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Studying American Studies in a Hostile Environment

In October 2003, the report by the State Department's Advisory Group on Public Diplomacy for the Arab and Muslim world offered valuable suggestions for how the United States could improve its ailing image in the Arab world, in an objective and balance manner. One of its recommendations was to establish an American-sponsored study centers or university programs or libraries. This effort receives more urgency when one considers the anti-American trend in Palestine where there is lack of trust and understanding among Palestinians of US policies. Anti-Americanism is widely spread within the Palestinian community. As a result, no other major would raise questions of identity and loyalty in Palestine as American Studies would. Like any other nation that view itself as victimized, the Palestinians have a simple view of the world; to them, it is divided into two camps; those who support their cause, and those who support Israel. The United States support Israel, thus it is perceived in the enemy camp. Thus, Palestinians look at the American Studies program at al-Quds University with suspicion and view its founder as having fallen under American spell. Under such conditions, what lures a Palestinian to study a major that would put him/her under suspicion of being unloyal to the Palestinian cause? What motivates a Palestinian join a major in which his/her peers would view him/her as having fallen under American hegemony? What job opportunity would such a major provide? Is such a program sustainable? The question "why do we study American studies" is problematic and carries more connotations and poses more challenge to a Palestinian than it does to any student of other nationality. This paper will examine the identity crisis of the Palestinians joining American studies programs and the peer pressures they are exposed to. The methodology employed in this paper will be interviews and questionnaires.