

PANEL IV

Stitches without Meaning



As homes are bulldozed and destroyed, so too are the traditions of centuries. The meaning system of Palestinian embroidery which once identified people from each region, village and town and indicated the status of the person, is buried in the rubble. What was once handed down from generation to generation with pride has been torn apart with the disintegration of Palestinian society which existed for centuries before 1948. Now the language of the art struggles to survive in the refugee workshops where women painstakingly execute remnants of former patterns for sale to support their families. Today, the patterns worn by the women, increasingly reflect the Palestinian intifada rather than the heritage of their origins and so the meanings of the stitches so important to their culture is in danger of disappearing forever.

PANEL V

Documents without Rights

'There is no such thing as Palestinians' were Golda Meier's words in 1960 - words meant to negate the existence of a whole people, their identity and heritage. But, official documents and papers, old passports, identity cards and former currency, give the lie to these false words. The Palestinians were not nomads wandering in from the desert to a *terra nullius*. They formed a properly functioning society – certainly for 400 years under the rule of the Ottoman Empire and then during the British Mandate – but nevertheless, a Palestinian society with political and economic structures and an enormously rich cultural heritage. There were schools, universities, hospitals, government departments, businesses and banks. The documents many still carry from before 1948, are testament to the nationality they had and what overnight was suddenly not recognised. Today, their identity cards are scrutinised at every Israeli checkpoint and they must suffer the humiliation of interminable queues and being regarded as aliens in their own land. The rights once afforded them by documents they still carry are now invalid with the stroke of a foreign pen. In effect, they are prisoners both inside and outside their land, powerless against the political machinations of those who refuse to recognise the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people in and to their own land.

