

## Macalester International

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Volume 23 *The Israeli-Palestinian Impasse: Dialogic Transformations*

Article 10

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Spring 2009

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### Recommended Citation

Ricks, Thomas M. (2009) "The Arbayeen Years of Israeli Colonial Occupation: Palestinian Schools and Universities in the Occupied West Bank: 1967-2007," *Macalester International*: Vol. 23, Article 10.

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/macintl/vol23/iss1/10>

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# The *Arbayeen* Years of Israeli Colonial Occupation: Palestinian Schools and Universities in the Occupied West Bank: 1967–2007<sup>1</sup>

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Thomas M. Ricks

Record!

I am an Arab  
and my Identity Card  
is number fifty thousand  
I have eight children  
and the ninth is coming in midsummer  
Will you be angry?

\* \* \*

Record!

I am an Arab  
without a name— without a title  
patient in a country  
with people enraged  
My roots—  
were entrenched before the birth of time  
and before the opening of the eras  
before the olive trees, the pines, and grass.

Mahmoud Darwish (1941–2008)<sup>2</sup>

The 8 August 2008 death of Mahmoud Darwish, Palestine’s greatest modern poet, did not go unnoticed by the global community of scholars of Palestine as obituaries of Mahmoud Darwish continue to appear in the media around the world. The poet from Birweh, one of the 400 destroyed villages within present-day Israel, was honored in Ramallah with three days of official mourning in the Occupied Palestinian Territories as well as a state funeral (usually reserved for the highest political officials). The past forty years (1967–2007) are an appropriate time period for reflection on the process of colonization in the Occupied Pal-

estinian Territories (OPT) of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. While many Israelis may consider the past forty years a time of rejoicing and jubilation, Palestinians worldwide see it as a time of quiet mourning and reflection. The events following the June 1967 Six-Day War began the Israeli process of colonial occupation of the West Bank through the use of former British Mandate emergency laws, the establishment of illegal colonies (called settlements), and an array of rules and restrictions on movement within the territories. Limitations were imposed on imports and exports of manufactured goods and produce. Restrictions were placed on access to religious sites, aquifers and wells, and home and factory building permits. There was the establishment of arbitrary invasions and the closure of schools and universities. It is the latter colonial restrictions and prohibitions that are the subject of this essay, which serves as a litmus test of the extent of the colonial social and cultural transformation of the Occupied Palestinian Territories over the past four decades. It is in the schools, colleges, and universities of a society where much of the growth and future hope of a nation may be observed and which manifest the deeper social and cultural values and aspirations of the nation. Yet these institutions are vulnerable to military and police actions.

### **I. A Brief History of Schools in Palestine, 1906 to 1966**

The thesis of this article is that over the past forty years, the Israeli military occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip has contributed significantly to the present distorted economy, backward social and cultural development, corrupt politics, and factionalism that characterize so much of the Occupied Territories today. There can be little question that the repeated Israeli deportations, arrests, and home demolitions of Palestinians, as well as the volumes of regulations regarding nearly every phase of Palestinian private and public life, have hamstrung the villages, towns, and regions of both Occupied Territories. There continues to be little or no equality in the asymmetric relations between Israelis and Palestinians. The suggestion that there is any such symmetry in their respective societies, economies, military, security forces, or political institutions flies in the face of the harsh realities of the Israeli's initial seizure of 78% of Palestinian lands between 1947 and 1949, and then the seizure and occupation of the remaining 22% of Palestinian land and water from 1967 to the present. Israel's massive road and tunnel building projects, the establishment of illegal colonies, the building

of multiple military checkpoints and the erection of the "Apartheid Wall" (or "security fence") all have increased the hardships and humiliations of Palestinians to date.

The phrase "Israeli-Palestinian Impasse" implies that there is some inherent balance in all that we commonly refer to as the "Israeli-Palestinian Conflict." There is no historical or present documentation that can verify any "balance" in the ongoing colonization of Palestinian land and water by Israel. Let there be no doubt that Israel continues to conduct a war on Palestine and a campaign of collective punishment of Palestinians, with the widespread support of the Quartet (the United States, United Nations, European Union, and Russia). Thus, in visiting the Occupied Territories, it is necessary to speak of Israel's sophisticated and advanced technological intrusions and intensely brutal war on a virtually unarmed Palestinian population.

In examining Palestinian schools, we see on the one hand the vulnerability of the Palestinian society to all-too-frequent intrusions into unguarded schools and the subsequent harassment of students and teachers.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, we gain insights into the variety of forms of Palestinian day-to-day resistance to Israeli colonization processes, with the establishment of private Palestinian universities (1972–78), the Council on Higher Education (1980), the covert establishment of the General Union of Palestinian Teachers (1980), and the overt creation of the Palestinian Ministries of Education and Higher Education (1993–95). Such initiatives demonstrate the determined will of teachers and administrators to build a Palestinian infrastructure of their own making in spite of the occupation.<sup>4</sup>

The essay argues, therefore, that there is no "dialogic impasse," but rather a "colonial impasse," over Palestinian political and social aspirations, and their ancestral lands and resources. While the colonial power (Israel) controls the borders, roadways, security, marketplace, prices, schools, and movements of Palestinians, the colonized (Palestinians within the Territories) struggle to control their day-to-day life, work, and universities. Overall, both schools and universities under occupation face daily challenges and adverse learning conditions, accentuating the present crises of poorly trained teachers; antiquated buildings; impoverished academic programs, courses, texts, and equipment (particularly in the sciences and computers); interruptions in the school day through closures; checkpoints; and the cancellation of final exams.<sup>5</sup> One researcher concluded his 2000 first-hand report on East Jerusalem by saying that:

Conditions for education in East Jerusalem are severely substandard: schools are in disrepair; there is a dearth of proper classroom space; pupils suffer overcrowding; and sanitary conditions are terrible.<sup>6</sup>

Academic and social problems exist in Palestinian schools and universities, such as the continuation of rote learning, socio-economic and gender inequalities, and rigid patrimonial and authoritarian traditions. These practices are exacerbated by the presence of Israeli occupation forces and by their myriad regulations.

At the same time, the Palestinian leadership and familial elites have failed to go beyond their traditional roles. They have not fashioned new broad-based social and political institutions that would embrace and include the multiple grassroots organizations found throughout the Occupied Territories. These failures have also contributed to the economic, social, cultural, and political problems and disappointments that many in the region face today. The Palestinians' own self-imposed restrictions on liberalizing social relations, improving cultural and religious relations among the various regions of the Occupied Territories, and discouraging innovations in education have not only constrained the much-needed and aspired for social and cultural transformations of segments of the population, but also have allowed well-aimed interventions into Palestinian society by Israeli leaders for the purposes of "divide and conquer."

At the same time, internal historical social and cultural restraints characteristic of Palestinian society—such as in the areas of student life and social relations, gender and religious relations, and rural-urban partnerships—have prevented the rewarding of innovative and hopeful changes among Palestinian youth. Today, Palestinian students between the ages of 5 and 25 outnumber the older generations and have exceeded their parents' levels of educational experiences, while exhibiting a greater national and international awareness of global technological, social, and cultural changes.

From the 1850s to 1906, Palestinian schools generally reflected the progressive and traditional trends in the 19th and early 20th century Ottoman period. As a rule, there were three kinds of schools available for Palestinian children during this period:

- (1) There were urban and rural Christian Orthodox Greek, as well as Muslim schools (*maktab*), which were primarily elementary schools teaching reading and writing Arabic, basic arithmetic, history, and geography.

- (2) There were urban and rural European and American Christian missionary and bible schools, such as the Anglo-Prussian Bishop Gobat School for Boys in Jerusalem (1853), the French Catholic Sisters of Sion in Jerusalem (1863), the Italian Catholic Terra Santa Schools for Boys in Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Nazareth (1840s, though Italian Franciscans had schools in Palestine as early as the 15th and 16th centuries), the French Catholic Collège des Frères for Boys and Ste. Joseph for Girls of Jerusalem and Bethlehem (1870s), the Russian seminaries for girls in Beit Jala (Bethlehem suburb) and for boys in Nazareth (1882), and the American Quaker Schools for Girls (1867) and Boys (1901) of Ramallah, teaching elementary and secondary curricula including humanities, sciences, music, arts, and religion primarily in the major towns of Palestine.
- (3) There were Ottoman government elementary schools teaching Ottoman Turkish and Arabic, basic arithmetic, science, humanities, and music in a number of major Palestinian towns.

During the period of the British military and civilian occupation of Palestine (1918–1948), the schools in Palestine included the former schools, with a great increase in Christian missionary schools.<sup>7</sup> The former Ottoman schools and new local elementary (grades 1 to 4) schools established by Palestinians were converted into Government of Palestine public elementary schools by the British and passed under the supervision of the Mandate's Department of Education. These elementary schools of Palestine taught reading, writing, arithmetic, and basic science, geography, and history. In addition, an important and fourth type of school was established under the Mandate; that is, a handful of British elite schools for teacher and agricultural training, accompanied by the establishment of 300–400 government rural and urban elementary schools up to grade four. A fifth kind of school system was also established, in 1920, by the Jewish Agency exclusively for Jewish elementary and secondary students studying a wide range of subjects only in Hebrew, with a special emphasis on Judaic and Hebrew studies as well as European subjects under the later control of the *Vaad Leumi*, or National Council. No similar national system was established for the Muslim or Christian Palestinians who were usually lumped together under the heading of "Arabs" and whose schools were administered

by the Mandate's Department of Education primarily at the elementary levels in Arabic and predominantly in towns.

Increasingly during the twenty years of British rule, the missionary schools attracted first Christian and then Muslim and Jewish students who studied in the European language of the school's nationals (from German, Italian, French and English to Russian and Swedish), in such subjects as the sciences, humanities including religions, and the history and geography of the respective European faculty. The British government schools mainly served the Muslim communities in Arabic and a range of elementary subjects. The elite British training schools taught Muslim and Christian students primarily in English and Arabic (Latin was added later in the Mandate for the boys) and all the subjects of English public schools. A mere handful of Palestinian private national schools were attended by both Muslim and Christian students, with a few Jewish students, studying the same subjects as the missionary schools, usually in Arabic.

Following the Palestine War of 1947–49, Israel reorganized the schools within the 1949 ceasefire (or Green Line) borders, closing all missionary and British Mandate schools within the new Jewish state of Israel while allowing Christian and Muslim Palestinians to attend "Arab" schools at the elementary and secondary levels, with only 2% of the Palestinian students advancing to the university level within Israel. Gaza's schools fell under Egyptian educational standards and the West Bank under the Jordanian school system for elementary and secondary schools.

A sixth kind of school system was established in 1950 throughout Gaza, the West Bank, Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon under the control of yet another non-Palestinian authority: the United Nations Relief and Work Administration (UNRWA) school system administered and financed by the U.N. headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland. Following the Six-Day War in 1967, however, all Gaza and West Bank former Egyptian and Jordanian government schools were subsumed under and financed by the Israelis while the missionary, private Palestinian and UNRWA schools in Gaza and the West Bank continued to function as they had before 1967.

## II. Three Periods of Occupied West Bank Social and Cultural Transformations

- **1967 to 1986**—A period of resistance, adjustments, and challenges to Israeli colonial rule.

The 1967 Six-Day War was nearly as cataclysmic for Palestinians as the 1947–49 Palestine War (also known as the Arab-Israeli War) had been. Both were unexpected and swift, with long-term repercussions. Both sent into exile and lifetime banishment large portions of the Palestinian rural and urban communities of refugees. Both wars were the principal reasons for the lifetime banishment and both fell under the Geneva Accords' provisions concerning the right of return and resettlement. And both increased the size of the existing Palestinian diaspora within the Middle East and beyond. The refugees from the wars came under UNRWA's protection and lifetime care, which included housing, food, education, and vocational training programs. While never called as such, the 1967 War and the subsequent occupation were indeed continuations of the earlier 1947–49 Palestine War, called the *Nakba*, or Catastrophe, by Palestinians. As a direct consequence of these wars, Palestine's borders, security arrangements, water, electricity, public services, and schools fell into other hands. In 1947–49, the Israelis assumed sovereignty over "1948 Palestine," the Egyptians over "1948 Gaza Strip," and the Jordanians over "1948 West Bank." They each seized all the existing pre-1949 social and economic institutions, from banks to schools, while maintaining close control over each of the borders of "tripartite Palestine." Each of the three Powers controlled Palestinian currencies, markets, imports and exports, and schools. In the latter case, each chose different curricula, schoolbooks, and "leaving exams." Each had its own criteria for what constituted an elementary and secondary education. Consequently, Egypt's questions for the 12th grade graduation or "leaving" examination in the Gaza Strip (called the *tawjihi* exam) were different from Jordan's criteria and questions for its *tawjihi* exam. Israel, moreover, set up a third separate "Arab" school curricula and system for Palestinians remaining in 1948 Palestine.<sup>8</sup>

Following the 1967 June War, all schools in Gaza and the West Bank were closed for the summer to be reopened with new curricula, texts, and faculty in November 1967. Israel now controlled all government school hiring and salary scales of staff and teachers, the kindergarten to 12th grade textbooks, and the rental of schoolrooms in both Gaza



and the West Bank.<sup>9</sup> Israel introduced strict censorship over West Bank and Gaza texts and maps in the Palestinian government schools in the towns and villages, “censoring textbooks with references to Palestinian national sentiments or to Palestine as a political or geographical entity.” Consequently, it made difficult any teaching in the various subjects of history, geography, or the social sciences. It even eliminated the word “Palestine” in texts and maps.<sup>10</sup> In East Jerusalem, the Israeli Department of Education attempted “to use the curriculum that it had begun developing after 1948 for [the] Israeli-Arab Palestinians population within Israel...hoping that it could use the education system to influence Arab children to support the Israeli state. But the plan did not go over well with Arab residents of East Jerusalem” and, in 1974, the Israeli Education minister announced that Israel would “return to the Jordanian curriculum which the schools had used up to 1967.”<sup>11</sup>

One of the first consequences of the 1967 War and Israeli occupation of the West Bank was the supervision of all West Bank borders by the Israeli Military Authority based in Beth El, a former Palestinian village in the northern section of Ramallah.<sup>12</sup> The military headquarters began “regulating” Palestinian access to Jordan and its capital, Amman, when it suited Israeli purposes, by opening and closing the Allenby/King Hussain Bridge. For the graduates of Palestinian government and private schools, access to Jordan was essential to attending Jordanian, Syrian, Lebanese, and Egyptian universities (or, for the fortunate elites, the universities of Europe or the United States). After repeated closures, it became apparent to Palestinian leaders that they needed to establish their own Palestinian private universities in the West Bank. From 1972 to the present, Palestinians began establishing privately-owned post-secondary schools, colleges, and universities, beginning with Birzeit University (Muslim/Christian, Ramallah, 1972), Bethlehem University (Christian, Bethlehem, 1973), Najeh University (Muslim, Nablus, 1977), Islamic University (Muslim, Gaza town, 1978), and Hebron University (Muslim, Hebron, 1980).<sup>13</sup>

From 1980 to 1982, three events signaled further struggles by the West Bank teachers in schools and universities against the occupation. First, in 1980, the university administrators of the newly established independent private Palestinian universities created the Higher Education Council in Ramallah. Its aim was to coordinate curricular programs, building projects, and fundraising activities in order to eliminate as much as possible duplication of efforts and expenses. It

also was to encourage the sharing and building of partnerships among all Palestinian institutions of higher education.

Secondly, in the following year, as if in response to the collective actions of the universities, the newly established Israeli Civil Administration in Ramallah inaugurated a program of “nationalization” of the Palestinian universities and private schools in the West Bank to be accomplished under the infamous Military Order 854 (MO 854) under the direction of the first director of the Civil Administration, Dr. Menachem Milson, a Hebrew University former dean and professor of Arabic literature.<sup>14</sup> The Order included the right by Israel to regulate all hiring of faculty and staff, the ordering of textbooks and library materials, and the approval of every course to be taught in all West Bank private schools, colleges, and universities. MO 854 also required all non-Palestinian faculties at the private universities to sign a “loyalty oath” as part of their work permit application. Such work applications had asked for the usual biographical and academic information until MO 854. By signing, the faculty member promised not to have been part of—or associated with or ever participated in—the illegal organization called the Palestine Liberation Organization. The 25 non-Palestinian resident faculty or “foreign passport holders,” at Birzeit University (Bir Zeit village) refused to sign the oath in the Fall of 1983 and were ordered to spend a couple of days in the Ramallah jail. A large number of non-resident faculty was eventually deported.<sup>15</sup> In time, the Israeli Military Authorities cancelled MO 854 as ineffective.

Lastly, in 1982, the elementary and secondary teachers of the major West Bank towns and cities formed the General Union of Palestinian Teachers (GUPT). Secrecy was imperative because collective action and bargaining were banned from the West Bank under the pretext that all organizations were essentially political in nature and thus prohibited. The GUPT’s purposes were to improve the professional quality of teachers in the government schools and to prevent the summary firing of teachers without cause or explicit explanations. Its goals also included the right to appeal dismissal orders and the rights to strike and collective action due to harassment, unreasonable work demands, unfair salaries, and intervention in the academic work of the government schools. In the 1980/81 school year, the government teachers went on strike for two months, accompanied by the UNWRA teachers. With the rising rate of inflation, much of any gains in salary were eroded by 1984, worsening the conditions for the teachers’ purchasing power and general situation.<sup>16</sup> Attempts to coordinate efforts with the Israeli

Teacher Unions to improve schools and teacher professional needs failed repeatedly.<sup>17</sup>

The 1983 to 1985 period found a number of universities, such as Birzeit, under closure orders as students and the Israeli military authorities clashed over student rights to hold student government elections, the right to take academic exams and attend classes without harassment or closure of the universities, the right to medical care as a result of demonstrations, and the right to travel throughout the West Bank or to and from Gaza.<sup>18</sup> By 1987, the political climate in the West Bank was charged.

- **1987–99**—The First Intifada, during which popular schools were established and universities closed.

During December 6–9, 1987, a series of events involving refugees from the Jabaliya camp and the Israeli military set off months of demonstrations and protests throughout the West Bank and Gaza. It was known as the “First Intifada.” The uprising very quickly resulted in the closure of all private and government schools, colleges, and universities in both the West Bank and Gaza. The reaction by Palestinians was to create “popular schools” for a four-month period in the spring of 1988 whereby students of all ages gathered in private homes for the continuation of their academic work with teachers, university professors, and volunteers. The irregularity of the school work, the mixing of students from various schools (private and government), the absence of texts and laboratory equipment, and the need to coordinate faculty travel between towns under curfew and closure meant that the experiment met with mixed results. While most of the students did continue to study both at home and in the popular schools, the lack of coordination of subjects and assignments reduced academic standards considerably. There was also a political risk in holding such classes in private homes because the popular schools were considered illegal gatherings. Thus, participants were subject to arrest and imprisonment. The excitement of the chance to openly protest the hated occupation since the June 1967 War meant a breakdown in domestic discipline by parent to child at home and in the street.

Children as well as teenagers were aggressive with any person of authority, be they an Israeli military officer, a teacher, or a parent, so that home life as well as street life were scenes of quasi-anarchy. Youth battled the adults on a number of fronts. Teachers began to worry

that the students lost much from their absence in the classroom while parents feared that past controls had diminished to such a degree that their parenting was reduced to negotiating nearly all phases of life at home. When the students at all levels did return to classes in their schools and universities in 1991, it was clear to the teachers and faculty that the Intifada created many skill and discipline problems. After two years of on again and off again home schooling, the students were not in the habit of studying, doing homework, reading, or writing. This is not to mention the increased disciplinary problems with the adult teachers, faculty, and administrators.

The dramatic events at the Madrid Conference in October 1991, followed by the Oslo Accords of 1993 and 1995, were high and low points, respectively, for the West Bank Palestinian teachers. In the first case, the Madrid Conference represented a rare global moment of recognition of the Palestinian faculty and their perspectives. The Palestinian delegation comprised the society's leading intellectuals, which read like a Who's Who of Birzeit, Najah, and Bethlehem University faculty, as well as the leading members of Gaza and the West Bank professional classes. That one brief shining moment in the political sun passed quickly as Yasser Arafat and his entourage began to carry on secret negotiations in Oslo, Norway, with Israeli officials, resulting in the two Oslo Accords.

The contrast between the Madrid and Oslo meetings could not have been more stark, although the nationalities were the same for both. In Madrid, Palestinian intellectuals and professionals carried out exchanges with the world media in an open, spirited, and reflective manner. They expressed the majority opinions and views of Palestinians "back home." In contrast, the talks in Oslo were held in secret with little give-and-take with the world media. They reflected less a Palestinian realistic view than Arafat's dreams. The resulting timetables for Palestinian statehood, the withdrawal of Israeli troops from the Occupied Territories, and the creation of the A-B-C zone divisions increasingly fragmented the West Bank, bringing back memories of the former British policies of the last days of the Mandate. The West Bank's ephemeral goodwill of 1991 was now replaced by the harsh realities of 1993 and 1995. The disappointment was palpable. The best outcome was the establishment, finally, of a veiled facsimile of a national government called the Palestine Authority (PA). The first ministries were the Ministries of Education and Higher Education. They were not only the first government ministries in operation by 1995, but also better

organized and better prepared to begin their work than any other of the PA ministries.<sup>19</sup>

The 1990s were a relatively stable period for West Bank schools, colleges, and universities, as the towns and villages returned to some semblance of social and economic normality. This was due to the return of wholesale and retail businesses, the founding of small family-run factories, such as Tayibeh Beer Company in the Christian village of Tayibeh near Ramallah, and Palestinian imports and exports. The European Union, private investors, and Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) began to invest heavily in Palestinian town and village projects, from road building and hospitals to schools, playgrounds, and agricultural projects. The schools and colleges graduated classes with unusual regularity, and seasonal festivals were celebrated once more. Improvements in the East Jerusalem elementary and secondary government schools, however, showed little progress according to several surveys in 2000. One in particular detailed a lengthy list of academic and facilities issues still facing Palestinian students and teachers after 33 years of occupation, such as the lack of classrooms, academic deficiencies in the teaching of core subjects, poor to very poor teaching facilities (from shoddy classrooms and limited rented space, to broken chairs and desks, to few science and computer laboratories and libraries), and often unsanitary bathroom facilities. Despite having to pay the annual taxes just as the Israeli residents of West Jerusalem, the East Jerusalem Palestinian students and teachers enjoyed few, if any, of the conveniences and modernity of their Israeli counterparts.<sup>20</sup> All of the decade's "normality of occupation" came to an end in 2000, including the academic work of all the elementary, secondary, and post-secondary government, private and U.N. academic institutions.

- **2000–08**—The Second Intifada, the construction of the June 2002 Wall (also known as the Security Fence), and the March–April 2003 invasion of West Bank towns, with closure of all schools and universities.

The Second Intifada, unlike the first, was focused on the "violation" of the sacred space of the Haram al-Sharif (the Noble Sanctuary), also known as the Temple Mount, rather than on violent exchanges between the Israeli military and refugees. On September 28, 2000, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon entered the Sanctuary with a 1,000 Israeli police escort for the ostensible purpose of a visit. Muslim Pales-

tinians reacted immediately in what is known as the Al-Aqsa Uprising against Sharon's visit. Sharon is deeply hated by Palestinians for his actions against Palestinians in Gaza and in Beirut.<sup>21</sup> The subsequent shootings by the Israeli police and military set off violent reactions by Palestinians throughout the Territories, including a dramatic rise in suicide bombings against Israeli civilians.

Israel responded to the suicide bombings with the construction of a "Security Fence," known by Palestinians as the "Apartheid Wall" or "Berlin Wall." Begun in June 2002, the 25-foot-high concrete wall, with its watchtowers and occasional gates for access to the other side, is expected to be at least 406 miles (650 kilometers) in length, enclosing "nearly 50% of the West Bank population...affected by the Wall through loss of land, imprisonment into ghettos, or isolation into Israeli de facto annexed areas."<sup>22</sup> This report from the Vermonters goes on to add that, "the Wall is built in the middle of the main street in Abu Dis, a town adjacent to and now cut off from East Jerusalem. After the Wall is completed, many students and teachers will not be able to reach their schools, which lie on the either side of the Wall. Access to private, UN, and PA (Palestine Authority) clinics, hospitals, and doctors will be impeded."<sup>23</sup>

By spring 2003, street violence by both Palestinian militia and Israeli troops reached new levels, culminating in the Israeli full military reoccupation of the major towns and regions of the West Bank and Gaza. During the months of April to July, West Bank towns, such as Ramallah and Bethlehem, bore the brunt of the Israeli Merkava tanks, Apache helicopters, and F-16 fighters. These weapons played a key role in imposing curfews and closures on the towns, schools, churches, mosques, factories, and businesses. With the widespread imposition of night and day curfews, the townsfolk were virtually imprisoned in their own homes as a result of the military orders to shoot anyone in the streets during curfew hours. An Israeli journalist living in Ramallah from 1997 to 2002 commented on the conditions of the young Palestinians trapped in their homes by curfews:

Internal closure, that is, the anti-modern process of reverting to ancient transportation methods is coupled with a modern mutation of house arrest—to which a half a million people have been subject for two months [July to September, 2002]...Internal closure and prolonged house arrest have not only reduced horizons to nothing (and made distances astronomical), they have pushed the economy back, together with the level

of sanitation and health. The level of education is also declining, despite official Palestinian denials and boasts of student achievement in recent matriculation exams.<sup>24</sup>

The orders also required people to stay away from the doorways and windows of their homes, from shopping for food and produce, and from going to emergency rooms, clinics, or pharmacies. For weeks on end, the schools were closed, though there were repeated attempts to reopen them.

In Bethlehem, Susan Atallah, a Palestinian teacher of an upper-level English class at Terra Sancta School for Girls (St. Joseph's School), began to assign a range of activities during the first years of the Second Intifada. She began with an oral history project involving their parents and grandparents. The project's purpose was not only to keep the girls busy during the long, boring hours at home without school work, but also to encourage them to be proactive in learning from their elders. It was also initiated in anticipation of the same potential results of youthful revolts at home as had been the case in the First Intifada.<sup>25</sup> In addition, transcribing the tapes involved improving the girls' listening and translation skills as well as their English grammar in presenting educated English prose of the oral history recitation. Finally, the teacher's purpose was to give the girls confidence in presenting a project of their own making and about their own families.<sup>26</sup>

By 2003, however, when the violence increased with street fighting by Israelis and Palestinians and then the reoccupation of the West Bank, the students of the Terra Sancta High School for Girls/Sisters of St. Joseph of Bethlehem turned to writing diaries of their daily experiences under curfew and closure.<sup>27</sup> The diary writing assignments of Susan Atallah became very popular among the students and served as an excellent coping device in response to the escalation of violence and death in their streets and near their schools and homes.<sup>28</sup>

In 2005, with financial assistance from the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), twenty of the high school girls, along with Susan Atallah and her colleague, participated in the Edinburgh, Scotland, September Fringe Festival where they performed their 13-scene play, "Diaries Through the Wall."<sup>29</sup>

A temporary ceasefire followed the evacuation of West Bank towns, with basic activities slowly restored by the autumn of 2003. The situation remained stable, although the population continued to live under the numerous restrictions of travel, export and import, and loss of

electricity and fuel. Gaza has suffered the greatest deprivations due in great part to its overwhelming support for the Islamic Resistance Movement or HAMAS (Harakat al-Muqawamat al-Islamiyyah) in the open and free spring 2006 elections; HAMAS also won majority support in the West Bank towns of Nablus and Qalqiliya and subsequently the majority of seats in the Palestinian parliament. By 2007, there existed an uneasy calm throughout the West Bank in the midst of further negotiations between the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli government. Clashes continue between Palestinian villages and the Israeli colonists despite complaints by Israeli Human Rights groups "that Israeli security forces are not doing enough to restrain vigilantes."<sup>30</sup> Recent Israeli air, sea and land bombings and invasions into Gaza on the pretext of acting tough against Gazans' resistance to the Israeli occupation and border closures in the past six months of 2008 has resulted in over 900 dead and 4,000 wounded Palestinian civilians and the destruction of mosques and schools. The Israeli massive military expedition has only increased the tensions in the occupied West Bank schools and among the students as well as the region towards the present Palestinian Authority, Israeli administration and forces, and the Quartet, which, so far, has endorsed the Israeli widespread killings in Gaza. Increasing international condemnation of Israel's military actions towards Gaza continues to grow.

### **III. Conclusion**

Overall, there has been little dialogue at the highest administrative levels between Israeli and Palestinian officials since the 1991 Madrid Conference. Teachers and faculty from Israel and the West Bank, however, have carried on lengthy correspondence and conversations about teacher unions, textbooks, the state of their students, and their own welfare. One impasse in the region is over the effects of Israeli colonization plans in the West Bank via the Wall, highway, and tunnel construction projects. In the end, the most irritating of these conditions is the activities of the Jewish colonists or settlers. At the heart of the conflict is the issue of who controls the land, the aquifers, and all other resources of the region. Protecting the colonists is a major activity of the Israeli military and police forces. While the government officials eschew any responsibility for the colonists' behavior, they are directly tied to the colonists through the Israeli military and police presence in



the towns and villages of the West Bank, more or less along the lines of the flagging Oslo Accords.

The welfare of the schools, students, and scholars in both private and government institutions is still threatened by the Israeli presence in the West Bank. Closures, curfews, checkpoints, and military and police raids disrupt the Palestinian academic enterprises without an opportunity for redress or protection. The truth is that Palestinian schools, colleges, and universities are still controlled indirectly by Israel and its allies. The long history of conflict in the region over the lands and waters of Palestine continues to interfere with the learning processes of the schools. Efforts at curricular reform, improved teacher training programs, and the building of usable schools are constantly being made, although social, economic, and political turmoil create a mountain of setbacks and deep frustrations for the educators of the West Bank. It will be the “end of Zionist colonization” of Palestinian land that will open up the many opportunities for growth and development of a free, equitable, and educated Palestine. The impasse is not about dialogue. It is about colonization, as the long and rich experiences of Palestinian schools, colleges, and universities in the West Bank make clear.

Mahmoud Darwish again tells us what is in the Palestinian vision and how it shapes the collective Palestinian political culture:

On the last evening  
We contemplate mountains surrounding the clouds,  
Invasion and counter-invasion,  
The ancient era handing our door keys over  
To a new age.  
Enter, O invaders, come, enter our houses,  
Drink the sweet wine of our Andalusian songs!  
We are night at midnight,  
No horseman galloping toward us  
From the safety of that last call to prayer  
To deliver the dawn  
Our tea is hot and green—so drink!  
Our pistachios are ripe and fresh—so eat!  
The beds are green with new cedarwood  
—give in to your drowsiness!  
After such a long siege, sleep on the soft down of our dreams!  
Fresh sheets, scents at the door, and many mirrors.  
Enter our mirrors so we can vacate the premises completely!

Later we'll look up what was recorded in our history  
About yours in faraway lands.

Then we'll ask ourselves,  
*"Was Andalusia  
Here or there? On earth  
Or only in poems?"*<sup>31</sup> ●

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## Notes

1. *Arbayeen*, or "40," is a number with many nuances for Arabic speakers and for scholars in general. One of the deepest days of mourning following the death of a loved one is the fortieth day. For scholars of literature and religion, the number forty appears many times in texts such as in the New Testament in reference to the "forty days of fasting" by Jesus Christ or the earlier references to the "forty days of Ramadan" in pre-Islamic Arabia. This paper was first delivered during the Macalester Faculty Development International Seminar in Jerusalem, May–June 2008.
2. Mahmoud Darwish, "Identity Card," in *Enemy of the Sun: Poetry of Palestinian Resistance*, edited by Naseer Aruri and Edmund Ghareeb (Washington, D.C.: Drum and Spear Press, 1970), p. 2.
3. See the two documentaries on "School in Palestine," retrieved online at [www.google.com/videoplay?docid](http://www.google.com/videoplay?docid), and "Two Schools in Nablus Under Occupation," online at [www.teachers.tv](http://www.teachers.tv). The former was a February 9, 2007, confrontation between Israeli soldiers and children on their way to school in the southern Palestinian city of Hebron. The latter

is an online British community of educators who prepare and distribute classroom materials in the United Kingdom. Their 15-minute documentary focuses on the implications of a January 2008 clash between Palestinian boys from King Talal School for Boys and the Israeli army and police in Nablus, which eventually enveloped the Haji Rushda School for Girls, Palestinians parents and teachers of both schools, and the people of the Palestinian refugee camp, El-Ain, where a 17-year boy was fatally wounded.

4. See the three well-researched accounts of Arab schools in Palestine by Sami Khalil Mari'i, *Arab Education in Israel* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1978), based on his dissertation research and fieldwork in Israel. See chapters 1, 2, 4, and 6 particularly. See Sarah Graham-Brown, *Education, Repression and Liberation: Palestinians*, World University Service Series on Education and Repression (London: Russell Press, Ltd., 1984), which is based on her field research and extensive travels in the Middle East, chapters 3 to 5. Finally, see Evan S. Weiss, *Palestinian and Israeli Nationalism: Identity Politics and Education in Jerusalem* (Cairo, Egypt: American University in Cairo Press, 2004). He conducted a detailed study and site visits in 2000 to a number of Israeli and Palestinian K–12 schools in the Greater Jerusalem region, including West and East Jerusalem and the Old City.

5. See Graham-Brown 1984, pp. 74–79.

6. Weiss 2004, p. 9.

7. Among the seminal works on girls' schools and boys' schools in 19th- and 20th-century Palestine are Inger Marie Okkenhaug's studies of missionary girls' schools in Haifa and Jerusalem, in her *The Quality of Heroic Living, of High Endeavor and Adventure: Anglican Missions, Women and Education in Palestine, 1888–1948*, Studies in Christian Missions (Leiden: Brill Press, 2002); and Dr. Okkenhaug's "Signe Ekbal and the Swedish School in Jerusalem, 1922–48," *Swedish Missiological Themes* 2 (2006): 147–162. See also Michael Marten's work on the Scottish Presbyterians' mission schools in *Attempting to Bring the Gospel Home: Scottish Missions to Palestine, 1839–1917*, edited by Safad and Tiberias (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2006).

8. The UNRWA schools followed the curriculum of the Egyptians in Gaza and of the Jordanians in the West Bank from the 1950s to the present. In addition, the UNRWA schools had established primary (grades 1–6) and preparatory (grades 7–9) levels only. There were no high school levels from the 1950s to the 1980s so that refugee students had to attend the government schools for their high school education. From the 1990s on, UNRWA built girls' and boys' high schools in selected refugee camps. See Graham-Brown 1984, pp. 64–73.

9. All Palestinian staff and teachers hired during the "Jordanian" period of the West Bank and who were rehired by Israel following 1967 actually received two salaries from 1967 onward; that is, they were paid in both Jordanian *dinars* and Israeli *sheqels*. The younger and newer Palestinian staff and teachers hired after 1967 were paid only in Israeli *sheqels*, thereby creating salary differences and political and social tensions among the teachers, old and new, over a variety of key issues, such as whether to join teachers' strikes or the General Union of Palestinian Teachers in the 1960s to the 1980s when the *dinar* was a stronger currency than the *sheqel*. As a result, the older teachers were reluctant to engage in any actions considered "political" by the Jordanians for fear of losing their privileged *dinar* salaries. Personal communication from Karam al-Abweh, an English teacher in the Ramallah Girls' High School, June 1985.

10. Graham-Brown 1984, p. 66. The writer visited several villages in the Ramallah district and saw the word "Palestine" blackened or taped out of maps and books. During the 1983–85 period of student activism and protests, girls wearing the map of Palestine as a necklace had them confiscated by Israeli soldiers at various checkpoints, or boys who had drawn maps of "Palestine" or colored their textbook spines with the four colors of the Palestinian flag (black, red, green and white) were harassed or taken into custody on their way to school by Israeli soldiers. Personal observations and experiences of the author while teaching at Birzeit University from the fall 1983 to the summer of 1985.

11. Weiss 2004, p. 5.

12. Beit El is an old site of human habitation near the Palestinian village of Beitin (pop. 3,100), which is three miles to the northeast of Ramallah. Today it is an Israeli colony town of 6,000 settlers, abutting the Israeli military base on the Jerusalem-Nablus road on the north outskirts of present-day Ramallah (70,000 population).

13. Graham-Brown 1984, pp. 82–85.

14. *Ibid.*, pp. 90–93 on MO 854 and the military restrictions on universities, their faculty and staff (such as Birzeit and Najah). See also Baruch Kimmerling and Joel S. Migdal, *Palestinians: The Making of a People* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 253–255, on Professor Milson and the Israeli banning of books, Palestinian flags, and student nationalists' councils and festivals.

15. Graham-Brown 1984, pp. 93–95. The author discusses the deportation of West Bank faculty and staff, including the case of Najah University's president, Dr. Munther Salah, the vice president, two deans, and four heads of department. "At Bethlehem, where almost half the teaching staff is 'foreign,' one laboratory instructor was deported and 10 lay staff prohibited from teaching (93)."

16. *Ibid.*, pp. 76–77.

17. Personal communication to the author from a GUPT group meeting of Ramallah elementary and secondary teachers in Ramallah, December 1984.

18. See Graham-Brown 1984, pp. 95–97, for the various years of closure of the West Bank universities from 1973 to 1984.

19. Personal communication to the author from Dr. Gabi Baramki, former acting president of Birzeit University (1974–95) and President of the Council on Higher Education, reflecting upon the origin of the Ministries of Education and Higher Education, Ramallah, June 2008.

20. Wiess 2004, pp. 15–28, where the author surveyed the leading East Jerusalem boys' and girls' elementary and secondary schools, such as al-Rashidiyah Boys' High School, al-Ahmad Samih al-Khalidi Boys' School, Shu'fat Boys' High School, Abdallah Ibn al-Hussein Boys' High School, Sur Baher Boys' Preparatory School, as well as al-Ma'mouniyeh Girls' High School, al-Essawiyeh Girls' College, Abu Tur Girls' School, and Khalil al-Sakakini Girls' Preparatory School.

21. See a brief description of the Al-Aqsa Intifada by Philip Mattar, retrieved online at <http://www.answers.com/topic/al-aqsa-intifada>.

22. In addition to many other Internet sites, the following site has a clear explanation by the Vermonters for a Just Peace in Palestine/Israel of the Wall, online at <http://www.vtjp.org/background/SeparationWall.htm>.

23. *Ibid.*

24. Amira Hass, *Reporting from Ramallah: An Israeli Journalist in an Occupied Land* (Los Angeles, Cal.: Semiotext(e)) (2003):185–186.

25. Toine van Teeffelen's *Bethlehem Diary: Living Under Siege and Occupation, 2000–2002* (Bethlehem, Palestine: RAI–House of Art, 2002), p. 261, states that with curfews in Bethlehem, “many youth did simply not know what to do. The problem, a social worker at a private school says, is that Palestinian youth are just not used to read and write at home. They only do such things when imposed. During the curfew, many of the students watched TV until deep into the night and got up at twelve the next day. Now, they lack any motivation to go back to school. One very young pupil, half-seriously, told his mother: ‘I don’t need to go to school, I am sure that all the teachers are dead.’”

26. Susan Atallah, the 11th Grade English teacher, along with Toine van Teeffelen from the Arab Educational Institute, compiled and edited the girls’ oral histories. With the help of Saint Joseph School for Girls, Wi’am-Palestinian Conflict Resolution Center, the Arab Educational Institute, and the Euro-Arab Dialogue from Below (IKV/EAD) based in The Hague, Netherlands, they published the oral histories in *Your Stories Are My Stories: A Palestinian Oral History Project* (Bethlehem, 2002).

27. See Thomas M. Ricks, “In Their Own Voices: Palestinian High School Girls and their Memories of the Intifadas and Nonviolent Resistance to Israeli Occupation, 1987 to 2004,” *NWSA Journal* 18, no. 3 (Fall, 2006, Special Issue: Feminist Perspectives on Peace and War: Before and After 9/11): 88–103. A number of interviewees and diaries from high school girls in the Ramallah Friends Schools and the Bethlehem St. Joseph’s School for Girls discuss coping devices in the midst of the urban violence of both intifadas.

28. The two volumes of diaries are now published from the Terra Sancta High School/St. Joseph’s project. They are co-edited by Susan Atallah and Toine van Teeffelen, and titled, *When Abnormal Becomes Normal, When Might Becomes Right: Scenes from Palestinian Life During the Al-Aqsa Intifadah* (Bethlehem, Palestine: Publication of the Arab Educational Institute, 2001) and *Diaries from Palestine, 2000–2004: The Wall Cannot Stop Our Stories* (Bethlehem, Palestine: RAI–House of Art and Zoom Artistic Printing Press, 2004). The second volume, *Diaries*, is published with a teacher’s guide and reference volume.

29. Stars of Bethlehem, *Diaries Through the Wall: A Play Based on the Diaries of Girls of St. Joseph School*, Bethlehem, Palestine: Terra Sancta School for Girls (Sisters of Saint Joseph–Bethlehem), 2005, in DVD format.

30. See the news account from Nablus, West Bank, on “Palestinian, 14, shot dead near West Bank Settlement,” in *The Philadelphia Inquirer* (Sunday, September 21, 2008): A16, by Ali Daraghmeh of the Associated Press. He reported the shooting of a 14-year-old Palestinian from the village of Assira al-Kubliyah, near the Jewish colony of Yitzhar, as he was lighting a firebomb near the colony. The report went on to state that, “Last week, settlers set fire to about 200 olive trees belonging to the village of Madameh near Yitzhar, and Israeli police arrested two Yitzhar residents. Last weekend, Yitzhar settlers went on the offensive in Assira al-Kubliyah after a Palestinian infiltrated a settler outpost and stabbed and wounded a 9-year old Israeli boy. Outgoing Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert has denounced the settler rampage, telling his cabinet that ‘in the state of Israel, there won’t be pogroms against non-Jewish residents.’”

31. Mahmoud Darwish, “Eleven Planets in the Last Andalusian Sky,” quoted in James L. Gelvin, *The Israel-Palestine Conflict: One Hundred Years of War*, New Edition (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 162–163.

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