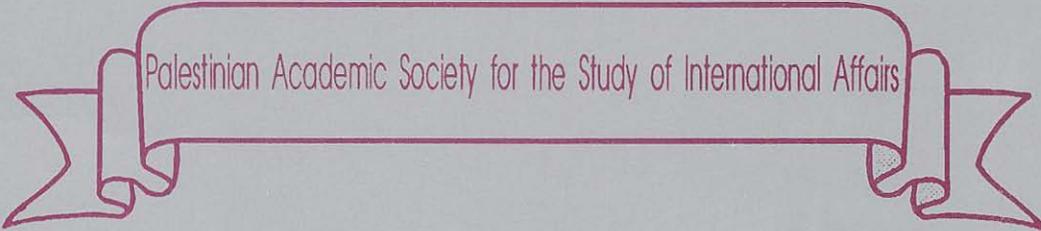


Palestinian Education

The Future Challenge

Dr. Andrew Rigby

PASSIA



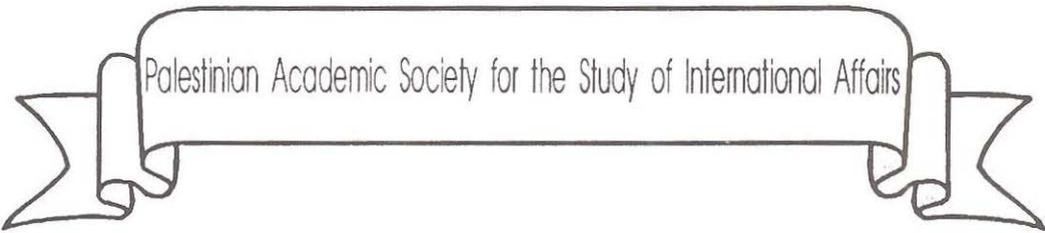
Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs

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I NTRODUCTION



At the heart of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are the related problems of territory and rival nationalisms. Any workable and sustainable solution to this conflict must involve each party accepting the national legitimacy of the other. Crucially, this involves the exchange of territory for peace as called for in UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338. Such is the aim of the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations as stated in the Declaration of Principles (DOP) signed in Washington on 13th September 1993.¹

The DOP envisaged the establishment of a Palestinian National Authority (PNA) for a transitional period not exceeding five years. It anticipated the transfer of powers and responsibilities from Israel to the representatives of the Palestinian people in stages. First off, there was to be Israeli withdrawal from much of the Gaza Strip and from Jericho, and commencement of Palestinian self-rule over these areas. In addition, this Early Empowerment was expected to take place throughout the remainder of the Occupied Territories with Palestinian authority being exercised over education, health, social welfare, direct taxation and tourism. Elections for a Palestinian legislative council

¹ For details of the Oslo Accords, see Middle East International (MEI), September 10, 1993, 5-6.

were anticipated to take place not later than 13th July 1994, by which time Israeli troops within the Occupied Territories would be redeployed outside Arab population centres, with the Palestinian police ensuring the maintenance of public order. Negotiations on the final settlement were to begin as soon as possible but certainly within two years of the commencement of the interim period. These negotiations would cover outstanding issues such as the status of Jerusalem, refugees, settlements, security arrangements, borders and other matters of common concern. The DOP also envisaged the establishment of a number of Israeli-Palestinian liaison committees to deal with issues requiring cooperation and coordination, such as economic development and joint security concerns, and to facilitate the smooth implementation of negotiated agreements. In the event there were various delays in implementing the first stages of the accord, with Prime Minister Rabin glibly observing that "No dates are sacred", and it was 1st July 1994, before Arafat made his historic entry into the Gaza Strip.

The enthusiasm for the accord amongst the population of the Occupied Territories during the period immediately following its announcement was not misplaced. It marked a historical development in the peace-making process between the hostile parties. However, in the months following the signing of the agreement there was a growing sense of disillusionment and concern about the possibility of achieving a lasting resolution of the conflict. From the first announcement of the accords, the majority of Palestinians within the Occupied Territories considered the Gaza Strip and Jericho paltry compensation for all the suffering they had endured under

occupation.² However, they were prepared to go along with it in the absence of any alternative and in the hope that they would experience an immediate improvement in their everyday living conditions. These hopes were not fulfilled. The Israeli soldiers remained on the streets shooting and killing Palestinian youths. The January 1994 deadline for their redeployment from Gaza and Jericho passed without any hint of their withdrawal. The vast majority of political prisoners remained in Israeli jails, unemployment remained at unacceptable levels. Moreover, as the months passed, the Palestinian political leadership seemed more concerned with appeasing Israel and fighting over who should occupy what post in the interim administration, rather than laying the foundations for the democratic processes which most Palestinians expected the embryonic Palestinian political entity to embody.³

Meanwhile, the 'rejectionists' on both sides continued to play their deadly games - seeking to provoke their opposite numbers into some new outrage. Palestinians ambushing settlers, settlers running riot whilst the army stood aside and watched. On 25th February, 1994, there came the outrage at the mosque in Hebron when an Israeli settler murdered some 29 Palestinian worshippers in an act of savage butchery. Some eight months later, on 19th October, 22 Israelis were

² Edward Said expressed many of the concerns felt by Palestinians in his critique, "A Palestinian Versailles", The Progressive, December 22, 1993, 22-26.

³ There were early reports of a power struggle between the Palestinian leadership in Tunis and those within the occupied territories. See, for example, Lamis Adonis, "Delaying Tactics", MEI, October 8 1993, 4. In January 1994, a delegation from the Gaza Strip led by Haidar Abd al-Shafi spent three days in Tunis in an unsuccessful effort to persuade Arafat to institute democratic reforms within the PLO decision-making process. See Graham Usher, "Things Fall Apart", MEI, January 21 1994, 9-10.

slaughtered when a Palestinian blew up a crowded bus in the centre of Tel Aviv.

Such acts of barbarism can never be condoned by anyone with a scrap of human compassion. But one can understand why they are committed. They are acts of terror, aimed at sabotaging a putative peace process, carried out by people who are outraged by the 'concessions' made to an enemy whose humanity they deny. As such, the terrorists are the most extreme exemplars of a mind-set and an orientation shared by many Israelis and Palestinians, people who are incapable of seeing their erstwhile enemy as anything but totally 'other', as aliens to be feared and mistrusted.

Whether the peace process, such as it is, can withstand such pressures remains to be seen. There are huge obstacles to be overcome such as the future of settlements and the status of Jerusalem. There is also the fundamental issue regarding the establishment within the emergent Palestinian political entity of a democratic political system and culture. Unless free and open elections are held for some kind of legislative, decision-making council or assembly, in which all shades of political opinion can be represented, then no Palestinian political leadership will be able to play its necessary role in the peace process, because they will lack the legitimacy required to make authoritative and binding commitments regarding the future of the occupied territories. In this sense, there is a direct continuity between the creation of a democratic political system and culture within the occupied territories and the nature of the future relationship between Israel and the Palestinians.

In *An Agenda For Peace*, Boutros Boutros-Ghali sought to explore the nature of this relationship between socio-economic and political change and the building of lasting peace between erstwhile enemies, observing that:

*Peacemaking and peace-keeping operations, to be truly successful, must come to include comprehensive efforts to identify and support structures which will tend to consolidate peace and advance a sense of confidence and well-being among people. ... only sustained, cooperative work to deal with underlying economic, social, cultural and humanitarian problems can place an achieved peace on a durable foundation.*⁴

He went on to observe that institutions placing strong emphasis on participation were essential for such processes to happen as the establishment and advancement of such institutions should effectively promote the empowerment of weak or marginalized groups.⁵

In the West Bank and Gaza Strip, children make up the majority of the population, with 48.5 percent of the people aged under fifteen years.⁶ It follows that with such a demographic profile, a key role in the shaping of the political culture will be played by the formal educational system. Under the terms of the Early Empowerment Agreement signed between Israel and the Palestinians on 29th August 1994, the control of formal education system in the occupied territories was transferred to the PNA.

⁴ Boutros Boutros-Ghali, *An Agenda For Peace*, New York: United Nations, 1992, 32-3.

⁵ *ibid.* 47.

⁶ Figures cited in *Growing Up With Conflict: Children and Development in the Occupied Territories*, London: Save The Children, 1992, ii.

The aim of this paper is to explore some of the obstacles and challenges faced by those charged with the task of establishing a Palestinian educational system, particularly from the perspective of those who see an intimate relationship between the building of a lasting peace between Israel and the Palestinians, the reconstruction of Palestinian social and economic life after decades of occupation, and the promotion of democratic political institutions and processes in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Before going on to identify the key issues that must be addressed, however, it is necessary to sketch out the main features of the educational system as it existed prior to 1st September 1994, when the PNA took over its administration.⁷

⁷ Much of the following is based on A. Rigby, 'Peace-building in the Occupied Territories: the Challenge of Educational Reform', *Peace and Change*, vol. 19, no. 4, 349-372, copyright 1994 by Peace History Society and Consortium on Peace Research, Education and Development. Reprinted by permission of Sage Publications, Inc.

1.



THE SCHOOL SYSTEM WITHIN THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES

The Palestinian school system as inherited by the PNA consists of three sectors: government, United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) and private schools. Government schools, those taken over by the Israelis from the Jordanian and Egyptian governments in 1967, constitute the largest sector of the school system comprising 79 percent of the schools in the West Bank and 49 percent in the Gaza Strip. They have been totally financed and controlled by the Israeli authorities, with the military-appointed director of education responsible for all key decisions relating to the hiring and training of teachers, the content and shape of the curricula (including the choice of textbooks), and the construction of new schools. UNRWA schools were set up after 1950 to provide education at the elementary and preparatory levels. They make-up 10 percent of the school system in the West Bank and 51 percent in the Gaza Strip, where there is a much heavier concentration of refugees. Finally, there are the private

schools run by various institutions, mainly religious - Muslim and Christian - which take about 16 percent of all students in the West Bank (including East Jerusalem) and about 4.5 percent in the Gaza Strip.⁸ In general, the private schools have offered a better quality of education than the other two sectors, whilst kindergarten and pre-school education for the under-sixes was only available through the private sector. UNICEF estimated that by 1992 there were some 487,029 Palestinian school children in some 1,282 schools in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.⁹

Schools in the West Bank were required to follow the Jordanian curriculum, with Gazan schools following the Egyptian. The text books for the courses have been supplied by Jordan and Egypt, subject to the approval of the Israeli administration which reserved the right to ban or censor educational material. Under Military Order 107 of August 1967, the Israelis had banned 103 textbooks from schools by 1992.¹⁰ Thus, all references to Palestine or Palestinians have been routinely censored by the authorities, with the result that school children have been instructed in the history, culture and literature of Jordan or Egypt, not Palestine. For the secondary schools in the occupied territories the major matriculation exam has been the *tawjihi*, which is a requirement for entrance to university and to a number of white-collar and professional career paths. Students in the West Bank have taken the Jordanian exam, while those in the Gaza Strip have

⁸ Figures taken from Educational Network, no. 1, (June 1990): 8, and Educational Network, no. 5 (June 1991): 3. For an overview of conditions in government schools under occupation, see Education Network, no. 2 (September 1990). Issue no. 4 (April 1991) covers UNRWA schools in the West Bank and no. 5 (June 1991) covers the private school sector.

⁹ Figures cited in Growing Up With Conflict, op. cit. 31.

¹⁰ idem.

taken the Egyptian. Both variants consist of a number of compulsory examinations, sat in two blocs. Failure to sit and pass any of the examinations results in failure to matriculate, and the student has to wait another year before trying again. This has meant that students prevented from sitting the exams (because of arrest, curfews, school closure or some other reason) in effect lose a year's schooling.

In the years since the outbreak of the Intifada the Palestinian schools and other educational institutions became one of the key arenas where the collective struggle against the Israeli occupation was fought out. Hence, before going on to discuss the future of Palestinian education, we need to explore some of the recent historical background.

2.



THE STRUGGLE OVER SCHOOLING DURING THE INTIFADA

During the Intifada the educational system in the occupied territories was subjected to an unprecedented assault by the Israeli authorities. Schools were closed for lengthy periods of time as part of a conscious strategy of collective punishment aimed at undermining the active resistance of the population. In February 1988, all schools in the West Bank were closed by military order. They were allowed to reopen in late May of that year but were closed once again from mid-July. They remained closed until July 1989 except for a few weeks during January. In the Gaza Strip, similar amount of school time was lost due to the frequency of military curfews, the number of individual school closures, the repeated closure of all schools within particular refugee camps and the non-attendance of students and staff during general strike days. According to one well-informed estimate,

Palestinian children lost between 35-50 percent of school days during the first four years of the Intifada.¹¹

In response to such an unprecedented assault on the educational system, Palestinians tried to develop an alternative system of schooling. The vitality of such efforts mirrored that of the wider struggle. An initial period of confusion was followed during 1988-89 by a sustained effort to create a new system of neighbourhood-based "popular" schools. For a variety of reasons the impetus behind this project waned, as did the Intifada itself as a mass movement of unarmed civilian resistance to occupation. It was the experience of trying to maintain some minimal level of schooling during the years of the Intifada that caused Palestinian educators to crystallize their concerns about the nature of schooling within the occupied territories, and thereby helped set the agenda for reform that needs to be addressed during the reconstruction phase that now confronts them. In order to understand this process and the nature of the concerns which emerged, we need to locate it within the wider context of the different phases of the Intifada itself.

¹¹ *ibid.* 32.

3.



THE STAGES OF THE INTIFADA

i) The first months: spontaneity and confusion

The outbreak of the uprising in December 1987 was as great a surprise to the leadership of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) as it was to everyone else, although in the first few days there was little to set it apart from previous confrontations with the occupying power. However, as the weeks went by the insurrection took on a distinctive character. One aspect of this was its scale. Whereas previous outbursts had been scattered in nature, which made them relatively containable, this time whole sectors of society became involved as the revolt spread from Gaza to the West Bank, from the camps to the towns and villages. The other key distinguishing feature was the emergence of an instrument of political unification for all the

various political factions in the guise of the Unified National Leadership of the Uprising (UNLU).¹²

ii) 1988-90: Horizontal escalation: the mass mobilisation of unarmed civilian resistance

By March 1988, the UNLU had succeeded in establishing itself as the guiding force behind the uprising, commanding the allegiance of the vast majority of the population in the struggle to end the occupation. It remained a clandestine body, with its existence most openly evidenced by the regular publication of its communiqués and leaflets. Along with the organizational infrastructure of popular neighbourhood committees that grew up alongside it, the UNLU took on the character of an "embryonic state" and came to constitute the legitimate political authority in the West Bank and Gaza Strip: coordinating activities in civil society, administering the provision of certain basic services, and seeking to control the use of force within the boundaries of its own territory.¹³

The first two years of the uprising witnessed a radical horizontal escalation of the struggle against the occupation, in the sense that all sectors of society became involved in various forms of resistance.¹⁴ These included forms of symbolic resistance such as wearing clothes in the Palestinian national colours and following

¹² For a more detailed analysis of the structures that sustained the Intifada, see A. Rigby, *Living the Intifada*, London: Zed Books, 1991.

¹³ *Ibid.* 40-43.

¹⁴ The following typology of forms of resistance is taken from Werner Rings, *Life With the Enemy: Collaboration and Resistance in Hitler's Europe 1939-1945*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1982.

"Palestinian time", which involved switching to summer and winter time a week earlier than the Israelis. Many took a further step and undertook what Werner Rings has termed "polemic resistance"¹⁵ - engaging in open protest against the occupation by such acts as resigning their positions in the Civil Administration of the occupied territories, actively engaging in the work of the popular committees, and generally making no secret of their support for the uprising. Forms of defensive resistance were also widespread, with people sheltering those Palestinians who were being sought by the Israeli security forces. Such fugitives were generally young members of the strike forces who had engaged in various forms of unarmed offensive resistance: confronting the occupiers with stones, barricades, and the occasional Molotov cocktail.¹⁶

Although the confrontations between stone-throwing Palestinians and armed Israeli soldiers attracted the attention of the world's media during the early years of the uprising, a more fundamental aspect of the resistance was the effort by Palestinians in their capacity as everyday people to undermine and transcend the structures of dependency which tied them to Israeli rule. Whilst this involved various forms of non-cooperation and the boycotting of Israeli goods and services, it also entailed a sustained attempt to create their own institutional structures, to create new patterns of living characterized by a heightened degree of self-reliance in all spheres of life. This form of resistance through constructive action involved

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 162-171.

¹⁶ For the distinction between "unarmed" and "nonviolent" resistance, see A. Rigby, Living the Intifada, 1-2. See also J. Semelin, Unarmed Against Hitler: Civilian Resistance in Europe, 1939-1943, (Westport: Praeger, 1993), 30.

efforts to develop a degree of economic self-sufficiency via the "household economy" (people growing their own food and meeting their basic needs from indigenous sources), promoting community-based health care, developing alternative modes of communication and underground information-sharing networks and establishing neighbourhood education projects. More than anything else these embryonic institutions were a manifestation of the active involvement of all strata of society in the struggle against occupation and the shared sense of optimism that they were laying the basis of an independent Palestinian society and state that would be realized in the not-too-distant future.

iii) 1990 : Vertical escalation and the deterioration of the Intifada

For the first two years, the Intifada could be characterized as a genuinely mass based movement of civilian resistance which boosted Palestinian morale and generated international support for their cause. During 1990, however, the resistance became more "professionalized", with groups of youths continuing to clash with the army whilst the majority of the population focused on survival rather than active resistance. In part, this reflected a growing frustration amongst Palestinians with the lack of tangible political gains achieved during the years of struggle and the waning of international media interest. There was a growing sense that the Intifada had become routinized, that the Israelis were learning to live with the uprising, and the international community was becoming anaesthetized to the sufferings of the Palestinian people. The intransigence of the Likud government in Israel caused many to question the overall effectiveness of the unarmed mode of resistance. There was a growing sense that what was needed was a vertical escalation of the means of resistance in the

direction of armed struggle. If the Israelis and the international community could not be moved by unarmed resistance, perhaps violent means might do the trick.

This feeling grew during the latter half of 1990 and the run-up to the Gulf War. In the immediate aftermath to the war, having endured weeks of blanket curfew, the Palestinians faced unprecedented economic hardship. This was brought about by a combination of burgeoning unemployment, due to Israel's radical restriction of Palestinian access to her labour market in favour of Soviet immigrants, and the loss of remittances and funding from the Gulf States upon which so many Palestinian families and institutions relied. Accompanying the economic hardship there was a growth in crimes of violence and theft within the occupied territories. While the economic situation explained a part of the increasing lawlessness, it was also linked to the declining ability of the leadership of the uprising to enforce its rulings and control the wilder acts of the gangs of masked youths. This erosion of authority was linked to the fact that so many experienced political cadres had been imprisoned by the Israeli authorities. This in turn contributed to the re-emergence of political factionalism which permeated the popular committees, the very bodies which had constituted the organizational infrastructure of Palestinian society during the highpoint of the Intifada in the years up to 1990. One of the calamitous consequences of this loss of control over the youth and the intensification of political factionalism, particularly between the political mainstream and the Islamic Resistance Movement, Hamas, was the rise in the number of assassinations of alleged collaborators. By the summer of 1991 more Palestinians were being killed by their own people than by the Israeli security forces and settlers.

In November 1991 the spirits of the Palestinians were boosted by the commencement of the Madrid peace conference. The optimism and the unity that was engendered soon dissipated with the lack of any tangible progress on substantive issues. Divisions within and between the main political groupings in the PLO intensified around the question of the continued participation of the Palestinians in the putative peace process. These rifts paralleled the growth of dissatisfaction within the Palestinian population at large, which heightened the pressure on the members of the Palestinian delegation, who found it increasingly difficult to justify their continuing participation in what seemed to be a futile exercise of talking peace with Israel.

The widespread frustration with the lack of political movement in the peace talks, in the context of the on-going deterioration in the living conditions of the mass of people within the occupied territories, manifested itself in growing support for the "rejectionist" stance of Hamas, and an increase in the incidence of armed attacks on Israeli settlers and soldiers. As a result, the iron-fist of occupation under the new Labour-led Israeli government become more repressive than ever. In December 1992, over four hundred Islamic political activists were expelled to a cold hillside in southern Lebanon. In March 1993, the borders between the occupied territories and Israel (including East Jerusalem) were sealed to all Palestinians except those with special permits. An impasse had been reached in the formal peace-making process between Israel and the Palestinians, one which was broken in August 1993 by the news of the Oslo Accords.

4.



EDUCATION DURING THE INTIFADA: THE PALESTINIAN RESPONSE

Palestinians in the diaspora and living under occupation have placed a particularly high value upon formal educational attainment. In uncertain circumstances, educational qualifications take on an enhanced significance as a form of investment for the future, providing people with a passport to greater economic security and enhanced life-chances. Given such an orientation, it is not surprising that Israel targeted educational institutions in the power struggle that lay at the heart of the Intifada.

Throughout the period of the occupation schools and colleges have been the sites of demonstrations and protests against Israeli rule. In attempting to clamp down on any centres of resistance, the occupation authorities have harassed, arrested, and deported troublesome students and teachers, and closed down educational institutions for varying periods of time as a form of collective punishment aimed at subduing unrest. As such, the response of the

Israelis during the Intifada did not represent any markedly new departure, but rather an intensification of established patterns of individual and collective punishment. The response of the Palestinian teachers and educators to the new challenges posed by the Intifada and the heightened repression of the Israeli occupiers changed with the different phases of the uprising itself.

i) The early months of confusion

On 3rd February 1988, a military order was issued closing down all schools in the West Bank until further notice, because they had become centres "to foment and launch violent demonstrations and hence constituted a severe security threat".¹⁷ A few days later, on 13th February, this closure order was extended to all government schools in East Jerusalem. This meant that over 1200 schools were shut down, affecting more than 300,000 students. In the Gaza Strip a different pattern was established. There was no blanket closure of schools as such. But the repeated imposition of curfews and the closure of individual schools for varying periods of time caused much the same interruption of the school year as in the West Bank.

The initial response of teachers and school administrators to the new situation was uncertain. They received no official advance notification of the closures. They had, therefore, no opportunity to meet collectively in school to prepare contingency plans. Moreover, they had no idea how long the Intifada would last or how long the schools would remain closed. As the weeks passed, depression spread

¹⁷ Marcia Kretzmer, "West Bank Schools: a Battle of Wills", Jerusalem Post International Edition, June 24, 1989, 8.

amongst teachers. More and more of the government schools were being taken over by the military as barracks, temporary detention centres and storage bases. Teachers and administrators felt helpless and frustrated and were reluctant to call for student demonstrations against the closures for fear of injury to the students.

The position of teachers in the government schools was particularly difficult. Deprived of their salaries, they suffered economically. In addition, locked out of their schools without warning, they had no access to teaching materials and no means of meeting with their pupils. In the West Bank, teachers could still gain access to the private schools, and so they could continue to meet with their colleagues to restore their flagging spirits and discuss contingency plans. The administrator of one such school told me of their efforts to frustrate the closure orders by preparing self-study packs for pupils, meeting with them on an individual basis at regular intervals to discuss their work and set them their next assignment. However, such attempts to "teach from a distance" were somewhat half-hearted. For one thing, the teachers themselves were not trained for such a task and lacked experience and expertise. For another, they lacked the equipment and the means necessary to duplicate the teaching materials and distribute them throughout the private school network.

ii) The attempt to organize

Towards the end of March 1988, well into the second month of closure, the Unified National Leadership of the Uprising began to urge students and teachers in the West Bank to return to schools and universities and "to practice their legitimate right to education". 24th

March was declared a "Day of Education" and this prompted a number of private schools to open on that day. It was a short-lived act of defiance. The military cleared the schools and threatened that any repeat would risk incurring permanent closure.¹⁸

A more sustained form of constructive resistance to the Israeli suppression of formal educational activity was launched towards the end of March 1988. This was the attempt by popular neighbourhood committees to organize alternative education classes for school children in private homes. This development was heralded as a significant move in the strategy of resistance through the progressive disengagement from the occupation authorities. It was also depicted as a first tentative step towards the development of a truly indigenous Palestinian educational process that was organically based in the community. For all those who were involved it was an exciting innovation. Teachers were faced with the challenge of motivating students without recourse to the traditional sanctions of the classroom, the formal school system of grades, and the "carrot" of accreditation.

However, the actual implementation of this program of popular education varied in quality and coverage from neighbourhood to neighbourhood, and a number of serious problems were encountered that were not satisfactorily resolved. In middle-class communities, where there was a ready supply of teachers and members of other professional groups, there was little difficulty in finding people to service the alternative classes. However, in many of the villages, camps and neighbourhoods, there were few people with appropriate

¹⁸ "The Lessons of Occupation", News From Within, May 31 1988, 9.

experience to take on the role of teacher, with the result that the classes suffered.

In addition to this problem of uneven development, there was no central coordination of what to teach and how to go about it. There were no back-up services to assist those lacking relevant previous experience. Moreover, a common problem was encountered in trying to motivate the students. The traditional process of schooling in the occupied territories involved a lot of "chalk and talk" from the teachers and rote-learning from the students. The prime aim seemed to be to enable the students to gain the necessary accreditation to move on to the next year of study. Insofar as the popular education classes could not provide the students with that accreditation, then it would appear that the pupils failed to appreciate the need to study.

Despite these problems, this community-based system of education was seen by many as a significant challenge to the occupier's ability to control the process and contents of Palestinian education. Perhaps the Israeli military authorities also saw it in such a light for, much to everyone's surprise, they announced on 23rd May 1988 that schools in the West Bank would be allowed to reopen.

For the teaching staff, a major concern accompanying the reopening of the schools focused on the motivation of the students. Would the young people generalise their defiance of the Israelis to defiance of authority in general, and the teachers' authority in particular? In fact, instructors were pleasantly surprised by the enthusiasm shown by the pupils on their return. However, this began to wear off after a few weeks, and there was a certain amount of tenseness in the classroom. Schools continued to abide by the

directions of the UNLU to restrict their hours in line with the daily commercial strike. To make up for lost time, one teacher remarked, they were "doing away with fun classes such as art, physical education and home economics, to concentrate on the more serious subjects."¹⁹

This attempt to cover the ground in examinable subjects during the restricted school day was very demanding of both staff and students, particularly when events outside the classroom intruded. As one young student at a school in Ramallah wrote, "Lots of time while we are in class we smell tires burning and hear shots in Ramallah. Our minds are outside so we can't do anything in class". Another student admitted, "Sometimes I feel bad in school. Everyone outside is in the Intifada and we're stuck in school."²⁰

Indeed, teachers found themselves unable to prevent secondary students from leaving the classroom early to make their preparations for the day's confrontation with the Israeli soldiers. These daily clashes with the military, as the students emerged from school, were a source of concern to teachers and parents alike who feared for the safety of the young. Eventually, early in July 1988, the West Bank schools were closed down once again.

If the aim of the Israeli authorities in allowing the schools to reopen for a few weeks had been to disrupt the development of an alternative Palestinian system of community-based education, then the plan succeeded. When the pupils had returned to the classrooms

¹⁹ Quoted in *Al Fajr* (English), May 29, 1988, 4.

²⁰ *Friends School Newsletter*, 2, no. 3, Summer 1988, 3.

following the first period of closure, it was resolved that the informal sector of alternative education should be maintained. One student was quoted as saying "We will not give up our classes. Schools teach in the morning, and our neighbourhood studies take place in the afternoon."²¹ Educators had also recognized the need for a thorough survey of the educational needs of the different villages and neighbourhoods throughout the occupied territories so that a serious attempt could be made to match resources with expressed needs through developing contact lists, resource centres and the like. It was also realized that particular attention should be paid to assisting parents who, it was acknowledged, would have to play a key role in leading the home-based educational groups.

Despite such worthy and laudable intentions, the reality was that during the period that formal schooling was resumed, the popular education classes were allowed to lapse. When the West Bank schools were closed once again in July 1988, people were faced with the problem of rebuilding their underground educational infrastructure. This task was made more difficult and costly when, in mid-August 1988, the Israelis declared all popular committees illegal. In effect, this meant that anyone involved with organizing any kind of educational or cultural activity risked prosecution and imprisonment for up to ten years. To by-pass this restriction, a number of teachers and schools began preparing study packs for students to use at home in an effort to launch a "teaching-at-a distance" experiment. In October 1988, just after the distribution of the first set of study the packs, the Israeli authorities ordered schools to stop such activity.²²

¹ Quoted in Jerusalem Post, September 5, 1988.

² Palestinian educator, personal communication to the author, April 1989.

The Israelis were attempting to outlaw all forms of Palestinian political organization and activity, and included in this broad category was education. To a considerable degree they succeeded in this aim with regard to school-age children.

iii) Fears for the future

The continued closure of the schools imposed a heavy cost upon the Palestinians of the West Bank. Concern focused on both the short and long term consequences of what some regarded as a policy of "cultural massacre".²³ Alongside the worry about the plight of the students prevented from completing their *tawjihi* examinations, there was considerable anxiety about the situation of the younger children. The fear was that the longer the children remained out of school, the greater the likelihood that they would lose their basic foundation in literacy and numeracy. Teachers also emphasized the damage to those who had yet to acquire these basic skills, arguing that the longer the delay in teaching a child how to read, the more difficult it became.

Beyond the concern with the consequences of lost qualifications and knowledge and the organizational problems of coping with the return to "normal" schooling, there were other troublesome issues. During 1989, the fear grew that the young were beginning to lose their study skills in general. This was linked to worries about the possible problems of motivation and discipline amongst the student body.²⁴ During the period of school closure, the students had a considerable amount of spare time when they could

²³ Palestinian educator, personal communication to the author, April 1989.

²⁴ See report by Hugh Carnegie, Financial Times, July 21, 1989.

have been studying. Most found it almost impossible. As one student explained: "I spend my time switching from one radio station to another, trying to find out what is happening around. When Palestinians of my age are being killed, I can't just sit and study."²⁵

Teachers themselves faced similar problems of motivation and low morale due to the repeated interruptions in the school year and growing dissatisfaction with the curriculum they were required to teach, which seemed increasingly irrelevant under the changed conditions of the Intifada. Teacher morale also suffered from their worsening economic plight. The repeated school closures resulted in severe reductions in their salaries, particularly for those employed in government schools. Such financial concerns were shared by administrators and teachers in the private school sector. Obviously, with the schools closed for month after month, tuition fees were not being paid, and a severe financial crisis was the result.

A substantial number of well-to-do families withdrew their children from fee-paying schools in the occupied territories, either out of fear for their physical safety or concern about the lost hours of schooling. The children were sent elsewhere, to the Arab world, the United States, Europe, or perhaps just as far as East Jerusalem where the private schools remained open for longer periods than elsewhere in the territories. Not only did this contribute to the financial crisis of the private schools, it raised deeper fears of a more long-term nature. In effect, what was happening was that those with the necessary resources were still managing to obtain schooling for their children, a schooling that would provide them with the necessary accreditation

²⁵ Quoted by Reem Nuseibeh, Al Fajr (English), March 27, 1988.

to proceed to higher education and beyond. At a time when social solidarity was claimed as a key factor in the continuation of the struggle against the occupation, the seeds of social division were being planted that would result in the emergence of different "educational classes" being superimposed on existing social divisions: classes made up of a mass group of relatively disadvantaged, and a minority group who managed to reap the benefits of uninterrupted formal schooling. Worries about the financial plight of the private schools increased in the months following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, as the loss of funds from the Gulf States placed all Palestinian institutions in dire financial straits.

Such concerns were part of a wider anxiety about the deeper damage that the Israelis were causing, beyond the denial of access to formal education. Outside of school, on the streets and elsewhere, the young Palestinians were receiving an education. They were learning new things about themselves and about the "enemy". They were operating in a milieu where aggression was valued. To this onlooker at least, the daily confrontations with the military were occasionally reminiscent of rival youth gangs, taunting and harassing and attacking each other, as they fought over their territorial rights. What kind of preparation was this for living and working cooperatively in a future Palestinian society?

In November 1989, there was evidence that these concerns were justified. During the *tawjihi* examinations, there was widespread cheating and intimidation. Even more worrying was the repetition of such behaviour in the examinations that took place the following summer. Despite prior appeals for honesty by the UNLU and other bodies, young activists entered a number of classrooms and ordered

teachers and invigilators aside while they coordinated the cheating process - a pattern that was repeated in 1991.²⁶ Since then, there has been a marked reduction in the level of cheating, and a corresponding drop in the pass rates of students.

Fears were mounting regarding the longer term consequences for these "children of the stones" who, in effect, forfeited their childhood during the Intifada. According to one researcher, writing in 1990 at the height of the uprising, "They do not play like normal children elsewhere in the world. Their games reflect their daily life: children with stones facing heavily armed Israeli soldiers. The older children carry makeshift toy guns while the little ones throw make-believe stones at them. Some pretend to be hit and fall to the ground while their friends carry them to hospital."²⁷ Fears regarding the damaging consequences of the repeated disruption of schooling upon the educational achievement levels of the pupils were borne out by survey results. In 1991 and 1992 tests of ability in mathematics and science were carried out amongst eighth grade students around the world, including the West Bank. In the science tests West Bank students ranked twentieth out of 21, with Mozambique coming last. In mathematics the West Bank came nineteenth, with Brazil last. Among the 21 countries surveyed, according to the National Centre for Educational Research and Development in Jordan, the West Bank results were "rock bottom".²⁸

²⁶ D. Kuttab, MEI, August 3, 1990, 10, and personal communication to author, An-Najar University, Nablus, April 1991.

²⁷ Nehaya al-Hero, "The Trauma of Growing Up in Palestine", Al Fajr (English), August 13, 1990, 7.

²⁸ Cited in S. Ramsden & C. Senker, eds., Learning the Hard Way: Palestinian Education in the West Bank, Gaza Strip and Israel, London: World University Service (UK), 1993, 11.

5.



THE EDUCATIONAL PRIORITIES OF THE PNA

According to the transfer agreement of August 1994, the Palestinians took over the educational system as it had been structured and operated by the Israelis, including the Israeli military orders and regulations pertaining to education in the occupied territories. Nothing was changed except the people in charge. Regarding the mechanism for changing and cancelling such regulations and instituting reforms to the system, the agreed procedure is that the Palestinians must place their proposals before the relevant Israeli authorities. If the Israelis do not respond within a month, then the changes can be implemented. If the Israelis object, then a process of negotiation will follow.

In taking over the system as it stood, the PNA inherited a service that was in crisis. Before the Palestinians can start thinking about transforming the philosophy and guiding principles upon which a new Palestinian educational system might be based, there is a more

immediate 'holding operation' to be carried out. Some idea of the extent of the immediate challenge faced and the consequent agenda to be addressed was revealed by the results of a study initiated in 1990 by the Tamer Institute for Community Education. Researchers set out to measure the educational skill levels of Palestinian school children by testing 3000 elementary school pupils in the central region of the West Bank. According to the director of the institute, writing in 1992, the results revealed that, "the deterioration of Palestinian education has reached emergency proportions". Amongst the relevant factors mentioned were "overcrowded classrooms, inadequate budgets, ill-trained teachers and a traditional curriculum that is grossly out of date as well as censored by Israeli authorities. ... The prolonged school closures have only exacerbated the general situation."²⁹ Some of the main educational priorities facing the PNA are examined below.

i) The overcrowding of schools and classrooms

Current estimates of the numbers of school children in the West Bank and Gaza Strip put the figure between 500,000-600,000. In general, the schools attended by these children are in a very poor state of repair, poorly lit and inadequately ventilated. The problem of unsuitable buildings is compounded by the problem of overcrowding. The school rolls are such that most government and UNRWA schools operate on a two-shift system, with classes for one group of children in the morning and another batch in the afternoon. It is not uncommon to have fifty or more students in one classroom. The

²⁹ "The Consequences of Repeated School Closures During the Intifada", *Az-Zajel*, no. 2, Spring 1992, pp 6-7.

shortage of space, coupled with a lack of teachers, has also meant that schools often run combined classes, with a teacher trying to teach up to three grades at the same time in a single classroom. To add to the level of overcrowding, the PNA faces the problem of coping with an additional 30,000-50,000 new pupils - the children of the 10,000-15,000 Palestinian 'returnees', who have returned since the signing of the DOP.

There is a clear need for a crash building programme to construct new schools and classrooms, so that class sizes can be reduced and the necessary physical environment created within which educational standards can be increased. In response to this need, UNESCO has promised aid in the region of \$2.5 million for the refurbishment and extension of existing schools.

ii) Resources and materials for schools

Palestinian pedagogy emphasises reliance on textbooks in preparation for exams. However, the textbooks that the students rely upon are out of date and old-fashioned in approach. Furthermore, most schools lack adequate library facilities, laboratory space and teaching resources in general. Thus, by 1976 there was not a single librarian or laboratory technician employed in the West Bank governmental school system.³⁰ Furthermore, municipal libraries in the West Bank are chronically under-resourced, and are non-existent in the Gaza Strip. To compound these problems, there are no locally produced Palestinian books for children and no Palestinian publishing house with a special children's

³⁰ Munir Fasheh, "Acquiring the means to learn", *Az-Zajel*, no. 2, Spring 1992, 2.

mandate.³¹ Investment in this area has been virtually non-existent under the Israeli occupation, and there is a clear and pressing need for the PNA to reverse the trend of the last two or three decades.

iii) Towards a Palestinian curriculum

As was explained above, Palestinian schools in the West Bank and Gaza Strip have worked with Israeli-censored Jordanian and Egyptian curricula since 1967. It has been recognised for some time that one of the key problems with the Palestinian educational experience in the occupied territories has been the outdated and irrelevant curriculum to which most students were exposed. In recent years there have been a number of workshops and programmes aimed at planning and developing a unified Palestinian curriculum, often in association with UNESCO which has promised its continued support for the project. Perhaps such support will not be required, if the coordinator of the Education Ministry's Curriculum Unification Program is to be believed. Speaking in September 1994, Fathiya Nasru announced that the work had been completed. The new curriculum was to consist of thirteen subjects from the Jordanian curriculum plus two subjects dealing with civics and with Palestinian society.³² One suspects that the list of subjects is about the only thing that has been completed.

Be that as it may, the PNA has been unable to introduce a new unified curriculum during the current school year. The transfer of authority took place on 1st September 1994, and the school year commenced just two days later, an impossible deadline to meet. The

³¹ *Growing Up With Conflict*, op. cit. 40.

³² Quoted in *Palestine Report*, vol. 7, no. 42, 30 September-6 October 1994, 3.

target date for the introduction of a Palestinian curriculum is the start of the 1995 school year. Insofar as the UNRWA schools always follow the curriculum of the host country, no serious problems are anticipated in the harmonisation of the curriculum to be taught throughout the West Bank and Gaza Strip, but inasmuch as the Palestinian curriculum is likely to be based very closely on the 1988 Jordanian curriculum, then the teachers from the Gaza Strip, accustomed to teaching the Egyptian curriculum, are going to face an additional burden of adjustment to the new scheme.

It is widely recognized that Palestinian school education needs to be reformed to make it more immediately relevant to the developmental needs of the students themselves, their communities and their country. As part of this necessary process, there will be a need for new teaching aides and packs. But it also has to be acknowledged that the teachers themselves need re-educating. This raises a fourth challenge faced by the Education Ministry of the PNA: the training of teachers and the improvement of teacher proficiency.

iv) Teacher training

As the agents of formal schooling, teachers constitute one of the keys to improving the quality of education in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. However, as remarked above, Palestinian school teachers have faced a crisis of morale in recent years, related to the continued interruption of the school year during the Intifada, poor working conditions, and inadequate rates of pay. In addition, many teachers are poorly qualified and schools have had great difficulty recruiting and retaining better qualified staff. According to a 1993 study, drawing on research by UNESCO, less than one third of Palestinian teachers are

educated to degree level, two thirds are qualified with diplomas, and the remainder have only secondary schooling.

The report went on to observe:

Teachers currently have to cope with extremely stressful classroom conditions. Students may be rebellious or traumatised as a consequence of disruptions and violence experienced during the Intifada. Dealing with added pressures without professional support and special training has left teachers deeply demoralised. ... The only obvious reason why most teachers continue to stay in their jobs - apart from personal commitment - is the lack of viable alternative employment alternatives in a situation of economic instability punctuated by periodic crises. ... Such a climate in the teaching profession makes for depressed staff, reduced effectiveness and unsatisfactory performance. There is an urgent need to upgrade teacher training, improve teachers' status and to bring salaries in line with acceptable living standards.³³

The truth is that the quality of teaching is low in all sectors of the school system. During the years of occupation there have been very few in-service training courses organised by the Israeli authorities, whilst they have also prevented teachers in government schools from attending courses run by Palestinian universities. UNRWA does run some in-service training, whilst private schools and non-governmental educational institutes have organised occasional workshops for teachers, but the impact on wider teaching practice has been very limited. The result has been that most teachers pursue traditional methods of teaching and classroom management.

³³ Learning the Hard Way, op. cit. 55.

According to one report, "Classes are run in an authoritarian manner with the teacher as expert who lectures to students and gives them traditional worksheets to complete. Creative and experimental teaching is discouraged."³⁴ The authority relationship within the classroom is reflected in the hierarchical administrative structure of the schools. As a consequence, most teachers lack the confidence, the skill, the support and the creative freedom to develop new methods of teaching.

There is an obvious and urgent need to develop and upgrade the teacher training system in the light of the new circumstances, and this will require close cooperation between the Education Ministry and the Palestinian universities. This is all the more pressing in the light of the PNA's decision to re-appoint and offer posts to somewhere in the region of 1,300 former teachers who lost their jobs for 'security reasons' under the Israeli occupation. Whilst laudable in its intent, to alleviate the conditions of those who have suffered as a consequence of their role in the liberation struggle, the educational implications of such a measure are rather more daunting. It could mean people returning to the teaching profession who have not been inside a classroom for over twenty years.

v) Remedial learning and community-based education

Student progress through the educational system depends on the acquisition of the appropriate skills and concepts upon which further development can be based. During the Intifada, educationalists expressed considerable concern about the problem of young children

³⁴ Cultivating Palestinian Education, Ramallah - El-Bireh: Educational Network & Ramallah Friends Schools, 1992, 5.

who were failing to achieve basic levels in literacy and numeracy. It follows from this that a major challenge facing the PNA is the establishment of appropriate remedial learning programmes targeted at those elementary, preparatory and secondary school pupils who have failed to acquire the foundational skills and capabilities necessary for them to progress satisfactorily through the formal educational system.

Amongst this category, particular mention must be made of those with special needs such as the disabled. In addition to the normal incidence of disability amongst the population of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, considerable numbers of people were injured in the Intifada who require special treatment. The vast majority of the injured were young people. Estimates have put the figure of people requiring rehabilitation in the region of 30,000-40,000. Of these, about half are children.³⁵ The challenge facing the Palestinians in addressing the needs of this section of society is vast, not least because existing services and programmes are so woefully inadequate. In the words of a 1992 report:

There are few strategies for community-based rehabilitation and effective outreach programmes and the predominant model for working with the disabled is still one of charity rather than empowerment. There is also a lack of expertise and training in social work, counselling, parental involvement, appropriate curricula development and play-centred learning. ... No comprehensive attempt has been made to prioritize the needs of

³⁵ Growing Up With Conflict, op. cit. 37-38.

*disabled children and to examine ways of integrating them into existing play, educational or health services.*³⁶

It is clear that the special needs of the disabled require a comprehensive approach, and herein lies a further problem. The Early Empowerment Agreement with the Israelis anticipated the transfer of control of five services to the PNA: education, social welfare, health, tourism and taxation. The requirements of those with disabilities demand the coordination of health and social welfare agencies in addition to the educational services. However, the institutional foundations and organisational structures for the development of such a strategic approach just do not exist at the present juncture. Until they do, one must fear for the rights of the disabled in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, as different ministries attempt to draw firm boundaries of demarcation around their areas of responsibility such that "marginal groups" become further excluded from the national agenda.

Of equal concern must be the plight of others of the "Intifada generation" who, having entered their teens in 1987-88, and having played a central role in the confrontations with the Israeli forces and in organising the resistance to occupation in Palestinian communities, are now finding themselves marginalised. In a situation of burgeoning unemployment they are disadvantaged in the job market by their lack of formal educational qualifications. They also lack the respect for their elders and established authority in general which most employers expect and demand. From being the heroes of the Intifada, they are now experiencing various forms of exclusion. Unless ways and means

³⁶ *ibid.* 39.

are found to train these young people in relevant skills that can provide them with employment prospects and a sense of purpose, then Palestine might find itself facing the problem of other societies (such as Britain) that are paying the price of nurturing a "lost generation" who, lacking access to legitimate avenues of social and economic mobility, turn to crime and drug-related activities as ways of "making out".

The sense of grievance and frustration experienced by many of the Intifada generation demands a creative and positive response from the PNA. It is a challenge that cannot be evaded. However, as with the disabled, much of the effort will need to be provided through the non-formal sector of education, with vocational training courses and the like being made available through various neighbourhood and community-based channels. The new Palestinian Ministry of Education sees its area of responsibility confined to the formal sector of the school and college system. Consequently, there is a real danger that the challenge of channelling the energies of the Intifada generation along constructive lines will not be met, unless the appropriate mechanisms of coordination between the different embryonic ministries necessary to develop a comprehensive and strategic approach to this problem are established.

6.



THE ROLE OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS AND INSTITUTIONS

A key responsibility for promoting innovative responses to the educational priorities and problems facing the Palestinians during the transitional phase of the current peace process rests with non-governmental organisations (NGOs). They possess a degree of relative freedom to experiment with new approaches to the educational challenges. They can draw on expertise and experience from around the world in order to develop their own indigenous models and paradigms. They can initiate in-service training schemes and workshops for teachers, and develop resources and teaching aids for those educationalists prepared to risk creativity in the classroom. They can feed the results of their projects and pilot schemes into the policy making process of the new Ministry of Education.

One of the problems in gauging the likely contribution of NGOs to the educational reconstruction process in Palestine is that in the past too many Palestinian NGOs have become agencies of

different political factions, oriented to extending the influence of one or other group rather than serving the needs of the society and promoting grassroots initiatives. Too often priority has been given to political struggle, rather than the social issues which the organisation is nominally intended to address, with agendas and programmes set by the imperatives of political rivalry rather than social need. As yet, under the new circumstances of the PNA and the proposed transitional period of autonomy, there is no sign that the situation has changed. Rather than being seed-beds for the promotion of an active and vibrant civil society, too many NGOs are thinly disguised agencies of political elites intent on extending their sphere of influence and dominance within society.

Against this, many of the NGOs associated with educational development within the occupied territories have proven themselves to be totally committed to their professional role.³⁷ One area that should be addressed by the NGOs relates to the promotion of universalistic and democratic values within and through the educational system, as a counter-weight to the politically inspired intolerance and bigotry that permeates so many aspects of Palestinian life. And it is to this longer term project that attention is now turned.

³⁷ For an overview of educational NGOs in the occupied territories, see Cultivating Palestinian Education, op. cit.

7.



THE LONGER TERM PROJECT: EDUCATION FOR DEMOCRACY

Like many others, I have indulged in dreaming of a democratic Palestine that might act as role model for the rest of the Middle East. I have entertained a kind of "domino theory of democracy" - the achievement of a free and pluralistic democratic order in the West Bank and Gaza Strip acting as a catalyst to bring about political transformation throughout the region.

A democratic political system rests on a democratic and open political culture, wherein people claim the right to voice their own opinions whilst respecting the rights of their opponents to do likewise, a culture characterised by respect for difference and appreciation of diversity. In the creation of such a culture, a key role naturally falls to the formal educational system as one of the prime agencies of political socialisation.

Unfortunately, it has to be admitted that as it stands, the Palestinian formal educational system is ill-suited to perform such a transformative role. Report after report bears witness to the authoritarian and hierarchical regime that rules within most Palestinian classrooms and schools, where teachers pronounce the truth from on high and the students learn it, in order to regurgitate it at their next exam so that they can proceed up the ladder of achievement. If the aim of progressive educationalists is to fashion a system that engenders respect for human rights and a positive response to difference and diversity, then this must clearly start with the promotion of a sense of self-worth within the students themselves. This means that the old patterns of Palestinian education must be transcended. But here one has to acknowledge that the patterns of authority within the classrooms are merely reflections of the authoritarian and patriarchal relationships that permeate the Palestinian family and the wider community.

Schools can act as one of the institutional foundations of a democratic Palestinian political culture, but it is difficult to imagine the educational practices of generations being transformed without some changes in the wider society. Schools are not islands, they cannot remain insulated from the social patterns and processes beyond their walls. Without underestimating the significance of the socialisation process in schools, it has to be recognised that young people are shaped more by what they experience within the family and the wider community than by what teachers urge them to absorb. Hence, Palestinian educationalists must ask themselves how they can persuade students of the richness of diversity when their society remains riven by factionalism and political rivalry that corrupts and distorts so many aspects of public and institutional life? How can they

convince students of the value of respecting difference in such an environment? How can teachers encourage pupils to resolve conflicts nonviolently in a situation where political opponents are imprisoned and offending newspapers are prevented from distribution? How can you instil in students the importance of equal rights for everyone, when all around them they see people being appointed to positions of influence on the basis of patronage and political favouritism rather than professional expertise and competency.

Such observations caution moderation in expectations regarding the transformative role that can be played by the formal educational system in the promotion of a democratic culture within the emerging Palestinian political entity. Little has changed since Jan Abu Shakrah, writing in 1992, observed:

If we look honestly at our children (or what happens to them as they go to school and grow up here), we see that the whole atmosphere - of military occupation, factionalism and other social divisions, repressive schools, authoritarian and patriarchal families and the rest - hardly provides a nurturing, supportive environment for the flowering of the personality and a sense of community.³⁸

³⁸ Jan Abu Shakrah, "Some Thoughts on Human Rights Education", Al Fajr (English), November 9, 1992, 5.

CONCLUSION

The task facing the Palestinian population as a whole during what is supposed to be a transitional phase towards a final settlement is overwhelming. Especially daunting is the economic situation within the occupied territories, with unprecedented levels of unemployment and associated impoverishment of vast sections of the population. The social and political consequences of such widespread suffering, if it remains unalleviated, could undermine any Palestinian regime. In the words of the authors of a recent report, "a dynamic and stable economy in the occupied territories is a *sine qua non* for the success of an interim self-government".³⁹

Equally problematic, however, is the underdevelopment of the institutional foundations for democratic self-government due to the restrictions imposed on all forms of political and quasi-political organization during the years of occupation. One consequence of this, coupled with the gross denial of basic human rights by the occupiers, has been the underdevelopment of a democratic political culture. The bitter rivalry that characterizes the relationships between the supporters of different political tendencies and resistance groups, often culminating in violent clashes, is indicative of the lack of that tolerance for difference which is one of the hallmarks of a democratic political culture.

³⁹ Ann Mosely Lesch (principle author), Transition to Palestinian Self-Government: Practical Steps Toward Israeli-Palestinian Peace, Cambridge, MA. American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1992, 120.

The relationship between these different dimensions of the process of reconstruction to be tackled as part of any sustained peace-building effort has been articulated by Boutros Boutros-Ghali:

Democracy within nations requires respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms ... It requires as well a deeper understanding and respect for the rights of minorities and respect for the needs of the more vulnerable groups of society, especially women and children. This is not only a political matter. The social stability needed for productive growth is nurtured by conditions in which people can readily express their will. For this, strong domestic institutions of participation are essential. Promoting such institutions means promoting the empowerment of the unorganized, the poor, the marginalized.⁴⁰

Since the signing of the peace accords in Washington, concern has grown in many quarters regarding the authoritarian political style of the PNA. There is a well-founded fear that the decision-makers within the embryonic Palestinian state structure have decided that democracy is a luxury that they cannot afford for the time being.

To counter such tendencies, it is vital that a strong and vibrant civil society should be created. The continuity between means and ends is one of the fundamental axioms of those who seek nonviolent social change. A democratic Palestinian state can only emerge on the basis of a political culture that values participation and cooperative action. The only way to achieve a democratic society is through democratic institutions. The only way to create democratic institutions is through grass-roots participation in their creation and functioning.

⁴⁰ Boutros Boutros-Ghali, Agenda for Peace, op.cit. 46-7.

Likewise, the only way to teach children about democratic participation is to provide them with the opportunity to practise it and for them to see it being practised around them, especially in their schools and their family networks. Such is the challenge that faces educationalists, teachers, students and parents within the occupied territories. The outcome of their efforts will have a determining impact not just on the Palestinian school system but on the peace-building process as a whole, and hence upon the long-term relationship between Israelis and Palestinians.