

RESEARCH STUDY

EDUCATING A COMMUNITY IN EXILE : THE PALESTINIAN EXPERIENCE

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1. GENERAL PROBLEMS

Subsequent to the political dismemberment of Palestine into Israel, the Jordanian West Bank and the Egyptian-administered Gaza Strip, the social and economic history of the Palestinians became intimately connected with the social and economic development of the areas in which the Palestinians came to reside. Although the Palestinians tended to retain their national identity, and eventually succeeded in charting a specifically Palestinian path for the regaining of their country, such developments occurred in spite of pressures towards assimilation, epitomized politically by the acquisition of different nationalities by the majority of the Palestinian people, and despite the absence of specifically Palestinian institutions to promote the preservation of a national identity.

Educationally, the new situation meant that the Palestinians came predominantly under the jurisdiction of Arab states. Here, there were three fundamental possibilities for their education: first of all, Palestinians were dependent upon the willingness and capacity of these Arab states to accept them in their own schools. Secondly, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), formed in 1949, assumed some educational role over a portion of the Palestinians. In this case, Palestinians were subject to the international policies and decisions imposed by the United Nations, especially in terms of the resources that were made available for their educational activities, and which ultimately determined the absorptive capacity and technical facilities of UNRWA schools. UNRWA's role was also discharged largely in light of the educational policies of the states in which it functioned, in matters of

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This essay does not deal with the dilemmas of the education of the Palestinian Arabs in Israel.

curriculum, textbooks and organization.¹ In practice UNRWA and/or the Arab states educated the vast majority of Palestinians, and certainly no more than 5 per cent of Palestinians in school at any point in time since 1948 were supported from private resources, the third alternative open when the first two possibilities were deemed to be inadequate or incapable of meeting Palestinian educational needs. Such private education was the option mainly in Lebanon, where private education is more common and of higher quality than elsewhere, and where members of the Palestinian bourgeoisie could afford the costs involved.

Against this background of the absorption of the Palestinians into other educational jurisdictions, the scholar wishing to analyse their educational fate faces many problems. There is a paucity of written material on the subject. Although considerable material on the problems and achievements of Arab education exists, no Arab scholar has seen fit to examine the problem of the education of Palestinians in depth. While some Arab scholars have written on discrimination against Arabs in the Israeli educational system, or the distortions of Palestinian history in the Israeli curriculum,² hardly any serious scholarly study has been addressed to the treatment of the Palestine question in the Arab curriculum and its impact on the Palestinian people, let alone to the educational problems faced by Palestinians in general.³

¹ This was true until 1967. After Israel occupied the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, it raised objections to several books used and exerted pressure on UNESCO/UNRWA to replace them. Long discussions and negotiations ensued which resulted in several substitutions and revisions of existing textbooks used by the Arab states where UNRWA functions. This had the actual effect of permitting Israel to interfere with the curriculum not only of the Palestinians under occupation, but also of all students in Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. For Israeli discussion of the "textbook crisis", see Shabtai Teveth, *The Cursed Blessing* (London, 1972), pp. 179-188. For an analysis of the "substance" alterations, see Najla Bashshur, "Taghyir al-Manahij al-Madrasiya fi al-Daffa al-Gharbiya li al-Urdun," *Shu'un Filastiniya* (Beirut), 3 (1971). The failure of the Arab states to raise objections to the textbooks used by Israel, particular in terms of their attitude towards the Arabs and Palestinian history, is inexcusable.

² Fayez Sayegh, *Discrimination Against the Arabs in Education in Israel* (Beirut: 1966); Shakir Mustafa, "al-Mu'allim al-Filastini wa al-Ta'lim fi al-Ard al-Muhtalla," *Shu'un Filastiniya*, 7 (1972), pp. 130-151; and Najla Bashshur, *Tashwih al-Ta'lim al-'Arabi fi Filastin al-Muhtallah* (Beirut, 1971). All of these are published by the Research Centre of the Palestine Liberation Organization.

³ Only after the emergence of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) did Palestinians have the opportunity of even partially addressing themselves to the content of education and its relevance. And by 1972 systematic discussions were being conducted under the auspices of the Planning Centre of the PLO with the aim of understanding the impact of the various educational systems on the Palestinians as a measure preparatory to taking remedial action. At present it is too early to anticipate the impact of such deliberations; their importance is simply that for the first time in history a specifically Palestinian authority is demonstrating serious concern for the future educational development of the people.

The highly sensitive subject of the content of the curricula taught to Palestinians in Arab countries, and its implications for Palestinian identity, deserves examination. The Palestinians require education in the context of the needs and aspirations of their own society, yet the socializing function of Arab educational systems is clearly carried out in the light of the needs of the particular countries involved; and it is obvious that the needs of a stable or developing society differ considerably from the needs of a community in exile committed to a goal of national liberation.

In the absence of detailed studies of the functional orientation and value impact of the curriculum in the Arab states, it is difficult to assess its impact on the Palestinian consciousness of the Palestinian people. Yet the one study which did "content" analyse the textbooks — history, geography and social studies — used in the Lebanese, Syrian and Jordanian schools, suggests some conclusions on this point.⁴ The student in such school systems would readily recognize that Palestine was an Arab country that was "usurped" by the Zionists/colonialists in 1948. He would have learned vaguely of the Sykes-Picot Agreement, the Balfour Declaration and the primary role which Britain played in the transformation of Palestine. He would also learn the role which the United States was to play in the Zionist success in the usurpation of the land. On the other hand, he was in no position to identify the major outlines of Palestinian history prior to or during the Mandate period; he would not be able to identify the specific importance of Palestine to Palestinians or to the Arab people in general; he would remain ignorant of the social and economic life of the Palestinians prior to 1948; and he would remain unaware of the type and nature of the struggle which the Palestinian people waged to prevent the usurpation of Palestine. The subsequent tribulations of the Palestinians, their attempts to preserve themselves as a community, and the outbreak of the Palestine revolution with specific objectives would remain a mystery if the Palestinians were to rely on the orientation and values of the educational system which prepared their offspring for the future.

Perhaps the more serious yet natural omission concerns identity itself. For the curriculum viewed Palestine as an Arab country, and therefore its liberation as an Arab problem. As far as the curriculum was concerned, the Palestinian, Arab though he may be, became ipso facto a Jordanian, Syrian or Lebanese, etc. He was to learn the facts of his social, cultural and political history and environment in terms of this "country." In that sense, the

⁴ These conclusions are drawn from the preliminary study which the Planning Centre of the PLO conducted. See Markaz al-Takhtit, Munadhamat al-Tahrir al-Filastiniya, *Tahlil al-Manahij al-Ijtima'iyah fi al-Urdun wa Lubnan wa Suriya* (Beirut, 1972), pp. 14-26, 55-56.

thrust of the educational system was to weaken Palestinianism. Yet the problems of attempted integration into the social, political and economic system in these countries were to remind him daily that he had a different identity, and belied the orientation of the educational system.

A more serious problem is that related to assessment of the educational achievements of the Palestinians. To accomplish this properly and scientifically one has to know the precise number and location of Palestinians since 1948. While the number and location of Palestinians immediately after 1948 has been estimated, the fluctuations in location since then, and the fluctuation in the "nationality" of the Palestinians and their natural increase, compel us to give only rough estimates of the Palestinians today. The following table gives the comparative figures of Palestinians in 1948 and 1970 and their present locations.

TABLE 1
DISTRIBUTION OF PALESTINIANS⁵

1948	1970
TOTAL: 1,398,000	
Transjordan	900,000
West Bank	670,000
Gaza	364,000
Israel	340,000
Lebanon	240,000
Syria	180,000
Kuwait	140,000
UAR	33,000
Iraq	14,000
The Gulf	15,000
Libya	5,000
Saudi Arabia	20,000
USA	7,000
Latin America	5,000
West Germany	15,000
TOTAL:	2,948,000

The statistical records of the Arab states, although abundant and differentially useful, do not provide data on the Palestinians in their midst unless they retained their original status as Palestinians, i.e., did not acquire

⁵ The figures for 1948 are taken from Janet Abu Lughod, "The Demographic Transformation of Palestine" in Ibrahim Abu Lughod (ed.), *The Transformation of Palestine* (Evanston, 1971), pp. 139-64; and those for 1970 from Nabil Shaath, "High Level Palestinian Manpower" in *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (1972), p. 81. I modified his figure for Syria in the light of the official data available in *al-Majmu'ah al-Ihsa'iya li 'Am 1971* (issued by the Central Bureau of Statistics of the Syrian Arab Republic), pp. 52-53.

another nationality, in which case they are recorded as Palestinian in Lebanon, Syria, Egypt and Kuwait.⁶ But even where these data are available, we get almost no information on the socio-economic background and characteristics of the population in question. The problem becomes more severe when one tries to deal with educational statistics. In this case the practice varies somewhat from one state to another. Since the bulk of the Palestinians are Jordanian by nationality, it is Jordan's educational statistics that will have to guide us in assessing the major educational developments of the Palestinians. In this case some assumptions are in order. The first assumption is one of numbers: according to all informed estimates, two-thirds of all Jordanians until 1967 were Palestinians residing either on the West or the East Bank. A second assumption, borne out by the social facts of Jordanian development since 1948 and based on the historical development of the two communities prior to 1948, is the higher ratio of school attendance among Palestinians before and after 1948 and their tendency to stay longer in school. The objective conditions of Palestine and Transjordan prior to 1948 and the slightly different cultural backgrounds of the two communities suffice to explain the differential ratios. Although these assumptions are real and account for a number of obvious social facts, we have not been able in the context of this essay to devise measures that are adequate to portray the differential rate of school attendance or completion of cycles between Transjordanians and Palestinians. Accordingly, the general measure of development for Jordan has been accepted as valid for the Palestinians.

Hard data on the specific Palestinian population in terms of education are available from UNESCO/UNRWA educational statistics. Although accurate and detailed in their coverage, the *Statistical Yearbooks* of UNRWA have limitations imposed by the educational services which UNRWA itself provides and by the population that is served by them.

UNRWA provides elementary education only to those Palestinians who are classified as "refugees" and who, furthermore, are considered "eligible for its educational services." In practical terms, this means that elementary education in UNRWA schools is available to no more than 30 per cent of the known total of the Palestinians today. To illustrate this point, we can refer to two types of data: in the year 1970 UNRWA provided the figure of 1,436,841 as the total number of Palestinian refugees.⁷ Yet the total number of Palestinians, as indicated earlier, was about three million; for 1966, UNRWA reported its total student population as 196,542, whereas

⁶ These countries combined do not, however, have more than 18 per cent of the known Palestinians today.

⁷ UNRWA/UNESCO, Department of Education, *Statistical Yearbook 1970-1971* (Beirut 1971), p. 13.

the total student population of the West Bank alone was 218,037.⁸ Even among the refugees so classified by UNRWA, about 30 per cent do not fall within the category of refugees eligible for educational services. Thus the educational statistics of UNRWA, while helpful and detailed, portray only a fraction of the situation.

Another omission relates to the fact that UNRWA provides no education beyond the preparatory level, and even the latter level is not consistently offered. In other words, the total number of years of education which UNRWA provides is nine. Since UNRWA provides no secondary education (the last three years), its secondary education data for Palestinians are quite limited. The same holds for higher education. In both cases, however, UNRWA occasionally offers scholarships which have enabled a limited number of Palestinians to continue their education beyond the preparatory cycle. These awards are so limited that they do not in any appreciable manner affect the total picture of the educational development of the Palestinian population.

Unfortunately, other countries where Palestinians reside provide limited or no data on their education. Occasionally, certain countries may provide data on the nationality of students in higher education, in which case one can get some figures for those who still retain their Palestinian status. But this is neither consistent nor persistent. Egypt, for example, used to provide such data, but in the late sixties the practice ceased; Syria provided such data for certain years. Other countries provided none. On the other hand, occasionally a country like Kuwait provides educational data on the various national communities that reside in the country, in which case one can assess the education of the Palestinians at various levels.

The enumeration of these problems suggests the kind of difficulties that a scholar faces in arriving at a meaningful picture of the educational development of the Palestinian people. One would have thought that accurate data on the Palestinians would have a compelling priority for the Arab states that have committed themselves to the Palestinian goal of continuing the struggle for Palestine. Their lack of concern with the maintenance of such records is both puzzling and deplorable. The pressures which the Palestine Liberation Organization is exercising on the Arab states to concern themselves with the maintenance and publication of such records on various aspects of the Palestinians may eventually succeed; but until then our analysis and presentations must be based on the collation of what is available and on reasonable estimates.

⁸ For UNRWA, *ibid.* p. 15, and for the West Bank, Ministry of Education, Jordan, *al-Nashra al-Ihsa'iya al-Sanawiya li al-'Am al-Dirasi 1966/67* (Amman, 1967) p. 26, by adding the numbers of the West Bank governorates (Jerusalem, Ramallah, Nablus, Jenin and al-Khalil).

2. WHO EDUCATES THE PALESTINIANS TODAY?

Throughout the Arab states in which Palestinians reside, pre-university education is divided into three cycles: six years of primary education, three years of preparatory cycle and three years of secondary education. By law, the first six are compulsory, although the implementation varies from one state to another, depending upon the capacity of the state to absorb all school-age children in that cycle. Thus far, only two of the Arab states, Kuwait and Lebanon, have reached the point where virtually all children in the primary age group (6-11) can in fact be absorbed, and the ratios of attendance range downward to a low of 29 per cent in Saudi Arabia.⁹

Primary Cycle

For the primary cycle, all the Arab states in which Palestinians reside — as well as UNRWA where it functions (Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and the Gaza Strip) — participate in educating Palestinian children of that age group. Iraq, Saudi Arabia, the Gulf States, Egypt and Kuwait also admit Palestinians in their national schools. Finally, the Palestine Liberation Organization runs a small educational system for Palestinians in Kuwait, a function assumed after 1965 when the state of Kuwait felt that the absorptive capacity of its school system could no longer permit it to admit the continuing influx of Palestinians into that state. Although small at the beginning, the Palestine Liberation Organization system in Kuwait expanded after the June War of 1967, which resulted in the expulsion of Palestinians from the West Bank and intensified migration from the East Bank of Jordan, particularly of dependents of wage earners already in Kuwait. It should be noted, however, that the PLO system is complementary to the Kuwaiti school system, which continues to absorb Palestinian school children whose parents were employed in Kuwait prior to 1965-67. A very small number of Palestinians, at the option of their families, enter private schools in Lebanon and Jordan, but their number is so small that they do not significantly affect the total.

Preparatory Education

What we have said about primary education essentially applies, with some modifications, to the preparatory cycle. The general trend in the Arab states is in the direction of making this cycle compulsory, but thus far this goal has eluded them. Ratios of attendance are highest for Kuwait and

⁹ UNESCO, *Comparative Statistical Data on Education in the Arab States, 1960/61-1967* (published by the Regional Centre for Educational Planning and Administration in the Arab Countries, Beirut: 1970). See also Mohammed Ahmed al-Ghannam, *al-Tarbiya fi al-Bilad al-'Arabiya fi Daw' Mu'tamar Marrakesh (1970)*, (Beirut: Regional Centre, 1971), especially pp. 26-27.

Lebanon, followed closely by Jordan, Egypt, Syria and, finally, Iraq and Saudi Arabia. Also, while UNRWA's system has striven to expand to accommodate the students who complete the primary cycle, thus far the technical capacity of the UNRWA preparatory system has failed to absorb the eligible Palestinians. Under such circumstances, UNRWA assumes a portion of the costs of education by paying a small subsidy to each of the three states — Jordan, Syria, Lebanon — where preparatory education is provided to Palestinians who complete the primary cycle in the UNRWA system.

Secondary Education

Compulsory education, legally speaking, ceases at the preparatory cycle. The additional three years required to complete pre-university education are entirely optional. Palestinians who wish to complete this cycle are dependent on two factors: successful completion of the preparatory cycle which makes them eligible to enter the secondary school belonging to the national system of education, and their own resources when the school system is incapable of absorbing them. The percentage of those who fund their own education is slightly higher at this cycle, again with the highest ratio in Lebanon. UNRWA provides no secondary education anywhere in the Arab world and therefore its contribution to the educational development of the Palestinians for all practical purposes ceases at this stage. Thus, the major burden of providing secondary education for Palestinians has been assumed entirely by the Arab states.

Post-Secondary Education

Aside from the few junior teachers' training colleges or institutes run by Jordan and UNRWA, post-secondary education of the university type had to be assumed entirely by Palestinians themselves in institutions of higher learning in the Arab states and abroad. Since university education is entirely optional, two factors have determined the flow of Palestinians into universities: one was the financial resources of the students' families; and the second, the willingness of the universities to admit Palestinians.

University education in the Arab world is essentially a state function, and consequently, tuition is nominal except in the small private institutions of the American Universities of Beirut and Cairo, and St. Joseph University in Beirut. Palestinians desiring to pursue their higher education were therefore required simply to meet the admission standards of the Arab universities. Although it might generally be assumed that Arab universities would give priority to their own nationals, the cumulative experience of Palestinians suggests strongly that Arab universities, particularly those in Egypt and Syria, placed no obstacles to the admission of eligible students. The only effective test has been the passing of the national secondary school

examination. Once the student has passed the test, the admission authorities determine his field of study on the basis of the average of marks achieved — the top admitted to medicine, engineering, and so forth.

A modest system of stipend scholarships does exist, which has enabled some additional Palestinian students to complete their university education. The governments of Egypt, Syria and Sudan have occasionally offered full expense scholarships to Palestinians. Since 1955, UNRWA has offered some scholarships to needy Palestinians as well, although the number has always been small. According to UNRWA statistics, some 1,850 scholarships have been provided to Palestinians since 1955.¹⁰

Three additional points are worth mentioning in this context. One was the establishment in 1961 of Beirut Arab University with its system of extension education which has enabled thousands of students to continue their education while working.¹¹ These students come to Beirut once a year to take the examinations. Second was the establishment of the University of Jordan in 1962, which enabled an additional number of Palestinians to continue their education *in situ*. Third, one should mention an unknown but substantial number of Palestinians who have opted to study in Europe and North America. Since 1967 the Soviet Union has contributed to the university education of Palestinians by offering complete scholarships to a limited number of such students.

Thus far we have discussed the education of Palestinians in terms of the cycle of education. At this point major indicators of who assumes the responsibility can also be given in terms of relative ratios. It is quite clear from the available data that the following authorities assume the major responsibility — financially and in terms of space — relative to primary education: Jordan, followed closely by UNRWA, Syria, Lebanon, Kuwait, the Gulf States, Egypt and Iraq. This distribution essentially reflects the geographic distribution of the Palestinians themselves as well as the financial requirements to defray the costs of educating this population. While this applies to primary education, to a similar extent it applies to preparatory education. Once we get to the secondary level, the order is changed. Jordan remains the principal state educating the Palestinians, followed by Egypt with its supervision of the Gaza Strip until 1967, then Syria, Lebanon, Kuwait, Iraq and the Gulf States.

As for university education, the order is completely altered as a consequence of the existence of facilities for that level of education. Universities

¹⁰ UNRWA, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

¹¹ University authorities estimate the number of Palestinians, including Jordanians, studying by extension at 12,000.

in Egypt and Beirut have recorded the largest number of Palestinians regardless of nationality, followed by Syria until 1962 when it was outdistanced by Jordan. Modest numbers of students finally found their way to Iraq's universities and the University of Khartoum. Palestinians studying in European and American universities in all probability constitute about 30 per cent of the total Palestinian university student population.

3. QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE INDICATORS

At the termination of the British Mandate for Palestine, the Palestinian Arab student population was about 135,000. This student population was served by a total of 827 schools, of which 514 were public and 313 private. In terms of the ratio of students to school-age children, that number represented approximately 30 per cent of all children aged six to twenty who should have been in school. In terms of the ratio of students to the total Arab population of about 1,350,000, it is evident that 9.2 per cent of the total Arab population was in school at that time. In contrast, the Jewish Palestinian population of about 650,000 was served by 794 schools with a total student population of about 108,875, representing one-sixth of the Jewish population.¹² It is, of course, not difficult to understand the glaring difference between the two populations in terms of education. The educational system for the Palestinians was completely controlled by the British colonial administration; that of the Jews was controlled by the Jewish Agency, which received a financial subsidy from the Palestine Department of Education to run the Jewish school system. The concern of the British colonial administration with the production of a small elite to man the administrative system rather than with the education of the entire community made it imperative for the administration to follow a very restrictive policy of school expansion. Moreover, the allocation of the scarce resources of the country was accomplished in the light of the administration's felt needs for the country; the perennially unsettled conditions of Palestine made it necessary to allocate the lion's share of the budget to the army and police, with education receiving less than 2 per cent.

It will also be recalled that at the time of the dismemberment of Palestine, the Palestinian Arab population was exerting considerable pressure on the British administration to expand educational facilities, particularly in the areas that had received almost no attention from it: namely, education in rural areas, technical and vocational education, and higher education. For, according to the data, the urban areas of Palestine were precisely those with

¹² Data are taken from Sati al-Husri (ed.) *Hawliyat al-Thaqafa al-'Arabiya, al-Sana al-Thaniya* (Cairo, 1951), p. 45.

the greatest concentration of educational facilities, and excepting three small vocational and technical high schools in Haifa, Jaffa and Tulkarm, no vocational training was available. The Palestinian Arab population was served by two junior colleges in Jerusalem.¹³

There is no doubt that the educational development of the Palestinians would have changed dramatically no matter what happened politically. The general recession of the colonial system in the Middle East released resources and energy that were to be used subsequently to advance the Arab people in all spheres. The expansion of educational facilities and the governments' response to the public pressure for an increase in their participation in education were one of the many outcomes of the end of the colonial period in the Arab world. The Palestinians, had they remained on their soil, undoubtedly would have followed a path similar to that of, say, Syria, Lebanon and other neighbouring states.

Despite the political dismemberment of Palestine and the eviction of its majority, the Palestinians seem to have continued to make progress educationally and ultimately to make important contributions to themselves as a people and to the Arab world in general. The reasons for this unusual development seem to be related to several factors. The first is obvious: that the Arab world itself, in the midst of which the Palestinians lived, made its educational facilities available to the Palestinians, and since the Arab world was expanding its own facilities, the Palestinians benefitted by this forward thrust. Second, the objective alteration in the milieu had the actual result of situating more Palestinians in urban environments and thereby altering decisively the urban-rural ratio in favour of the former, so that they were within reach of the more available and more attractive urban educational facilities and opportunities. Third, deprived of their normal institutions and options in life, the Palestinians began to view education as perhaps constituting the single most important avenue for decent maintenance and, ultimately, for social and economic mobility. Fourth, the fact that the normal work options open to a settled community, which might induce school children to opt out, were not available to the majority of the Palestinians meant that they tended to stay in school for a longer period and to achieve as high a level of education as possible. In other words, the negative sanction of the non-availability of options which might otherwise have acted as an inducement to leave school, plus the positive reward of finding lucrative opportunities with more schooling, and, finally, the competitiveness of the Arab market

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 10-47. See also the three studies of education in Palestine during the Mandate period: A.L. Tibawi, *Arab Education in Mandatory Palestine* (London, 1956); Abd al-Qadir Yusuf, *Mustaqbal al-Tarbiya fi al-'Alam al-'Arabi fi Daw' al-Tajriba al-Filistiniya* (Cairo, n.d.) and Nabil Badran, *al-Ta'lim wa al-Tahdith fi al-Mujtama' al-'Arabi al-Filastini* (Beirut, 1969).

and the opportunities it offered all acted jointly to produce a more highly educated population among the Palestinians.

Pre-University Education

While, as mentioned earlier, it is difficult to assemble precise figures, it is possible to reach reasonable estimates and demonstrate general trends concerning the education of the Palestinians. Out of a total Palestinian population numbering close to three million people in 1970, there are about 600,000 students enrolled in pre-university education. Of these, UNRWA educates slightly more than half (310,687), all of whom are in the primary and preparatory levels. The rest are educated by the following Arab states: Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Kuwait, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Qatar; and by private schools. In terms of their distribution by level of education, approximately 71.95 per cent are in primary education, and the remaining 28.05 per cent are in preparatory and secondary education. The following tables summarize the comparative totals and ratios.¹⁴

TABLE 2
PALESTINIAN EDUCATION
COMPARATIVE TOTALS

	<i>Population</i>	<i>Students</i>	<i>Per Cent Ratio</i>
1947-48	1,350,000	125,000	9.2
1969-70	3,000,000	600,000	20

TABLE 3
PALESTINIAN EDUCATIONAL DISTRIBUTION
BY AUTHORITY 1969-1970

UNRWA (West Bank of Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and Gaza Strip)	310,687
East Bank and others	239,801
Kuwait	23,041
Syria	11,055
Lebanon	8,514
Saudi Arabia	4,801
Qatar	2,101
TOTAL:	600,000

¹⁴ The figures were aggregated on the basis of what UNRWA provides, plus the actual number presented in the yearbooks of Kuwait, Syria, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, plus an estimate of those in Egypt and Iraq, plus 40 per cent of the student population of the East Bank of Jordan. The distribution by level is essentially an estimate on the basis of figures provided by UNRWA's yearbooks. The ratios given are quite revealing. In terms of the

TABLE 4
PALESTINIAN EDUCATIONAL DISTRIBUTION
BY LEVEL, 1969-1970.

		<i>Per Cent Ratio</i>	<i>Per Thousand Ratio to Population</i>
Elementary	431,718	71.95	144
Preparatory and Secondary	<u>168,282</u>	<u>28.05</u>	56
	600,000	100	

Looked at differently, and in terms of age groups, about 59 per cent of the age group 6 to 20, are, in fact, in school. Yet for the critical age group 6 to 11, which is the primary school age group, the figure for the Palestinians reaches about 85 per cent of the total for those educated by UNRWA, 95 per cent in Jordan and almost 100 per cent in Kuwait and the Gulf region.

Although the gross figures and percentages give an idea of steady progress since 1948, they hide some important imbalances. For example, while the education of females has registered more progress than that of males, it still lags behind because males had a considerable head start in Palestine as well as in the rest of the Arab world. For instance, UNRWA reported a total enrolment of 70,212 elementary students for the academic year 1963-64. Of these, 56.6 per cent (39,727) were boys. For the year 1966-67 UNRWA reported a total of 180,101 of whom 97,842 (54 per cent) were boys. By 1970-71, this had declined to 53 per cent.

However, while progress is obvious in terms of reducing the gap between males and females at the primary level, the gap widens with every increment in the level of education, reaching a point where, in secondary education, there are occasionally at least twice as many boys as girls — excepting the Gaza Strip student population. Again we can use UNRWA's figures to illustrate this point. For the year 1963-64, UNRWA reported a total of 7,301 students of whom 5,948 were boys. The ratio was 81.5 per cent for males and 18.5 per cent for females. For the year 1966-67, the figures were 11,994 males and 6,181 females (66 per cent and 34 per cent respectively). But by 1970-71 there were 12,310 boys and 8,355 girls (59.3 per cent and 40.7 per cent).

ratio of students to total population, it is evident that the Palestinians recently reached the level of the Palestinian Jewish population of 1948. The comparable ratios for the Arab states are as follows: for elementary education, Iraq, 111, Egypt, 113, Syria, 136 per 1000; for secondary education 33, 30 and 38 per 1000 respectively. The ratios were computed from the figures provided in *Comparative Statistical... op. cit.*, and al-Ghannam, *op. cit.*

While we can thus note the gap at the secondary level, we can also observe that there is a steady increase in female enrolment to a point where occasionally a balance is obtained, as is the case in the Gaza Strip. UNRWA's records suggest that between 1966 and 1970 the relative annual increase (averaged for the four years) in secondary education was 12 per cent for males and 22 per cent for females.

These gross figures and ratios are helpful in obtaining an overall picture of secondary education, but they tend to hide regional or area variations. It is my suggestion that the improvement in the ratio of females to males is largely due to the figures for the Gaza Strip. There, secondary education was a purely Egyptian contribution and the economic conditions of the Strip produced an abnormal situation which made the education of women an imperative means of exit for them from the Strip to more favourable economic conditions. This proved to be even more powerful than the traditional values of Arab and Palestinian culture. At this point we can illustrate the variations by using different sets of figures. For the year 1969-70, there were 7,568 students in the Gaza Strip of whom 3,714 (49.1 per cent) were females. On the other hand, in Syria, Lebanon and the West Bank, the percentages of female students were 35 per cent, 23 per cent and 33 per cent respectively. The following table illustrates most of these points.

TABLE 5
SECONDARY EDUCATION BY SEX ¹⁵

		1966-67	Per Cent	1970-71	Per Cent
(UNRWA Reports)	M	11,994	66	12,130	59.3
	F	6,181	34	8,335	40.7
	T	18,175	100	20,465	100
		1969-70	Per Cent		
Syria	M	1,894	64.9		
	F	1,023	35.1		
	T	2,917	100		
Lebanon	M	1,161	76.6		
	F	354	23.4		
	T	1,515	100		
West Bank	M	1,576	66.6		
	F	525	33.4		
	T	2,101	100		
Gaza Strip	M	3,854	50.9		
	F	3,714	49.1		
	T	7,568	100		

¹⁵ All the computations are based on the figures available in UNRWA's *Statistical Yearbook* 3, p. 35, and 7, pp. 98-100.

The general conclusion to be drawn from the above is that whereas the goal of universal primary education is within reach of the Palestinians, there is a higher drop-out rate for females which grows progressively as school years increase. The general conservatism of Arab society, which traditionally has acted as a barrier against the education of Arab women, is still quite operative. Palestinian families seem to place a more limited value on the education of their female than on their male offspring.

University Education

A recent analysis has suggested that in the year 1966 there were slightly more than 30,000 Palestinian university students studying either in neighbouring Arab universities or in Europe and North America.¹⁶ While this figure may be subject to dispute, my own calculations for 1969 tend to confirm it by giving a total of about 33,000 students. Of these, about 12,000 study in various Egyptian or Egyptian-supported universities established in Egypt, Khartoum and Beirut. About 3,000 study in Jordan and about 2,500 in Syria. No more than 150 students of Palestinian status and an additional 450 who carry other passports were studying at the American Universities of Beirut and Cairo. All in all, about 20,000 study in Arab universities and the rest in various European and American universities.¹⁷

In terms of trends and quality, what applies to national students also applies to Palestinians with respect to specialization, curriculum and quality of higher education. Whether the sex imbalance noted in secondary education applies equally to the university level is unknown, but it is very likely. To illustrate the dimensions of the imbalance, we may cite two figures: one for the enrolment in the University of Jordan; and the other of Palestinians at the University of Damascus. For the year 1969, Jordan reported a total enrolment of 2,717 students, of whom there were 655 females, constituting about 21 per cent. For the University of Damascus, the Palestinian enrolment was 2,027, of whom 417 were women.¹⁸ Since we have no reason to assume substantial differences in the characteristics of the Palestinians in other regions of the Arab world and in their willingness or capacity to pursue

¹⁶ Shaath, *op. cit.* p. 92.

¹⁷ I arrived at these figures on the basis of the estimate of the students studying at Beirut Arab University plus the known figures provided in *Taqir Lajnat Khubara al-Takhtit wa al-Mutakhassisin fi al-Tarbiya wa al-Ta'lim Hawl Wad' Khittah li al-Khadamat al-Ta'limiya li Abna Filastin* (League of Arab States, Palestine Department, 1969), plus official data released by the universities of Jordan and Damascus, plus *Mashru' Khittat al-'Ashr Sanawat al-Qadima* (1973-1982), issued by the Ministry of Higher Education in Egypt (Cairo, 1972), p. 67.

¹⁸ For Syria, I have relied on the figures provided for the Arab League by the University of Damascus in the above mentioned report which gives breakdown by sex. For Jordan, see *al-Nashra al-Ihsa'iya al-Sanawiya an 'al-Ta'lim, 1968-69* (published by the Ministry of Education, Amman, 1969) p. 249.

higher education, it seems that about 1 in 4 Palestinian university students is a woman.

In terms of overall ratios, Palestinian university students represent about 11 for each 1000 of the population, a figure reached only in Lebanon among the Arab countries. (The comparable rates are 5.7/1000 in Syria and Egypt, 4/1000 in Iraq and less than 3/1000 in Tunisia, as contrasted with 30/1000 in the US, 18/1000 in the Soviet Union, 9/1000 in France and 8/1000 in England).¹⁹

Imbalances and Defects

The pronounced discrepancy between the educational participation of male and female Palestinians is only one of many which characterizes Palestinian as well as Arab education in general. Other imbalances and defects are common to the Arab states and have been analysed elsewhere. For example, the deficiency in technical and vocational training — so essential to provide staff for middle level technical development schemes and widely recognized as one of the most important defects of the educational curriculum in all Arab countries — applies even more clearly to the Palestinians who have absolutely no control over their own education. The very limited number of vocational schools which UNRWA has established in no way fills this gap.

Inferior training of the teaching staff, as indicated by the presence of large numbers of unqualified teachers, is common to all Arab educational systems. The specifically Palestinian component is no exception. Examination of the qualifications of Palestinian teachers employed by UNRWA/UNESCO reveals that those who are indeed academically and professionally trained constitute a minority of the teaching staff. To illustrate this point, we can utilize UNRWA's data on the teacher population. In 1965-66 UNRWA had a total Palestinian teacher population of 4,904 for its primary and preparatory systems. Of these, 3,650 (74 per cent) were high school graduates, and 864 (18 per cent) had little training beyond the preparatory cycle. Only 390 (8 per cent) were university graduates. Data for 1967-68 reflect some improvement; unfortunately UNRWA ceased providing such data after that date.²⁰ On the basis of this evidence, it is reasonable to conclude that

¹⁹ Comparative figures derived from al-Ghannam, *op. cit.*, and his *Ta'lim al-Umma al-Arabiya* (Cairo, 1969), pp. 52-53. See also Baha and Sharon Abu-Laban, "Educational Development" in Abdeen Jabara and Janice Terry (editors), *The Arab World: From Nationalism to Revolution* (Illinois: Wilmette, 1971), pp. 32-54.

²⁰ Figures derived from UNRWA/UNESCO Department of Education, *Statistical Summary for the School Year 1965-1966* (Beirut, 1966), pp. 10-11. I have regrouped the nine categories utilized in each of the tables to yield my three categories. The corresponding figures for 1967-68 are as follows: 646 (12.3 per cent), 3,433 (66 per cent) and 1,170 (21 per cent) respectively. *Ibid.*, 1968, p. 50. For the year 1970-71 the *Statistical Summary* presented data on teachers who are "certified," i.e. were considered qualified to teach in the UNRWA school

the Palestinian student in specifically Palestinian/UNRWA schools has been obtaining an inferior general education.

Defective scientific education at all levels of the curriculum affects the Palestinian students as much as it affects their fellow Arab students studying in the same schools.²¹ The pronounced flow of Palestinian students into the arts and the humanities at the university level is, in fact, no different from that of Arab students in general, and is largely determined by the more restricted facilities for the natural and physical sciences of the universities in the Middle East. Nor should it be assumed that the flow of Palestinian and Arab students into certain fields necessarily reflects their own choice. Rather, the admission policies are to a large extent based on the available space which can be exploited more ruthlessly in the arts and the humanities than in the natural and physical sciences. Similarly, the poor quality of university education in the Arab universities where Palestinians study is already producing poorly qualified graduates.

4. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE EDUCATIONAL FUTURE OF THE PALESTINIANS

Within less than a decade at the most, the goal of universal education for Palestinians at the elementary level will undoubtedly be reached, regardless of the degree of political or educational control which the Palestinians may attain for themselves, since the Arab states within which most of the Palestinians live will reach this goal within the next decade. Assuming no major political upheaval affecting the policies of the Arab states towards the Palestinians, and no major restrictions on the budgetary allocations of UNRWA which might curtail its educational services at the elementary level, we can be reasonably certain of the implementation of universal education of Palestinians at the elementary level.

While some attrition will occur at the preparatory and the secondary levels of education, particularly in some areas — e.g., Lebanon, where the attrition at this level is quite high — undoubtedly the trend of prolonging

system without referring to academic or school degrees. 59.5 per cent of the teachers of the preparatory cycle, and 23 per cent of the elementary lacked the necessary "certification." (See pages 54 and 86, categories regrouped.)

²¹ In addition to Ghannam's studies, see, for example, A.L. Tibawi, *Islamic Education, Its Traditions and Modernization into the Arab National Systems* (London, 1972), especially pp. 197-226; UNESCO, *Third Regional Conference of Ministers of Education and Ministers Responsible for Economic Planning in the Arab States* (Paris 1969), especially the section entitled *Trends in General, Technical and Vocational Education in the Arab States*; and also Musari al-Rawi et. al., *al-Ta'lim al-Sina'i fi al-Iraq* (Baghdad, 1968); Mohammed Ahmed el-Ghannam, *Nahwa Istratijiya al-Takhtit al-Tarbawi: al-Takhtit li-Tatwir al-Manahij fi al-Buldan al-'Arabiya* (Beirut: Regional Centre, 1972); and A. Zahlan, "The Science and Technology Gap in the Arab-Israeli Conflict," *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 3, (1972), pp. 17-36.

school years, evident since the fifties, will persist. Some fluctuation might occur in terms of level of education and sex. More restricted economic opportunities might affect the income level of a large segment of the Palestinian people which might be reflected in their reluctance to prolong the education of their children at the secondary level and beyond — where they bear the major costs of education. (It will be recalled that the major financial burden at the first level is assumed by the Arab states and UNRWA.) The education of Palestinian women, too, is vulnerable to such economic as well as other factors, and the tremendous increase — both absolute and in relation to males — which has been observable in the fifties and the sixties might be subject to reverses.

The future picture of university education is not very clear. While the Palestinian drive to attain as high a level of education as possible will persist, the capacity of Arab universities to absorb them with the same degree of willingness as they have exhibited in the past is open to question. Pressure from national students for the restricted spaces and the need of the Arab states to give higher priority to their own students may make it increasingly necessary to restrict admission of Palestinians to these universities. At the same time, the economic outlets for university graduates in the Arab world as a whole are already becoming more competitive, which is affecting the ease with which Palestinians can find lucrative, high-level jobs, particularly in the Gulf. These factors combined might in the future result in altering the steady and high flow of Palestinians into higher education.

But for the present, Palestinians will have to ponder the very important implications of several factors if there is to be a successful continuation of their struggle for the liberation of Palestine. The first is the ultimate meaning of educating Palestinians for secure jobs, which at present seems to be the major characteristic of education in the Arab states, rather than for liberation; or to put it differently, the relevance of educating a community in exile according to a curriculum and by methods appropriate for a stable and on-going society. The second is the implication of educating the Palestinians without attention to their Palestinian consciousness and identity. Third, one must study the implication for future revolutionary strategies of a more highly educated population. Within less than a decade, the normal balance that obtains in all societies among its various sectors — working class, peasantry, tertiary services, business, etc., — will be totally and irreversibly altered. Palestinians will constitute a highly urban community predominantly engaged in middle class occupations, and this will strongly affect the type of struggle they can wage. These are some of the implications responsible Palestinian and Arab leadership will have to examine closely.