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Background to the Study
Safeguarding cultural heritage is a primary focus in socio-economic settings. In most developing countries and war zone regions in the Middle East, it’s regarded as fundamental to society, as it endorses and preserves history as well as promotes identity. For Palestine, one aspect of cultural heritage can be attributed to symbolic costumes and textiles; however, this has suffered gradual disappearance after harsh political, social, and economical transformations of Palestinian regions in past years.

Rationale and Aim of the Study
Symbolic costumes and textiles within the context of material culture play a large part in defining principles and values for Palestinians; yet, to date processes and features that constitute their establishment are eluded and not widely comprehended. The study aimed to capture and establish a meaning to eluded original Palestinian costumes and textiles.

Data Collection
Through oral history, critical review of literature and examination of artefacts, this study collates a variety of women’s traditional costumes, textiles and their uses; and provides a record of creative, historic and socio-economic conditions of their development.

Findings and Conclusion
The study’s findings underscore that Palestinian traditional costumes are intricated with historical data that document centuries of textile art and craft developments in regions. This demonstrates the antiquity of Palestinian existence, textiles and costumes; whiles fostering the sense national identity within regions and in diaspora. By capturing and appreciating traditional Palestinian textiles and their uses, the true significance of its historical, political, economic and social values become firmly established.

Palestinian Embroidery & Processes of Costume Development
Palestinian traditional dresses were made of different elements that were assembled after the fabric had been embroidered, with various parts attached by different stitches (c-f).

Thobes (dresses) provided modesty as garments were not tailored or shaped to the body:
- Chest Panel: considered one of the most important parts of the dress, the colours and motifs of the chest panel differ from one village to another, and used as indicator of the weaver’s financial status and personal skills.
- The shoulder pieces: it’s the decorative piece of the dress- used also as a protection from hair dye as well as wear and tear around the neckline.
- Sleeves: Two main types which clearly identify the village or region of the dress. The long pointed sleeves “Irdan” had pointed ends which were usually left unembroidered to make it easier for women to tie this part of the sleeves behind their back when they worked on fields, and they were sometimes used to help them carry heavy objects.
- The side panels of the skirt: The “Banayeq” were made of triangular pieces of a variety of fabrics that were usually embroidered. Their main purposes were to widen the base of the dress for ease of movement.
- The front side of the dress: The “Hijar” featured regional variations, with most costumes featuring two elongated lines of embroidery known as “mawars” on both sides of the hijar.
- The back lower panel of the dress: The “Shinyer” was richly embroidered and classified as one of the most important parts of the dress. It showcased the skills of the one who embroidered it and was usually the most critiqued part of the dress.

Natural dyes:
Several Palestinian regions are associated with specific fabric colours and threads. In developing garments, natural dyes were produced from local plants and insects.
- Yellow: was made from saffron flowers.
- Red: was produced by mixing pomegranate skins with other plants like kermes and insects.
- Purple: from crushed murex shells.
- Indigo: was made from a plant that was cultivated in the Jordan river valley, the darker the more expensive as it took several dye baths to achieve deep shades.

Palestinian Motifs and Symbolic Designs
Embroidery featured in Palestinian textiles have been influenced by social interaction, travel, inter-marriages and European presence. Embroideries have been inspired by: Nature, symbols/beliefs and events, geometrics, magic and superstition/amulets. Although meaningful to cultural observations, a number of motifs and symbols have humorous underpinnings (g-j).

The “Intifada” Dress
During the First Intifada Rebellion, uprising (1987), Israeli soldiers confiscated the flags of Palestinian women protesting in the streets, the women responded by embroidering the Palestinian flag and silhouettes of the country in endless repetition along the chests, sleeves, and back hems of their Thobas (traditional Palestinian dresses) (q-r).

References