gaza. As he explained:

The first thing I do is that I want to talk about our culture that will never die. Our culture must live year by year and all the new generation must take image and picture about our culture and about our land, our country. The first thing is to go to Palestinian people and to go to Swedish people to make them know about our culture.

Other socio-cultural Palestinian associations and networks have emerged at a national level, with a local implantation in Malmö. They organize events to celebrate specific dates such as the 15<sup>th</sup> of May (Nakba day), art exhibitions and music concerts. The Palestinian socio-cultural centre [*Palestinska Rättvisecentret*] as well as the Palestinian youth movement [*Palestinska Ungdomsrörelsen i Malmö*] are two other structures that aim to create an important Palestinian network in the city. Members and participants seek to gather and organize debates in which traditional aspects of the Palestinian culture are important tools of communication.

In Sweden, we have something called Diwan. It is a forum where the Palestinian diaspora can meet in Malmö, share opinions, share stories, what they are doing, help each other, do some activities, socialize with each other, somehow to interconnect with each other or to link each other here in Sweden. That is basically the gate, the key where I have been the most integrated or in touch with the Palestinians here in Sweden, through Diwan. (Palestinian from Yarmouk—arrived in Sweden in 2011)



Photo 1

Young Palestinians dancing the traditional dabke during a cultural event in Malmö

© Evènement Facebook –

organisé par le groupe Palestinska Rättvisecentret i Sverige, 22.10.2016



Photo 2

Traditional Palestinian/Arabic food during a cultural event in Malmö

© Fanny Christou, 22.10.2016, Moriskan - Malmö



Photo 3

Palestinian artist during a cultural event in Malmö

© Fanny Christou, 22.10.2016, Moriskan - Malmö



Photo 4

Palestinian singer during a cultural event in Malmö with a movie on Palestinian traditions

© Fanny Christou, 22.10.2016, Moriskan - Malmö

During these events, one can see the importance that arts play in gathering Palestinians around a common sense of belonging. Similar symbols can also be noticed: traditional clothes, dances, food, music and flags related to the 1948 Nakba. All throughout the day, you can find artists here, painting or drawing.

Thus, arts have a way of transforming ordinary daily experience into a profound emotional journey, contributing towards the development of a collective memory. Arts are used as a forum to communicate different feelings, being unapologetically forward with an activist flair.

### *Palestinian-Arabic festivals*

The Palestinian Cultural group organizes the Palestinian film festival that takes place every year in Malmö Panorama Cinema and that aims to “demonstrate the Palestinian reality through cinema” and to “suit the resulted cultural diversity of the Palestinian diasporas.” This festival presents a variety of film categories, hosts seminars, discussions and meetings with Palestinian directors as well as actors whom both contribute to the Palestinian Cinema.



Photo 5

Palestinian film festival (screenshot from the website of Cinema Panora in Malmö)

© site internet du Cinéma Panora, Malmö

Other festivals take place in Malmö each year (such as the Malmö Arab Film Festival—Europe’s largest Arab Film Festival that was launched in 2011), that highlight the varied cultural and grassroots life in Malmö. Vibrant and mixed, Malmö has gone through substantial transformations throughout the migration waves and the city is now a space that attracts people as a place to live in, endorsing



a unique vibe in which migrants play a key role.<sup>7</sup> During these events, Palestinian culture is well-represented through music, dance, exhibitions and traditional clothes. Some of them are organized in and around Malmö's Folkets Parks (People's Park) that attests to a multi-faceted city where the Swedish *fika* is combined with traditional Arabic food for instance. Indeed, the Swedish coffee break (that consists of coffee or tea with fruits and sandwiches) is a social institution that fits perfectly to the Arabic customs of gathering.

Another important festival that was held in Malmö in 2016 is the Palestinians in Europe Conference. Taking place in different European cities annually, this event is an opportunity to strengthen social bonds and networks and foster activism in Europe. Many key issues were on the agenda for the fourteenth conference: the Palestinian refugees' situation in Syria, the Al-Aqsa Mosque issue as well as the Israeli threats of temporal and spatial division. While political discourses were the main content of this Conference, this event also highlighted the importance of Palestinian arts in Malmö.



Photo 6

Palestinian exhibition during the Palestinians in Europe Conference

© Fanny Christou, 07.05.2016, Malmö

These festivals are an occasion to create social ties and uphold traditions as a form of resistance. The dynamic area of Möllervången (or Möllan) is often the space

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7. Malmö has residents representing 171 countries, 43% of its residents were born abroad and Arabic is currently the second most spoken language.

where demonstrations, socio-cultural activities, and gatherings are organized. For many Palestinians, these events help keep valuable traditions alive and provide a way to deal with memories of their homeland and create an imprint on Swedish society. These celebrations are more than a time to look forward to; they are a time to connect Palestinian history and age-old traditions with a Palestinian future, and to create a Palestinian national identity by honouring a common cultural heritage. The celebrations, with their customs and rituals, aim to integrate Palestinians in the Swedish agenda. They also highlight the importance of arts as a way to gather individuals who express their emotions through socio-cultural practices and who together, make a collective memory, a sense of belonging to the same community.

### *Musical bands*

Many Palestinian bands whose members come from Lebanon, Syria or Palestine, aim to promote both the presence of a Palestinian identity in Sweden as well as a culture of non-violent resistance. Music can thus be a form of expression and representation of diversity while also developing social interactions and interrelations (Vertovec, 2007). Indeed, artistic performances play a role beyond being an emotional refuge from the suffering of migratory trajectories. These practices can help build bridges between societies and identities. In this sense, what these artists try to achieve through musical expression is not necessarily to change the current situation in Palestine, but to foster an image of Palestine that is non-violent.

Palestinian/Arabic music produced by people with an immigration background is increasingly regarded as belonging to the Swedish cultural sphere. The emergence of new musical genres like Arabic-Swedish music that combines different rhythms as well as different events in Sweden can provide a place for migrants to be exposed to encounters between diverse groups in the host society (Salzbrunn, 2014). Palestinian culture thus endorses political messages (resistance, integration, identities). Political characteristics of music, such as lyrics, sounds and rhythm, but also performance (Martiniello & Laflaur, 2008) appeal in a broadly given sense to the Palestinian socio-cultural initiatives in the diaspora, therefore having a transformative role by contributing to community cohesion, structural integration and social change while fostering intercultural dialogue (Martiniello & Laflaur, 2008).

### *The Middle Eastern food revolution in Malmö*

Incorporating all the senses, cooking and gastronomy can be considered as a form of art through which individuals express themselves as well as create emotions. Palestinian restaurants in Malmö are places emotionally connected to a specific



land, having the ability to communicate the Palestinian values and culture. These restaurants thus play the role of integration in the sense that people can both eat and reminisce there at the same time. In Malmö, the strong and ever increasing Middle Eastern presence has helped drive the burgeoning food scene, with a culinary revolution based on new flavours. The neighbourhood around Möllevången has become the centre of the Middle Eastern food revolution in Malmö.

The market at Möllevången's main square does not only sell fresh produce, but also spice mixtures, dried fruit, and nuts. The hustle and bustle of the market on a Saturday sometimes feels more Middle Eastern bazaar than calm Sweden. New venues are opening almost monthly and they are not just serving up food—they also display culture as well. There is also a surprising number of specialist grocery stores in the surrounding streets, creating an alternative city centre around Möllevången square.

Since the Second World War, Sweden has experienced different migration waves and since the 1970s more specifically, the country has hosted an important number of asylum seekers from the Middle East and parts of Africa. These migration waves have created an imprint on Swedish society and the Middle Eastern food is well known in Sweden. Palestinian restaurants and supermarkets are part of this dynamism and contribute towards developing aspects of social integration. Palestinians work in other economic sectors. Many of them, who are hairdressers, taxi or bus drivers, have transformed a city which in the early 1980s was in a deep slump after the collapse of its shipbuilding industry.

### **Integration goals of Palestinian socio-cultural activities in Malmö**

At the municipal level, Malmö supports the cultural activities of migrants aiming at promoting greater intercultural understanding and exchange. However, the city is facing challenges that particularly concern migrants, such as unemployment and residential segregation,<sup>8</sup> that migrants address through acts of solidarity. Thus, Malmö is also a creative hub with a booming culture and foodie scene in which migrants play an important role.

#### ***“No-go zones,” “hubs of arts” and venue for artistic creation***

Only a few minutes' walk from the city centre of Malmö, the large Sofielund area is facing a variety of socio-economic issues.<sup>9</sup> Norra Grängesbärgsgatan is a vast

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8. See ANDERSSON, 2007; BEVELANDER, 2010; ERIKSON & RUDOLPHI, 2010; CECCATO & DOLMEN, 2010.

9. In Malmö, neighborhoods with a high density of ethnic minorities are often referred to

landscape of run-down buildings, factories, car washes, shisha smoking clubs and illegal clubs (svartklubbar or “black clubs”) that Palestinians and other migrants’ communities invest a lot in. These parallel societies are places where migrants work without an employment contract but with more flexibility. This hub for unlicensed and illegal businesses often funding criminal activity is challenging diverse issues. Considered as vulnerable by a Swedish police report in 2015, the large Sofielund area is one of the so-called “no-go zones” in Malmö, where crime and poverty rates are generally high, and where gang wars serve as a constant reminder of Sweden’s struggling migration/integration policies.

However, the image of these streets needs to be mixed and demystified. These areas have their own societal structure separated from the Swedish system, involving their own norms and values. This internal functioning system contributes to the development of a parallel system in which criminality finds a place. At the same time, the community organization can help with tackling the challenges of these areas. Indeed, creativity hubs with rehearsal spaces for musicians, cultural associations and properties used by artists show that migrant communities often invest in these streets to challenge integration in Sweden. Thus, arts play a significant role in dealing with segregation, labour market exclusion and discrimination.

Another example is Rosengård.<sup>10</sup> While this neighbourhood is the subject of negative headlines, this multi-ethnic district is slowly becoming a model for positive change. Observing and analysing this neighbourhood reveals its specific character, rhythm and coloured by halal supermarkets, traditional (religious) clothes shops and falafel restaurants. A specific one, Yalla Trappan, located in the heart of Rosengård, is built on values such as participation, co-determination and solidarity. Since the start in 2010, running without funding from the municipality, this women’s cooperative aims to provide work for immigrant women who face difficulties to enter the labour market. While the mainstream political debate tends to blame refugees for failing to integrate into Swedish society, Rosengård is one of the liveliest areas in Malmö. Many visible and physical changes are taking place, and residents get involved through participatory processes to bring about ecological, social and economically sustainable development.

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as ghettos (förorter in Swedish) that suffer from poverty and unemployment while being depicted as violent, which in turn leads to stigmatization, labor discrimination and housing segregation.

10. Built in the 1960s as part of the Million Homes Program, Rosengård has long been associated with immigrants. Most of the original residents came for work, but in more recent times it has hosted a number of refugees from the Middle East.

*Solidarity for fighting trauma*

Palestinian socio-cultural activities and practices address similar challenges, problems and ambitions in Malmö. What is more, they share a conviction that it is possible to contribute to their own social inclusion in the country. These initiatives create opportunities for the Palestinian diaspora in Sweden to share their experiences with society and the broader community but also to open spaces for expression. Palestinians in Malmö create and develop opportunities, acts of solidarity and strategies of belonging to the host society.

While “integration is an interactive process between immigrants and the host society” (Bosswick & Heckman, 2006, p. 11), migrants offer opportunities in developing their own initiatives in the host society. Arts and culture can thus be considered as a media of communication and as tools for dialogue through which Palestinians can express their feelings and (re)create a sense of belonging in Sweden. These activities can facilitate the process of “getting to know” the host society, they can help migrants develop a sense of solidarity as well as encourage both interpersonal and intercultural relations between different groups. These artistic initiatives provide a positive atmosphere in which migrants can interact and mingle with individuals from other backgrounds. Solidarity and connections among and between Palestinians can also be highlighted by a collective sense of identity as well as repetitive narratives that are built around common memories in creating and maintaining networks.

Arts can then improve physical, mental and emotional well-being of immigrants (Fitzpatrick, 2002; Heusch, 2000) but can also play a therapeutic and healing role in helping migrants address trauma (Kalmanowitz & Lloyd, 2016). Socio-cultural activities can be driving forces for migrants that help them find a way to feel rooted in new realities. Used as resilience support and psychosocial intervention, these practices can help migrants in expressing their identities, voicing their experiences and healing wounds from traumatic experiences while fleeing. In Malmö, many Palestinian initiatives take place with the aim to help the psychological well-being of different traumas that migrants might be dealing with, such as the activities of a youth dance group school in Malmö that expresses contemporary themes through the traditional Palestinian dabke dance or an array of other activities.

These results highlight that socio-cultural initiatives in Malmö respond to interests that go beyond the intrinsic sense of the integration concept. Indeed, while Sweden, highly inclusive (Papadopoulos, 2011), managed to perform at the top European level in the field of migration/integration policies (Koopmans, 2010), the country cannot any longer be seen as a model used to create a template for Europe-wide policies. In this respect, “even if it was indisputable that Swedish

integration policies are highly effective in fostering the integration of immigrants” (Wiesbrock, 2011), Palestinians socio-cultural activities and development of art help in understanding to what extent Swedish integration policies are being reframed by the migrants’ contribution and experiences.

### **From a collective culture of resistance...**

While questions of migrant participation in politics have become important topics of public and scholarly attention, much of this work focuses on conventional forms of political participation with far less focus on the role that arts and culture play in politics. According to Martiniello and Laffeur (2008), art, music and cultural activities endorse three functions. With or without juridical rights in the host society, art, music and culture can be a way of engaging politically outside of conventional political channels but they can also provide opportunities for political engagement in order to face language barriers, discrimination, under-representation and confusion around the political process. Finally, the authors suggest that music, art and culture can complement traditional forms of political participation. Considering this argument, it is clear that Palestinian socio-cultural practices constantly deal with matters of politics.

Palestinian culture endorses a political role and it is widely considered to be an important tool for the liberation battle. Often framed as a form of “cultural resistance,” these artistic practices are initiated in different places and spaces, amidst the everyday reality of division and fragmentation but they also serve to express, strengthen and promote a sense of Palestinian shared identity across generations and geographical locations. Different testimonies collected in the field fall into this argument according to which socio-cultural practices are seen as an act of non-violent resistance. Cultural expression in the diaspora serves the purpose of maintaining a collective Palestinian identity as well as creating a sense of belonging to the new host society. Highly politicized, cultural activities and arts that emerge from and within the Palestinian diaspora in Sweden constitute an essential tool for achieving political aims. Disappointed by the consequences of the Oslo Accords, many Palestinians tend to focus on a monocultural concept of culture that presents images of a Palestinian people unified across the borders and boundaries of time and space.

Music was four-years hardcore activism that I was working with between 2007 and 2012. It is about the Palestinian cause, the conflict and generally at the same time, talking about what is going on in Gaza, all the attacks, internal conflicts that led to the divisions

between Palestinians. It is really important for us, as Palestinians, to reconcile and to sit together and talk. It has been a lot of that. (Palestinian who was born in 1982 in Saudi Arabia, moved to Gaza when he was a child and migrated to Sweden in 2011)

I saw music as a way to resist, I saw hip-hop as a way to say no to Hamas. Maybe they don't say it into the lyrics, but it does say a figurative no to Hamas and also to the all social paradigm that rules everything. (Palestinian who was born in 1988 in Gaza-Jabalia refugee camp and who moved to Sweden in 2013)

As Wong (2009, p. 269-271) points it out, "music has never been absent in Palestinian nationalism against Israeli occupation since the Nakba" and culture acts as an artistic weapon for a "non-violent means of struggle and resistance." An increasing number of artists address Palestinian issues using music and more specifically hip-hop or rap with different groups that appear all around the world. In Malmö, a young man who grew up in the Gaza strip and who applied for asylum in Sweden in 2011, has been working in the music industry producing Arab Hip Hop music as a "form of spoken word resistance" based on the DARG Team band (Da Arabian Revolutionary Guys).<sup>11</sup> Frustrated by Hamas' election victory in 2006, he moved to Egypt to go to university. After his return to Gaza, different music projects enabled him to tour in Europe where he immediately felt a strong connection to Malmö. For the DARG Team members, music is a form of resistance and the oriental accents of the rap they play speak of Palestine, of the siege but also of childhood or friendship. They make their music a weapon, fighting both the blockade imposed by Israel and the quarrels of different Palestinian political factions. By resistance through words rather than weapons, they express their daily life through music and hope to change the image of Gaza.

The process of integration cannot ignore the presence of this Palestinian collective culture of resistance that exists in the diaspora. The political use of socio-cultural strategies affects the integration in the sense that migrants want to be more visible in the host society while claiming a sense of belonging to the homeland. Music, but also any kind of cultural expression, can be a key site where migrants express their social identities, political perspectives and imaginings of the future (Maira, 2013). Challenging the Oslo framework, the Palestinian artistic diasporic scene is reviving

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11. DARG Team, established in 2007, was a combination of two hip hop groups (DA. Mcz and RG), but its members had started making hip hop since 2004.

the possibility of a non-violent resistance that goes beyond conventional forms of participation and that (re)creates new cultural idioms or political vocabularies. In the post-Oslo context, the collective culture of resistance aims to build a new narrative that is not only linked to the Palestinian national struggle, but more largely to everyday life and socio-economics conditions of living in and outside Palestine.

### **... To a plural diaspora based on various forms of capital**

However, Palestinians have faced a very different political reality and many migratory trajectories, which contributed to the apparition of a plural repertoire of participation, and by extension of integration. The ambiguity of legal statutes, the profusion of spatial fragmentation as well as the extreme variety of conditions of life in the different territories have generated hierarchies among Palestinians based on associated distinctions about who can move, engage and settle. Thus, the collective cultural resistance deals with multiple Palestinian identities that one can consider as a point of departure for re-imagining the Palestinian ethos. It can be remarked that the expression of socio-cultural narratives can then contribute towards deconstructing the romanticized and polarized perception of Palestinian struggle.

Palestinian socio-cultural practices and initiatives can also become a catalyst to undertake matters of individual integration as part of the broader political landscape. Indeed, while a Palestinian collective sense of belonging appears in Malmö, the spatial fragmentation of the Palestinian diaspora and its political dilution can also reflect a plural mobilisation that addresses a more nuanced approach regarding the integration process. Given the spatial and political Palestinian fragmentation, in regards to the failure of the Oslo Accords, the socio-cultural sector has made changes that are addressed and challenged in the diaspora. In these artistic practices and initiatives, individuality is at the heart of their aesthetic.

Indeed, this Palestinian collective sense of belonging in Malmö deals also with individual narratives that express a more fragmented and less romanticised point of view about the Palestinian situation. Whereas Palestinian mobilisation used to conform to political agendas, specifically in regards to Palestinian nationalism and struggle, today socio-cultural practices that are emerging in the diaspora mark a rupture with the conventional political repertoire and include more individualised strategies of integration into host societies.

I feel like that activism by culture is just what is keeping me sane  
in a way, between me and myself, it is what is keeping me connected

back home, to Palestine, to Gaza, to my family. (Palestinian who was born in 1988 in Gaza-Jabalia refugee camp and who moved to Sweden in 2013)

Thus, echoing the Palestinian geopolitical fragmentation, socio-cultural activities in Malmö are characterized by their integration-related differentiation. This fragmentation can be explained by the migration process (wave of migration and country of origin).

More precisely, the generation of Palestinians who came from Lebanon or Jordan to Sweden in the 1980s feel well integrated into Swedish society. The socio-cultural activities, in connection to Palestine, aim to provide Sweden with a better knowledge of middle-eastern traditions but also to promote an active integration into society. However, the generation who came in the 2000s (and after) ascribe to a different kind of repertoire.

In addition, a distinction can be made based on the country of origin. Indeed, alternative means of activism appear amongst the members of the Palestinian diaspora in Sweden who were born in the occupied Palestinian territories and who have migrated from these spaces to Sweden, such as music or artistic expression, especially among the youngest. Although some of them used to be strongly mobilized in the homeland, their migration to Sweden has somehow changed their ways of mobilizing, with discourses that traduce a moral exhaustion and loss of hope. Many Palestinians who were born in the occupied territories experienced violence there and they then develop specific practices in Sweden. Indeed, interviews with Palestinians who were born in the West Bank or in Gaza feel disconnected to other Palestinians who have migrated to Sweden from other countries. They express a better knowledge of what is going on in the field and a realistic vision of Palestinian politics, while not feeling engaged among and with Palestinians from Lebanon or from Syria.

Some of them came here in Sweden actually, and I talked to them, but I don't feel connected. I would like to connect with what they are doing but I feel like it is a different, a completely different struggle in a way. I feel it all comes down when you talk about this; it comes down to the point that who are the most Palestinians than other. [...] There is something in common. I am also a refugee, I am a refugee in Palestine, in Gaza, but even that it is different, I am Gaza natives. [...] Unfortunately, I don't feel like connecting with all these groups. Because for them it is the right of return, for us it is a bit deeper than that. Maybe I wouldn't say deeper because we are just given up with the right of return. And we want solutions, we



want practical solutions. And this is why I feel like there is a gap. Ok we share we are Palestinians, but I feel like there is ignorance on both sides. They don't know what is happening. (Palestinian who was born in 1988 in Gaza-Jabalia refugee camp and who moved to Sweden in 2013)

I lived in Gaza and living in Gaza, seeing everything it's different. You see actually how does it work. And it is always some agendas that have been followed or some men. It is either like you follow or being followed. (Palestinian who was born in 1982 in Saudi Arabia, moved to Gaza when he was a child and migrated to Sweden in 2011)

In Malmö, activities are at the centre of significant creative networks, being the interface between spatial, institutional and human hubs with different backgrounds. Palestinians engage in cultural and artistic expressions, developing innovative practices that challenge boundaries and form new identity configurations. The inter-individual mutualization and the mutation of different capital can explain the diversity of socio-cultural strategies. In this respect, our fieldwork in Malmö aims to understand that places of origin have provided Palestinians with a wide range of socio-cultural capitals as well as different types of resistance capital.

The production and circulation of cultural capital can be explained by capital shifting boundaries in different geographic areas that are key factors of migrants' integration. Palestinian cultural resources (language, preferences, dispositions) that are important in places of origin become convertible and legitimate in new societal contexts through practices that they create and develop in the host society. Through arts and culture, Palestinians mobilize, share and voice their experiences but migration trajectories have also had an impact in (re)producing socio-cultural capital between different places and spaces. Thus, the analysis of socio-cultural activities of Palestinians in Malmö highlights the necessity to link conditions of life and socio-cultural engagement in the country of origin with the impacts of migratory trajectories.

In addition, while references to traditional cultural Palestinian symbols have occurred during the conducted fieldwork in Sweden, the Palestinian diaspora refers to a wider range of issues and acts of solidarity. Palestinian culture does not only deal with the Nakba but also with the current situation in the refugee camps, the absence of a political centre of gravity, as well as the migration experiences to name but a few of the challenges faced by Palestinian communities.



Thus, while our conducted interviews with Palestinians from Lebanon who arrived in Sweden in the 1970-1980s traduce an important socio-cultural mobilisation aiming at fostering a discourse of integration into the Swedish society, Palestinians from Syria and from the Palestinian occupied territories demonstrate a more nuanced approach. This fragmentation can be explained by the socio-cultural and resistance capitals that have been constructed in the country of origin as well as all the migratory trajectories. Palestinian mobility can become a form of capital seeking to avoid “socio-spatial irreversibility”, which is called “mobility capital” (Kaufmann *et al.*, 2004; Ceriani Sebgondi, 2007).

Migration trajectories challenge shared memories and collective culture of resistance in regards to the Palestinian homeland, which can contribute to the creation of a more individualized participation into the host society. Whereas “certain spaces can become referents for collective visions” (Buser *et al.*, 2013, p. 608), the multiple places of mobility can turn into different capitals that can be individually shaped to achieve different integration processes. Palestinians in the diaspora are engaging in arts according to their “resistance capital” that refers to “those knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional behaviour that challenges inequality” (Yosso, 2005, p. 80). The Palestinian culture of resistance that also appears in the socio-cultural field is thus linked to the wide range of experiences of Palestinians in securing equal rights and freedom. The ability to communicate via artistic and cultural tools can be transferred into a resistance capital that Palestinians in the diaspora refer to in order to voice collective experiences of exile but also individual narratives of integration in host societies.

To summarize, socio-cultural activities are an integral part of sustainable integration and they can be leveraged to strengthen the circulation of migrants’ capitals through culture-based urban revitalization and the preservation of traditional heritage. Depending on their socioeconomic backgrounds, social networks and the conditions they find in the contexts of reception, migrants may experience upward or downward mobility, and selectively integrate and preserve some elements of the origin and reception communities’ cultures (Portes & Zhou, 1993; Portes & Rumbaut, 1996; Rumbaut, 1997; Zhou, 1997). In Malmö, Palestinians develop artistic practices that traduce a culture of resistance and strengthen their own-constructed integration, preserving their traditions and a common sense of belonging. On the other hand, socio-cultural, mobility and resistance capitals vary considerably from one individual to another and explain the various ways of mobilizing in Sweden.

Thus, cultural and artistic practices by migrants reconfigure the mainstream local integration process, rather than being considered as simply passive actors in the host society (Martiniello, 2015). The Palestinian diaspora performs

socio-cultural activities that are associated with their homeland as a collective act of resistance, but they can also become more rooted in Swedish society thanks to their individual capitals based on migratory trajectories, activist backgrounds and socio-cultural determinants. In this respect, Palestinians' collective culture of resistance is challenged by dense ties created across borders and they become embedded in Sweden allowing for shifts in the integration process.

### **Migrants as key actors of integration**

Palestinians play an important role in their self-integration process, becoming actors of it based on the development of a socio-cultural participation that goes beyond traditional settlement programming and conventional forms of political mobilization. Voicing their experiences and challenging the top-down integration process, Palestinians explore ways of being part of the Swedish society based on the creation of their own space and forms of belonging in the society where they live. Palestinians do not wait for the Swedish State "to turn them into political subjects" (Quinsaat, 2018, p. 3). They rather become active actors in the construction of their participation into the host society, through less mainstream and conventional forms of politics.

Palestinian socio-cultural practices in Sweden highlight the emergence of a more individualized process of integration. Indeed, these activities, place-making and space gathering facilitate exchange, strengthen solidarity and build a dense network of organizations but they are at the same time invested in a different way in regards to the diverse range of socio-cultural, mobility and resistance backgrounds. The Palestinian collective culture of resistance has an integration effect due to the development, in the diaspora, of multiple practices that lead to a more individualistic embedding of Palestinians in the host society, where they claim their own identity.

Consequently, Palestinians paradoxically strengthen their collective culture of resistance through socio-cultural practices that aim to contribute to their individual integration into the host society. Although the existence of strong ties among Palestinians in Sweden, foster continued identification with the homeland and a collective participation into the Swedish agenda, the individual markers and narratives that appear consequently to the migration process can become vehicles for an individual process of integration in the host country. Through making collective public claims, Palestinians are also able to build their own projects of life in Sweden, thus contributing to their integration based on a collective solidarity as well as the pursuit of individual goals.

This mixed rootedness can also be explained by the Swedish context itself. While the country used to be considered as a model of integration, the Palestinian case can allow its deconstruction. Castles *et al.*, (2001, p. 19) define multiculturalism policies as the granting of cultural and political rights to migrants but this approach can be deconstructed looking at the tools that migrants develop in the host society. Cultural and artistic activities have a great impact on integration but initiatives that are developed by Palestinians in Sweden encourage a new definition of integration. In this respect, when discussing the consequences of migration into the integration process and based on the sociological theory of social system (Lockwood, 1964), one should distinguish between system integration (as a result of functioning of institutions, organizations and mechanisms) and social integration (referring to the inclusion of individuals in a system; the creation of relationships among individuals and their attitudes towards the society).<sup>12</sup>

While these approaches demonstrate the vital aspects of the integration process, the analysis of Palestinian arts in Malmö highlight a more active role of migrants within the city, placing them not only as subjects of policies but rather as actors of the integration process. In addition, one can argue that system integration is a top-down phenomenon created by the State whereas social integration is a bottom-up process that relies on the communities' initiatives. Multicultural policies grant the same rights to migrants as Swedes but do not address the role of the newcomers in the host society, nor their interaction with it as an intrinsic requirement for integration. Culture and arts empower migrants, giving them a sense of community and belonging, raising their self-esteem and developing their skills, which then contributes to their efficient and bottom-up integration. Therefore, socio-cultural practices can act as a new framework of the diasporic activism that can serve as a form of collective but also individual identity making.

## Conclusion

The analysis of Palestinian artistic initiatives in Sweden contends that culture can be an empowering space for grassroots integration. This article demonstrates this point with an overview of the Palestinian socio-cultural practices in Malmö in order to display their impacts on the process of integration. Indeed, firstly, Palestinian artistic activities in Malmö play a key role in facilitating exchanges about beliefs and raising awareness of different cultures and identities. In this respect, the integration models that have been largely taken for granted can be

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12. See ESSER, 2000; BOSSWICK & HECKMAN, 2006, ANDERSSON, 2007.

unpacked and deconstructed, providing an empirical insight on the challenges that Sweden is currently facing. Thus, top-down understandings of established integration models throughout the migration process are challenged. In Sweden, migrants act by sharing, exchanging and voicing their experiences through their own resources and strategies that vary according to spaces of migration and available capital. An innovative approach from below is building up a concrete alternative vision of the concept of integration where people are involved based on daily choices and self-organized initiatives.

Second, the analysis of several key roles that socio-cultural practices play in the self-integration of migrants in Sweden highlights the plurality of the Palestinian diaspora. Indeed, while this study refers to the literature that describes the Palestinians as a diaspora (Abu-Lughod, 1995; Adelman, 1996; Hammer, 2005), including emotional attachments to the homeland (Safran, 1991; Clifford, 1994), it also provides an analysis of the plurality of this diaspora due to its political and spatial fragmentation.

Finally, through socio-cultural strategies, migrants' voices can be heard and can gain a political/societal weight. In the Palestinian case, socio-cultural practices have a political outcome. Thus, while Palestinians develop cultural and artistic initiatives and projects in Malmö, in order to voice a collective culture of resistance, their different backgrounds can be the root cause that explains the individual acts of negotiating a plural Palestinian identity. Artistic and socio-cultural activities are powerful and less conventional political tools for the individual and collective empowerment of Palestinians in Malmö, thus having spill-over effects based on their contribution to the process of integration. These practices rely on a collective culture of resistance that circulates across borders but also of the diversity of capitals that circulate between spaces and places of migration.

Due to their common sense of belonging but also to their diverse experiences and trajectories, Palestinians in Malmö live in multifaceted cultural relationships and no longer solely identify with a single identity. They develop artistic practices that contribute to the definition of culture as a reservoir of symbols, signs and behaviours that are permanently undergoing transformation. Furthermore, integration can address migration challenge and vice-versa: migrants themselves are actors of their inclusion into different societies. The sharing of socio-cultural and artistic practices acts as valuable tools for integration. Creating new hybrid forms of socio-cultural engagement, migrants redefine integration that is not a one-side and top-down concept but rather a process in which they play a role.

Sweden, just as other countries in Europe and beyond, is undergoing social, demographic and cultural transformations which necessitate a new way of viewing and navigating the contemporary ecologies of integration, paying more attention to the agency of migrants and refugees making their homes in it. Positive,

feature-worthy stories, inspiring profiles and compelling perspectives are abundant in the Palestinian diaspora, but these stories are not being told. Yet, they are definitely strong enough to garner political and research attention. The Swedish/Malmö reality means that new policies and a revised concept of what is meant by integration are necessary. A new perspective must be negotiated, not based on what the population makeup was in the past but rather on the population that does exist in the country now.

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Abstract: This article aims to critically analyse established integration models and look into how migrants/diasporas actively create practices of encounter, dialogue and mutual learning within host societies. This paper is based on fieldwork in a Swedish local space (Malmö) and explores the diversity of artistic activism of the Palestinians in Sweden in order to analyse its consequences on the concept of integration.

Keywords: Palestinian diaspora, socio-cultural practices, cultural resistance, integration, Sweden.

### *Écologies de l'intégration : l'activisme socio-culturel palestinien en Suède*

Résumé : Cet article a pour objectif d'analyser de manière critique les formes d'intégration en interrogeant comment les migrants/diasporas créent activement des pratiques de rencontre, de dialogue et de compréhension mutuelle au sein des sociétés d'accueil. Ce papier se base sur une étude de terrain réalisée au sein d'un espace local suédois (Malmö) et explore la diversité du militantisme artistique des Palestiniens en Suède dans le but d'analyser ses conséquences sur le concept d'intégration.

Mots-clés : Diaspora palestinienne, pratiques socio-culturelles, résistance culturelle, intégration, Suède.