

# Education as Resistance: Detention of Palestinian University Students under Israeli Occupation and Palestinian Political-Cultural Responses

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# INTRODUCTION

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## *PREFACE*

As a multiracial Arab American growing up in a predominantly Jewish neighborhood on Long Island, New York, my life represented an interesting and at times troubling intersection between conflicting perspectives on the situation in Israel/Palestine. Not content with the dueling versions of rhetoric that was my understanding of the conflict, I set out in my college career to learn more for myself. To that end, I visited Israel/Palestine on an educational trip in the winter of 2009. The short trip, though incredibly informative, left me with more questions and a drive to learn and contribute to peace in whatever way I could. Accordingly, I returned to the West Bank for an internship with the Right to Education Campaign (R2E), a human rights organization dedicated to advocating Palestinian access to higher education, in the summer of 2010. It was then that I became intrigued with the potential for liberation through education in occupied Palestine. This thesis is thus largely a product of my experiences that summer.

## *RESEARCH QUESTION*

Throughout Palestinian history, education has always been a site of political struggle against occupation and oppression. From student-led strikes to the development of the Palestinian university system, education—particularly higher education—has proved itself to be an integral means of resistance. So true is this, in fact, that the very

concept of Palestinian liberation is intimately tied to cultural notions of the importance of education.

This thesis explores the detention of Palestinian university students involved (or perceived to be involved) with political life under Israeli occupation. I argue that such detentions both shape and reflect the cultural stance that education is a legitimate form of political resistance to occupation. In other words, the targeting of academically and politically empowered students results in a cycle of cultural reimagining of education as a legitimate and valued tool of non-violent resistance, followed by yet more repressive measures taken to limit this resistance. Thus, this research demonstrates three main ideas: (a) that the Israeli occupation of Palestine presents significant, human rights-violating obstacles to Palestinian access to education, specifically through the detention of university students; (b) that these obstacles shape Palestinian political and cultural thought and action; and finally, (c) that both Israel's occupation and Palestinian society are therefore dynamic forces that are continually defining and redefining each other—i.e., the obstacles placed on education politicize the cultural value placed on education, leading Israeli forces to establish more obstacles to education access in order to strategically maintain the status quo of the occupation.

## *METHODS*

This research is a case study procedure with a particular focus on Palestinian higher education under Israeli occupation. I use historical data to convey the extent of the repression of Palestinians' rights that has occurred throughout history in order to provide

a context for understanding Palestinian resistance. Broader resistance to occupation provides the setting within which Israeli targeting of students and their resistance is to be understood. Resistance is notable for two main reasons: firstly, how students and universities have always been integral to its development, and even at its forefront; and secondly, how its cultural meaning has shifted over time, making it a popularized activity in which any ordinary citizen can (and should) participate.

Next, my focus on the obstacles to education under Israeli occupation, specifically, the detention of university students, will show how the Israeli government seeks to suppress even non-violent resistance and how Palestinians exercise choice in countering Israeli initiatives. Understanding the historical progression of educational oppression in the course of the Israeli occupation of Palestine will show how these restrictions on education and manifestations of pro-education political resistance have evolved over time. In addition to these documentary sources, my thesis will rest on contemporary data compiled from human rights organizations, demonstrating the frequency of Israeli abuses of Palestinians' right to education and other obstacles to education Palestinians face.

The research will show how education is a domain of struggle in the relationship between repression and resistance. Palestinians have identified education as a useful tool in their liberation struggle. Education is empowering, creating opportunities and potential; an educated class is more likely to bring about the political changes it wants—like ending an occupation—than are street kids armed with stones and Molotov cocktails. Israel, in turn, is also aware of this truth, rightly identifying Palestinian empowerment as

a threat that would need to be reduced if not altogether eliminated. For this reason, the trends of Palestinian encouragement of education and Israeli repression thereof reinforce one another.

### *LITERATURE REVIEW*

The body of research which exists relating to the topics at hand—obstacles placed on Palestinian education under Israeli occupation, the detention of Palestinian university students, Palestinian non-violent resistance to occupation, and the general cultural conception of education as a form of resistance in Palestinian society—while extensive, is in many ways incomplete. While much has been written on the cultures of violence that exist in Palestinian society, less research has been conducted into the culture of resistance of the non-violent variety so prevalent throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT), though it is a huge aspect of social and political discourse therein.

Furthermore, resistance is often conceived as being a usually illegal action undertaken separately and distinctly from everyday life. Yet it is the premise of this research that within Palestine and its aforementioned culture of resistance, resistance, though no less heroic, can take on more ordinary forms—e.g., anything that opposes or undermines the occupation or Israeli authority in any way. Considering the breadth of Israeli suppressions on Palestinian rights and freedoms, this list is similarly exhaustive. “To exist is to resist and to resist is to exist,” Palestinians often say. For them, resistance is not limited to armed struggle or nonviolent civil disobedience; it is also found in the simplicity of surviving under a regime whose every action seems to discourage it, as is

the logic behind Sara Roy's theory of de-development—that the Israeli regime has deliberately impeded and weakened Palestinian economic and social growth—or Saleh Abdel Jawad's theory of sociocide, which asserts that the goal of the Israeli occupation is to make life so unbearable for the Palestinians, who present a demographic threat to the existence of Israel as a Jewish state, that they subsequently choose to leave. For that reason, though many Palestine scholars seem to overlook it, education is both a legitimate and popular form of resistance, and one that receives special cultural praise. This is in part evidenced by the extent to which the Israeli authorities suppress education throughout the OPT, and how, precisely because it is suppressed, it is considered a form of resistance.

Consider Edward Said's writings; though a prolific author renowned for his Palestine scholarship, Said, in all his emphasis on the importance of education to the development of a free Palestine, often fails to appreciate the cultural value it already holds within Palestinian society. His invocation of Jawad's theory of sociocide in his article "Occupation is the Atrocity" disregards the risk to an occupation inherent to a diaspora.<sup>1</sup> An educated Palestinian who leaves Palestine can become an Edward Said, an intellectual working to undermine Israeli authority and its occupation. Israel, in fact, in addition to trying to force Palestinians to leave, seeks also to control and confine those who stay, as this is the only way to maintain power.

Similarly, in his landmark work *Palestinian National Identity: the Construction of Modern National Consciousness*, Palestine scholar Rashid Khalidi downplays student

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<sup>1</sup> Edward W. Said, "Occupation is the Atrocity," in *From Oslo to Iraq and the Road Map: Essays*, ed. the Estate of Edward Said (New York: Pantheon Books, 2004), 94.



activism and, in speaking about the development of a distinct national identity, understandably avoids portraying it as existing merely in opposition to Israeli national identity: Palestine and Palestinians existed before the creation of the Israeli state in 1948 and thus should not be defined solely in contrast to it. In other words, national identity is not formed simply through interactions with the “other,” even if that other is particularly repressive.<sup>2</sup> Yet in so doing, he deemphasizes the cultural and political importance of resistance—a concept deeply revered among a people who have been occupied, partitioned, expelled, etc. throughout their history. Moreover, when he does discuss resistance, particularly the role education plays therein, he sees education as merely a *vehicle* to resistance, rather than a legitimate form of resistance in and of itself.

These two intellectuals are not alone in underestimating or altogether overlooking the importance of resistance or the role education plays therein. Ghada Karmi limits her discussion of obstacles to education to the impact of the wall (separation barrier). *Haaretz* journalist Amira Hass, in writing extensively on the issue of forcible closure in Palestinian society, focuses mainly on university closure as the major barrier to education access, overlooking the obstacles that exist even when the universities are open. Even the great documentarian of non-violent resistance Gene Sharp focuses too narrowly on organized resistance movements, falling short of acknowledging that the collective participation in an ordinary (and repressed) act—e.g., getting an education—can be resistance as well. The goal of this thesis, then, in being informed by the work of others,

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<sup>2</sup> Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: the Construction of Modern National Consciousness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 154.

is to bring together a confluence of conversations on education, national development, and decolonization and make vital conclusions others have not.

The following chapter will begin our exploration of the concept of resistance in Palestinian society throughout history. From there, we will be able to place the modern challenges posed to students, as well as their political and cultural responses, in the context of a wider struggle.

# CHAPTER 1

## A History of Struggle

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The Israeli occupation of Palestine is the longest existing occupation in the post-World War II period. By even the most conservative of conventional definitions, it has existed for at least 44 years. It is therefore reasonable to suppose, as a basis for this research, that the occupation and resistance thereto are not static, but co-evolve over time. Thus, the following review of the history of Palestinian resistance is undertaken in order to understand the present status of resistance within Palestine as it stands at the endpoint of a long and dynamic process.

The history of Palestinian resistance is best analyzed beginning in the Ottoman Period. Palestine was under the control of the Ottoman Empire from 1517 until the end of World War I, with few exceptions. Revolts occurred in 1808, 1826, and 1834, the latter of which ended a brief period of Egyptian rule. As expert on Palestinian resistance Mazin B. Qumsiyeh recorded in *Popular Resistance in Palestine: A History of Hope and Empowerment*, this "...uprising ignited a sense of nationalism and provided a model of endogenous political activism and resistance that was to be repeated in the decades to come."<sup>3</sup> By the 1880s, Zionist migration began in earnest, with Jews settling in Palestine with the intention of establishing a Jewish state therein. Again, we see peasants and villagers organizing politically against this threat. Through protests, petitions, and armed resistance, Palestinians managed in some cases to successfully halt the expansion of

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<sup>3</sup> Mazin B. Qumsiyeh, *Popular Resistance in Palestine: a History of Hope and Empowerment* (London/New York: Pluto Press, 2011), 36.

settlements such as Petah Tikvah in 1886.<sup>4</sup> Later, in the early 1900s, Palestinians began to develop indigenous media publications, underground societies, political parties, and nationalist Arab language schools as well.<sup>5</sup>

This political organization continued into the Balfour era, which gave rise to Muslim-Christian solidarity societies established to oppose the arrival of the first Jewish Zionist delegation and the beginning of the British occupation in 1918. These attempts to counter Zionist influence and infiltration became centered on petitions, symbolic acts of resistance, and a nationalist call for education and development, culminating in the First Palestinian Arab Congress of several, held in Jerusalem in 1919. In 1917, the British issued the Balfour Declaration, pledging support for the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine, and on February 27<sup>th</sup>, 1920, issued another proclamation officially declaring the intentions to create a British mandate of Palestine. In response, the Second Palestinian Arab Congress was held in Damascus, which called for Arab unity, resistance to British occupation and to the Balfour Declaration, and self-determination.

Demonstrations in Jerusalem demanded the same, and by March 11<sup>th</sup>, had spread to all major Palestinian cities, leading to mass resignations, strikes, and other forms of popular resistance.<sup>6</sup> Cities like Haifa became centers of resistance, while students led massive demonstrations in Tulkarem and elsewhere.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 43-45.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 50-53.

According to Qumsiyeh, by 1922, it became clear that, "...the Zionist project and the British Mandate were inseparable; resistance to one meant resistance to the other."<sup>7</sup> Thus, mass demonstrations, strikes, and other forms of popular resistance were planned: religious leaders discouraged the sale of land to Zionists and traveled to Mecca to gain Muslim support; a general strike held in July of 1922 brought commerce across the country to a standstill; women's groups organized politically, working on issues of prisoner mistreatment and opposing the occupation; and the sham elections of 1923 were boycotted.<sup>8</sup> Yet up until this point, resistance had yet to completely thwart the Zionist movement and the aspirations of the Balfour Declaration. In 1929, rumors that Zionists planned to takeover Muslim holy site al-Buraq (the holy Western Wall to the Jews, who were permitted to visit the site under Muslim control) sparked an uprising that left 116 Palestinians and 133 Jews dead. The uprising, which became known as *hibbit al-Buraq*, "...inspired the grassroots popular resistance movement to mobilize the Arab streets."<sup>9</sup> Boycotts of British goods, guerilla movements, and the development of revolt-focused political parties arose in the following years.<sup>10</sup>

The next phase of Palestinian resistance occurred during the Great Revolt of 1936-1939. Between the British suppression of anti-Balfour declarations, the appropriation of land from the Tulkarem Agricultural School for Jewish use, and an incident that seemed to indicate that the Zionists were preparing for an armed takeover, the call for revolt intensified throughout Palestine, beginning with a general strike in

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 73-74.

Nablus that quickly spread. This strike, which was backed across the political factions, gave rise to a tax revolt as well. National committees were formed in many cities; residents in Jaffa went as far as to form a National Guard to protect against the brutality of the British, who declared a state of emergency, arrested revolt participants, instated curfews, confiscated property, and demolished homes.<sup>11</sup> For the first time in Palestinian history, separate municipalities were engaged in a collective action, and the strike gained even more ground when student involvement was established.<sup>12</sup>

The Great Revolt was dismantled with the prohibition of all Arab national committees in 1937, allowing for the normalization of the occupation and the strengthening of Jewish Haganah forces and support from the Yishuv (Jewish residents in Palestine before the creation of the state of Israel). Some groups, mainly Muslim in origin, having grown frustrated with the few gains of civil disobedience, advocated and employed armed resistance, particularly after the announcement of the partition plans proposed by the 1937 Peel Commission.<sup>13</sup> “As education spread in newly semi-independent Arab states,” Qumsiyeh explains, “students became a vanguard of political activism in the 1940s...the [Palestinian] student movement grew and its leaders developed skills they would later use in forming and leading various Palestinian liberation organizations.”<sup>14</sup> Yet for the years immediately following the Great Revolt when these future leaders were still being educated, the general lack of leadership and

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 82.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 92.

rise in violent clashes made it clear that the Zionist movement would be successful and the partition plan would proceed.<sup>15</sup>

In 1948, in a series of events that would come to be known amongst Palestinians as *an-Nakba* (“the catastrophe”), the state of Israel was established, expelling around 800,000 Palestinians in the process. Israeli laws that, in violation of international human rights laws, prevented the return of Palestinians were enacted and enforced by punishment of death; in the years following the *Nakba*, between 3,000 and 5,000 Palestinians were murdered while trying to return to the homes, businesses, and farmlands from which they had been expelled.<sup>16</sup>

So devastating was the *Nakba* that more organized forms of resistance did not reemerge for another decade or so<sup>17</sup>, until the founding of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in 1964, which quickly became an instrument of Palestinian political aspiration. What popular resistance that did exist followed the concept of *sumud*—“steadfastness”—such that the harsher the Israeli repressions of Palestinian freedom, the more strength resistance movements gained. It was out of this era that the strong Palestinian literary tradition of resistance grew, including such writers as Mahmoud Darwish, Samih al-Qasem, Tawfeeq Ziad, Salem Jubran, Hanna Abu Hanna, and others.<sup>18</sup> For Palestinians within the new state of Israel, resistance often came in the form of using the Israeli legal system to address their grievances, while the efforts of Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank were mainly humanitarian in nature and focused on the

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 102.

assistance of refugees until the founding of the UN Relief Works Agency for Palestinians (UNRWA).<sup>19</sup>

Students and education-based efforts played a significant role at this time. The Pan-Arab Nationalist movement, inspired by Egyptian President Nasser in 1959, focused on, amongst other goals, Arab-language education.<sup>20</sup> Students also became involved in leading demonstrations: in 1961, thousands attended the funerals of several Palestinian university students who were killed after attempting to complete their studies in Egypt in defiance of military orders banning them from doing so; in 1964, Palestinian Hebrew University students attempted to organize politically by holding meetings for marginalized Palestinian students at the university, and were consequently arrested and banned from meeting when the Israeli forces declared the location a closed military zone; and, in general, “Arab student activism in Israeli universities mushroomed in the decades to come.”<sup>21</sup> Qumsiyeh elaborates:

As the traditional ways of making a living disappeared, exiled Palestinians emphasized the need for education to rebuild their lives. The youth in Arab universities were especially politicized and ready for action... In the early 1950s, a group of young Palestinian students in Egypt and in Egypt-controlled Gaza started organizing and training in a context of re-emergent nationalism. The first Palestinian student league was set up in Cairo, in 1954. These students would become the leaders who would inherit the mantle of the aging and dead leaders of the 1930s and 1940s. For example, Yasser Arafat studied engineering at King Fuad I University (later the University of Cairo), where he met Salah Khalaf and Khalil al-Wazir in 1951 (children of grocers from Jaffa and Ramallah). Al-Wazir was already undertaking guerilla operations from the Sinai. They ran for election to student councils, winning seats by having a very broad platform and creating lists that included rival political ideologies. With Khaled al-Hasan (from Haifa)

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 103.



and Farouk al-Qaddumi, they later founded the Palestinian Liberation Movement (known as Fatah or Fateh).<sup>22</sup>

It is for this reason that, to this day, as Penny Johnson observed in “Palestinian Universities under Occupation,” university news is widely read both throughout Palestine and internationally; student movements can in themselves be political movements, and university student government elections are often gauged as a “barometer” for Palestinian politics as a whole.<sup>23</sup>

By the time of the Six Day War and the commencement in 1967 of the formal occupation of the West Bank and Gaza as we know it today, *sumud* was alive and well in Palestinian society, with families—having learned from the forced displacement of the *Nakba* that leaving their homes would mean permanent expulsion—refusing to leave again, despite military orders to do so. Though this period came to be known as the *Naksa* (“defeat”), civil resistance still thrived. Palestinians in Israel refused to participate in Knesset elections, organized guerilla movements, formed grassroots political committees, and built political parties, such as the National Progressive Movement, out of what began as university student groups.<sup>24</sup> Likewise, in the OPT, the years leading up to the First Intifada gave rise to general strikes; protests; demonstrations<sup>25</sup>; vigils; letter-writing campaigns<sup>26</sup>; cooperative economic structures<sup>27</sup>; the public shunning and

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 104-105.

<sup>23</sup> Penny Johnson, “Palestinian Universities under Occupation,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 18, no. 2 (1989): 128-129, <http://www.jstor.org>.

<sup>24</sup> Qumsiyeh, *Popular Resistance in Palestine*, 112.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 118.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 122.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 133.

excommunication of collaborators with the Israeli occupation<sup>28</sup>; the artistic resistance of Palestinian cartoonist Naji al-Ali and his iconic Handalah, a symbolic representation of the poor Palestinian child and Palestinian resilience<sup>29</sup>; and efforts from organizations such as the Palestinian Center for the Study of Nonviolence, which, opening its doors in Jerusalem in 1983, translated and distributed works from famous pacifists such as Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr., peacefully dismantled settlement fences, and encouraged Israeli-Palestinian dialogue.<sup>30</sup>

Meanwhile, students organized politically as well. The 1967 school year began with a delayed start after Palestinians protested the Israeli authorities' attempts to revise the curriculum.<sup>31</sup> In December of 1973, a West Bank-wide uprising grew out of the student movement in Ramallah and al-Bireh; explains Qumsiyeh, "The Palestinian universities of Bethlehem and Birzeit...became hotbeds of activism...Israeli forced tried many means to quell all student political activities regardless of their nature and direction."<sup>32</sup> Schools and universities led political organization and popular resistance, demanding more funding for schools alongside other, more general political goals. As Sami Khalil Mar'i details in *Arab Education in Israel*, Palestinian students played "not only an active participant's role but a leading one, too" in the 1976 Land Day strike.<sup>33</sup> The deep involvement of the universities in resistance led to Birzeit University being closed by military order in 1982 for three months; it would not be the last nor the longest

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 127.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 133.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 118.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>33</sup> Sami Khalil Mar'i, *Arab Education in Israel* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1978), 127.

closure the university faced.<sup>34</sup> For fourteen months in 1984 and 1985, the Palestinian academic scene was dominated by demonstrations and other political activities, some of which resulted in tangible success—for example, with the Israeli army withdrawal of the mandate that foreign academics working at Palestinian institutions sign a contract agreeing not to associate with the PLO.<sup>35</sup>

The First Intifada, of course, saw its share of armed resistance. But contrary to popular belief, nonviolence was the preponderant part of the struggle. Qumsiyeh points out that, “A statistical analysis of monthly events that could be classified as popular resistance (demonstrations, strikes, petitions, flying flags, etc.) jumped from 933 in 1985 to 1,358 in 1986 to 2,882 in 1987 and novel forms of resistance were created.”<sup>36</sup> Though the uprising itself was precipitated by a number of events, a main factor in the fomentation of the First Intifada was the spread of demonstrations and other forms of popular resistance that began with schools and colleges in Gaza to protest the killing of three citizens near a refugee camp.<sup>37</sup> These demonstrations were particularly effective on university campuses, where students of a range of ages and both genders—more than 80% of male students and more than 50% of female students counted amongst regular participants<sup>38</sup>—worked together to actively resist the occupation forces; in response, schools, universities, and civil organizations were forcibly closed in attempt to keep the uprising at bay, and remained closed for several years.<sup>39</sup> In order to minimize the

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<sup>34</sup> Qumsiyeh, *Popular Resistance in Palestine*, 127-128.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 126-127.

interruption of education, education committees were formed and classes for all educational levels were held in mosques, churches, living rooms, and even caves, despite the risk of fines and imprisonment for violating the military order that closed all schools and universities (and thereby effectively made education illegal).<sup>40</sup> Simultaneously, solidarity committees were formed within Israel while disparate factions came together to focus on international organizing.<sup>41</sup> Boycotts, prisoner hunger strikes, the organization of women's groups, tax revolts, and the intentional discarding of Israeli-issued ID cards were all common tactics of popular nonviolent resistance during the First Intifada as well.<sup>42</sup>

The years after the Oslo Accords, which ended the First Intifada, saw a decrease in popular resistance throughout the OPT, due to both Palestinian Authority-imposed repression and OPT residents believing that the peace process would actually result in positive change; yet five years later, they realized in dismay that the agreement had only further entrenched them in occupation. (Incidentally, in the mean time, Palestinian citizens of Israel, who were largely overlooked in the peace process, increased their efforts.<sup>43</sup>) Frustrated with the post-Oslo lack of progress, Hamas carried out a suicide bombing campaign<sup>44</sup>, increasing tensions leading up to the al-Aqsa Uprising, or the Second Intifada. On September 28<sup>th</sup>, 2000, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, along with 1,000 armed Israelis, visited the al-Aqsa mosque, a holy Muslim site. A peaceful demonstration ensued but six Palestinians were killed in the brutal Israeli suppression

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 140-141.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 137-139.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 141-142.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 164-165.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 165.

thereof. Wanting to end the uprising quickly, the Israeli military killed Palestinians at a higher rate in the Second Intifada than in the First. As throughout Palestinian history, students and teachers played a critical role, leading trauma counseling efforts<sup>45</sup>, intentionally breaking curfews in order to attend classes<sup>46</sup>, and protesting at checkpoints when prevented from doing so.<sup>47</sup>

Likewise, local resistance committees were formed, many of which received international backing from organizations like the International Solidarity Movement, which was founded at this time. In 2002, Israel began constructing a separation barrier, commonly referred to as “the wall,” allegedly along the Green Line in order to reduce the threat of Palestinian terrorism. However, it became increasingly clear that the path of the wall was annexing Palestinian land and presenting significant obstacles to Palestinian daily life. In response to the encroachments of the wall, which cut off villages such as Bil’in, Ni’lin, al-Ma’sara, and Jayyous from their agricultural lands, Palestinians staged weekly nonviolent protests, maintained 24-hour presence at the wall in protest<sup>48</sup>, and organized international solidarity actions such as the Freedom March of 2004 in which Palestinians, Israelis, and internationals marched along the path of the wall.<sup>49</sup> This period also gave rise to the Free Gaza movement and a series of hunger strikes coordinated across prisons in which prisoners demanded better treatment.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 170-171.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 175.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 192.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 178.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 203.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 196.

Today, many of these weekly protests and other forms of popular struggle still exist. Perhaps the most coordinated and widespread contemporary resistance campaign is the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement. Modeled after the steps taken to end South African Apartheid and following the successes of tax revolts and boycott efforts during both Intifadas<sup>51</sup>, BDS is best described as follows:

A boycott is the refusal to buy products or to interact with entities or individuals that support oppression or are part of a system of oppression. Divestment requires withdrawing financial support that props up the oppressive system. Sanctions prevent dealing with oppressive governments or other entities. These three elements work in tandem.<sup>52</sup>

The 1998 European Commission call for boycott of settlement products signaled the first large international BDS action, which later received overwhelming support in late September of 2001 at the NGO Forum of the UN World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination and Related Intolerances. This conference, held in Durban, South Africa, affirmed the growing movement to identify the Israeli occupation of Palestine as a system of apartheid. Students again were heavily involved in launching the international effort, which by 2002 was expanded to advocate for the cultural and academic boycott of Israeli professionals in addition to the economic boycott of Israeli goods.<sup>53</sup> This movement, which is in fact a series of multiple campaigns that utilize email listservs, websites, and international conferences to gain global support<sup>54</sup>—the BDS National Committee of Palestine (BNC) alone is comprised of about 20 smaller groups—has produced significant and concrete results since its inception.

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 208.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 207.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 209.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 210.

The history of resistance activism and popular struggle in Palestine is certainly a rich one. We can draw two important conclusions from this history. First, it is evident that education, specifically with regard to university students, has played a critical role in Palestinian resistance for as long as the Palestinians have been occupied. In the Ottoman and Balfour eras, Palestinian nationalists focused on developing a free Palestine by educating its young adults while students organized demonstrations. The Great Revolt of 1936 was precipitated by the encroachment of occupation forces on the land of a school, and then largely furthered by students. Leaders of Palestinian liberation movements were politicized during their years at university during and after the *Nakba*, while Palestinian citizens of Israel supported political parties that can trace their humble beginnings back to university student organizations. Throughout both Intifadas, university students were at the forefront of political demonstrations, and today they continue this tradition with international movements such as BDS. Clearly, the university is and has always been a focal point of Palestinian resistance.

Secondly, in this history we can observe the development and evolution of the form Palestinian popular struggle has taken over the years. Recently, perhaps as a result of two Intifadas' worth of failed armed and political struggle, resistance has become largely decentralized. Global in its reach and emanating from every sector of society, popular resistance is not just popular—it is common. It can be posited that the widespread nature of resistance, combined with its failure thus far to achieve its primary goal (a free Palestine), has brought resistance into an even more widely accessible realm, in which any person not only has the opportunity to fight in her way on behalf of the collective, but

in fact should. Throughout the history of Palestinian resistance, resistance has been used as a tool of the common person, as opposed to restricted to a political elite or a glorified warrior. After all, popular struggle is so named because it is supposed to be a movement of the people. It is therefore only natural for resistance to continue to follow this progression today, empowering those who need it most: those without power.

But can this decentralized struggle still be considered resistance if it does not take the form of a distinct movement? Culturally and philosophically speaking, yes, it can. Considering the breadth of Israeli repressions, any action that opposes or subverts this repression in any way is a valid form of resistance. It is in this way that education—not an organized student movement or university elections, but the act of getting an education in and of itself—can legitimately be considered resistance, and is throughout Palestine. It is a daily activity of the common person that directly undermines the oppression to which she is expected to submit. The struggle for education is a struggle for liberation not just because the qualities of education that make liberation more likely (e.g., the ability to improve a society's intellectual, economic, and political standing), but because, in the face of so many restrictions on Palestinian action, getting an education is one of the few opportunities for resistance that remains—and, because of its cultural capital, is certainly amongst the more prestigious options.

Accordingly, as subsequent chapters will detail, Palestinian education is repressed under Israeli occupation and is culturally valued, in part, precisely for this reason; furthermore, Palestinians' attitudes toward education confirm this cultural perception of



education as resistance, and the more education is repressed, the more valued it becomes in a society struggling for liberation.

## CHAPTER 2

# Obstacles to Palestinian Higher Education

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The obstacles to education for Palestinian university students are numerous and longstanding. These barriers to access come in several main forms: movement restriction, military attacks, curfews, closures, harassment, the stifling of political life, and student detention and imprisonment. These obstacles have been documented extensively by organizations such as the Right to Education Campaign, a West Bank-based student movement/non-governmental organization that documents and advocates against violations of Palestinians' human right to education.

### *MOVEMENT RESTRICTION*

The restriction of free movement throughout the OPT is achieved primarily through checkpoints, the wall, and the restriction of travel both between and outside the OPT. Checkpoints refer to the permanent structures in place at key points of traffic, as well as flying checkpoints (arbitrarily set up by the Israeli military and enforced at whim), forbidden roads (roads reserved for Jewish settlers and other Jewish Israelis), and physical obstructions in roads.<sup>55</sup> These checkpoints, which are routinely more burdensome around exam periods,<sup>56</sup> can delay students for hours at a time. In allowing the Israeli occupation forces to determine who may or may not pass, the checkpoint

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<sup>55</sup> Right to Education Campaign, Education under Occupation, <http://www.right2edu.org/education-under-occupation/>.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

system severely inconveniences students and inhibits their access to education.

Furthermore, checkpoints inhibit academic freedom: professors, guest lectures, and other academics can be turned away at checkpoints or denied entry into Palestine altogether and hence barred from reaching the university, as is often the case with known supporters of Palestine (Noam Chomsky was most recently denied this past year).<sup>57</sup> According to the Right to Education Campaign, at Birzeit University in the West Bank alone, there was a:

50% drop in staff holding foreign passports... In the 2006-2007 academic year, there were at least 14 faculty members at risk of deportation prior to the conclusion of the year due to visa insecurity, as well as 383 students who, in waiting for Israel to issue their IDs, also suffered the constant threat of deportation or imprisonment.<sup>58</sup>

Birzeit University was in fact specifically targeted by the checkpoint system between 2001 and 2003 when the Israeli military established the Surda roadblock, cutting Birzeit off from Ramallah by closing the only remaining unobstructed road between the two. Ramallah, a major travel hub, is the city in which the majority of Birzeit University students and faculty live; its isolation from Birzeit was thus a “major repressive force in the lives of the 50,000 villagers and more than 6,000 students, faculty, and staff.”<sup>59</sup> The Surda roadblock was not dismantled until 2003, when focused resistance (including holding classes at the roadblock itself)<sup>60</sup> forced the military’s hand; unfortunately, that road is still subject to arbitrary closure by Israeli soldiers today.

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<sup>57</sup> Amira Hass, “After denied entry to West Bank, Chomsky likens Israel to ‘Stalinist regime,’” *Haaretz Daily Newspaper*, May 17, 2010, <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/after-denied-entry-to-west-bank-chomsky-likens-israel-to-stalinist-regime-1.290736>.

<sup>58</sup> Right to Education Campaign, *Education under Occupation*.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> Al-Haq, “Palestinian Education under Israeli Occupation” (paper presented at the conference on International Law in the Shadow of Israeli Occupation, Stockholm, Sweden, April 12, 2005), 9,

The wall also presents a significant source of the restriction of Palestinian movement. Israeli human rights organization B'Tselem describes the wall, or separation barrier:

In June 2002, the government of Israel decided to erect a physical barrier to separate Israel and the West Bank, its declared objective being to prevent the uncontrolled entry of Palestinians into Israel... the barrier is comprised of an electronic fence with dirt paths, barbed-wire fences, and trenches on both sides, at an average width of 60 meters... [or] a concrete wall six to eight meters high... Eighty-five percent of the amended route runs through the West Bank, and not along the Green Line [the official border between Israel and the West Bank]. In areas where the Barrier has already been built, the extensive violations of human rights of Palestinians living nearby are evident.<sup>61</sup>

Further and more disturbingly, B'Tselem has documented that the political aim of the wall is the “de facto annexation of part of the West Bank,” as Israeli politicians consider the path of the wall to be Israel’s future border, which, with the conclusion of construction of the wall, will include within it about 9.5% of the West Bank.<sup>62</sup>

The wall is accompanied by a complex permit system whereby Palestinians—not Israeli Jews—must apply for permits to travel, work, and even live in their own homes. When they are denied, there is little recourse. Moreover, the wall poses a particular imposition on rural education, where many of the schools’ teachers live outside the area and thus face additional challenges in commuting. The main campus of al-Quds University at Abu-Dis, for example, risks losing approximately 200 dunums of land due to the construction of the wall.<sup>63</sup> Al-Haq, a Palestinian legal and human rights advocacy

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<http://asp.alhaq.org/zalhaq/site/eDocs/txtDocs/Presentations/Palestinian%20Education%20under%20Israeli%20Occupation%20-%20final.pdf>.

<sup>61</sup> B'Tselem, Separation Barrier, [http://www.btselem.org/English/Separation\\_Barrier/](http://www.btselem.org/English/Separation_Barrier/).

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Al-Quds University, Al-Quds University, the Arab University in Jerusalem: General Information, [http://old.alquds.edu/gen\\_info/index.php?page=overview](http://old.alquds.edu/gen_info/index.php?page=overview).

organization, found that in 81% of the households they surveyed, members of the family had experienced unintended absences from university as a direct result of the wall.<sup>64</sup>

Travel within and between the OPT and abroad are both incredibly difficult under Israeli occupation. Over the years, it has become increasingly impossible for students from Gaza to study in the West Bank. As the Right to Education Campaign has noted, “In 2000, there were 350 Gaza students at Birzeit University; many were deported, and those who were not...[risked] deportation at any moment. By 2005, only 35 Gaza students were able to attend Birzeit University. Today, there are none.”<sup>65</sup> In a report on the state of higher education in the OPT, the Gisha Legal Center for Freedom of Movement, an Israeli legal advocacy group, noted a 90% drop in the number of Palestinian university students from Gaza studying in the West Bank since 2000, at which time the Israeli authorities banned all Gaza-West Bank travel for educational purposes; this ban, though purportedly for security reasons, exists almost without exception and regardless of individual case assessment.<sup>66</sup> (A 2008 Amnesty International report entitled “Freedom of Movement/Right to Education Denied” notes that a total travel ban has been applied to the entire Gazan population since 2007. “The Israeli blockade on Gaza...” it details, “constitutes a form of collective punishment—a practice which is expressly forbidden by

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<sup>64</sup> Al-Haq, “Palestinian Education under Israeli Occupation,” 3.

<sup>65</sup> Right to Education Campaign, Education under Occupation.

<sup>66</sup> Gisha Legal Center for Freedom of Movement, “Limitations on Access to Higher Education for Palestinian Students,” 2006, 2. [http://www.gisha.org/UserFiles/File/publications\\_english/Publications\\_andReports\\_English/Position\\_Paper\\_Dec\\_06.pdf](http://www.gisha.org/UserFiles/File/publications_english/Publications_andReports_English/Position_Paper_Dec_06.pdf).

international law. In this case, it is students seeking to advance their education by studying abroad who are being targeted for collective punishment.”<sup>67</sup>)

These policies most adversely affect students wishing to pursue professional degrees (e.g., medicine, speech therapy, occupational therapy, etc.) that only exist in the West Bank, as well as women, who are more likely to not be permitted by traditional parents to risk the threat posed by soldiers alone. Aside from the obvious impact on students, this policy has had highly damaging effects on Palestinian society; in Gaza, there is one trained occupational therapist for an estimated 24,000 disabled residents.<sup>68</sup> (It is worth noting that this statistic is from 2006, three years before Israeli Operation Cast Lead left many Gazans severely injured.) The Palestinian Centre for Human Rights reports that Palestinian university students who study abroad are also at a particular disadvantage. Foreign universities are likely to withdraw scholarships or acceptance offers if the student is physically unable to attend the university for longer than the university is willing to wait. Students who wish to return to the Gaza Strip to visit home during their abroad studies risk not being able to return. Doctoral students who are unable to study abroad are effectively barred from their studies altogether, as Gaza offers no doctoral programs. Closure of the border crossings has completely denied these students of their right to education.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Amnesty International, “Freedom of Movement/Right to Education Denied,” 2008, 1. <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/MDE15/033/2008/en/236d1587-6ad6-11dd-8e5e-43ea85d15a69/mde150332008en.pdf>.

<sup>68</sup> Gisha, “Limitations on Access to Higher Education for Palestinian Students,” 3.

<sup>69</sup> Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, “Gaza Students Face Denial of International Education Opportunities,” Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, [http://www.pchrgaza.org/portal/en/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=2860:gaza-students-face-denial-of-international-education-opportunities&catid=41:pchrclosurereports&Itemid=173](http://www.pchrgaza.org/portal/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2860:gaza-students-face-denial-of-international-education-opportunities&catid=41:pchrclosurereports&Itemid=173).

Among these students is Zohair Abu Shaban, a university student in Gaza who has been prevented from accepting his Fulbright scholarship in the United States. The US revoked the visa it offered Shaban upon receiving “secret evidence” from Israel that Shaban can neither see nor contest. “A few weeks ago when I went to the Erez Checkpoint between Gaza and Israel,” Shaban stated in an interview, “I was told by the Israeli official that I could not leave unless I collaborated with the Israeli occupation. I refused. My conscience and my people’s right to freedom and equal rights mean more to me than even the finest education.”<sup>70</sup>

#### *MILITARY ATTACKS*

The 2007 edition of the UNESCO report “Education Under Attack,” as well as its 2010 follow-up, determined the OPT to have among the highest reported rates of “[violent and] systematic targeting of students, teachers, academics, education staff and institutions” in the world.<sup>71</sup> Israeli military incursions into the OPT are not uncommon, and can have a severe impact on the state of education for Palestinians. For example, in a military operation in Gaza in March of 2004, the Israeli military deliberately closed off access to al-Aqsa University at the outset of the operation; by the end of the incursion, “...1,750 square metres of land were razed...with the loss of...16 classrooms, 6 offices, three laboratories, a library and cafeteria. Excluding equipment and the opportunity loss of the land, the cost of the destruction was estimated at the time of the attack at over

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<sup>70</sup> Zohair Abu Shaban, “Trapped in Gaza with a Fulbright Scholarship,” Right to Education Campaign, <http://www.right2edu.org/student-voices/trapped-in-gaza-with-a-fulbright-scholarship/>.

<sup>71</sup> United Nations Economic, Social and Cultural Organization, “Education Under Attack,” 2010, 21. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0018/001868/186809e.pdf>.

\$700,000,” a Right to Education Campaign special report details. The report goes on to state that in the period between the outbreak of the Intifada in 2000 and this particular incursion in 2004, a total of 73 educational establishments in Gaza alone had been rendered unusable.<sup>72</sup>

The most recent major attack—Israeli Operation Cast Lead, a 22-day assault on Gaza beginning in late December of 2008—is an excellent example of the damage that can occur with regard to education access. Ameera Ahmad and Ed Vulliamy of *The Guardian* explain the extent thereof:

After Cast Lead, Gazans referred to “scholasticide”—the systematic destruction by Israeli forces of centres of education dear to Palestinian society, as the ministry of education was bombed, the infrastructure of teaching destroyed, and schools across the Gaza strip targeted for attack by the air, sea and ground offensives.<sup>73</sup>

The “scholasticide” which took place in those 22 days wrought havoc on Gaza’s educational system. “Education Under Attack” reports that approximately 302 education-related buildings were destroyed.<sup>74</sup> As Ahmad and Vulliamy indicate, there seems to be ample evidence the damage was not incidental: “Israel began attacking Gaza’s educational institutions immediately. On only the second and third day of air attacks...Israeli planes wreaked severe damage in direct strikes on Gaza’s Islamic University...The Ministry of Education has been hit twice [directly].”<sup>75</sup> They continue:

...[An] Israeli air strike destroyed the pinnacle of Palestinian schooling, the elite and private American International School...The chairman of its board of trustees, Iyad Saraj, says: “This is the destruction of civilisation.” ...Many of the

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<sup>72</sup> Right to Education Campaign, “The Impact of Military Occupation on Palestinian Education,” 2005, 2. <http://right2edu.birzeit.edu/downloads/pdfs/OccShockRight2Edu.pdf>.

<sup>73</sup> Ameera Ahmad and Ed Vulliamy, “Attacks on school in Gaza,” *Guardian*, January 10, 2009, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/jan/10/gaza-schools>.

<sup>74</sup> UNESCO, “Education Under Attack,” 45.

<sup>75</sup> Ahmad and Vulliamy, “Attacks on school in Gaza.”



250 who graduate from it each year go on to US universities. “They are very good, highly educated open-minded students who can really be future leaders of Palestine.”<sup>76</sup>

As the 2010 “Education Under Attack” report stated, “Attacks on education targets...are not just attacks on civilians and civilian buildings...[but] on the right to education...”<sup>77</sup>

Approximately 441,452 students were left without access to education for the duration of Cast Lead.<sup>78</sup> More than two years after Cast Lead, Gaza still struggles to rebuild its educational system and infrastructure.

#### *CURFEW*

The Israeli army has been known to impose curfews during military operations on entire villages and cities in order to control the population, the obvious effects of which on education being a complete halting thereof. These curfews will sometimes be instated merely as a means of collective punishment for demonstrations—like acts of stone throwing, for example—within a village. These curfews can last for hours or days at a time. The curfew imposed during three-week Operation Defensive Shield lasted longer than the operation itself. Likewise, the curfew imposed during Operation Determined Path was gradually lifted beginning only two full months after the operation began. Though the use of curfews has been reduced in recent years, they can still be

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> UNESCO, “Education Under Attack,” 25.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 206.

implemented at any time. The curfews are typically enforced with live gunfire; students who try to attend classes under these conditions are thus risking their lives to do so.<sup>79</sup>

### *CLOSURES*

For four and a half years during the First Intifada, Israel closed by military order all Palestinian universities, schools, nurseries, and other educational institutions, effectively outlawing education in the process. During this time, even carrying textbooks could be grounds for interrogation and detention. Students, faculty, and others risked their lives to hold classes despite this military order. Birzeit University, which holds the reputation for being the most politically active of all the Palestinian universities, was closed fifteen times in its history.<sup>80</sup> A 1987 report issued by Birzeit University detailed the extensive losses a university suffers when forcibly closed for an extended period of time, including but not limited to "...restrictions on research, difficulties in meeting international cooperation agreements due to loss of facilities and laboratories, loss of several million dollars of revenue, and the human and academic costs to Birzeit's 2,650 students," as well as long-term concerns for current young students who, interrupted in the process of learning to read and other elementary education, will undoubtedly be at a disadvantage in terms of qualifications for university down the road.<sup>81</sup>

As Penny Johnson chronicles in a series of essays about Palestinian education under occupation, the 1985 closure of an-Najah University for several months left the student

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<sup>79</sup> B'Tselem, Curfew, [http://www.btselem.org/English/Freedom\\_of\\_Movement/Curfew.asp](http://www.btselem.org/English/Freedom_of_Movement/Curfew.asp).

<sup>80</sup> Right to Education Campaign, Education under Occupation.

<sup>81</sup> Johnson, "Palestinian Universities under Occupation," 130.

body unable to hold elections for that year.<sup>82</sup> She explains, “It is generally accurate to say that closures of universities are less determined by the event itself (whether a student-army clash, book exhibit, cultural week) than by prevailing [Israeli military] policy considerations.”<sup>83</sup> Closures, like movement restriction and the other obstacles to education access, are a political tool used to systematically impede Palestinian higher education.

### *HARASSMENT*

Harassment is most commonly experienced at checkpoints in the form of random and unnecessary delays, interrogations, detention, and humiliation. This humiliation, which is quite widespread conduct for soldiers in an army that boasts about its morality, is the price students often pay to be permitted to pass through a checkpoint to attend class. As Right to Education Campaign report “The Impact of Military Occupation on Palestinian Education” makes clear,

Students, in testimonies of their experiences, often refer to the humiliation and insults suffered in terms that suggest these provoke the greatest sense of resentment. If they wish to pass a checkpoint, Palestinians themselves may be forced to direct such insults at others in their company. Flashpoints of cultural or religious sensitivity make effective targets for flaunting absolute authority, on occasions with sexual overtones. Stories of those being asked to strip themselves bare are legion, often without discretion from public view.<sup>84</sup>

The report goes on to detail a female university student who was ordered to remove her shirt in public on threat of death; a group of male students made to walk through sewage

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<sup>82</sup> Penny Johnson, “Palestinian Universities under Occupation: 15 August-15 November,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 18, no. 2 (1989): 93, <http://www.jstor.org/>.

<sup>83</sup> Johnson, “Palestinian Universities under Occupation,” 130.

<sup>84</sup> Right to Education Campaign, “The Impact of Military Occupation on Palestinian Education,” 11.

water barefoot; and another student who, in being forcibly quizzed from a history book he was carrying, was beaten with the soldier's rifle upon his refusal to answer the soldier's questions, and rewarded for a correct answer with "two books"—his history book torn in half.<sup>85</sup>

Denial of work permits is also a frequent means by which the Israeli military can harass Palestinian students and others. Many students have additionally been subjected to arbitrary interview and/or house invasions. Rawad Rarweesh, a Birzeit University student, describes his experience when Israeli soldiers raided his dorm:

The dorms were peaceful and quiet. Suddenly we were all shocked by the noise of sound bombs, and a feeling of horror filled the entire area—there were loud screams from the residences, and I immediately realized that there were Israeli jeeps all over the area... My thoughts were interrupted by...an attempt to break the door. My friend...went to open it, and as soon as he opened it a large number of soldiers entered the room. They ordered...us to sit down on the floor in the corner of the room, [and] handcuffed us with plastic handcuffs that dug into our wrists. Then they made us all leave... [and] searched the entire building, claiming that they were searching for guns. They searched very roughly, leaving a huge mess behind them... In our room the Palestinian *hata* [*keffiyeh*, a Palestinian scarf and common resistance symbol] and some Palestinian posters which were stuck on the wall, had been ripped down and thrown on the floor...<sup>86</sup>

Invasions of this sort occur regularly. The Right to Education Campaign reports that these invasions can be accompanied by physical violence, gunshots and subsequent injuries, and property destruction, with some soldiers preferring the use of explosives to force open doors rather than knocking and asking for permission to enter.<sup>87</sup> Theft is also an issue. The R2E report explains: "Over fifty students from Birzeit University were arrested ... and held captive for several days, during which operation half of the students

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>86</sup> Right to Education Campaign, Education under Occupation.

<sup>87</sup> Right to Education Campaign, "The Impact of Military Occupation on Palestinian Education," 7.

reported having money and small electronic appliances stolen by soldiers. Ten other cases of army theft were reported during the course of the year.”<sup>88</sup>

### *STIFLING OF POLITICAL LIFE*

Technically speaking, under Israeli law, any political organization within the university is illegal. According to the Right to Education Campaign, “The students most frequently targeted for arrest and imprisonment are those who belong to or are suspected of belonging to political or student life organizations such as student unions.”<sup>89</sup> It is routine for the heads of university student governments to be interrogated, arrested, and/or detained. For example, the head of Birzeit University’s Student Council was charged with “holding a position of responsibility” within an “illegal organization” in 2007; as he was previously imprisoned for ten months for prior student government involvement, this student was detained for a full year on these charges.<sup>90</sup> Currently, half of the cases represented by Birzeit University’s lawyers are prisoners of conscience such as this—students who were politically organized and empowered through student government or other student society membership. As the Right to Education Campaign explains, “These students are not only being denied their education; they are also being actively and unjustifiably deprived of their freedoms of association, thought, and liberty.”<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 6-7.

<sup>89</sup> Right to Education Campaign, Education under Occupation.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Right to Education Campaign, Education under Occupation.

## DETENTION

The detention of university students is widespread. At Birzeit University alone, in the past seven years, 480 students have been incarcerated. Of the 80 currently held in Israeli prisons, more than half have yet to be formally charged or found guilty of any charge; five are held in administrative detention, under which “a Palestinian may be held without charge using ‘secret evidence’ from Israeli intelligence for indefinitely renewable six-month periods of detention. Under this system, the charges raised against a student detainee are not communicated to him/her or his/her lawyer.”<sup>92</sup> One Birzeit student has been held under this system for three years.<sup>93</sup> Similarly, based on figures from April of 2009, 80 an-Najah University students are currently incarcerated, and 550 Hebron University students have been detained since 1987.<sup>94</sup>

As Penny Johnson explains, “The sharp escalation in the use of administrative detention orders...has noticeably affected the university community.”<sup>95</sup> Having gained momentum during the early years of the First Intifada, administrative detention is not used exclusively on students, but very commonly. For example, in September of 1985, half of the Palestinians who received administrative detention orders were students; this proportion remained steady in the coming months, with almost all the heads of the university student councils counting amongst the administrative detainees.<sup>96</sup> In fact, Israeli officials have made the targeting of students an explicitly clear policy: “In a June

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Right to Education Campaign, Studies & Research, <http://right2edu.birzeit.edu/news/article495>.

<sup>95</sup> Penny Johnson, “Palestinian Universities under Occupation: February-May 1988,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 17, no. 4 (1988): 120, <http://www.jstor.org/>.

<sup>96</sup> Johnson, “Palestinian Universities under Occupation,” 131.

[1985] press conference,” Johnson writes, “outgoing civil administrator Colonel Freddy Zach listed among other ‘improvements’ of the past year a policy to bar student ‘troublemakers’ from campus, rather than to close universities.”<sup>97</sup>

This research focuses primarily on detention as an obstacle to education for Palestinian university students. This focus has been selected both to necessarily limit the breadth of the research—for a host of obstacles and repressions certainly do exist—as well as due to the nature of the detention of university students. As dire and widespread a phenomenon it is, it is often overlooked. Unlike closures or military raids, student detention does not occur merely in times of crisis. Paradoxically, it is precisely because its status as a constant fixture of the occupation—a fact of life for many Palestinians—that it rarely receives the consideration it is due.

Moreover, these arrests and imprisonments are clearly political. This is evident in who is targeted, when they are targeted, and why they are targeted. The most likely targets for detention are student leaders and others involved in student political life—in other words, the most politically empowered university students who, as will be discussed in later chapters, pose the greatest threat to the Israeli occupation forces. These students are furthermore most likely to be targeted at critical points in the course of their education: for example, during final exams and before graduation. In an interview with the *Electronic Intifada*, an online news source on Israel/Palestine, one mother expresses distress at the recent arrest of her son, Ammar, a student: “They wanted Ammar because he’s studying for his final exams. The army does this every year, they arrest boys when

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 131.

they are preparing for the final exam so they aren't educated. Because they arrested him at the start of the exams, he automatically loses one year of his education."<sup>98</sup> Her story is not uncommon.

Moreover, it is incredibly difficult, if not altogether impossible for some, to enroll in or continue formal higher education programs while imprisoned. According to a 2003 primer published by Addameer, the Prisoners' Support and Human Rights Association, Palestinian detainees in Israeli prisons are permitted to study only through designated Israeli "Open University" programs. Though several Palestinian universities, including al-Quds, also have distance-learning programs, Israeli Prison Services typically rejects prisoners' applications to enroll in them on the basis of "security reasons."<sup>99</sup> The issue here, of course, is that Israeli Open University programs are Hebrew-instruction only, which Aseeraat, a product of the Protection of Palestinian Female Prisoners and Detainees in Israeli Prisons Project, describes as "extremely prohibitive" for many students.<sup>100</sup> Additionally, economic barriers to education are a significant concern for imprisoned Palestinian university students. Prisoners have to provide tuition to the Open University program in full in order to enroll, but Israeli Open Universities charge up to five times as much as Palestinian universities.<sup>101</sup> These Israeli Open University programs are furthermore problematic because only sentenced prisoners with a minimum five-year sentence are eligible to enroll in them; students in administrative detention or who

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<sup>98</sup> Jody McIntyre, "'They don't want our boys educated,'" *Electronic Intifada*, September 13, 2010, <http://electronicintifada.net/v2/article11515.shtml>.

<sup>99</sup> Addameer, "Addameer Primer 2003: Background on Political Detention," 2003, 19. <http://www.addameer.org/resources/reports/addameerPrimer.pdf>.

<sup>100</sup> Aseerat, "Behind the Bars: Palestinian Women in Israeli Prisons," 2008, 4. [http://www.aseerat.ps/files/EN\\_Fact\\_sheet\\_3\\_-\\_education.pdf](http://www.aseerat.ps/files/EN_Fact_sheet_3_-_education.pdf).

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.



receive shorter sentences are completely barred from pursuing formal higher education while behind bars<sup>102</sup>. Finally, Israeli Prison Services will also restrict what Palestinian detainees seeking higher education can study; Addameer cites a “recent restriction placed on the following topics: ‘Democracy and Dictatorship,’ ‘History of the Middle East from the New Historians,’ ‘Democracy and National Security,’ ‘Mass Communication,’ in addition to other similar course subjects.”<sup>103</sup> Hard science programs are completely banned for female prisoners.<sup>104</sup>

The detention of Palestinian university students thus in itself presents a slew of additional obstacles to higher education. Aseerat highlights one prisoner’s story, which is in many ways typical:

At the time of her arrest in 2002, Du’a was a 4th year sociology student at the An-Najah University. In prison, she did not have the opportunity to complete her BA degree even though she had only a few courses left in order to graduate. Therefore she decided to enroll at the Open University of Israel in a BA program in Economics. However, without giving her a reason, Telmond’s [the facility where she was imprisoned] administration prevented her from doing so. She was told to register in a sociology course instead. At the same time, her family entered in an agreement with the Palestinian Ministry of Detainees Affairs, whereby it would reimburse them Du’a’s tuition fees. When the ministry failed to do so in the second semester, Du’a’s family could not support her financially. Additionally, she received her books with a considerable delay, which prevented her from submitting her course work on time. As communication over the phone and by email is not permitted for “security” prisoners, she could not get an extension, nor could she effectively explain her case. The combination between the lack of funds and the difficulty in communicating with the university eventually caused Du’a to drop out of the course in her second semester of studies.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>103</sup> Addameer, “Addameer Primer 2003: Background on Political Detention,” 19.

<sup>104</sup> Aseerat, “Behind the Bars: Palestinian Women in Israeli Prisons,” 5.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 5.

Why is it that university students are deliberately targeted in this manner? Maya Rosenfeld, author of *Confronting the Occupation: Work, Education, and Political Activism of Palestinian Families in a Refugee Camp*, explains:

The Palestinian universities were quick to become centers, perhaps *the* centers of political, national, and cultural activity in the Territories. This served to turn their student populations, as well as the teaching staff and the institutions themselves, into targets of systematic repression and harassment by the military government and Civil Administration.<sup>106</sup>

Penny Johnson reiterates this idea. “The students in the occupied territories,” she writes, “who are in fact the ‘generation of occupation,’ are one of the most affected by the occupation and most active in resisting it.”<sup>107</sup> As these two quotes demonstrate, Palestinian university students are targeted because they, as empowered and often socially conscious individuals, are likely agents of resistance; to interrupt their education, practically speaking, removes them from the atmosphere in which they may become politically active and thereby reduces the power of the resistance. Israel attempts to discourage activism and resistance by punishing those who engage therein.

However, repressing education to stifle resistance is a double-edged sword. In so doing, the Israeli occupation forces are providing those who oppose them with more reason to do so. For this reason, resistance is furthered, rather than restricted, by increasing oppression. In terms of education, the more restricted it becomes, the more worthwhile it is to pursue. As Gene Sharp wrote, “the key to habitual obedience is to

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<sup>106</sup> Maya Rosenfeld, *Confronting the Occupation: Work, Education, and Political Activism of Palestinian Families in a Refugee Camp* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2004), 126.

<sup>107</sup> Johnson, “Palestinian Universities under Occupation,” 132.

reach the mind”<sup>108</sup>; the source of the oppressor’s power and authority is in the acquiescence of the people. Israel cannot possibly achieve this when Palestinians are being educated in universities of their own design that function despite the repressions placed upon them. It is not just student activism but the institution of education itself, then, that undermines and threatens the power and authority of the occupation. It therefore must be restricted—and once it is restricted, as aforementioned, its cultural and political value is amplified.

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<sup>108</sup> Gene Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* (Boston, Massachusetts: P. Sargent Publisher, 1973), 12.

## CHAPTER 3

### *Sumud*: the Role of Education in Resisting Oppression

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Education has always been linked to resistance in Palestinian society, and in oppressed societies throughout history. As Mireille Fanon Mendès France of the Frantz Fanon Foundation and the French Jewish Union for Peace explained in a presentation at the World Education Forum in Palestine in 2010, “Education must be a strategic weapon of resistance to oppression and the most effective way to ensure liberation for emancipation.”<sup>109</sup> She continued:

...Those who fought through armed and political resistance during liberation struggles...made education of the populations one of the most important priorities. From Vietnam to Algeria, literacy and education have generally been very quickly recognized as a founding dimension of resistance to oppression. Thus the Palestinian people, who are among the most literate and educated peoples, do not ignore the crucial importance of training—especially against colonialism, which in its classical forms has largely disappeared from the surface of the earth, except here in Palestine.<sup>110</sup>

Her assessment of the Palestinian commitment to education is quite accurate. The cultural meaning Palestinians assign to education is rooted in their historical valuing of resistance in general, which has always been a cornerstone of Palestinian existence and national identity. Education, then, as a form of resistance, is bound to become culturally valued among this oppressed people, as well as more culturally valued over the course of increasing repressions. And it is precisely because resistance is so highly valued that it has become something for which all people can and should strive to achieve and

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<sup>109</sup> Mireille Fanon Mendès France, “Education and Resistance,” World Education Forum. Bethlehem, West Bank, Palestine, October 10, 2010 (World Education Forum), <http://www.alternativenews.org/english/index.php/topics/news/3001-education-and-resistance->.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

incorporate into their daily lives. It is in this sense that ordinary, daily actions can legitimately be considered resistance, in addition to the more traditionally understood organized popular struggle movements. Amira Hass explains this notion of decentralized resistance: speaking of Palestinian resilience, she writes, “The only reason it cannot be termed ‘resistance’ is that it is not organized. It is an individual, personal decision and behavior adopted by an entire collective, but it is not part of a centralized, calculated strategy...”<sup>111</sup> Mazin Qumsiyeh captures this idea perfectly in his definition of *sumud*, an Arabic word describing steadfast devotion to a cause:

We could write volumes about resistance by simply living, eating, breathing in a land that is coveted. We resist by going to school, by cultivating what remains of our lands, by working under harsh conditions and by falling in love, getting married and having children. Resistance includes hanging on to what remains and doing all the mundane tasks of trying to live (survive) in what remains of Palestine when it has been made crystal-clear in words and deeds that we are not welcome on our lands. That is what is called *sumud* in Arabic...<sup>112</sup>

*Sumud* is the exact attitude behind the common Palestinian adage, “to resist is to exist and to exist is to resist.” From the spraypainted Che Guevara silhouettes on the concrete buildings of refugee camps, to the political demands for liberation with which Palestinians and international supporters adorn the wall, to the rich literary tradition of resistance including such greats as Mahmoud Darwish, to the once banned-by-Israeli-military-order Palestinian flag proudly flown from every taxi, keychain, business, home, university, market, etc., Palestinian existence is in many ways defined by this cultural reverence for resistance, which is as much a part of its political landscape as the

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<sup>111</sup> Amira Hass, “Israel's Closure Policy: an Ineffective Strategy of Containment and Repression,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 31, no. 3 (2002): 12, <http://www.jstor.org/>.

<sup>112</sup> Qumsiyeh, *Popular Resistance in Palestine*, 235.

occupation is a part of Palestinian life. For that reason, resistance does not *have* to be an organized movement; it can be anything that indicates survival against the odds, thriving despite oppression. And education is an excellent example of that.

But what proof exists to demonstrate that education truly is valued in Palestinian culture? First of all, the sheer extent to which Palestinians are educated indicates its value. As Samih K. Farsoun explains in *Culture and Customs of the Palestinians*, “The Palestinians are the most highly educated population group per capita in the Arab World and the Middle East.”<sup>113</sup> Sami Khalil Mar’i, author of *Arab Education in Israel*, confirms this point; since the early 1900s, his research outlines, the ratio of Palestinian students enrolled in universities is comparable to most Western European nations, and in fact is paralleled only by the United States, which boasts one of the highest university education rates in the world.<sup>114</sup> So strong is the Palestinian emphasis on education and higher education that it even defies common cultural taboos: according to Farsoun, even decades ago, women of the middle and upper classes were expected to complete university and even postgraduate work, as well as to work after graduation.<sup>115</sup> Ameera Ahmad and Ed Vulliamy reiterate this point, highlighting the connection between education and oppression:

...Palestinian society—both [in Palestine]...and scattered in the diaspora—has put a singular emphasis on learning. After the expulsions of 1948 and after the 1967 occupation, waves of refugees created an influential Palestinian intelligentsia and a marked presence in the disciplines of medicine and engineering across the Arab world, Europe and the Americas.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Samih K. Farsoun, *Culture and Customs of the Palestinians (Culture and Customs of the Middle East)* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2004), 28.

<sup>114</sup> Mar’i, *Arab Education in Israel*, 109.

<sup>115</sup> Farsoun, *Culture and Customs of the Palestinians*, 46.

<sup>116</sup> Ahmad and Vulliamy, “Attacks on school in Gaza.”

Secondly, the emphasis placed on education by what is often an otherwise ineffective government conveys the importance education holds in Palestinian society as well. According to Nathan J. Brown's essay, "Contesting National Identity in Palestinian Education," "One of the first important projects of the [Palestinian National Authority] was to develop a Palestinian national curriculum, which turned out to be the only project that the PNA took that ran on schedule."<sup>117</sup> Brown goes on to explain how the first curriculum the Palestinian Authority developed for Palestinian schoolchildren was remarkably standardized throughout the West Bank, Gaza, UNRWA schools in refugee camps, Israeli-controlled East Jerusalem schools, and church-/private organization-run schools. That the PA managed to complete the curriculum development project when so many of its other initiatives were failing, and did so exceedingly well considering the challenges it faced, is itself a testament to the cultural dedication to education.

#### *HISTORICAL REASONS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF TIES BETWEEN EDUCATION AND RESISTANCE*

It has been established that education is culturally valued because of its profound connection to resistance, and that this valuing of education is evident in the emphasis that is placed on it within Palestinian society. But when did this connection to resistance develop, exactly? We can trace the building of the ties between education and resistance to three main historical trends: lack of control over curriculum, the use of education as a

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<sup>117</sup> Nathan J. Brown, "Contesting National Identity in Palestinian Education," in *Israeli and Palestinian Narratives of Conflict: History's Double Helix*, ed. Robert I. Rotberg (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2006), 226.

vehicle for nation-building and the undermining of the occupation, and the use of education as a means to improve socioeconomic conditions and standards of living.

### *Lack of Control over Curriculum*

One of the many aspects of Palestinian life that has been controlled throughout the imperial control of Palestine—by the Ottoman Empire, Britain, Jordan, Egypt, or Israel—is education. Gaining control of curriculum development, which did not happen until mid-1994 after 26 years of military occupation<sup>118</sup>, was thus itself a small liberation, a victory in terms of national independence and autonomy, which allowed Palestinians to take charge of the cultivation of their own nationalistic ideas. As a Right to Education Campaign report states, “the struggle for education has been critical to protecting Palestinian national identity and civil society.”<sup>119</sup> Before this point, Palestinians were subjected to politicized education designed to build allegiance to competing colonial powers (e.g., Britain and Ottoman)<sup>120</sup>, curriculum that ignored their national identity<sup>121</sup> or downplayed the importance Arab political figures<sup>122</sup>, instruction in languages other than their own<sup>123</sup>, and, upon the creation of the state of Israel in 1948, historically inaccurate teachings emphasizing Jewish ownership of the lands from which many students and their families had just been expelled.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Right to Education Campaign, “The Impact of Military Occupation on Palestinian Education,” 1.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>120</sup> Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*, 51.

<sup>121</sup> Mar'i, *Arab Education in Israel*, 70.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.



The lack of control over education likely worked to emphasize the Palestinian desire to pursue it: like the land, freedom, and so much else, education, as something denied to the people, became something for which they longed. And once control did fall into Palestinian hands, it immediately became vital to resistance efforts. Education indeed shaped and recruited the resistance; gaining control of curriculum development meant Palestinians could finally answer the questions at the heart of their struggle: What is Palestine? What is a Palestinian? What does it mean to be a citizen of Palestine? Brown details some of the changes that were immediately placed into effect:

Given the opportunity to write a comprehensive curriculum for the first time, the Palestinian educators inserted nationalist symbols in every conceivable location and illustration in the new books. Every school flies a Palestinian flag...classrooms exhibit nationalist slogans on blackboards, computers display Palestinian flags... In language class, a grammatical point is illustrated with a quotation from the 1988 Declaration of Independence. The texts...ask children to...repeat, “I am from Palestine” and “my nationality is Palestinian.” In learning calligraphy, second-grade students copy the phrase “Jerusalem is in the heart of every Arab.” Seventh graders graduate to the...question “Beloved Palestine, How Can I Live Far from your Peaks and Valleys?” The students read nationalist writings when studying Arabic and count Palestinian flags while learning arithmetic.<sup>125</sup>

The significance of controlling curriculum development went beyond inserting passing references to nationalist symbols, of course. Controlling the telling of one’s own history is hugely empowering to a historically oppressed people. In developing their own curriculum, Palestinians were able to tell their story as they experienced it, using words like *Nakba*—the catastrophe—to describe their expulsion upon the establishment of the state of Israel in what Jewish Israelis consider their independence day. Every year, the anniversary of the *Nakba* is a day of mourning and political demonstration in both protest

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<sup>125</sup> Brown, “Contesting National Identity in Palestinian Education,” 234.

and commemoration of the injustices of 1948 and those that have continued every year since. As Nur Masalha states in “60 Years after the Nakba: Historical Truth, Collective Memory and Ethical Obligations,” “The rupture of 1948 and the ‘ethnic cleansing’ of the Nakba are central to both the Palestinian society of today and Palestinian social history and collective identity.”<sup>126</sup> It is not surprising, then, that prior to 1994, Israel used its control to reduce the presence of the *Nakba* in education content; after all, to acknowledge the truth of the *Nakba*—the expulsion of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from their homes, the ethnic cleansing of a people—is to give it legitimacy, and thereby legitimize the struggle of the Palestinian people and the people themselves, who history has made clear Israel prefers to be powerless, stateless, and within its control.

In line with gaining control of curriculum, the effect of which was mainly felt on the primary education level, the development of the Palestinian university system was a pivotal event in fostering the Palestinian commitment to education. With the occupation of 1967, it became more difficult for Palestinian students from the West Bank and Gaza to travel abroad to attend university as they had traditionally done. With harassment of students who tried to continue their college education abroad so common, and the ability to actually attend those universities thus so uncertain, by 1970 Birzeit, then a junior college, began the development of a four-year degree program. The institution opened its school of arts and sciences in 1972; following suit, Bethlehem University began its four-

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<sup>126</sup> Nur Masalha, “60 Years After the Nakba: Historical Truth, Collective Memory and Ethical Obligations,” *Kyoto Bulletin of Islamic Area Studies* 3, no. 1 (2009): 38, [http://www.asafas.kyoto-u.ac.jp/kias/contents/pdf/kb3\\_1/06masalha.pdf](http://www.asafas.kyoto-u.ac.jp/kias/contents/pdf/kb3_1/06masalha.pdf).

year program in 1973, an-Najah in 1977, and Hebron University in 1982. Currently, there are six major universities with four-year programs in the OPT.<sup>127</sup> In his review of the history of Palestinian universities, Gabi Baramki makes clear, “none of these institutions received assistance, financial or otherwise, from the Israeli authorities. Rather, the universities are the result of a national initiative by the Palestinian people, who can point to their achievement with pride...”<sup>128</sup> He later reiterates the idea of educational development as a step toward national liberation: “The ‘logic’ of Palestinian academic institution-building...has been independence for the universities, for Palestinian young people, and for Palestinian society.”<sup>129</sup> Higher education, then, is key to the movement for a free Palestine.

A number of authors confirm this assertion. Maya Rosenfeld also points to the development of a university system within Palestine as further solidification of the link between education and resistance. By the 1980s, the founding of the Palestinian universities had forever changed the course of political and civic engagement; the most popular path taken by an aspiring activist was to join a university student committee.<sup>130</sup> To that end, organized resistance movements have always drawn upon teachers, students, and other educated professionals for their leadership.<sup>131</sup> Khalidi, too, shows that education and the educated classes have been an integral part of the Palestinian resistance from the beginning. “There was a widespread and sophisticated opposition to Zionism among

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<sup>127</sup> Gabi Baramki, “Building Palestinian Universities under Occupation,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 17, no. 1 (1987): 13, <http://www.jstor.org/>.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>130</sup> Rosenfeld, *Confronting the Occupation*, 234.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 213.

educated, urban, and politically active Palestinians from a very early stage in the implantation of the Zionist movement in Palestine,” he writes, confirming Rosenfeld’s point.<sup>132</sup> Non-violent resistance expert Gene Sharp also helps underscore the philosophical reasoning behind the establishment of political ties between education and resistance. According to Sharp, the development of social institutions, including educational institutions, is a legitimate form of resistance because these institutions “fulfill needs neglected by established bodies”<sup>133</sup>—in other words, the occupying power. Schools are the most commonly relied upon institution for this form of development; Sharp points to Nazi-occupied Poland and slavery-era America as other historical examples of the use of education to further liberation struggles.

*The Use of Education as a Vehicle for Nation-Building and the Undermining of the Occupation*

Education has always been viewed as a means of forming a more articulate, politically empowered, and effective resistance movement. Accordingly, education is intimately connected to Palestinian ambitions for nationhood; the resistance leaders the universities churn out, in theory, can go on to be leaders of the new Palestinian state, should one ever be established.

Getting an education is thus a way of undermining the occupation not just in its enabling of an active struggle for independence, but in its building a leadership base for a state the oppressor refuses to allow to exist. Palestinians can never hope to achieve any

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<sup>132</sup> Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*, 154.

<sup>133</sup> Gene Sharp, *The Methods of Nonviolent Action* (Boston, Massachusetts: P. Sargent Publisher, 1973), 398.

level of independence if they produce no citizens capable of leading them effectively and competently. In this way, education is an investment into the collective future of Palestine. Rosenfeld's analysis captures this idea best: "In the aftermath of the 1948 war—the uprooting and dispersal in the host countries—higher education gradually came to play an increasingly central role in the social history of the Palestinians."<sup>134</sup> She goes on:

Palestinian higher education was intimately connected to pressing social and political issues, such as the economic and class transformation of the Palestinians in the Diaspora, the long-term development of Palestinian human resources, and the impact of the latter on the composition and potential of the emergent national movement.<sup>135</sup>

Education was also valued for its ability to unify the people. As Mar'i illustrates, "Education, particularly higher education, has apparently played a major role in expanding the clan, religion, or region-based identity into a nationalistic one."<sup>136</sup> Identity can be a divisive factor in the Middle East; religion and social class have the potential to deeply fracture a society. Palestinian society does exhibit this phenomenon to a degree, of course, but historically speaking, education has helped nationalize Palestinian thinking. In the space of the university, students from different religious and socioeconomic backgrounds are still students, and similarly oppressed ones at that, which allows for the formation of solidarity in struggle. Without university education, then, the Palestinian people would be significantly less able to resist the occupation or endeavor to liberate themselves.

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<sup>134</sup> Rosenfeld, *Confronting the Occupation*, 121.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>136</sup> Mar'i, *Arab Education in Israel*, 120.

*The Use of Education as a Means of Bettering Socioeconomic Conditions and Standards of Living*

As Farsoun explains, in the immediate aftermath of the *Nakba*, and again after 1967, Palestinians faced a profound sense of insecurity. Having been expelled from their lands, forced to live under occupation, or made to accept the establishment of a new state altogether in their historic homeland, Palestinians' economic prospects and general living conditions were incredibly unstable and uncertain.<sup>137</sup> Palestinians thus had to depend upon their human capital—education and skill levels—to provide the sense of security they were otherwise lacking, making education “extremely valued” amongst Palestinians.<sup>138</sup> “Having by and large become urban-centered, political-national minorities without land, property, or influence,” Rosenfeld writes on the particular challenges with which diaspora Palestinians were presented, “the Palestinians were forced to struggle in...competitive labor markets of the host countries. Under these debilitating conditions higher education was rendered a valuable asset, perhaps the only one that could guarantee survival in the long run.”<sup>139</sup> Mar'i agrees: “Since [Palestinians] do not have a state of their own in order to provide them with some kind of protection, they find higher education furnishes the means to occupy highly influential positions in the political and socioeconomic structure of many Arab countries...”<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Farsoun, *Culture and Customs of the Palestinians*, 28.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>139</sup> Rosenfeld, *Confronting the Occupation*, 124.

<sup>140</sup> Mar'i, *Arab Education in Israel*, 120.

Even completely divorced from quixotic ideals of resistance to oppression, education holds a deeply practical value to Palestinian survival. For generations, Palestinians have faced an uncertain reality in which they could lose their homes, jobs, or lives at almost any moment. The occupation in its present form (and in the forms that have existed before it) presents myriad challenges to Palestinian prosperity. As is generally true, positions acquired on the merits of higher education guarantee more economic security and thus socioeconomic stability than lower-level employment. Higher education, then, is not just an investment in the collective future as previously mentioned; it is an investment in the individual's present, a means by which to substantially and immediately improve one's chances for survival in a system seemingly designed to prevent it.

Following the *Nakba*, for example, education came to altogether replace the social and political role previously held by the economic stability of individual land ownership and the collective ownership of a homeland. As Salah Alzaroo and Gillian Lewando Hunt, who interviewed Palestinian refugees extensively for their *Social Policy & Administration* article entitled "Education in the Context of Conflict and Instability: The Palestinian Case," explain, "Education for Palestinians was used as a remedy, to make up for the loss of land and property...[and to] rescue what was left and to rebuild themselves..."<sup>141</sup> Many international agencies and NGOs additionally used education as a

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<sup>141</sup> Salah Alzaroo and Gillian Lewando Hunt, "Education in the Context of Conflict and Instability: the Palestinian Case," *Social Policy & Administration* 37, no. 2 (2003): 174, <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/>.

rehabilitative tool in order to help refugees cope with trauma.<sup>142</sup> Alzaroo's and Hunt's interviewees highlight this idea:

*“Education is our shelter. We do not own land, farms, factories or any businesses.”* (1st generation male elder from Al Fawar)

*“I think education is very important. It is our only way out. We don't have land, we only have education.”* (1st generation male elder from Al Aroub)

*“We are nothing without education. Education gives value to humans, especially to us the Palestinians, for we are without money or support and we have no choice but education.”* (3rd generation girl from Al Fawar)<sup>143</sup>

(Note: the first generation is comprised of those who survived the *Nakba*; the second generation is comprised of the children of the first generation, and so on.) Evidently, then, education is considered to be absolutely critical both to Palestinian leadership in the future and to Palestinian survival in the present.

Considering these three primary benefits education has conferred upon Palestinians—a level of autonomy from the occupying powers, a means by which to undermine occupying powers by investing in future Palestinian independence, and an option for increasing economic security—it is no surprise that education is so valued within Palestinian society nor so closely tied to resisting oppression. Taking into account how Palestinians perceive and define resistance culturally, each of these three benefits is a legitimate form of resistance: each allows for the Palestinian people to exist, survive, and even thrive despite the efforts of their oppressors.

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 174.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 174.



*THE INCREASED VALUE OF EDUCATION AMONG THE FURTHER MARGINALIZED*

Now that it has been established that (a) Palestinians value education, particularly higher education; and (b) this education is valued due to both its embodiment and promotion of resistance, we can further evidence the cultural significance of education in identifying and analyzing how the notion of education as resistance becomes even stronger when increasing obstacles are placed thereon. In other words, the more education is repressed, the more valuable it becomes. According to R2E's report, "...it is difficult to overestimate the esteem in which education is held or the considerable sacrifices that individual students are prepared to make to remain involved to a high level of achievement."<sup>144</sup> Ahmad and Vulliamy explain in *The Guardian* that the obstacles the Israeli occupation places on education access for Palestinians, namely closures and student detentions, "only [strengthen] the desire to become educated."<sup>145</sup> The article goes on to interview Oxford professor Dr. Karma Nabulsi, whose offers valuable insight:

"Learn, baby, learn" was a slogan of the black rights movement in America's ghettos a generation ago, but it also epitomises the idea of education as the central pillar of Palestinian identity – a traditional premium on schooling steeled by occupation, and something the Israelis "cannot abide... and seek to destroy," according to [Nabulsi]... "We knew before, and see more clearly now than ever, that Israel is seeking to annihilate an educated Palestine," she says.<sup>146</sup>

We will examine the Nabulsi's final assertion in more depth in Chapter Five. For now, we will focus on the idea of increasing repressions further motivating Palestinian students to pursue education. To understand this phenomenon, just look, for example, at what happened in Palestinian society when education was effectively outlawed. With the

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<sup>144</sup> Right to Education Campaign, "The Impact of Military Occupation on Palestinian Education," 1.

<sup>145</sup> Ahmad and Vulliamy, "Attacks on school in Gaza."

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

Israeli military ban placed on all education institutions in the OPT during the First Intifada, we see the rise of clandestine schools, with communities organizing and holding classes for students of all levels in homes, mosques, churches, and wherever else possible. The pursuit of education despite military order against it made getting an education an act of civil disobedience. In chronicling this and other obstacles placed on education in the OPT, Penny Johnson explains that these clandestine schools helped shape the Palestinian perspective on the function of education in a society fighting for its liberation. “The drive for community education,” she writes, “stimulated new thinking about Palestinian education in the context of sustained rebellion or crisis, including at the university level.”<sup>147</sup> Indeed, as has been demonstrated time and time again, the university played a central role in this linking of education and resistance. During this period, several attempts were made by both students and faculty of Birzeit University to reclaim their closed campus; sit-ins were held at the checkpoint blocking entry to the university, and faculty were able to give lectures and small seminars in some parts of the campus. Despite this, university closure largely prevailed, and the Israeli occupation forces continued to use university buildings and other educational centers as makeshift detention centers and military headquarters.<sup>148</sup> Hence, education remained, by necessity, underground.

This increased valuing of education that comes with the increased repression thereof is evident in almost countless ways. For example, education takes on a more elevated cultural meaning to the marginalized within the marginalized—in other words,

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<sup>147</sup> Johnson, “Palestinian Universities under Occupation: February-May 1988,” 117.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

groups of Palestinians who face additional oppressions, such as refugees and incarcerated students. With these groups, we once again see how the more obstacles that are placed on the access to a right, the more significance that right will have to those who are denied it. The struggle for education access for these Palestinian university students further demonstrates how education is directly philosophically and politically resisting oppression.

### *Refugees*

Sociologist-anthropologist Maya Rosenfeld lived in Dheisheh refugee camp, just south of Bethlehem, for four years in order to write *Confronting the Occupation: Work, Education, and Political Activism of Palestinian Families in a Refugee Camp*. This book provides a fascinating view into the cultural attitudes held by some of the most marginalized Palestinians. Rosenfeld found that living in a refugee camp placed additional barriers on education access, meaning that refugee families had to be that much more committed to educating their children in order to be able to do so. While most of these obstacles to education in refugee camps exist on the primary level and thus do not directly apply to higher education, they certainly can bar students from acquiring the level of achievement necessary to go on to university. Rosenfeld cites the limitations of the UNRWA schooling program and a lack of government investment—both from the Jordanian regime when it maintained control and the current Israeli regime whose policies she describes as promoting “de-development”—as significant obstacles Dheisheh families faced. Despite this, Rosenfeld notes, it was not unusual for otherwise

impoverished refugee families in Dheisheh to put as many as nine children through high school (which was not available under the UNRWA schooling system) and even university.<sup>149</sup> She further notes that it was not uncommon for older siblings to facilitate the education of younger siblings, which was considered the ultimate gift.<sup>150</sup>

Refugee families like those Rosenfeld encountered in Dheisheh illustrate the intrinsic relationship between living under a state of oppression and marginalization and the cultural importance of using education as a tool to combat that state. Her observations on interacting with Palestinian refugees whom she interviewed about this very topic are very enlightening and thus worth quoting at length:

Dheishehians, young and old, frequently speak in praise of educated people and of education. Already in my first meetings with families in the camp, and before I had managed to raise the subject, my hosts presented me with “lists” of those among their sons and daughters who had acquired higher education. They provided names of the universities and the degrees obtained, often fleshing out matters with a full “geneology” of the educated people on their family tree. Apart from the subject of political prisoners—which was then the signal item on the agenda for the Dheishehians [note: these interviews took place during the First Intifada]—higher education of family members was a topic of choice. Showing how well versed they were on the details, men and women who did not know how to read or write easily elaborated the exact course of study of their younger siblings, their sons and daughters, as well as of distant relatives.”<sup>151</sup>

It is clear, then, that education is genuinely valued among the refugee population of Palestine, to an extent that makes the impact of marginalization on their commitment to education undeniable.

Additionally, Penny Johnson concluded in her research on the state of education under occupation that university students who are refugees are the most likely group of

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<sup>149</sup> Rosenfeld, *Confronting the Occupation*, 108.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

students to be arrested and placed under detention while attending university.<sup>152</sup> Being a primary target for both arrest and administrative detention, refugee university students are at a severe disadvantage as compared to university students who do not come from camps, and are much more likely to have their university education interrupted and thus their right to education denied. A refugee therefore takes additional risks when attempting to assert and pursue this right. Considering this fact and Rosenfeld's observations, we can reasonably conclude that, having faced additional barriers to acquiring education as compared to their non-refugee counterparts, the refugee demographic can trace its exceptional dedication to education back to its similarly exceptional lack of access thereto, further confirming the idea that increasing repressions make that which is repressed all the more valuable.

### *Detained Students*

Students who are arrested and incarcerated—especially those who are detained as students precisely *because* they are students, the demographic upon which this research is mainly focused—perhaps face the most daunting challenges to pursuing higher education while behind bars, physically isolated from their universities. Yet the Palestinian prison experience reveals a remarkable commitment to education—and, more notably, a politicization of detainees that explicitly links this education to resistance. Political organization within prisons (and even across them, as seen with the prisoner hunger

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<sup>152</sup> Johnson, "Palestinian Universities under Occupation: February-May 1988," 120.

strikes during the Intifada years<sup>153</sup>) is certainly common and well documented. Less understood, however, is the extent to which education and resistance in prison culture is seen as one in the same, and equally necessary for overcoming oppression. In her essay “Political Detention: Countering the University,” Barbara Harlow explains this concept best:

The economic and political conditions of occupation and dispossession that have disrupted the ideal of the splendid solitude of scholarly pursuits have made of learning a collective street activity. They have inspired as well, over decades of repression, the emergence of an organized Palestinian resistance movement demanding liberation of the land and autonomy and self-determination for the people living under occupation. The Israeli military occupation has responded to this challenge by its opponents to its oppressive authority with consistent and massive detention, often without trial. In prison, however, and within the framework of the collective work of political opposition, those counter-strategies of reading and writing, developed of necessity outside, are further exercised and developed as critical weapons in the struggle itself.<sup>154</sup>

In other words, education is seen as an invaluable tool for resistance specifically within the context of imprisonment. Likewise, the politicization of prisoners—the Marx and Malcolm X books passed from prisoner to prisoner, the networking and connections made, the strategic planning for acts of popular struggle to be carried out both on the inside and the outside, etc.—is not merely a formation or heightening of political awareness; this politicization within prison *is* an education. And the prison, in turn, becomes the university. Rosenfeld notes that most prisoners spend their detention studying politics, philosophy, and history, in addition to whatever subjects they had been studying prior to their arrest, as part of this political education. As a result, many

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<sup>153</sup> Qumsiyeh, *Popular Resistance in Palestine*, 142.

<sup>154</sup> Barbara Harlow, “Political Detention: Countering the University,” *October* 53 (1990): 42-43, <http://www.jstor.org/>.

university students are released from prison ready to continue their education that had been interrupted by detention—a political statement in itself, showing that they cannot be deterred by Israeli repressions—as well as further politicized and committed to the Palestinian struggle.<sup>155</sup>

As sites of Palestinian oppression, both the prison and the university present the opportunity for political resistance, and are thus both battlefields on which the Palestinian liberation struggle is waged. This overlap of seemingly separate spaces and processes—prison and university, education and political resistance—demonstrates the pervasiveness of the cultural idea of education as resistance in Palestinian society. One imprisoned student who was fully engaged in this prison education culture, for example, in speaking to a lawyer who asked him to comment on the overcrowding of the prison, corrected the lawyer’s assertion that the prisoners were packed in like sardines, declaring instead that they were packed more like matches in a matchbook: in which “the heads of all the matches are facing in the same direction.”<sup>156</sup>

#### *HISTORICAL REASONS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING OF EDUCATION AS INHERENTLY POLITICAL*

Thus far, we have discussed the significance of education to resistance within Palestinian society. At what point, though, did the cultural notion of education shift from education being understood as merely something that was important and useful to something that was inherently political as well? Or rather, what specific factors along

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<sup>155</sup> Rosenfeld, *Confronting the Occupation*, 253.

<sup>156</sup> Harlow, “Political Detention: Countering the University,” 42.

with the aforementioned historical trends caused this collective cultural realization of sorts? The answer to this question boils down not to any specific date or event in history, but to two more historical trends.

### *Education as a Proud Tradition*

The more repressed education was, the more normalized the expectation that Palestinians would educate themselves became. Two distinct social pressures enable this relationship: first, a “we cannot let them take this from us, too” attitude, which is a general desire on behalf of those living in a highly oppressive society, such as under occupation, to limit the extent of the oppression to which they must be subjected; and secondly, the implicit understanding that one must carry on the tradition of struggle of one’s forbearers, for the forbearers struggled to overcome oppression such that the younger generation might hopefully need not struggle as much. That oppression has seemed only to increase over time means that so too must the commitment to resist it. The Ahmad and Vulliamy interview with Dr. Nabulsi sheds light on this idea. “Education is the most important thing,” Nabulsi says. “It is part of the family life, part of your identity and part of the rebellion...every child knows that in those same schooldesks sat your parents and your grandparents, whose tradition they carry on.”<sup>157</sup>

### *The Extent of the Repression of Education Synonymizes it with Struggle*

Mazin Qumsiyeh quotes Israeli political scientist and former Jerusalem administrator Meron Benvenisti, according to whom there exists an inevitable tension

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<sup>157</sup> Ahmad and Vulliamy, “Attacks on school in Gaza.”



between Palestinian universities and the occupation forces: “[Israel’s] view of the universities as hotbeds of subversion in academic guise, the Israeli view of political expression as subversive activity aimed at the destruction of Israel, and the Palestinian view of Israel as an occupying power and illegitimate ruler, made the clash inevitable,” he claims.<sup>158</sup> This “clash” of which Benvenisti speaks, of course, is any of the number of repressions placed on the Palestinian university system, from closures to student detention to the banning of student societies, and the subsequent Palestinian resistance.

Logically speaking, something must carry at least some political meaning if it is deliberately restricted and repressed by political authorities. In Palestine, education qualifies for this distinction. Likewise, the cultural imperative in Palestinian society is not just to become educated; it is also to make use of that education for the benefit of Palestinian liberation. Thus, for Palestinians, fighting to access education despite the obstacles is not just necessary in the practical sense of wanting to prevent yet another right from being denied to them, as explained in the previous section; Palestinians must, more importantly, understand the significance of *why* this right is being denied in the first place. Israelis would not bother restricting Palestinian access to education if Palestinian education was not, in some way, a threat. Gene Sharp writes that, “Violent domestic sanctions, such as imprisonment or execution, are commonly intended to punish disobedience, not to achieve the objective of the original command, except insofar as such sanctions may inhibit future disobedience by other persons.”<sup>159</sup> Looking at the state of Palestinian higher education under Israeli occupation, it is clear that the Israeli policy

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<sup>158</sup> Qumsiyeh, *Popular Resistance in Palestine*, 121.

<sup>159</sup> Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*, 12.

of arresting students simply for their being students demonstrates how education can legitimately be considered an act of civil disobedience or resistance—and, like all acts of civil disobedience, it is something that an oppressive governmental power must seek to eradicate in order to maintain its power. In recognizing the inherent political value of education, then, and in taking advantage of that by further committing themselves to pursuing this politically valuable education, Palestinians strengthen their resistance to oppression.

As has been mentioned before, the restrictions placed on Palestinians' access to higher education are ongoing and, in many cases, worsening. It is for this reason that we see the creation of the Right to Education Campaign, which began at Birzeit University in the 1970s as a legal assistance organization for university students who had been arrested and imprisoned, and which has since expanded to document the Israeli abuses of Palestinians' right to education on the campus of each major Palestinian university with international support. The next chapter will analyze Palestinians' attitudes toward education, comparing the experiences of these Palestinians, many of whom students, to those of students and educators living under other oppressive societies throughout history. These similar manifestations of the education-as-liberation paradigm demonstrate the critical link between education and resistance.

## CHAPTER 4

### Contemporary Attitudes and Issues: Perspectives from Palestine, South Africa, and Brazil

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#### PALESTINE

For his book *Arab Education in Israel*, Sami Khalil Mar'i surveyed college- and pre-college-aged students about their experiences with and attitudes toward higher education. "Keeping economic values aside," one question asked, "what does it mean to you to become a college educated person?" 90% of Mar'i's respondents in the West Bank associated college education "with sociopolitical power, with nation-building, and with Palestinian nationalistic leadership."<sup>160</sup>

His findings, demonstrating the cultural commitment to education and its relevance to political resistance, are not surprising. Palestinians in Israel, in the OPT, and throughout the diaspora have all recognized a linkage between education, particularly higher education, and the process of addressing the social and political oppressions they face. Salah Alzaroo's and Gillian Lewando Hunt's Palestinian refugee interviewees embody this perspective. As previously argued, Palestinian refugees, as a doubly marginalized group, serve as a prime example of how education comes to be increasingly valued over a period of intensified repression. As such, refugees are a microcosmic representation of Palestinian society as a whole, and an extreme case worthy of study in order to explore the concept of education as resistance. Alzaroo's and Hunt's interview results highlight the three main points of this research: that education is highly culturally

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<sup>160</sup> Mar'i, *Arab Education in Israel*, 119.

valued among an oppressed people; that education is a valid means to liberation; and that education, though not an organized political movement, can nevertheless be considered a legitimate form of resistance.

### *The Cultural Value of Education*

Alzaroo's and Hunt's interviews with Palestinian refugees were incredibly revealing. Through these interviews, the two were able to conclude that:

...The experience of displacement and prolonged conflict is a decisive factor in pushing Palestinian refugees towards education. Education has both helped them adapt to the new life of exile and kept alive the prospects of returning home. It is no surprise that refugees attached great significance to obtaining an education, for it was a survival strategy.<sup>161</sup>

According to Alzaroo and Hunt, education, then, as has been argued earlier, transcends even the concept of political resistance: it is a means of survival in a society where survival is constantly threatened. As such, it certainly attains a heightened level of cultural capital and meaning. "To stay and survive," a second generation woman from al-Aroub told Alzaroo and Hunt, "you don't need to eat and drink only, but to study as well."<sup>162</sup> As with Rosenfeld and her experiences conducting interviews in Deheisheh refugee camp, Alzaroo and Hunt note the incredible frequency and reverence with which Palestinian refugee interviewees spoke of education, particularly higher education.

Consider the following interview with a third generation young woman from al-Aroub:

*Q: What do you like to accomplish?*

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<sup>161</sup> Alzaroo and Hunt, "Education in the Context of Conflict and Instability: the Palestinian Case," 171.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.

*A: The biggest concern is finishing my law studies and becoming a lawyer. I want to defend people who have been unjustly treated and give them back their rights. I want to be independent.*

*Q: What distinguishes your family?*

*A: My grandfather and his brothers were educated. Their father was blind but educated. He used to memorize the Quran. My father was always interested in our education. I must always be the first in my class. My mother failed in the subject of history in her general exam and my grandfather begged her to re-sit the exam but she refused and got married. My mother says that this is the biggest mistake of her life because the certificate is a weapon and without it there is no value for a girl in society. If I got 18 out of 20 in my exam my grandfather felt upset even at Al Tawjihi [matriculation]. My grandfather used to count my marks, he insisted on educating us ... We are facing a difficult situation and my mother wants to work, her chances would be better if she had her certificate. My mother likes our marks to be in the nineties so she can be proud of us.<sup>163</sup>*

As this interview demonstrates, Palestinian refugees are likely to refer to education and the importance of being educated *specifically* when asked about their values, goals, or achievements *in general*. The fact that education is so ubiquitously and consistently evoked in response to completely open-ended questions is itself a testament to how pervasive this cultural notion of its importance is. In this particular interview, higher education is identified as a means to redress injustices, establish independence, gain honor or repute, assert gender equity, and, most descriptively, as a “weapon”—a source of political, social, and economic power that one would deeply regret forsaking. Education is valued, indeed.

These characterizations are by no means unique to this particular respondent. In the majority of 18 interviews between two separate refugee camps, interviewees identified education as their first personal priority, and women in particular notably ranked education as more important than getting married. Interviews typically revealed that

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<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 172.

education was valued above even money, despite the fact that most of the respondents, as refugees, faced significant financial hardship. As a second generation male respondent from al-Farwar stated simply in response to the question, “What do you teach your children?” “The poor is the poor of mind, not money.” For that reason, he teaches his children “the fear of God, and the value of education,” in that order, above all else.<sup>164</sup>

### *Education as Liberation*

Alzaroo and Hunt learned through their interviews that education was not merely considered important in Palestinian culture, but that it was, more significantly, linked to the idea of political emancipation itself. “Through education,” they explain,

... Palestinians...tried to create a critical awareness of political phenomena by opening discussion and analysis of a range of evidence and opinions. They realized that education is one of the primary elements without which they cannot liberate their land. For them schools and universities were not educational institutions only, but also political establishments.<sup>165</sup>

Thus, Alzaroo and Hunt confirm previous arguments that education and freedom, in Palestinian social consciousness and in liberation struggles in general, go hand in hand. The following interview with a second generation woman from al-Aroub reiterates this idea:

The first Intifada destroyed us, they used to come to school and ask us to go out for demonstrations. We were happy about that because we were able to leave school. The severe consequences of that is a generation of illiterates for there was high drop-out rate from school. Everyone should have worked to control us in the schools because getting us out of schools is the aim of the Zionists.<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 172.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 176.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., 176-177.

This woman's interview provides yet more insight into the Palestinian perception of education as an integral aspect of the struggle for liberation. The harmful effects of the interruption and devaluing of education (here, perpetrated by fellow Palestinians who encouraged political demonstration during the Intifada at the expense of classroom instruction time) is considered to have "destroyed us"—to altogether ruin Palestinians as a group—which is undeniably a powerful statement and strong indication of just how critical to the collective struggle for liberation education is considered to be. Moreover, this woman accuses "the Zionists," the Israeli forces, of intentionally and strategically restricting Palestinian education—a claim that will be examined in the following chapter.

### *Education as Resistance*

If education is a path to liberation, it is because of its ability to undermine oppression. This, of course, is the heart of resistance. In Palestine, it has become understood that resistance takes many forms. No longer limited to armed struggle, Palestinian resistance manifests itself in actions from the heroic to the seemingly mundane—which, in turn, are reimagined and promoted as heroic. Education, of course, is a key example of this phenomenon. As Alzaroo and Hunt explain, "For some of the interviewees the struggle against occupation and for liberation was not only limited to the armed struggle. It was understood that the good educator can also be a militant whose actions are in line with a political and revolutionary stance."<sup>167</sup> One second generation man from al-Fawar reiterated this idea: "I didn't keep quiet," he said. "Participation [in

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 177.

the struggle] is not necessarily with a sword or bullet or a stone. Fighting can be done with words also.”<sup>168</sup>

It is through just this perspective that education has become so centrally and irrevocably tied to resistance. This connection, however, does not exist only in Palestine. In fact, it is common amongst oppressed peoples throughout the world and at various points in history. Two particularly telling instances of this cultural promotion of education as resistance are found in Apartheid-era South Africa and Brazil.

#### *SOUTH AFRICA*

As Walter R. Johnson writes in “Education: Keystone of Apartheid,” “education [was] manipulated to perpetuate the dominance of one group over another.”<sup>169</sup> In providing a context for education issues in Apartheid-era South Africa, he quotes a 1961 Transvaal administrator, whose words explain the political aim of education perfectly: “We must strive to win the fight against the non-White in the classroom instead of losing it on the battlefield.”<sup>170</sup> The British used education early on in South African history as a tool to establish political authority and dominance, implementing English-language education to counter Dutch influence. As early as the 1890s, white South Africans argued for the manipulation of education systems to maintain their social and economic superiority over other racial groups.<sup>171</sup> In 1953, the South African government passed the

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<sup>168</sup> Ibid., 176-177.

<sup>169</sup> Walton R. Johnson, “Education: Keystone of Apartheid,” *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 13, no. 3 (1982): 214, <http://www.jstor.org/>.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 214.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 216.



Bantu Education Act, which completely “centralized African education under the national government and made it illegal for anyone to establish schools for Africans without the government’s permission.”<sup>172</sup> This system was designed to disempower black Africans and thereby elevate the social and economic standing of the white Afrikaner population.<sup>173</sup> The Bantu Education Act of 1953 and other government policies reinforced the high dropout rate in African school systems and relegated black Africans to low-paying menial labor.<sup>174</sup> Even school curriculum was designed to perpetuate Apartheid by further subjugating black Africans: textbooks emphasized white self-determination and preservation and linked black Africans to rural, uncivilized, and tribal existence, “[creating] a psychological atmosphere in which African resistance to domination [was] reduced.”<sup>175</sup> So intimately linked were the Apartheid policies and South Africa’s educational system, in fact, that Johnson wrote, “to change education is to change apartheid.”<sup>176</sup>

It is clear, then, that those in power exploited education to reinforce and further entrench the marginalization of others. But, as this research seeks to demonstrate, the marginalized can co-opt this process of politicizing education, appropriating it as a tool in their liberation struggle against those who oppress them. This was certainly the case in South Africa, where student movements and university groups led major resistance movements against Apartheid. The National Union of South African Students (NUSAS), due to its commitment to equality and freedom, frequently came under attack from the

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<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 219.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 219.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 220.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., 223-224.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., 230.

national government. As Gail Morlan explains in “The student revolt against racism in South Africa,” NUSAS became actively involved in opposing Apartheid policies in the 1950s.<sup>177</sup> As is the case with Palestinian student organizations, members of NUSAS, particularly presidents, were routinely arrested beginning in July of 1964. Charged with sabotage, these students were detained and, as is also seen amongst Palestinians today, subsequently developed a widely successful grassroots prisoner education program to minimize the negative impact of imprisonment on education access.<sup>178</sup> When certain “liberalistic” students and faculty—in other words, those who dissented from Apartheid’s oppressive regime—were “banned” such that they could not continue their university education or teaching, NUSAS and other student groups protested so ardently that the organization, along with similarly focused groups such as the University Christian Movement, was banned on several campuses.<sup>179</sup> Likewise, today, professors in Palestinian universities who oppose Israel’s policies may be banned from re-entry into the OPT and Palestinian student organizations, including student governments, are banned under Israeli law, leaving those elected to student government likely to face arrest and detention. As Stephen Zunes points out in “Non-Violent Action: Downfall of Apartheid,” South African universities became arbiters of anti-Apartheid resistance when students led non-violent boycott movements, such as the 1985 boycott of classes<sup>180</sup>—much like, of course, Palestinian movements of the same nature. According to Zunes,

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<sup>177</sup> Gail Morlan, “The Student Revolt against Racism in South Africa,” *Africa Today* 17, no. 3, (1970): 12, <http://www.jstor.org/>.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, 14-15.

<sup>180</sup> Stephen Zunes, “The Role of Non-Violent Action in the Downfall of Apartheid,” *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 37, no. 1 (1999): 155, <http://www.jstor.org/>.

student strikes, in conjunction with other non-violent actions, were definitive and effective in forcing the hand of the Apartheid government; they also helped recruit support for the resistance across racial and professional lines.<sup>181</sup>

These stories, however, depict the university as merely the *site* of resistance. But, as is currently seen in Palestine, just getting an education—or asserting control over that process—was in many ways a valid form of resistance in Apartheid-era South Africa in and of itself. Zunes explains how “schools...were renamed by young men with paintbrushes after jailed and exiled heroes of the resistance,”<sup>182</sup> illustrating the symbolic connection between education and resistance. Accordingly, a number of lower-level schools admitted non-white students in violation of segregation laws in a show of solidarity with the anti-Apartheid struggle and in an effort to dismantle the unjust educational structures that supported the institution of Apartheid.<sup>183</sup>

Yet it is Nelson Mandela, hero of the anti-Apartheid movement in South Africa who went on to become president of the post-Apartheid nation, who is perhaps the best embodiment of education as resistance. A political prisoner for 27 years, many of which spent on the infamous Robben Island, Mandela became a source of hope and intellectual growth for other prisoners, with whom he worked to develop the now renowned academic culture of the prison. As Anders Hallengren wrote for the official Nobel Prize website,

Robben Island became a campus for political prisoners. They had to work outdoors in an isolated lime quarry, where, when left to themselves in mine shafts,

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<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 166-167.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., 159.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid., 159.

they discussed their different views and taught each other what they knew, year after year. Mandela wanted the spirit of a university to reign, and regular lectures were arranged in secrecy. Thus, the prison would be called “The Robben Island University” or later, “Nelson Mandela University.” From debates with prisoners and white warders through the years, Mandela grew to a widened ideological awareness from which he would draw when arguing with the government on a new South African constitution.<sup>184</sup>

It is in the example of Nelson Mandela that we see how education was identified as a key instrument in the struggle against oppression in South Africa. It even laid the foundation for post-Apartheid South Africa, which is a society built on tireless efforts to redefine racial relations such that all people of South Africa are citizens with full rights and protections of the law—a model to which many Palestinians today aspire.

### *BRAZIL*

Indigenous populations in Brazil face many political, social, and economic disadvantages as a result of national policies that marginalize or ignore them. Education is no exception. Christine Ballangee Morris’ case study of the Guarani school project in Brazil, published in “Decolonialization, Art Education, and One Guarani Nation of Brazil,” demonstrates many of the same elements we saw in Apartheid-era South Africa and in Palestine today: the manipulation of education by oppressive forces to institutionalize marginalization, the reclamation of education by an oppressed people as an act of resistance, and the subsequent suppression of those resistance efforts.

The Guarani people have been colonized since the 1500s, when early Spanish and Portuguese settlers first came to Brazil. The colonial government instated at that time

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<sup>184</sup> Anders Hallengren, “Nelson Mandela and the Rainbow of Culture,” Nobelprize.org, [http://nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/peace/laureates/1993/mandela-article.html](http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/1993/mandela-article.html).

sought solely to “enslave or eliminate the indigenous population.”<sup>185</sup> Deprived of their land and in the face of diaspora, many Guarani were forced to labor for the colonial government or seek livelihood elsewhere. Under the colonial regime, the Guarani tribe was almost altogether annihilated; the 1966 government census which claimed the tribe no longer existed was not corrected until a 1995 UNESCO census confirming there was still an existing, though small, population.<sup>186</sup>

Educational systems for Guarani people are in crisis. According to Morris, many Guarani children drop out of school due to the racism they experience at the hands of their fellow students and teachers. The curriculum children are forced to learn, as in Apartheid South Africa and under Israeli control of Palestinian curriculum development, is thoroughly grounded in western ideology, culturally divorced from the indigenous people, and highly colonialist in nature. “The [Brazilian] government’s 1995 report on the indigenous people states that a goal of public education for the indigenous youth is to recruit and domesticate them as laborers,” Morris writes.<sup>187</sup> She continues: “Federal policies deprive the Guarani of traditional food, their style of living, education, cultural identity, health, land, and occasionally their lives.”<sup>188</sup> She reiterates this idea again: “Colonialism is a complex set of relationships stemming from one people’s having power over another people’s education, language(s), culture(s), lands and economy.”<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> Christine Ballangee-Morris, Karai’ Mirin, and Christina Rizzi, “Decolonialization, Art Education, and One Guarani Nation of Brazil,” *Studies in Art Education* 41, no. 2 (2000): 102, <http://www.jstor.org/>.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

Thus, from Palestine to South Africa to Brazil, controlling education is a critical element of oppressing and controlling a population. For that reason, the attempt of an indigenous population to take the control of education into its own hands undermines colonialism and oppression, and can accordingly be considered an act of resistance. To that end, Morris' interviews with Guarani tribe members indicate that the Guarani people tend to consider getting an education an "action for freedom."<sup>190</sup> As one tribe member explained, "We have lost our land. Our herbs, feathers, special ceremonial wood, and some art have been lost because of our displacement but we still have our traditions. Traditions are the most important aspect of our culture because this contains the continuation of our knowledge."<sup>191</sup> Karai' Mirin, contributor to Morris' article and the director of the Guarani Cultural Center, identifies education—particularly of history, including the narratives developed by both the colonized and the colonizers—as the first critical step in the process of decolonization.<sup>192</sup> Clearly, education carries significant cultural meaning to an oppressed people like the Guarani.

After the federal government of Brazil created the National Education for the Indigenous branch (NEI) in 1987, Mirin began a legal battle for the right to develop an autonomous school system, pedagogy, and curriculum for his tribe. He justified his case by arguing that educational autonomy would help address the Guarani's "loss of identity," "loss of dignity and self-respect through oppression over the years,"

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<sup>190</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid., 104.

alcoholism, youth suicide, poor health, and unemployment.”<sup>193</sup> Thus, as in Palestine, education and educational independence are seen as a means to resist and redress injustices. Unfortunately for the Guarani people, their struggle for freedom is also parallel to Palestine’s in the subsequent increasing repressions faced by those who resist. The Federal Indigenous Agency (FUNAI) actively tried to remove Mirin from the school project, and “unidentified people” spread rumors about Mirin’s efforts throughout the reservation, costing him essential trust and support amongst his constituents.<sup>194</sup> FUNAI went as far as to claim the school did not even exist, accusing Mirin of collecting money under false pretenses. Though these charges were ultimately dismissed, Mirin and the school system he hoped to create were no longer welcome on the Guarani reservation. Today, Mirin believes that FUNAI became involved in his project because the autonomy of the Guarani posed a threat to the power of the colonizer: “the colonizer’s discourse allows no foundation or text in which the colonized person can have a voice,” Mirin states.<sup>195</sup> Morris reiterates this notion: “The Guarani came close to achieving an education model for other indigenous and non-indigenous groups to follow—a dangerous notion in a colonialist setting.”<sup>196</sup>

Be it in Palestine, South Africa, or Brazil, education the world over is considered to be a powerful weapon in the hands of the oppressed. For that reason, the oppressor logically fears this possibility and must, to maintain supremacy, restrict or eliminate it. In

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<sup>193</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid., 112.

the next chapter, we will explore how and why the Israeli occupation forces deliberately and strategically limit Palestinian education access as a means to maintain authority.



## CHAPTER 5

# Scholasticide and the Threat of Education

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In her interview with Ameera Ahmad and Ed Vulliamy, Dr. Nabulsi provided an unequivocal assessment of the situation of Palestinian education. “We knew before, and see more clearly now than ever,” she said, “that Israel is seeking to annihilate an educated Palestine.”<sup>197</sup> In this chapter, we will explore how Israel’s repression of Palestinian education is not incidental, a mere fact of occupied life, but deliberate and calculated.

Dr. Nabulsi’s comments were not made without substantial evidence. In the Intifada years, with the military order of the closure of all educational institutions and the intentional targeting of anyone suspected to have defied this order—recall, carrying a book while walking down the street was grounds for arrest or shooting—education was, for all intents and purposes, banned. Currently, arrest, detention, and administrative detention are more likely for those involved in student government (presumably the most politically involved of students), as well as more likely to occur at critical points in one’s educational career, such as during final exams or near graduation. The state of Israel often categorically denies travel for educational purposes, banning Gazans from studying in the West Bank or abroad, even for such prestigious programs as the Fulbright fellowship. And though Israel formally ceded control of primary-level curriculum development to the OPT in 1994, it still seeks to restrict education access and autonomy on all levels, in these and countless other ways. There is a clear and established pattern:

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<sup>197</sup> Ahmad and Vulliamy, “Attacks on school in Gaza.”

identifying them as a threat, the Israeli occupation forces deliberately target students and educational systems.

The question, then, is why? The first and most basic response is a matter of practicality. In general, students, particularly college students, are often the members of society who are highly likely to not only be involved in popular struggle, but to be main organizers thereof. The history of Palestinian resistance is certainly a testament to that. It is obviously within the interests of an oppressive state power to limit resistance against it; thus, university students, as a threat to the regime, must be targeted. Accordingly, the UN, which named the OPT as one of the most oppressed places in the world in terms of education access, identified one of the trends glaringly present in Palestine as being a main source of education repression worldwide: specifically, “attacks on students and academics to silence political opposition or prevent the voicing of alternative view.”<sup>198</sup>

The barriers to Palestinian access to higher education, however, are not limited to the targeting of students pursuing this education. After all, if that were the case, student detention would be a sufficient strategy to combat the threat posed by students; we would not see the Israeli occupation forces engaging in the myriad other measures to restrict education, such as university closures and travel bans. The Israeli government, then, in order to neutralize the threat posed by the educated, must also target the educational institutions themselves. This is necessary due to the power inherent in higher education institutions: they produce an informed and empowered population more equipped to engage in and devoted to political struggle. The university is both the symbolic and actual

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<sup>198</sup> UNESCO, “Education Under Attack,” 66.

space in which opposition is fostered and strengthened. It must, by default, be treated as the enemy by an oppressive occupying force like the Israeli regime.

Israel, moreover, is historically not alone as an oppressive state that identifies the significance of higher education to a resistance struggle and correspondingly represses it. Huey Newton, founder of the Black Panther Party and major player in the struggle for black liberation in America, routinely decried the “miseducation” of black Americans and called for the use of education to raise black political consciousness as a means to liberation. Writes Matthew W. Hughey in “The Pedagogy of Huey P. Newton: Critical Reflections on Education in His Writings and Speeches,” “Newton’s stance on education was always linked to a larger societal revolutionary theory.”<sup>199</sup> In *Teaching to Transgress*, bell hooks echoes this idea. “For Black folks, teaching—educating—was fundamentally political because it was rooted in an anti-racist struggle.”<sup>200</sup> Her words certainly ring true for the Palestinians, as well. Writing during the middle of the First Intifada, Barbara Harlow gives a comprehensive review of yet more examples of oppressive regimes that deliberately restricted and repressed education access, including Palestine:

In Chile, for example, in September 1973, with the overthrow of the Allende government, troops invaded the National University to arrest those Popular Unity supporters or even “neutral” observers who had taken refuge there. Between 1980 and 1984, the University of El Salvador was occupied by the Salvadoran army, and professors, staff, administrators, and students continue to be regular victims of the paramilitary death squads. In the United States, university administrations of the 1980s had repeated recourse to city, rather than campus, police to disperse—and arrest—demonstrating students. Palestinian universities and schools in the Occupied Territories are militarily closed more often than they are

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<sup>199</sup> Matthew W. Hughey, “The Pedagogy of Huey P. Newton: Critical Reflections on Education in his Writings and Speeches,” *Journal of Black Studies* 38, no. 2 (2007): 210, <http://www.jstor.org/>.

<sup>200</sup> bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 2.

open. Indeed, in order to accommodate the massive numbers of detained protesters since the beginning of the *intifada*, the Israeli authorities have for certain periods used the closed schools as makeshift prison centers.<sup>201</sup>

According to Harlow, repressive states seek to control the university as they do the prison, because both are sources of intellectual and political resistance. She describes the two as “complicit parts of the same operational system of state control of dissent and the containment of anti-systemic challenge.”<sup>202</sup> Alzaroo’s and Hunt’s review of political activity amongst Palestinian prisoners reiterates this idea. As they describe, Israeli authorities used to prohibit prisoners from using pencils and paper, and did not allow them to do so until a wave of hunger strikes forced the establishment to provide better conditions, including access to writing materials, books, newspapers, and even radio broadcasting. At this time,

...Prisoners established a library in every prison and ...[organized] literacy classes, language courses, awareness-raising sessions, political discourse and orientation workshops, as well as classes for the young prisoners to prepare them for Secondary General Examination. Furthermore, the prisoners succeeded in building a manual information system network to exchange information between the rooms, between prisons and between their families and the political leadership outside the prisons and in exile.<sup>203</sup>

The Israeli government routinely claims that the restrictions it places on Palestinians’ right to education have nothing to do with attacking education or impeding dissonance, but instead are solely made in consideration of national security and are thus justifiable. This argument, were it valid, would discredit the claim made here that these restrictions are a deliberate attack on the rights of Palestinians. However, the

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<sup>201</sup> Harlow, “Political Detention: Countering the University,” 54-55.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>203</sup> Alzaroo and Hunt, “Education in the Context of Conflict and Instability: the Palestinian Case,” 177.

government's assertion is illegitimate for two main reasons: firstly, in analyzing the government's actions, it is clear security is not actually the primary concern, making said actions political subterfuge; and secondly, even if these actions were taken solely as a matter of security, Israel still has a moral and legal obligation to uphold international humanitarian laws, which it currently is not.

Penny Johnson's perspective on the legitimacy of Israel's security concerns in terms of their invocation as justification for restricting Palestinian education access is particularly compelling. Johnson writes:

Deliberate "de-education" of Palestinians is of course difficult to prove conclusively; there are, however, clear indicators that Israeli policy toward education has moved far beyond a concern for maintaining "security and public order," the well-worn phrase used to justify closures of educational facilities. One such indicator is the continued closure of elementary schools, which pose no real security problem; another is the harassment of home teaching and alternative education, which also have no direct bearing on security matters."<sup>204</sup>

Johnson's analysis illuminates a key logical flaw in Israel's claim that its repressive measures are necessary for the protection and promotion of national security, which is that it simply does not make sense. If security were truly the impetus behind its actions, those actions would, in practice, look much different. If Israel's concern about Gazan student travel was security-based, it would evaluate individual cases rather than instate the blanket policy of denial that it did—for certainly not even the Israeli government would claim that *every single* resident of Gaza is an extremist with both the intent and means to carry out terrorist acts against the state of Israel. Similarly, on the higher education level, where one could more reasonably argue that the students, unlike

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<sup>204</sup> Johnson, "Palestinian Universities under Occupation: 15 August-15 November," 93.

their younger counterparts who Johnson mentions, may pose a real threat to Israeli security, it is still difficult to believe that this threat is somehow most paramount precisely at the most inopportune and academically devastating times for students—like when they are preparing to take final exams or to graduate (when, one would think, it would furthermore be challenging to also focus attention on carrying out violent acts of terrorism).

This is not to say, of course, that Israel has no right to concern itself with protecting its citizens against terrorism. But it may not invoke this legitimate imperative to justify an illegitimate action, nor may it assume that doing so allows it free reign over the human rights of others. In other words, the manner in which Israel has restricted and denied education access for Palestinians is, as will be discussed in more depth momentarily, unjust and inexcusable. Any claims to security concerns for the civilian population (which are conveniently righteous and thus unlikely to be questioned) are merely a distraction from the truth: what Israel is doing is wrong. For political reasons—namely, punishing resistance and stifling opposition—the Israeli occupation forces are denying Palestinians their human right to access education.

And this is, in fact, a human right. A host of international laws, agreements, and norms mandate the protection of the right to education, in addition to numerous other rights that Palestinians are currently being denied under Israeli occupation. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, whose rights are described as “inalienable” and are meant to be applied to all nations, clearly states in Article 26 that, “Everyone has the right to

education.”<sup>205</sup> Likewise, the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights—of which Israel is a signatory nation—calls in Article 13, sections 1 and 2c, for the right of *everyone* to education, as well as the need for higher education to be equally accessible:

The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to education. They agree that education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity, and shall strengthen the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. They further agree that education shall enable all persons to participate effectively in a free society, promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations and all racial, ethnic or religious groups, and further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.<sup>206</sup>

The Fourth Geneva Convention, which deals specifically with the rights of those under occupation and the obligations of the occupying power toward the occupied, mandates in Part III, Section III that the occupying power facilitate and, if necessary, provide culturally appropriate education within the territories it occupies. While most references to education within the Geneva Conventions mention the education of children specifically, and thus could arguably be deemed irrelevant to the restriction of access to higher education, we can look to Part III, Section 1 in the Fourth Geneva Convention, which explicitly bans collective punishment: “No protected person may be punished for an offence he or she has not personally committed. Collective penalties and likewise all measures of intimidation or of terrorism are prohibited.”<sup>207</sup> Certainly one can consider the closure of universities, mass and unjustifiable detention of students, and bans on travel

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<sup>205</sup> United Nations, “Universal Declaration of Human Rights,” 1948, <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml>.

<sup>206</sup> Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, “International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights,” 1966, <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/cescr.htm>.

<sup>207</sup> International Committee of the Red Cross, “Fourth Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War,” 1949. <http://www.icrc.org/ihl.nsf/FULL/380?OpenDocument>.

and student society formation to be collective punishment to which Palestinian university students are subject almost entirely without recourse.

Article 14 as well as other articles of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights delineates a host of rights for those who are arrested and/or detained—including clear and immediate communication of charges, access to counsel, disclosure of evidence, and the right to be tried without “undue delay”<sup>208</sup>—that are violated under practices like administrative detention; recall that about half of all cases of administrative detention at any given time are university students.

In truth, the list of international humanitarian laws regarding education Israel has flagrantly violated or altogether ignored is an exhaustive one. Israel, as aforementioned, frequently invokes security concerns as justification for these violations. It is important to remember, however, that the national security excuse for Palestinian oppression is invalid. Even if these security concerns were legitimately the reason for the repressions it has enacted (which we have already determined not to be the case), Israel, like any other country, still maintains an obligation to uphold international laws like those above. In fact, international humanitarian law rarely provides provisions or exceptions for national security, and in the specific laws considered relevant here, there are no such provisions. Generally speaking, the very purpose of human rights, of their inalienability and intended universality, is to transcend such concerns. States do not have the privilege of picking and choosing which human rights it will uphold and which it will ignore for the sake of their

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<sup>208</sup> Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, “International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights: Article 14,” 1966, <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/ccpr.htm#art14>.



own political agendas, however seemingly noble those agendas may be. They especially do not have the right to do so when those agendas are far from noble, as is the case here.

For a state to apply exceptions to its legal obligations—in other words, to circumvent certain rights of a group to whom it is responsible, like the people whose land it occupies—it must be able to justify its actions: that is, to provide legitimate explanations as to why and how, exactly, upholding those rights would be detrimental to the state such that they should not be upheld. Yet as legal advocacy group al-Haq has found, Israel rarely justifies its actions, even when its own courts ask it to do so.<sup>209</sup> For example, the Gisha Legal Center for the Freedom of Movement filed papers with the Israeli Supreme Court in 2005 on behalf of ten students from Gaza who were prevented from studying at Bethlehem University. The Israeli government claimed in response that it was not responsible for the education of Palestinians (a falsehood in itself, considering the Fourth Geneva Convention and other such international laws), and reserved the right to deny students from Gaza entry into the West Bank at will in place of evaluating individual requests as Gisha advocated, on the basis that the population of Gaza was “highly dangerous.” The High Court rejected Gisha’s petition, but did order the Israeli government to issue an affidavit to the public record justifying why it refuses to evaluate cases on an individual basis. Almost six years later, the state has submitted no such document.<sup>210</sup>

Now that it has been established that security claims are not legitimate, it becomes unequivocally clear that Israel’s denial of Palestinians’ right to education is a violation of

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<sup>209</sup> Al-Haq, “Palestinian Education under Israeli Occupation,” 11-12.

<sup>210</sup> Gisha, “Limitations on Access to Higher Education for Palestinian Students,” 3-4.

their human rights, and that, moreover, its doing so is part of a deliberate campaign of oppression against the Palestinian people, whose resistance and resilience threaten the occupation regime. Consider the following two quotes. First, in her interview with *The Guardian*, Dr. Nabulsi makes a compelling point about “scholasticide”:

Now in Gaza...we see the policy more clearly than ever—this “scholasticide.” The Israelis know nothing about who we really are, while we study and study them. But deep down they know how important education is to the Palestinian tradition and the Palestinian revolution. They cannot abide it and have to destroy it.”<sup>211</sup>

Secondly, Mireille Fanon expounded upon this same idea in her presentation at the World Education Forum:

This occupation-colonization, which is well aware of the dangers of an educated Palestinian people, regularly tries to delegitimize the education given in Palestine. For supporters of the occupation-colonization, yesterday as now, the strategies of domination are based on the maintenance of the broadest categories of people in ignorance and obscurantism. Their goal is to deny the Palestinian people the legitimacy to refer to themselves with the same references used by others. For the Israeli state, the “them as Palestinians” is only used to exist as “we Israelis.” It’s all “to naturalize cultural differences,” which is neither more nor less than an approach based precisely on the modern racist ideologies. Deculturation and ignorance allow theorists to justify the enslavement, domination and dispossession in obliterating the memory of peoples and prohibiting the transmission of history and knowledge...<sup>212</sup>

From these quotes we can draw three important conclusions. Firstly, education, particularly higher education, is key to the empowerment of the Palestinian people and thus to their liberation. As such, it is a threat to the occupying regime that oppresses them, and must in turn be restricted by said regime. Secondly, allowing a people the freedom of education licenses them the power of history. Nowhere is this fact more

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<sup>211</sup> Ahmad and Vulliamy, “Attacks on school in Gaza.”

<sup>212</sup> France, “Education and Resistance.”

evident than in the struggle to include the *Nakba* in Palestinian curriculum. With the power of history comes a people's ability to tell their own stories from their own perspective; in giving them such agency, it legitimizes them. This is understandably hugely significant to the Palestinian people who are oppressed and occupied by a government that in some cases refuses to even acknowledge the existence of Palestine or Palestinians, justifying their mistreatment through the insistence that "Palestinians" are merely Arabs who may, if they so desire their own state, live in the "Palestinian state" of Jordan.

This attitude, of course, is not surprising; acknowledging an oppressed people sets the government that oppresses them on a slippery slope toward obligations to give them the land and rights to which they are entitled. Palestine was taken in the first place by a campaign that insisted the land was uninhabited, offering to the world's Jews—a people without a land—an appealing land without a people. The establishment of the state of Israel can only be understood as anything other than the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians through the assumption of Palestinian non-existence. Israel achieved this feat through the manipulation and control of the telling of history, and in repressing education, seeks to continue to do so today by attempting to deny that power to the very people whose fate rests upon it. As Alzaroo and Hunt argued, "The importance of education for the Palestinians...was clear to the Israeli authorities and therefore it was not surprising that they not only obstructed education, but also used it as a means of control."<sup>213</sup>

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<sup>213</sup> Alzaroo and Hunt, "Education in the Context of Conflict and Instability: the Palestinian Case," 169.

Thirdly and finally, and perhaps most importantly, these perspectives demonstrate that though a people may be occupied, dispossessed, and dominated, as long as they maintain this sliver of power, this ownership of history and culture, and this refusal to ever submit it, there is hope for freedom.

# CONCLUSION

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This thesis aimed to make three claims: first, that the Israeli occupation of Palestine and the forces that maintain it present numerous obstacles to Palestinian access to education, including the detention of university students; that these obstacles, along with other human rights violations to which Palestinians have been subjected throughout history, have prompted Palestinians to attach a heightened sense of cultural meaning to education which likens it to resistance and which has increased over time with escalating repressions; and that, in response, the Israeli occupation forces have sought to further repress education in order to curtail the prospects of Palestinian resistance and liberation.

As for the first point, the obstacles to Palestinian access to education under Israeli occupation are numerous, and many are in violation of international human rights law. The harassment and detention of university students, in particular, is a widespread phenomenon that aptly demonstrates the intentionality of Israeli repression: students who are most likely to be targeted are those who are the most politically empowered, such as student government heads. Final exam periods frequently give rise to en masse arrests, producing some of the worst threats to education access for Palestinian students. Movement restriction is another serious problem for Palestinian students living under Israeli occupation; be it through checkpoints, travel bans, or the separation wall, Palestinian university students face severe challenges when trying to attend and complete classroom instruction. When curfews or university closures are enforced, as was the case during both Intifadas, it is effectively both illegal and impossible for Palestinians to

pursue formal higher education. Finally, military attacks on students and schools, as we saw in Gaza during Operation Cast Lead, pose additional and serious threats to student life and education access.

As for the second point, and as a result of many of the aforementioned obstacles, education in Palestine is culturally and politically considered to be vital to resistance efforts. University students throughout Palestinian history have been a focal point and main organizers of resistance movements, and families assign significant value to educating their children. Education is so emphasized within Palestinian society because it is ideologically connected to the struggle for liberation: education can contribute to nation-building efforts, ensure economic security, guarantee personal autonomy, and redress injustices, thereby undermining the occupation and other oppressive forces in Palestinians' lives.

As for the final point, we know that an educated Palestine is a threat to the Israeli occupation forces. Education is personally empowering and politically and culturally tied to resistance and emancipation. If the Israeli authorities want to maintain power through their oppressive regime, they must restrict access to that which threatens their ability to do so. Therefore, Palestinian education is deliberately and strategically controlled under Israeli occupation. The claim that security concerns are the true motivation for Israeli restrictions on Palestinian education access is not legitimate, because Israeli policies regarding education access, freedom of movement, and other relevant issues would be applied much differently if the intention were anything other than to de-develop—in Sara

Roy's and Maya Rosenfeld's sense of the word—Palestinian education as much as possible.

As Nelson Mandela said in his “Lighting Your Way to a Better Future” speech, “Education is the most powerful weapon which you can choose to change the world.”<sup>214</sup> The Palestinians, for as long as they have been oppressed under colonial powers, have understood and internalized this truth, passing it on from one generation to the next. From the time of Ottoman control, to the *Nakba* in 1948, through both Intifadas to the present-day, Palestinians have struggled for liberation with a steadfastness—*sumud*—that is reinvigorated with every additional injustice to which they are subjected. “To resist is to exist and to exist is to resist,” they say. As long as Palestinians exist, they will resist oppression. And as a focus on education helped Mandela bring about an end to Apartheid, so too will it empower the Palestinians to defeat the systems of occupation and oppression which hinder their freedom.

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<sup>214</sup> Nelson Mandela, “Lighting Your Way to a Better Future” (speech given at the launch of Mindset Network, Randburg, South Africa, June 16, 2003).  
[http://db.nelsonmandela.org/speeches/pub\\_view.asp?pg=item&ItemID=NMS909&txtstr=lighting%20your%20way%20to%20a%20better%20future](http://db.nelsonmandela.org/speeches/pub_view.asp?pg=item&ItemID=NMS909&txtstr=lighting%20your%20way%20to%20a%20better%20future) (accessed 4/26/2011).

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