

# Popular Beliefs in the Palestinian Society: An Analytic Study

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## Abstract

The present study addressed the popular beliefs in the Palestinian society. Popular belief practices were evaluated using an index of a 39-item scale developed by the researchers, and were administrated to 1,066 Palestinians in the West Bank, Palestine, during 2022. The sample population was selected via the stratified random selection method. Study findings revealed that almost three quarters of the participants (71.6%) experienced a moderate level of popular belief practices in their daily life. The study indicated that gender, educational level, age and the degree of religiosity were significant predictors of popular belief practices. The consequences of the study findings for practice were highlighted.

## Keywords

Popular Beliefs, Practices, Traditions, Faith, Culture, Palestine

## 1. Introduction

Cultural beliefs in the Arab and Muslim world, like any other culture, popular beliefs concept is a tradition and heritage of past Arab and Muslim world history, living side by side, generation after generation (Yahya, 1991; Waardenburg, 1995). The Arab culture in general, and Palestinian culture in particular, have popular beliefs, folklore traditions, superstitions and rituals that are in common and should be studied empirically.

The Palestinian people belong to the Arab ancestors and the Muslim faith, they are part of Arab and Islamic cultures. Studying popular beliefs among the Palestinian people must involve the wide screen of Islamic faith and culture

stretched from Indonesia to the Atlantic Ocean. It is necessary to expand the description of the Arab and Muslim world, because lots of the popular beliefs among the Palestinian people under study are in common with all Arab countries (Yahya, 1991; Waardenburg, 1995).

The main purpose of this study is to study aspects of popular beliefs in the Palestinian society, to find out the main popular beliefs practices among Palestinians, and explore the demography breakdown over popular beliefs practices among Palestinians with the aim of identifying any statistical significant differences in terms of the contextual variables selected for the study, which include age, gender, religion, marital status, place of residence, level of education, and the degree of religiosity.

This study came in view of the novelty of the topic, and the lack of previous literature in the Palestinian society. The study is considered one of the leading studies that deal with the popular beliefs practices among Palestinians empirically. The study will be an important reference for those interested in the issue of popular beliefs practices in general and the Palestinians' in particular, and it is expected that the findings would add new scientific knowledge to its field.

The growing interest among humanistic scholars in popular beliefs is one of the more existing academic trends of the present day. Popular beliefs legacy is handed down to children from one generation to another. Popular beliefs are studied as a sub-field of social sciences, like history and anthropology, which examines spiritual beliefs that develop not independently from religion, but still outside of established religious institutions. Aspects of popular piety, historical folklore, and historical superstitions are some of the themes explored (Boyle, 1982; Yahya, 1991; Wiesner, 1993; Waardenburg, 1995; Ferrell et al., 2004; Cullen & Agnew, 2006).

Such a field of study presents a great expansion in the range of human knowledge and profession. It is an activity subjected to the scrutiny of historians and scholars of the art. But problems may arise. For example, giving some shape to one's inquiries into popular beliefs conveys the need for analytical concepts which might enable us to find our way through the various beliefs materials, which is, in turn, the potential subject-matter of studies in popular beliefs. Therefore, a way of relating the various perspectives whether it be historical, psychological or aesthetic—which are being used in any investigation of such phenomena in the Eastern sphere as distinguished from Western popular beliefs—is much needed. The first seems to have more emphasis on traditional religious beliefs as superstition as was the case of the Western sphere before the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries when there were no radios, printed newspaper, television or other technological inventions. The latter is distinguished with inventions, technology and creating popular beliefs through the promotion of research addressing music, business marketing and distribution, criminology, superpowers, and zombies in films, and other mass media channels to promote economic and business-like activities (Ferrell et al., 2004; Cullen & Agnew, 2006).

Recently, in Western literature, superstition beliefs include zombies. We know that there has been quite an abrupt shift in what gets called a zombie in fiction, and that the new usage is quite different from the term's meanings in folklore/religion. If you want to call that an error, that's fine, but much the same could be said of the author's own use of "ghoul" and "revenant"—only their meanings do not even predominate in fiction (Ghoul | Revenant) (Anderson & Taylor, 2011; Yahya, 2012).

David Paul Strohecker, who studies cultural sociology, theory and intersectionality, asks the question: What is the zombie and where does it come from? He answers it by saying that "what makes the zombie unique from other movie monsters is its unique place of origin. Whereas Frankenstein, Dracula, and the Wolf man all have ties to the Gothic literary tradition, the zombie stands apart in having a relatively recent (and proximal) origin. Theorists of zombie culture, such as Kyle Bishop or Jamie Russell, attribute the origin of the zombie to Haitian folklore and the hybrid religion of voodoo. But the zombie did not make its way into American culture until the 1920s and 30s, when sensationalist travel narratives were popular with Western readers. Specifically, W.B. Seabrook's book *The Magic Island*, is often credited as the first popular text to describe the Haitian zombie. Additionally, the work of Zora Neale Hurston, namely her 1937 book *Tell My Horse*, explores the folklore surrounding the zombie in Haitian mythology. The many roles pop culture plays in our lives, provide a theoretical sociological background for our ideas. Superstition and popular beliefs do the same (Anderson & Taylor, 2011; Yahya, 2012).

Social scientists who study popular belief offer explanations for behaviors and events that arose as a means of redress in times of adversity, or from perceived practical or spiritual utility. The cause of the European witch craze, responsible for the death of many older women in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century, is one such area of research. The attitudes to sanctity and relics in the central Middle Ages, represent a bottom-up phenomenon—whereby relics became acceptable to the Roman Catholic Church as a result of their popularity among the masses—which is another widely studied area of popular belief (Wiesner, 1993).

Sociologists study religion as both a belief system and a social institution. As a belief system, religion shapes what people think and how they see the world. As a social institution, religion is a pattern of social action organized around the beliefs and practices that people develop to answer questions about the meaning of existence. As an institution, religion persists over time and has an organizational structure into which members are socialized (Borhek & Curtis, 1975; Boyle, 1982; Yahya, 1991; Waardenburg, 1995).

In studying religion from a sociological perspective, it is not important what one believes about religion. What is important is the ability to examine religion objectively in its social and cultural context. Sociologists are interested in several questions about religion, for example, how are religious beliefs related to other social factors like race, age, gender and education? How are religious institutions

organized? How does religion affect social change? And what influence does religion have on other social institutions, such as political or economic or educational institutions?

Sociology suggests an alternative to both the view that it has always been an unsatisfying way at one extreme, and the sociological individual genius view at the other. This alternative posits that culture and cultural works are collective, not individual, creations. We can best understand specific cultural objects by seeing them not as unique to their creators, but as the fruits of collective production, fundamentally social, in their genesis (Griswold, 2004: p. 53). In short, Griswold argues that culture changes through the contextually-dependent and socially-situated actions of individuals. Macro-level culture influences the individual who, in turn, can influence that same culture. The logic is slightly circular, but it illustrates how culture can change over time yet remain somewhat constant (Borhek & Curtis, 1975; Boyle, 1982; Yahya, 1991; Waardenburg, 1995).

It is, of course, important to recognize here that Griswold is talking about cultural change and not the actual origins of culture. As in: “there was no culture and then, suddenly, there was”. Because Griswold does not explicitly distinguish between the origins of cultural change and the origins of culture, it may appear as though Griswold is arguing here for the origins of culture and situating these origins in society. This is neither accurate nor a clear representation of sociological thought on this issue. Culture, just like society, has existed since the beginning of humanity (humans being social and cultural). Society and culture co-exist because humans have social relations and meanings tied to those relations i.e. brother, lover, friend. Culture as a super-phenomenon has no real beginning except in the sense that humans (*homo sapiens*) have a beginning. This, then, makes the question of the origins of culture moot—it has existed as long as we have, and will likely exist as long as we do. Cultural change, on the other hand, is a matter that can be questioned and researched, as Griswold does (Griswold, 2004; Griswold & Carroll, 2012).

The belief system in which we believe is the offspring of both faith and culture. But not all societies share the same set of beliefs. Arab societies have much of the popular beliefs in common with other societies. However, in one form or another, religion is found in all known human societies; even the earliest of societies on record show clear traces of religious symbols and ceremonies. Throughout history, religion has continued to be a central part of societies and human experience shaping how individuals react to the environments in which they live. Since religion is such an important part of societies around the world, sociologists are very interested in studying it as well cultural beliefs (Yahya, 1991).

Some studies describe the marriage and death ritual or norm including its related popular Folklore. Taha (2009), in her study entitled *Social & Popular Rituals & Beliefs in the Palestinian Literature in Ramallah District*, went two hundred thousand years back, to the tendril-human age and Roman era, to describe

the method of these rituals. Taha (2009) reached the conclusion that “[u]p to this day, humans still practice old rituals that belongs to hundreds of thousands of years ago, and the late new human keeps going back to his first origins and his first models, undeliberately” (Taha, 2009).

Taste and value in the society will change varying from belief changes that influence the attitudes and behavior of an individual to a group or community change (Yahya, 1991). Alindah (2001), in her study *Resistance Values in Palestinian Hip-hop Music*, aimed to describe popular culture of Palestinian Hip-Hop and the values of songs. The objective of her study was to describe popular culture in Palestinian Hip-Hop, and to find resistance value in Hip-Hop songs. Music, however, is part of the culture created by man. Formerly, all kinds of sound were music although they did not produce musical tones. The development of music is dictated by evolution of taste and by continually changing esthetic concept. According to Massad (2005), Palestinian rap music was produced by young Palestinians in the form of political revolution and underground music. Palestinian political music started in 1950 by combining elements of the nationalist poetry in Arab-Western musical instruments (Massad, 2005).

We have a certain well-known assumption, or say tradition, from anthropology, sociology as well as other social sciences which states that we do not judge popular beliefs as good, better, or bad in research studies. Anthropologists, sociologists and social work specialists conducting research shall, as the old scholars describe research methods, find what is, not what should be.

While culture is important as the source of beliefs, the Arab and Muslim societies and culture shall be described. Hasan Yahya notes that “the Islamic society is based on a positive recognition of the sacred; religion is inconvertibly of highest value in almost all Muslim populations. This often creates difficulties in adjusting to the secular ends-means criteria. From a sociological point of view, the Muslim social organization has always placed great emphasis on the particularism which acts as a barrier in modernization (Yahya, 1991: p. 12).

Islam in common with other religions, inherently rejects change. The word for “innovation” in the religious sense is Bid’ah, (heresy), opposite to Sunnah, the path of the Prophet and the way of life in the Islamic community. Innovation includes inventions as a source of popular cultural beliefs. Religion in this case is no longer the source of social energy or the model for the future among many Muslim leaders (Yahya, 1991: p. 12). Unlike Islam, Christianity has given some more comprehensive teachings on the ethics of work, profession and occupation than any other religion as a result of the teachings of Calvin and the Protestant thinkers who emphasized work and success as signs of salvation, a doctrine that easily led to secularization (Weber, 1964; Waardenburg, 1995).

The contemporary Muslim world has many aspects of secular characteristics in social, political and economic life. General patterns of change that indicate such phenomena are, for example, expanding urban areas and factory labour, the increase in communication, education and literacy in addition to the advent

of national states backed by rationalist feeling that spread from the educated elite to the masses. Until recently those masses had remained largely outside the political society. Furthermore, there is a growing equality of women and the loosening of parental authority, as well as an application of Western, secular legal codes, and an increasing use of science and technology in agriculture, industry and healthcare (Yahya, 1991: p. 14).

Such contemporary social structure does not, however, seem to include the entire Muslim nation. Two competing attitudes permeate these structures: opposition to change for whatever reason, and a desire to stimulate revival through change. Such attitudes are reflected in two sharply opposing divisions: “secularism” and “fundamentalism,” or “modernism” and “traditionalism,” which may be more applicable to the Muslim culture in general and the Palestinian people in particular. Both of which exist in almost all societies and interpret change differently (Yahya, 1991: p. 15).

The progress of world communication systems, transportation and inventions has contributed to the decline of agricultural and desert population. Such transformation has created, and still creates local as well as global unrest and tension. In the case of Palestinian people, it is much harder to adjust to occupying forces.

Social loyalty is of great importance in Arab culture. Family is one of the most important aspects of Arab society. While self-reliance, individuality and responsibility are taught by Arab parents to their children, family loyalty is the greatest lesson taught in Arab families: “Unlike the extreme individualism we see in North America (every person for him or herself, individual rights, families living on their own away from relatives, and so on), Arab society emphasizes the importance of the group. Arab culture teaches that the needs of the group are more important than the needs of one person” (Barakat, 1993; Banat, 2012). In the Bedouin tribes of Saudi Arabia, “intense feelings of loyalty and dependence are fostered and preserved” by the family (Yahya, 1992). Margaret Nydell (2012), in her book *Understanding Arabs: A Guide for Modern Times*, writes that “family loyalty and obligations take precedence over loyalty to friends or demands of a job”. She goes on to state that “members of a family are expected to support each other in disputes with outsiders. Regardless of personal antipathy among relatives, they must defend each other’s honor, counter criticism, and display group cohesion...”. Of all members of the family, however, the most revered member is the mother (Yahya, 1991).

Arab countries share too many beliefs, and forms. In the Palestinian case, people have experienced several changes, politically and socially. Here, the authors study the common popular beliefs in Palestine (West Bank) which are similar to beliefs practiced in other Arab countries. Muslims are the predominant religious group in Palestine, comprising around three quarters of the population, and Islamic practices prevail in the territories. Most Palestinian Muslims belong to the Sunni sect. The word Islam means “submission,” to the will of Allah (God) and obedience to his commands. Muslims believe that the prophet Mu-

hammad (c. 570-632 C.E.) received Allah's commands through the angel Gabriel, and that these revelations are recorded in the Quran, the Islamic holy book. Islam is inseparable from day-to-day life, so religion, beliefs, politics and culture are all bound together in Muslim communities. The article "*Popular Beliefs as Reflected in 'Merits of Palestine and Syria' (Faḍā'il al-Shām) Literature*" is worth mentioning here. It is on Pilgrimage Ceremonies and Customs in the Mamluk and Ottoman Periods. The article discusses literary, religious, economic and folkloristic aspects of saint worship in Muslim Syria and Palestine in the Mamluk and Ottoman periods, as reflected mainly in manuscripts of the genre '*Merits of the Holy Land*'. Traditions found in compositions of this type clearly go back to early Muslim times or even before as they contain folk elements and legends which contradict accepted Islamic norms (Waardenburg, 1995; Anabsi, 2008; Banat, 2010).

In addition to literary and folkloristic aspects of traditions concerning holy places, Anabsi (2008) looks at the official attitude of Islam towards expressions of saint worship as reflected in the traditions in question. In particular, the authors discuss the opposition to saint worship by the Hanbali school of Islamic jurisprudence. Because it was in the Mamluk period that the religious dispute among jurists concerning the status of saint worship was at its peak, it is no wonder that traditions on this matter are abundant for this period. The study conclusion was that traditions concerning pilgrimage and saint worship in the Mamluk and Ottoman periods reflect a popular need, sometimes with local overtones, which found an outlet in pilgrimage to holy sites and in saint worship, despite the opposition of certain Islamic jurists to this practice (Anabsi, 2008).

## 2. Popular Beliefs in the Palestinian Society

The authors' primary concern in this paper is with actions and perceptions of signs as well as understanding the various cultural significance of these signs according to the respondents' level of education, location of residence, age and gender in addition to their social status. Some of the beliefs in the Palestinian society are among the elderly, and to a lesser extent among young people, for they are the ones who still believe and practice such popular beliefs. For instance, if a woman did not get pregnant in the first three years, or even after the first year, she is advised by the elders of the family to seek consultation from one Sheikh (usually dress a green cloth on his head, and body, hanging from his neck) known by the people and who lives in one side of village or the mountain. The same after marriage, keeping the love of a husband to his wife, sometimes needs *Hijab* (a paper written with the shape of rectangle or square) to keep the husband honest and loyal to his wife. The *Hijab* has to be placed in the husband's clothes or under his pillow. Sometimes the people's eyes movements have meaning, their hands have meaning, and their behavior itself has meaning. A husband and wife walking in Arab countries according to tradition is such that a



man never walks side by side with a woman, the woman always follows the man, whether it be husband, father or brother. Women in Islam cannot go to perform Haj, or any other place without a legal relative (Muhram) as a son, father or brother. This belief is followed and practiced all over the world without change, generation after generation (Yahya, 1991, 1992).

Taha (2009) addresses some cases of sorcery traditions of rituals that women adopt in order to reproduce (bear a baby) or to keep her infant safe if she ever becomes pregnant whereby one of the rituals is for the woman to stand before a holy mans' grave to offer her vows and supplication near the grave of a man who was killed by oppression (Taha, 2009). In this study, the authors describe popular cultural practices or beliefs that are still memorized in the Palestinian society. The authors will accordingly analyse how Palestinian people perceived some popular beliefs. The beliefs include: the snake in dreams where people believe that a snake in dreams is good luck. If it was dead, it means that the person is saved from bad luck or enemies. If the snake was black in the dream, it indicates the person leading his people and governing them. If the snake was small, then a new life is coming to the family. If someone dreamt of a snake biting him, it means that he will be saved from injury.

The bat is usually known as a blood-sucking animal, like Dracula. If someone dreamt with bats, it is interpreted as a holy man or a witch existing at home, or the bat and the snake do not live in one place. Bat blood used on the human body is believed to prevent pain (Yahya, 1991, 1992).

Dreaming of a wolf means there is an enemy or thief in the house. If the wolf bites the dreamer, then good things shall come to the dreamer or his family members. But if the wolf touches the sheep in the dream, it means that a bad thing will happen such as losing valuable things for example (Yahya, 1991, 1992).

There is a belief that scorpions will visit the dead man if he was a liar or a cunning person in his life. Scorpions are too many kinds, the worst is fighting its own race, therefore, people who fight each other are like scorpions. Dreaming of a dead scorpion indicates death to the person's enemies. If the dreamer eats a scorpion, it means that he is eating illegal (Haram) rights. If the scorpion bites the dreamer, it means that something good will be realized. If two scorpions fight each other in a dream, it means that soon two family members will sue each other in court (Yahya, 1991, 1992).

The crow in dreams is believed to be bad luck. It is described as Ghurab al Bayn, the crow of making distance between people, in the case of death or traveling. If a woman hears the crow's voice in the house or near it, she would take two knives and beat them together to make the crow fly away. In dreams, the crow eating a dead thing means that someone in the family will die soon. If the sound of the crow was not heard, it means a close relative will steal from the house. If the crow was dead in a dream, it indicates preventing the owner of the house from traveling the next day (Yahya, 1991, 1992).



Horses in dreams communicate nobility or noble expectations such as a marriage, or having a high position in society. Horses are a sign of power and wealth. If a horse was making noises, jumping or standing on its back feet, it means that disaster is coming. The horseshoe is a symbol of good deeds, luck and good news (Yahya, 1992).

When it comes to coffee cup reading, Palestinians believe in reading coffee cups after drinking coffee. The cup will be put upside down, then a special or well-known person of this art reads what the coffee drawings show of future events, good or bad. The black cat is bad, a broken jug brings people back, believing in magic in marriage customs, a knock on wood is believed to bring blessings. Holy men visitations are also believed to help in certain disorders like infertility and reproduction; spirits images live around as Jinn influences people lives; eating with the right hand is a tradition from Islam narrated on behalf of the Prophet; entering a house with the right foot is better than the left foot for using the right foot brings happiness and throws out the devil or bad luck; presence of dough on the door by a bride protects from bad spirits and brings blessings. The blue bead is believed to protect those who wear it and prevents envy from other people. Finally, the black cat is seen as a negative sign of evil (Yahya, 1991, 1992).

Beliefs in numbers, for example, three, five, seven, 40 and 99 has a meaning among Palestinian people as well as among their Arab brethren. Numbers have a certain meaning in popular beliefs. In Chinese culture, the odd numbers mean bright, sunny days, fire and sun. The even numbers indicate the colour black, nights, cold, water and earth. In Arab culture, the number six is holy. God created Heaven and earth in six days. The number seven is used in various things in marriage ceremonies and songs. For example, the seven blessings are repeated. In tales and stories, there is the seven divorced women, walking the desert for seven days. Moreover, the same applies to number 40 in Arab culture whereby different ceremonies are usually conducted after 40 days, for example, the celebration of children after the 40<sup>th</sup> day of their birth, or the 40<sup>th</sup> day after a person's death; The belief is that spirits come back to the diseased on that day. In literature, there is Ali Baba and the 40 robbers. This religious belief is common among the Abrahamic faith. For example, the Israelites were lost in the desert for 40 years. In Christianity and Judaism, people fast for 40 days. The number 40 also appears when Moses received the Ten Commandments (Exodus 34:28), and when Jesus was being tempted in the wilderness (Matthew 4). In the Qur'an, the number 40 was mentioned in several Suras. For example: "We give promises to Moses, thirty nights and complete it by ten nights, it is God's duration forty nights" (Yahya, 1991, 1992).

With regards to popular beliefs on death, death is an important event in life of all human beings. In some cultures, in the old times, women were burned beside their diseased husbands in India. In Japan, there is two layers for the tomb. In Arab countries, there is a certain way to dig a grave that is both respected and inspected. Interpretation of a dream concerning death in most Arab countries

involves someone dreaming of riding a camel, which means that the man will die soon. Beliefs on infertility and reproduction in old times did not have the knowledge of who might be the culprit, the man or the woman. Therefore, the (poor) holy pious men in the area, the area was sought for a solution. In folkloric medicine, popular local plants were used as medicine to cure women from such infertility. Another belief is insisting on the need to renew henna for the bride before *Hinna* is spoiled by envious other women, where other recent brides are prevented from visiting the new bride, or preventing a person who observed the Arab moon from visiting the bride before she observes it first. Other means to cure infertility from Holy pious men is to write Ayat from Holy Qur'an on a white China plate, then advising the bride to mix the writings with water and then drink it (Yahya, 1991).

In this paper, too many issues are addressed concerning popular beliefs in the Palestinian society about Jinn dwelling and its possible effect on individuals, and the role of the veil in harming others or protecting them. Pouring water on the ground at night. The optimistic belief of using the right hand rather using the left. The Jinn existence in our world. The right ear ringing being a good sign whereas the left ear ringing means it's a bad sign. The Blue Bead put on the door preventing evil and protecting from envy. The meaning of an itchy hand. The belief of twitching the left or right eye and its meaning. The belief in ravens as a bad omen; And that frequent laughter is a harbinger of evil. The belief that knocking on the wood pushes envy too. The belief of a horseshoe being a good sign. The belief in magic has a role in marriage and divorce affairs that magicians have uncanny ability to predict the future. Visitation to saints helps in the treatment of infertility among sterile women. Reading the cup and its ability to detect the future, and beliefs in Palmistry. Pasting dough on the home of a bride on her wedding day brings her luck. Coffee spilling after a person leaving is a good sign, and breaking a jar strengthens the hope for a traveler's return, and finally the belief of the black cat as evil, and washing clothes on the day of someone's death (Yahya, 1991).

### 3. Review of the Literature

In this section, the authors cover the direction of research and the development of the concept on popular beliefs. Historically, the ancient Greeks and Romans employed the Latin word "superstition" to describe activities they felt to be backwards or meaningless. According to historians Helen L. Parish and William G. Naphy, Protestants accused Catholics of having superstitious beliefs during the Reformation era. For example, Protestants denounced as superstitious the veneration of saints, lighting candles to find favour with God and saying a set number of prayers for penance (Momigliano, 2016). Religious beliefs are old. Many traditions predate Christianity. Like Zoroastrianism—good versus evil, Virgin birth, soul tried at death, flood and ark, covenant with God—let he who is not derivative cast the first stone.

“The best seed ground for superstition”, wrote [Gilbert Murray \(1925\)](#), “is a society in which the fortunes of men seem to bear practically no relation to their merits and efforts”. In modern times, however, the gambling complex—seeing life in terms of ‘the lucky break’—remains the philosophy of the unsuccessful ([Murray, 1925](#)).

The belief that the poor are responsible for their position in society and should blame themselves, is an idea that was circulated happily among most economic writers in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. It was their idleness and improvidence which had landed them where they were. Therefore, there was no hope for unfortunate populations to prosper, or to hope to get better. But, the clergy endeavored to console these unfortunate people with the doctrine of divine providence, stressing that there was a purpose behind everything, even if it was an unknown one. This was a gloomy philosophy, teaching men how to suffer, and stressing the impenetrability of God’s will. At its most optimistic, it promised that those who bore patiently with the evils of the world would have a chance of being rewarded in the next life ([Reeves, 1972](#)). Even after the reformation, organized religion continued to help men cope with the practical problems of daily life by providing an explanation for misfortune and a source of guidance in times of uncertainty. There were also attempts to use church for divination and supernatural healing. Some men were said to employ prayer in the pursuit of widely inappropriate evil goals. Sir Thomas Duncan observed that, among the Welsh and the Irish, it was common for thieves to pray for success before going out to steal. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, a case was recorded of a Presbyterian who prayed for two hours before engaging in a highway robbery ([Wilkinson, 1998](#); [Duncan, 2005](#)).

In old times, where there was no radio, television or newspapers, the pulpit was the most important means of direct communication with people. Setting arrangement was made by the church. For example, women were seated separated from men. And the young women from matrons, the rich sat in front, and the poor at the back ([Yahya, 1991](#)).

Religion has a unique importance worldwide as the vehicle of beliefs. Popular piety, also known as folk religion, refers to religious practices that arose and occurred outside of official religious institutions. Typically, the term is used within the context of the Catholic Church in Western Europe, and the practices were generally allowed, if not accepted. Forms of popular piety can be seen from the earliest Christian communities through the Middle Ages, and into the present day ([Yahya, 1991](#); [Wiesner, 1993](#); [Waardenburg, 1995](#)).

The belief that culture is symbolically coded and can thus be taught from one person to another means that cultures, although bounded, can change. Cultures are both predisposed to change and resistant to it. Resistance can come from habit, religion, and the integration and interdependence of cultural traits. Asian regions have a rich variety of mythical fauna. Anthropological case studies from Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Myanmar, Laos and Vietnam investigate the role

and impact of different social, political and economic dynamics in the reconfiguration of local spirit worlds in modern Southeast Asia. Their findings contribute to the re-enchantment debate by revealing that the “spirited modernity” that have emerged in the process not only embody a distinct feature of the contemporary moment, but also invite a critical rethinking of the concept of modernity itself. Japan has Nekomatas, cats with two tails and having magical powers whereas Balinese mythology has child-eating Rangdas. Hindu mythology has Pishachas haunting the cremation grounds to eat half-burnt human corpses, and Bhuts haunting the desolate places. Asia has a rich tradition of folklore and storytelling. In the Indian subcontinent, the Panchatantra, a collection of fables 200 BC, has remained a favourite for 2000 years (Yahya, 1991; Waardenburg, 1995).

Folk religions take two forms in Asia: as distinct religions (East Asia) and as popularized versions of world religions (South and Southeast Asia). Chinese Folk Religion, in its present form dating back to the Sung Dynasty (960-1279), includes elements traceable to prehistoric times (ancestor worship, shamanism, divination, a belief in ghosts, and sacrificial rituals to the spirits of sacred objects and places like relics in the West) as well as aspects of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism. Buddhist elements include believing in karma and rebirth, accepting Buddha and other bodhisattvas as gods, and using Buddhist meditational techniques. The Confucian influence is the concept of filial piety and associated practices. The numerous gods are organized into a hierarchy headed by the Jade Emperor, a deity borrowed from Taoism. Important annual rituals reflect their origin in an agrarian way of life (e.g., a harvest time festival), but have been given new or additional meaning to accord with the ancestral cult or Buddhism. The religion is not centrally organized and lacks a formal canon. Rituals take place before home altars or at temples, which have no fixed congregations. Adherents vary considerably in belief and practice. Generally, folk religionists are fatalistic yet believe that one’s luck can be affected by pleasing ancestors or gods, by locating graves and buildings in places where vital natural forces are located (geomancy), and by balancing opposing forces (yin and yang) within one’s body (Borhek & Curtis, 1975; Boyle, 1982; Yahya, 1991; Waardenburg, 1995).

In Korea, Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism have influenced the elite while a folk religion has existed among the common people that resembles Chinese Folk Religion. However, unlike the Chinese, most Korean spirit mediums are women, a vestige from a time when female deities dominated the folk religion. The Japanese have been influenced by Shintoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. Buddhism and Shintoism have separate organizations, buildings, festivals and religious specialists. Thus, one can speak of Japanese religions that individuals blend in different ways but not of a distinct Japanese folk religion (Borhek & Curtis, 1975).

Indonesia is an example of the Asian countries where syncretic religions have been dominant. On Java, nearly everyone identifies with Islam, but most people practice *Agama Jawa*, Javanese religion, or Javanese Islam. Those who practice

Javanese religion call themselves Muslims. In a somewhat similar manner, one can speak of Burmese, Sri Lankan and Thai Buddhism (Yahya, 1991; Waardenburg, 1995).

Researches argue that consideration of cultural differences is critical when applying observation techniques in cross-cultural research as well as in the applied contexts of performance appraisal and international management. Culture theory, developed in the 1980s and 1990s, sees audiences as playing an active rather than passive role in relation to mass media. One strand of research focuses on the audiences and how they interact with media, and the other strand focuses on those who produce the media, particularly the news (Griswold & Carroll, 2012).

Studies show that Christians were not divided culturally in the upper and lower strata. Their division cut across the social pyramid and was influenced by national, doctrinal and institutional factors. The Christian abolition of the interior frontiers between the learned and the vulgar had clear implications. For cultured persons, it meant the reception and acceptance of many uncritical, unsophisticated beliefs, relics and apparitions. For the vulgar and uncultivated, it meant appreciation, to the point of fanaticism, of the importance of theological controversies and consequent participation in these struggles. It is probably a modern legend that the factions of the circus, as such, had a share in the religious movements of the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries (Cuming & Baker, 1972; Boyle, 1982).

Yet in many parts of the contemporary world, spirit beliefs and practices have continued to serve a pivotal role in addressing the discontinuities and uncertainties of modern life. The myriad ways in which devotees engaged the spirit world showed the tremendous creative potential of these practices and their innate adaptability to changing times and circumstances (Yahya, 1991; Waardenburg, 1995).

In the Western sphere, one aspect of popular beliefs has received extensive examination. The overwhelming emphasis has been on “texts” cover almost all from romance to block-buster movies and serial box premiums. The purpose of these studies was serving the commercial and industrial revolution. It covers also, specific economic, technological, social and cultural factors that account for its production. Furthermore, in the Western sphere, rarely-acknowledged or alone-analyzed the complexity of the actors-consumer’s role. The creating and reworking of society’s master narratives and dominant symbols advanced studies outside the given “texts” (Yahya, 1991; Gohar, 2011).

French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu’s (1977) influential model of society and social relations has its roots in Marxist theories of class and conflict. Bourdieu (1977) characterizes social relations in the context of what he calls the field, defined as a competitive system of social relations functioning according to its own specific logic or rules. The field is the site of struggle for power between the dominant and subordinate classes. It is within the field that legitimacy—a key aspect defining the dominant class—is conferred or withdrawn (Bourdieu, 1977;

Boyle, 1982; Bourdieu & Distinction, 1984).

Bourdieu's (1977) theory of practice is practical rather than discursive, embodied as well as cognitive and durable though adaptive. A valid concern that sets the agenda in Bourdieu's (1977) theory of practice is how action follows regular statistical patterns without the product of accordance to rules, norms and/or conscious intention. To explain this concern, Bourdieu (1977) explains habitus and field. Habitus explains the mutually penetrating realities of individual subjectivity and societal objectivity after the function of social construction. It is employed to transcend the subjective and objective dichotomy (Bourdieu, 1977; Borhek & Curtis, 1975; Bourdieu & Distinction, 1984).

Griswold outlined another sociological approach to cultural change. He points out that it may seem as though culture comes from individuals—which, for certain elements of cultural change, is true—but there is also the larger, collective and long-lasting culture that cannot have been the creation of single individuals for it predates and post-dates individual humans and contributors to culture. The author presents a sociological perspective to address this conflict (Griswold & Carroll, 2012).

City and village residents have different views of popular beliefs. Because distance makes people strange somewhat, and therefore, the value of something is determined by the distance from its actor. In "The Stranger", Simmel discusses how if a person is too close to the actor, they are not considered a stranger, but if they are too far, they would no longer be a part of a group. The particular distance from a group allows a person to have objective relationships with different group members (Ritzer, 2007).

The cultural industries create tastes and trends of the masses, so it creates awareness of false needs. Bucca (2016) concludes that Hip-Hop music or Rap in Palestine is not only a popular culture that presents mere entertainment but rather contains resistance values carried by the Palestinian rappers to defend the Palestinians. The resistance values in the lyrics of the song are the resistance that represents the Palestinians. The resistance values carried in the lyrics of Rap songs had their influences in the world both nationally and internationally (Bucca, 2016).

Simmel's (1908) concept of distance comes into play. Simmel identifies a stranger as a person that is far away and close at the same time. In his words, "[t]he Stranger is close to us, insofar as we feel between him and ourselves common features of a national, social, occupational, or generally human, nature. He is far from us, insofar as these common features extend beyond him or us, and connect us only because they connect a great many people" (Levine, 1977).

More generally, Simmel (1908) observes that because of their peculiar position in the group, strangers often carry out special tasks that the other members of the group are either incapable or unwilling to carry out. For example, especially in pre-modern societies, most strangers made a living from trade, which was often viewed as an unpleasant activity by "native" members of those societies. In

some societies, they were also employed as arbitrators and judges, because they were expected to treat rival factions in society with an impartial attitude (Karakayali, 2003).

Akers (1985) studied deviant behavior: a social learning approach. It is an essential reader that summarizes Akers's social learning theory, its expansion from Sutherland, and the empirical support for this model. Akers (1996) had another study entitled "Is differential association/social learning cultural deviance theory?". It's essential discussion on the critique that socialization is perfectly successful in social learning theory, thus making culture the cause of crime. Akers argues that this is a misinterpretation of social learning and clarifies the incorporation of cultural elements into this theory. Akers has a third study entitled "Social learning and social structure: A general theory of crime and deviance" (Akers, 1998). It was an essential work presenting Akers's expanded macro-level model of social learning theory, which argues that the influence of social structural characteristics is mediated by the social learning process.

Akers and Jensen (2006) in their empirical status of social learning theory of crime and deviance: The past, present, and future present a summary of the body of social learning research, including support for and critiques of this theory as well as future areas of exploration. In 2009, Akers and Sellers (2009) wrote their "Criminological theories: Introduction, evaluation, and application" which was an extensive examination of criminological theory, with some emphasis on social learning and differential association theories (Hirschi, 1996).

Adler and Adler (2008) report in their research, "Constructions of deviance: Social power, context, and interaction", a comprehensive edited volume with detailed examinations of cultural theories and empirical research appropriate for all levels of study. This work is an excellent reader for theory and general deviance classes.

Cullen and Agnew (2006) in their "Criminological theory: Past to present: essential readings" present a comprehensive edited volume with fundamental readings in criminological research, including various cultural theories. Ferrell et al. (2004) in "Cultural criminology unleashed" give a comprehensive read that provides important international context to the application of cultural theories of crime. Lee et al. (2004) in their social learning and structural factors in adolescent substance use explore the social learning process using structural equation modeling. They found that social learning measures mediated the effects of gender, class, age, family structure, and community size on adolescent substance use. Evitar Zerubavel's (1981), *Sociology of Time, Hidden Rhythms*, is particularly useful in considering the temporal context, as it systematically explores and analyzes the "subtle and diverse significance of time in organizing our social relationships and lives". Collins (1989) on uncommon cultures for example, states that "there are so many conflicting modes of representation and divergent ideological positions that any suggestion that we are all part of the same 'popular culture' is ludicrous" (Zerubavel, 1981; Collins, 1989).

More than other aspects of popular beliefs studies, the actors demand serious



attention. Equally clearly, scholars are divided between studying texts and studying the audience who perceive the beliefs. Ideally, studies should neither ignore the texts' implied actors nor its actual actors. Elizabeth Bird (1992) in her balanced model, she very generally describes her research as follows:

“In my own research as supermarket tabloids, I began with immersion in the papers themselves, reading them for two years, and interviewing writers and editors before getting to the audience. My research was then in two steps. First, soliciting letters from readers. I asked them to write anything about themselves that they cared to share in addition to information about the tabloids. I received life histories, personal descriptions and discussion of family problems, all of which helped me develop a perception of lives apart from tabloids. Later, when it came to interviewing, I had learned the right words to use, and had some conception of the people I was talking to. During the interview, I tried to conceive the interaction as a collaborative dialogue, more conversation than interview” (Bird, 1992).

Bird's ethnographical model is indeed balanced and that most scholars could adopt. To some extent, researchers of popular beliefs have simply applied a wider range of materials to historical and critical methods of tradition such popular forms, but remains the analysis of popular beliefs is somewhat different from that of the fine arts; Cultural themes used in the literature such as magic, marriage, philosophic terms as spiritual themes. The analysis of cultural, social or medical technological themes is certainly a tried and true method of dealing with popular beliefs. Researchers are free to use these themes according to the presence or absence of these themes in which they are interested despite the vagueness of the concept “theme” and what to include in certain study. At the end, a theme turns out to be any prominent element or characteristic of a group of beliefs perceived by the society which has relevance to the social and cultural problems such as signs of good or bad, or signs for optimistic or pessimistic perceptions.

Finally, the authors explain two concepts related to popular beliefs in terms of conformity or deviation from social mainstream cultures. As we know, almost all cultures, contain a mixture of two kinds of elements: conventions and inventions. Conventions are elements which are known to both the creator and the people beforehand, they consist of things like folklore, plots, beliefs, community devices, and thereof.

Inventions, on the other hand, are elements which are uniquely imagined by the creator such as a new kind of characters, ideas or linguistic forms. Difficulty of distinguishing between the conventions and inventions is clear from the many elements that lie somewhat along the continuum between the two poles. But to overcome this difficulty, familiarity with a group of literary works or actions or perceptions, will usually soon reveal what the major conceptions are and therefore, what in the case of the individual theme is unique to the creator.

However, both conventions and inventions have quite different cultural func-

tions. Conventions represent familiar shared images and meanings as they assert an ongoing continuity of values; inventions confront us with the very perception or meaning which we have no knowledge before. Both concepts remain temporary in any culture, in which conventions help maintain a culture's stability while inventions help culture to respond to changing circumstances and provide new information about the world (Cuming & Baker, 1972).

The rise of violent groups in the Middle East can be interpreted in terms of the conventions and inventions concepts. The disability to cope with inventions, ideas diffusion or technologies, or communication or mass media, is translated into searching for new ways to find narrow solutions as violence.

On the individual level, if one does not encounter a large number of conventions of analyzed experiences and situations, the strain on one's sense of continuity and identity will lead to great tensions and even to a neurotic breakdown. Even though without new information about the world, the individual will be increasingly unable to cope with it, and will withdraw behind a barrier.

#### **4. Purpose and Scope**

Cultural beliefs in the Arab and Muslim world, like any other culture, and popular beliefs concept is a tradition and heritage of past Arab and Muslim world history, living side by side, generation after generation. The Arab culture in general, and Palestinian culture in particular, has popular beliefs, folklore traditions, superstitions and rituals that are in common and should be studied empirically.

The Palestinian people belong to the Arab ancestors and the Muslim faith, they are part of Arab and Islamic cultures. Studying popular beliefs among the Palestinian people must involve the wide screen of Islamic faith and culture stretched from Indonesia to the Atlantic Ocean. It is necessary to expand the description of the Arab and Muslim world, because much of the popular beliefs among the Palestinian people under study are in common with all Arab countries.

The main purpose of this study is to study aspects of popular beliefs in the Palestinian society, to find out the main popular beliefs practices among Palestinians, and explore the demography breakdown over popular beliefs practices among Palestinians, with the aim of identifying any statistically significant differences in terms of the contextual variables selected for the study, which include age, gender, religion, marital status, place of residence, level of education, and the degree of religiosity.

This study came in view of the novelty of the topic, and the lack of previous literature in the Palestinian society. The study is considered one of the leading studies that deal with the popular beliefs practices among Palestinians empirically. The study will be an important reference for those interested in the issue of popular beliefs practices in general and the Palestinians' in particular, and it is expected that the findings would add new scientific knowledge to its field.

## 5. Definition of Terms

Concepts included in this study are: Culture, Popular beliefs, Superstitious witchcraft beliefs, Folklore and Religious Piety.

**Culture:** culture is “the shared patterns of behaviors and interactions, cognitive constructs, and affective understanding that are learned through a process of socialization. These shared patterns identify the members of a culture group while also distinguishing those of another group” (Anderson & Taylor, 2011; Yahya, 2012). The literature in sociology and anthropology mentions other definitions as well. For instance, “most social scientists today view culture as consisting primarily of the symbolic, ideational, and intangible aspects of human societies. The essence of a culture is not its artifacts, tools, or other tangible cultural elements but how the members of the group interpret, use, and perceive them. It is the values, symbols, interpretations, and perspectives that distinguish one people from another in modernized societies; it is not material objects and other tangible aspects of human societies. People within a culture usually interpret the meaning of symbols, artifacts, and behaviors in the same or in similar ways” (Anderson & Taylor, 2011; Yahya, 2012).

**Popular beliefs:** is a concept that represents people’s perception of good or bad beliefs usually handed down to children from parents and grandparents, to interpret events in people’s lives, and eventually become an obsession to preoccupy people’s optimism and joy at times, fear and pessimism altogether, under the influence of their cases psychologically and socially to interpret these behaviors as events will take place on the basis of intellectual background of years in memory, and passed on the ideas that are still related to some of those beliefs in spite of scientific progress and openness to the world through modern means of communication, although some of those beliefs have changed as a result of these changes in contemporary society (Bethell, 1972; Cuming & Baker, 1972; Borhek & Curtis, 1975; Wilkinson, 1998; Anderson & Taylor, 2011; Yahya, 2012).

**Superstitious witchcraft beliefs:** According to its popular meaning, superstitious witchcraft beliefs refer to the notion that a ritual or activity can have a positive or negative impact on the events in one’s life. No empirical evidence exists to support a superstitious belief, and a pejorative use of the phrase emphasizes its irrationality. Attempts to define and explain superstitious beliefs have appeared throughout Western history, especially in the areas of religion, psychology and anthropology. However, in Eastern cultures, superstitious beliefs may be found but mostly they are dependent on religious beliefs (Anderson & Taylor, 2011; Yahya, 2012).

The superstitious witchcraft beliefs are an irrational belief usually founded on ignorance or fear. Consequently, the notion, act or ritual derived from such a belief is a superstition. Such a belief is never based on reason; it may be in continuity since decades or centuries past because nobody ever questioned the credibility or the basis of such a belief (Borhek & Curtis, 1975).

**Folklore:** Anthropologists study superstitious belief as a form of folklore,

which is a collection of traditions within a culture, usually passed along orally. Anthropologists prefer the use of the terms “folk belief,” “popular belief,” or “folk science” because of the frequent disparaging uses of the term superstition, according to “American Folklore: An Encyclopaedia” (Bethell, 1972; Cuming & Baker, 1972; Yahya, 1991; Georges & Jones, 1995).

Folklore consists of legends, music, oral history, proverbs, jokes, popular beliefs, fairy tales, stories, tall tales, and customs included in the traditions of a culture, subculture, or group. It also includes the set of practices through which those expressive genres are shared. The study of folklore is sometimes called folkloristics, and people who study folklore are sometimes referred to as folklorists. The English antiquarian William Thoms introduced the word “folklore” in a letter published in the London journal *The Athenaeum* in 1846 (Georges & Jones, 1995). In usage, there is a continuum between folklore and mythology. Stith Thompson (1885-1976) made a major attempt to index the motifs of both folklore and mythology, providing an outline for classifying new motifs within which scholars can keep track of all older motifs (Bethell, 1972; Borhek & Curtis, 1975; Yahya, 1991; Georges & Jones, 1995).

Folklore can be divided into four areas of study: artifacts, such as voodoo dolls; describable and transmissible entities such as oral tradition; culture; and behavior or rituals. These areas do not stand alone; however, a particular item or element may often fit into more than one of these areas. Folklorist William Bascom states that folklore has many cultural aspects, such as allowing for escape from societal consequences. In addition, folklore can serve to validate a culture in what is called romantic nationalism as well as transmit a culture’s morals and values. Folklore can also be the root of many cultural types of music. Country, blues and bluegrass all originate from American folklore. Examples of artists who have used folkloric themes in their music would be: Bill Monroe, Flatt and Scruggs, Old Crow Medicine Show, Jim Croce, and many others. Folklore can moreover be used to assert social pressures, or relieve them, for example in the case of humor and carnival. Additionally, folklorists study medical, supernatural, religious and political belief systems as an essential, often unspoken, part of expressive culture (Borhek & Curtis, 1975; Yahya, 1991, 1992; Georges & Jones, 1995).

**Religious Piety:** Sociologists study religiosity of individuals, groups and societies. Religiosity is the intensity and consistence of practice of a person’s (or group’s) faith. Sociologists measure religiosity by asking individuals about their religious beliefs, on a scale of five or ten degrees, their membership in religious organizations, and attendance at religious services as well as perceptions on inventions and secular issues (Boyle, 1982; Yahya, 1991, 1992).

## 6. Hypotheses

The study proposed the following hypotheses:

- 1) There are no statistically significant differences at  $\alpha \leq 0.05$  in the popular belief practices among Palestinians according to gender.

- 2) There are no statistically significant differences at  $\alpha \leq 0.05$  in the popular belief practices among Palestinians according to religion.
- 3) There are no statistically significant differences at  $\alpha \leq 0.05$  in the popular belief practices among Palestinians according to marital status.
- 4) There are no statistically significant differences at  $\alpha \leq 0.05$  in the popular belief practices among Palestinians according to place of residence.
- 5) There are no statistically significant differences at  $\alpha \leq 0.05$  in the popular belief practices among Palestinians according to level of education.
- 6) There is no statistically significant correlation at  $\alpha \leq 0.05$  between age and the popular belief practices among Palestinians.
- 7) There is no statistically significant correlation at  $\alpha \leq 0.05$  between degree of religiosity and the popular belief practices among Palestinians.

## 7. Methodology and Design

### 7.1. Approach

The current study used a quantitative approach using a questionnaire that is appropriate to the exploratory nature of the research.

### 7.2. Population and Sampling

The target population consisted of Palestinians, who were 18 years of age or older in the West Bank during the year 2022, which included 781,864 individuals, 394,730 of whom were males and 387,134 females (Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2022).

The sample was composed of 1,066 participants stratifiedly-selected, according to their gender. The sample size was calculated using the sampling web of <http://www.surveysystem.com/sscalc.htm>, the Sample Size Calculator (2022), with a margin error of 3%, as indicated in **Table 1**.

### 7.3. Sample Socio-Demographic Characteristics

The demographic breakdown parameters of the sample participants were age, gender, religion, marital status, place of residence, educational level and religiosity. In total, 1066 Palestinians from the West Bank participated in the study. Respondents were between 18 and 75 years of age ( $M = 30.15$ ,  $SD = 12.70$ ); and more than half (59.7%) were married. Males represented 50.6% of the participants while the remaining 49.4% were females (almost 1:1 ratio of male to female), and the vast majority (90%) were Muslims. A total of 41.6% of the participants were from rural areas, 37% from urban areas, and the remaining 21.5% were

**Table 1.** Distribution of the study population and sample by gender.

Gender	Population	Sample
Males	687,821	539
Females	673,244	527
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,361,065</b>	<b>1066</b>

from refugee camps. The majority of the respondents were well-educated, such that 56.5% had a college or undergraduate degree, and their religiosity was rather high (42.8%) compared to 49.7% of moderate religiosity, while the remaining 7.5% were not religious.

#### **7.4. Instrumentation**

Popular beliefs practices among Palestinians were evaluated using an index of a 39-item scale, developed by the researchers. A 5-point Likert scale (ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree) was used to assess the popular beliefs practices among the sampled population. The survey was conducted through face-to-face interviews in the West Bank. The sampling survey instrument sought background information about the participants which included age, gender, religion, marital status, place of residence, level of education and the degree of religiosity.

##### **7.4.1. Instrument Validity**

The validation of the instrument proceeded in two distinct phases. The initial phase involved a small focus group session ( $N = 10$ ); while the second phase involved the implementation of a pilot study ( $N = 40$ ) to validate the survey using exploratory factor analysis. Factor loading for all items exceeded 0.75 (0.76 to 0.84), which indicated that these items were suitable in assessing every item of the popular beliefs practices among Palestinians.

##### **7.4.2. Instrument Reliability**

The reliability was tested using the Cronbach's Alpha and Guttman Split-Half Coefficients to ascertain the reliability and consistency of the survey. The Cronbach's Alpha and Guttman Split-Half Coefficients for the survey instrument were 0.92 and 0.90, respectively, indicating excellent reliability and consistency.

#### **7.5. Data Analysis**

The questionnaire items were rated on a 1 - 5 Likert scale (1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree) whereby the highest score indicated a high practice of popular beliefs. Descriptive statistics gauged the popular beliefs practices among the sampled population. The following statistical techniques were measured: Regression, T. test, One-way analysis of variance, Tukey test, Cronbach's Alpha, Guttman Split-Half Coefficients and Factor Analysis using SPSS.

### **8. Findings**

The mean score of the popular beliefs practices among Palestinians as reported by the sampled participants was moderate ( $M 3.58$ ,  $SD 0.65$ ). About three quarters of the participants (71.6%) experienced a moderate level of popular beliefs practices in their daily life.

Furthermore, the findings identified the types of popular beliefs and practices as reported by the participants, ranked in a descending order as follows: "I think

of the Jinn existence in our world” (M 4.34, SD 0.98), “Jinn dwell in deserted places” (M 4.27, SD 1.08), “Feeding mouth makes revenge away” (M 4.23, SD 1.10), “It is not desirable to pour water on the floor at night” (M 3.98, SD 1.15), “Spilling coffee is a good sign” (M 3.94, SD 1.28), and “Left ear ringing is a bad sign” (M 3.90, SD 1.25).

Additionally, Palestinians believed that “seeing a black cat is a sign of evil” (M 3.55, SD 1.35), “I feel pessimistic using the left hand” (M 3.46, SD 1.36), “Album and ravens are omen birds” (M 3.42, SD 1.44), “Frequent laughter is a harbinger of evil” (M 3.37, SD 1.40), “Blue bead put on the door of the house will protect from envy” (M 3.29, SD 1.43), “Knocking on wood pushes envy away” (M 3.23, SD 1.49), “Breaking the jar prevents the return of someone” (M 3.22, SD 1.32), “Horseshoe is a good sign” (M 3.14, SD 1.53), “I believe that the Omen is true” (M 2.94, SD 1.55), and “Reading a cup of coffee shall detect the future” (M 2.93, SD 1.43).

The study explored the demographic breakdown over popular belief practices among Palestinians with the aim of identifying any differences. Findings showed that religion, marital status and the place of residence do not indicate any statistically significant differences. However, it was found that gender, educational level, age and the degree of religiosity were statistically significant variables. In relation to gender, the differences were in favor of the females (M 3.65, SD 0.59) compared to (M 3.51, SD 0.69) for the males: T. test value was ( $-3.416$ ,  $P = 0.001$ ).

As for the educational level, the differences favored the less-educated participants (M 3.65, SD 0.66) compared to the well-educated participants (M 3.41, SD 0.47): F-value was ( $8.489$ ,  $P = 0.000$ ).

Finally, the study findings indicated that there was a statistically significant positive correlation between age and popular belief practices among Palestinians, however, a statistically significant inverse correlation was found between the degree of religiosity and popular belief practices among Palestinians. Beta-value was ( $0.142$ ,  $P = 0.000$ ) and ( $-0.109$ ,  $P = 0.000$ ), respectively.

## 9. Discussion

The findings of the study revealed that Palestinians practice popular beliefs to a moderate level in their daily life. Popular beliefs legacy is handed down to children from one generation to another. Cultural beliefs in the Arab and Muslim world, like any other culture, and the popular beliefs concept is a tradition and heritage of past Arab and Muslim world history, living side by side, and generation after generation. The Arab culture in general, and Palestinian culture in particular, has common popular beliefs, folklore traditions, superstitions and rituals (Yahya, 1991).

The Palestinian people belong to Arab ancestors and the Muslim faith. They are part of Arab and Islamic cultures. Besides, social loyalty is of great importance in Arab culture. Family is one of the most important aspects of Arab so-



ciety. While self-reliance, individuality and responsibility are taught by Arabic parents to their children, family loyalty is the greatest lesson taught in Arab families (Yahya, 1991; Banat, 2010).

Furthermore, the Palestinian family has played and continues to play a distinguished role in preserving the social, cultural, political and economic identity in the Palestinian society, especially if one looks at the difficult circumstances and the great events that the Palestinian community has been exposed to for more than 74 years, and prior to that as well, in terms of family gathering around the epicenter of the land (Yahya, 1991; Banat et al., 2021b; Banat et al., 2022). Therefore, popular belief practices that culture is symbolically coded and can thus be taught from one person to another is still memorized in the Palestinian society.

The study results showed that Palestinian females scored a higher level of popular beliefs practices than their male counterparts. These results reflect the patriarchal ideology which is deeply rooted in the Palestinian society, where the notions of father and brother are prevalent. The Palestinian culture seeks to direct males towards an affirmation of masculine qualities like manhood, chivalry, bravery, gallantry, daring and stamina. On the other hand, it stresses directing females towards feminism, decency, decorum, virginity, love of children, home economics and stability (Barakat, 1993; Muhawi & Kana'na, 2001; Banat & Rimawi, 2014; Banat, 2010, 2014, 2015, 2019a, 2019b, Banat & Dayyeh, 2019; Banat et al., 2021b).

That is in addition to the process of socialization in the Palestinian family that is based on discrimination on the basis of gender, which allows a greater margin for males compared to females, in terms of the nature of social positions and roles, freedom, participation in decision-making, responsibility, broad participation in the labor market and the development of capabilities and skills, which in turn, negatively affects the development of their personalities and their self-confidence, which would agitate their stability, thereby increasing their popular belief practices as a defense mechanism in their daily life (Banat, 2010; Banat et al., 2021a; Banat et al., 2022).

Furthermore, the study findings indicated that less-educated participants scored a higher level of popular belief practices than the well-educated ones. There is no doubt that education constitutes a turning point and an important stage in the formation and development of one's personality, not to mention the pivotal role that higher education plays in the betterment of developing societies, which results in a societal return that far exceeds economic accounts. Higher education plays a pivotal role in shaping the most advanced types of human capital. Higher education institutions are the ones that establish the societal wealth of advanced knowledge and capabilities, that is, the highest levels of human capital, which are the mainstay of progress in the current century (Firjani, 1998: p. 3; Banat & Rimawi, 2014; Banat et al., 2022). This consequently contributes to decreasing the participants' popular belief practices as a defense mechanism in their daily life (Banat et al., 2021a).

Additionally, popular belief practices increase substantially among elderly participants. In the era of globalization and technology, perhaps younger participants direct more cognitive effort to maintain positive emotions and avoid negative ones. However, the senior participants face greater social, emotional responsibilities toward their families' health and protection under the difficult living conditions prevalent in the Palestinian society and the new challenges, which would agitate the stability of their families and increase the popular beliefs practices as a defense mechanism in their daily life (Banat, 2019b, 2019c; Banat et al., 2021a; Yan et al., 2021).

Finally, popular belief practices decrease substantially among religious participants. This result could be linked to the fact that commitment to religion in the Palestinian family occupies a large space in its social, intellectual and emotional life. It is normal that the religious creed is respected by all members of Palestinian society. This is due to the concentrated efforts which the parents exert in bringing up their members (Banat, 2010; Banat et al., 2021b).

In fact, religion as a mediator can influence mental procedures and the evaluation of daily events. Thus, some researchers believe that confronting stress and social situations are facilitated via religious beliefs as a source of comfort (Mahoney et al., 2001; Yeganeh & Shaikhmahmoodi, 2013). Additionally, religious orientation improves mental health and provides a suitable condition for answering basic questions of humans such as identity and choosing a certain life style in order to attain perfection contributing to adjustment and psychological well-being. In short, religious commitment increases the level of self-confidence, adjustment and self-esteem, which are basic factors of mental health, psychological well-being, and life satisfaction, that consequently decreases the popular belief practices as a defense mechanism in the participants' daily life (Allport, 1950, 1963; Banat et al., 2021a).

In this regards, Yahya (1991) indicated that the Islamic society is based on a positive recognition of the sacred; religion is inconvertibly of the highest value in almost all Muslim populations. This often creates difficulties in adjusting to the secular ends-means criteria. Innovation includes inventions as a source of popular cultural beliefs.

Moreover, the contemporary Muslim world has many aspects of secular characteristics in social, political and economic life. General patterns of change that indicate such phenomena are evident. For example, expanding urban areas and factory labor; the increase in communication, education, and literacy; and the advent of national states backed by a rationalist feeling that spread from the educated elite to the masses. Until recently those masses had remained largely outside the political society. Furthermore, there is a growing equality of women and the loosening of paternal authority as well as an application of Western, secular legal codes and an increased use of science and technology in agriculture, industry and healthcare (Yahya, 1991: p. 14), which consequently decreases the popular belief practices as a defense mechanism in the participants' daily life.

## 10. Conclusion and Recommendation

The study indicated that Palestinians practice popular beliefs to a moderate level. Almost, three quarters of the participants (71.6%) experienced a moderate level of popular belief practices in their daily life. Gender, educational level, age and the degree of religiosity were associated factors with popular belief practices. These findings confirm the value of popular belief practices in the Palestinian Arab Muslim society, that culture is symbolically coded and can thus be taught from one generation to another, and is still memorized in the Palestinian society. Understanding the Palestinian cultural framework with its original popular beliefs, far from any mythical issues is recommended, the necessity of reviving the bright popular beliefs in Palestinian culture, raising the Palestinian generations to know their popular beliefs, designing a guide for the popular beliefs that common in Palestinian society, and given the popular beliefs the utmost importance in the Palestinian curriculum.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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