4. The Struggle over Education

Introduction

It has been a common observation that Palestinians in the diaspora and living under occupation place a particularly high value upon formal educational attainment. In uncertain circumstances, education is an important form of investment for the future, providing people with a passport to greater economic security and enhanced life-chances. Israel is well aware of this orientation towards education on the part of Palestinians. Therefore it should have come as no surprise that educational institutions became a specific target in the power struggle that lay at the heart of the Intifada.

The use of education as a means of collective punishment has been a particular feature of Israeli policy towards the West Bank. The Israelis have not attempted to "outlaw" educational activity with anything like the same rigour in the Gaza Strip. In part this is because of the peace treaty with Egypt, in part because the direct economic dependency upon Israel of the majority of the Gazan population makes them far more vulnerable to economic coercion. Thus, whilst the Islamic University in Gaza has been closed since December 1987, schools remained open — except for those areas under curfew and individual schools closed for specific periods as punishment for particular acts of defiance on the part of their students.[1] Consequently, in this chapter the focus will be upon the West Bank and the battle of wills that has taken place over education.

Background

Schools, colleges and universities represent a considerable problem to any occupying power. Educational institutions are one of the places where people gather and meet together as a group to discuss issues of common concern. They are key agencies for the transmission not only of substantive knowledge but also of cultural values and dominant world views. In the occupied territories the world view of the Palestinians has been crucially shaped by the perception of the injustice and illegitimacy of occupation, and the values that have been transmitted have been nationalist ones.

Throughout the period of the occupation schools and colleges have been the sites of demonstrations and protests against Israeli rule. The response of the Israeli authorities has been equally predictable as they have sought to clamp down on any centres of resistance. Students and teachers have been harassed, arrested, deported. Schools and colleges have been closed down for varying periods of time as a form of collective punishment aimed at subduing unrest. Universities in particular have come in for special attention as Israel has sought to prevent and frustrate the emergence of any autonomous indigenous political, social and cultural leadership amongst the subject population.

To some observers there was a ritualistic quality to the regular confrontations that took place between students and the military during the years prior to the outbreak of the Intifada. The students would demonstrate by blocking a road and setting fire to tyres; stones would be thrown at the advancing soldiers, who would reply with tear-gas, rubber and occasionally live bullets. A chase would then take place. Those unfortunate enough to be caught would be beaten and arrested. The school or university would then be closed by military order, and the academic year would have been interrupted once again. Universities, and to a lesser degree secondary schools, became accustomed to spells of closure and enforced inactivity, followed by periods of intensive instruction and study in order to make up the lost time so that students might complete their courses before the commencement of the next academic year.

For the schools in the West Bank the major matriculation exam is the Jordanian *tawjihi*, which is a requirement for entrance to university and to a number of white-collar and professional career paths. It consists of a number of compulsory examinations, sat in two blocs — the first in January and the second in June. Failure to sit and pass any of the exams 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.

The universities in the occupied territories are modelled to some degree on the North American system of course credits, with students taking a range of different courses in order to obtain the required number of credit hours to graduate. In both schools and universities the methods of teaching have been fairly traditional, and before the Intifada there had been little attempt to develop any indigenous model of education with regard to teaching methods and curriculum content. Paradoxically, the impetus for such a revaluation emerged during the Intifada as the Israeli authorities, fully aware of the value placed on education by Palestinians, sought to impose a mighty cost on the resistance through a massive disruption of the educational system.

The struggle over schooling

As in other areas of life, the response of the Israeli administration to the challenge posed by students and institutes of education during the Intifada did not represent any markedly new departure, but rather an intensification of established patterns of individual and collective punishment. From the Israeli point of view, if the schools and colleges could not control their students in the interests of "law and order", then they would have to bear the resultant cost.[2] The hope has been that if sufficient sanctions were imposed upon the Palestinians, they would eventually "come to their senses" and follow the more rational course of quiet acceptance of the status quo. They would then be in a position to resume their pursuit of knowledge and the associated educational qualifications that represent necessary passports to economic and social mobility.

On 3 February 1988 a military order was issued closing down until further notice all schools in the West Bank because they had become "centres for organising and stimulating violence". A few days later, on 13 February, this closure order was extended to all government schools in East Jerusalem. This meant that over 1,200 schools were shut down, affecting more than 300,000 students. The schools were allowed to reopen on 23 May, but were closed down again two months later and remained closed from mid-July until December 1988. On 20 January 1989 all the schools in the West Bank were closed down once again, only one month after the secondary schools had reopened. They remained closed until the last week of July 1989, when the Israelis allowed them to start reopening once again.

The initial response of teachers and school administrators to the closure order of early February 1988 was uncertain. They received no advance official notification of the closures, many of them hearing the announcement over the radio or arriving at school to find the gates locked. They therefore had no opportunity to meet collectively in school to prepare contingency plans. Moreover they had no idea how long the Intifada would last, and how long the schools would remain closed. As the weeks passed depression spread 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. They were reluctant to call for student demonstrations against the closures for fear of injury to the students. Indeed it has been reported that one of the wry jokes of the Intifada during this early period was "Don't ask him to demonstrate. He's a teacher; he might dirty his hands".[3]

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. 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 order 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. There was also a strong feeling that at a time when the Palestinian people, in their resistance to Israeli occupation, were experiencing an unprecedented degree of unity that transcended divisions of class, religion and family, then it was inappropriate to discriminate in favour of the children of middle class families who could afford the fees of the private schools. By continuing to make educational provision for these already relatively privileged pupils, they would in effect be discriminating against the relatively disadvantaged pupils of the government schools. However unintentionally, they would be contributing to a widening of the social gulf between the classes, something that was contrary to the whole ethos of the Intifada.

Towards the end of March 1988, well into the second month of closure, the unified leadership of the Uprising began to urge students and teachers to return to schools and universities and "to practice their legitimate right to education". 24 March was declared a "Day of Education" by the UNC, which prompted a number of private schools to open on that day.[4] It was a short-lived act of defiance. As the administrator of one of the schools told me, within minutes of the pupils arriving the military appeared on the scene and threatened to use tear-gas if the school were not emptied within five minutes, intimating that any repeat would risk incurring permanent closure.

A more sustained form of constructive resistance to the suppression of formal educational activity was launched towards the end of March 1988. This was the attempt by popular neighbourhood committees to organise alternative education classes for school children which were held in private homes. This development was heralded as a significant move in the strategy of resistance through 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 for the diligent student.

However, the actual implementation of this programme 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 experience to take on the role of teacher, with the result that the classes suffered. Added 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. The popular education classes could not provide the students with that accreditation, and it would appear that, as a result, 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 and ... another grave threat to Israel's failing efforts at maintaining authority over the population".[5] Perhaps the Israeli military authorities also saw it in such a light for, much to everyone's surprise, they announced on 23 May 1988 that schools would be allowed to reopen. The elementary schools were the first to be allowed to welcome their pupils again, followed a few days later by the secondary schools.

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 teacher's authority in particular? In fact they were pleasantly surprised by the initial enthusiasm shown by the pupils on their return. However, this began to wear off, and after a few weeks there was a certain amount of tenseness in the classroom. Schools continued to abide by the directions of the UNC 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."[6]

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 tyres 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."[7] Indeed, teachers found themselves unable to prevent secondary students from leaving the classroom before classes finished, as they made 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 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 in May, 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."[8] Educationalists had also recognised 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 realised that particular attention should be paid to assisting parents who, it was acknowledged, would have to play a key role in the educational classes. There were simply not enough professional and experienced teachers available to lead 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 schools were closed once again the following July, 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 organising any kind of educational or cultural activity risked prosecution and imprisonment.

That the Israeli authorities were serious in their attempts to suppress any form of educational activity was revealed by the arrest, on 2 September 1988, of a number of teachers and twelve students discovered when soldiers raided a classroom in Abu Diss College of Science and Technology. A couple of days later two teachers and two students were temporarily detained in Nablus following an army raid on the offices of the Society of Friends of al-Najah University. The head of the Society, Said Kanaan, had been organising classes in a range of subjects including physics, chemistry and English. He explained, "We wanted to serve our people. We were involved in education and we were not doing anything against the security of Israel."[9]

In effect the Israeli authorities were attempting to outlaw all forms of educational activity, and to a considerable degree they succeeded, especially with regard to school-age children. During the 1987-1988 school year pupils lost 175 out of 210 school days. During the school year that began in 1988, students were allowed to attend school for only 40 days prior to the reopening of the schools at the end of July 1989. During 1989 the schools were in operation for a total of four months.[10]

The continued closure of the schools was a very heavy cost borne by the Palestinians of the West Bank. Their concern focused on both the short and long term consequences of this Israeli policy of "cultural massacre", to quote the phrase used by one of my informants. Alongside the concern for the plight of the students prevented from completing their *tawjihi* examinations,[11] there was considerable worry 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. Educationalists also emphasised 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.

There was also considerable trepidation about the administrative difficulties of coping with the return of the pupils to school. In the relatively normal times prior to the Intifada there had been approximately 28-30,000 children entering the school system. How could the schools cope with an entrance double the normal quota? Government schools in particular already suffered from over-crowding, with class sizes in the region of 45-65. How could they manage when the normal entry was supplemented by an equal number who had been prevented from starting twelve months previously because of the closures?

Beyond the concern with the consequences of lost qualifications and knowledge, and the organisational problems of coping with the return to "normal" schooling, there were other issues causing anxiety amongst educationalists. A genuine fear has grown that during the Intifada the young have begun to lose their study skills in general, and that in future there will be a serious problem of motivation and discipline amongst the student body. During the period of school closure, the students had a considerable amount of spare time when they could have been studying. Most found it almost impossible. As one student explained:[12]

> 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.

One can understand it. How can you sit down and concentrate on reading a history book when history is being made outside your very door? The helicopters are circling overhead, the smell of tear-gas is in the air, there are military patrols in the street and your friends are whistling for you to come out and join them in the fray. Who can concentrate with so much excitement and tension being generated? How mundane and tedious will the classroom appear after such periods of high drama? How ready will the young strike forces of the Intifada be to accept the discipline and order of the classroom? How prepared will they be to make the necessary effort to make up for the lost time ?

These were the questions that exercised the teachers, educationalists and parents. They were part of a wider anxiety about the deeper damage that the Israelis have been causing, beyond the denial of access to formal education. Outside of school, on the streets and elsewhere, the young Palestinians have been receiving an education. They have been learning new things about themselves and about the "enemy". They have been operating in a milieu where aggression is 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 when fighting over their territorial rights. What kind of preparation is this for living and working cooperatively in a future Palestinian society? As one Palestinian mother expressed her hopes and fears about her infant son: "I would like him to grow up to be a revolutionary, but I'm worried that he is growing up learning to resort to stone-throwing as a means of settling arguments and conflicts".

In November 1989 there was evidence that these fears were justified. During the *tawjihi* examinations, held six months later than usual, there was incontrovertible evidence of widespread cheating and intimidation during the course of the examinations, even though the students were tested on just half the normal syllabus in the light of the disrupted school year. Even more worrying was the repetition of such behaviour in the examinations that took place the following summer of 1990. Despite prior appeals for honesty by the UNC and other bodies, in a number of locations young activists entered the classrooms and ordered teachers and invigilators aside while they coordinated the cheating process. The result was that in at least one university in the West Bank, the *tawjihi* results were dismissed as unreliable and applicants were required to take a separate university entrance examination.[13]

Meantime, for the administrators and teachers in the private school sector there have been far more immediate fears: the threatened bankruptcy of their schools. Tuition fees were the major source of income for a number of the private schools. Obviously, with the schools closed for month after month these were not being paid, and a severe financial crisis was the result.

A substantial number of well-to-do families that had been sending their children to fee-paying schools in the occupied territories withdrew them, either out of fear for their physical safety or concern about the lost schooling. The children were sent elsewhere for their education — 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.[14] 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 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.

It might be the case that for many of the school-age young of the occupied territories, the costs of interrupted schooling might not seem too immediate. The future appears to be a long time away when you are young. However, many educationalists are deeply concerned about the future of these "children of the stones". There seems to be no satisfactory alternative except to struggle to keep the schools open as much as possible. The popular home and neighbourhood based educational classes have not really functioned adequately, for reasons already discussed. But even if this alternative system did succeed in some measure (providing the opportunity for peers to meet and study together, maintaining study skills and encouraging a basic coverage of texts and other materials), it could not hope to provide the accreditation that the formal school sector has traditionally supplied, and which the students need to proceed to the higher education so valued by Palestinians.

Of course, even with the schools open, many senior students might ask themselves why they should trouble to study for examinations, as the universities in the occupied territories have been closed down more frequently and for longer periods than any other sector of the educational system.

The assault on academe

Until the summer of 1990, when a few higher educational institutes, including Bethlehem and al-Quds Universities, were allowed to reopen, all the universities and colleges of further education in the occupied territories had been under continuous closure order since January 1988. The faculty and students should not have been too surprised at this drastic punishment, as the institutions of higher education have been a special target of the occupying authorities over the years.

The military have intruded onto the campuses regularly, breaking up demonstrations, arresting students, confiscating books and materials. Military checkpoints and road-blocks around the campuses have also been an all too familiar feature, disrupting the daily life of students and staff. Even before the commencement of the Intifada the members of the universities suffered disproportionately from the whole gamut of repressive measures available to the Israeli authorities: short-term arbitrary arrest, restriction orders and "town arrest", administrative detention without trial, and even deportation.

In July 1980 the Israelis introduced Military Order 854 through which they sought to exercise broad powers of control over curricula, the admission of students, the hiring and firing of staff and other areas. Foreign and non-resident staff were asked to affirm a "loyalty oath" that they would "refrain from any act which is harmful to security and public order... and the rendering of any service, of a collaborative or helpful nature, to the PLO or any other hostile organisation." Due to local and international protest, the operation of this order was allowed to lapse in November 1982 and the pledge was struck from work permit applications a year later.

The experience of closure was a familiar one before January 1988. Birzeit University near Ramallah had been closed on 15 separate occasions between December 1973 and December 1987 for periods totalling over 18 months, including one of four months during the 1986-87 academic year. In the 1981-82 academic year it was closed for a total of seven months.[15] Al-Najah University in Nablus was closed by military order on three separate occasions amounting to two months in total during the first six months of 1987. The universities and colleges at Bethlehem, Hebron, and Gaza have also suffered similar disruptions.

For their part, the Israelis justified their actions by claiming, not without some justification, that the universities were centres of protest and hot-beds of nationalism. "If they wish to pursue their goal of instruction and research, then they should control their students", was the argument. Amongst the voices raised in protest against such reasoning and the punitive measures of the authorities were those of students and academics within Israel itself. In October 1981 five professors from the Hebrew University in Jerusalem published a report calling on the authorities to "refrain from closing universities as a means of punishment or to prevent disturbances". In November of that year 100 students and staff from the Hebrew and Tel Aviv universities, associated with the Birzeit Solidarity Committee, took part in a demonstration and sit-in at the Birzeit campus in protest against the two month closure order that had been imposed.[16] To a far greater degree than the schools, Palestinian universities have cultivated support not only from Israeli faculty and students but from the wider international academic community, who were urged to exercise pressure upon Israel in protest against the assault on academic freedom and higher education in general within the occupied territories.

Indeed, for Palestinian academics, a key reference group has been the international community of scholars and academics, in whose institutions many of them obtained their higher degrees and upon which their own universities have been modelled. They are divided into faculties and departments along traditional subject lines: engineering, mathematics, social science, and so on. Teaching and assessment methods are likewise along the established lines of lectures, text-books, examinations and credits. Power is also distributed in a manner familiar to academics the world over — with students feeling that they are relatively disenfranchised, junior faculty complaining that their voices remain unheard, and senior academics bemoaning the power of the administrators and the patronage of the university power elite. Palestinian universities have also had their fair share of "internal" conflicts, with sit-ins and demonstrations by students protesting over such issues as the level of tuition fees, assessment procedures and the like.

In other words, prior to the Intifada there was nothing particularly unique about Palestinian universities, except for the circumstances under which they attempted to fulfil their functions. Added to this, Palestinian academics seem to have enjoyed an unusual degree of prestige within the Palestinian community, a reflection of the value placed by Palestinians upon higher educational qualifications. In response, Palestinian academics have accepted as part of their function the role of opinion leader within the community, and have also sought to champion the Palestinian cause on the conference circuits of the world, and within the ranks of international organisations and professional associations.

Sadly, it would appear that following the commencement of the Intifada and the consequent closure of the universities, the academics began to lose the respect that was once theirs. By September 1988 I was being told that "Academics are one of the few groups that are not playing a significant role in the Intifada". "They draw their salaries, sit at home, and do nothing" was the feeling expressed by more than one observer; a verdict endorsed by some of the academics that I met at that time. "I am not part of the struggle, I am doing nothing for the Intifada", bemoaned one of their number. "All that we have done since the Intifada in terms of developing alternative teaching has been little more than symbolic, more an expression of inertia than of active and imaginative struggle", confessed a senior professor. "The military have forbidden any teaching — what can I do?" queried another.

What the teaching staff of the universities had done up to that stage had been to continue teaching final year students who had only a few credit hours to complete for their degree. Classes were held in private houses and elsewhere on a regular basis, coursework was assigned, course notes and other handouts distributed, problems discussed. Thus, Birzeit University ran classes between July and September 1988 for 240 students, 80 of whom graduated on completion of their courses.[17] Attempts to establish any wider system of alternative education were frustrated by the outlawing of the popular committees and the subsequent suppression of educational classes.

As a consequence, many university staff experienced a deep sense of impotence. They, like the other sectors of Palestinian society in the occupied territories, felt the need to play a part in the Intifada. But individually they feared the penalties that the Israeli authorities had shown themselves willing and capable of applying. Collectively, they had not developed the infrastructure to coordinate any joint action throughout the university sector. Once the universities were closed, they had been unable to develop a means to facilitate the widespread discussion and concrete planning necessary for coordinated activity throughout the occupied territories.

Although there were demonstrations in protest against the closure of educational institutions during the first year of the Intifada,[18] some activists were critical of the limited and uncoordinated nature of such actions. Disappointment was expressed that there no attempt was made to organise a joint demonstration on all the campuses, perhaps supported by eminent academics from Israel and the international community, which could have attracted the attention of the world media and seriously embarrassed the military authorities in their attempt to make any educational activity illegal.

Likewise, whilst there was a fair amount of discussion around coffee tables and within individual homes about the possibility of engaging in a radical review of the existing structure, content, and process of higher education in the light of the needs of the Palestinian community during the Intifada, little progress was made at the collective level during that first year.

This relative failure can be attributed to a number of factors. First of all, Palestinian academics have generally been trained in traditional university environments and have accepted the established norms, practices and patterns of education as their own. They have proved themselves reluctant to develop new paradigms, to experiment with new approaches, with all the associated risks of failure and the damage to one's career prospects that can result from being labelled a "trouble-maker". Of equal importance has been the nature of the relationship between the universities within the occupied territories, characterised more by rivalry and competition rather than cooperation and open communication.

As the Intifada advanced into its third year the situation changed somewhat. When I returned to the West Bank during the autumn of 1989 I was heartened to discover that the alternative "universities without walls" had become rather more firmly established over the previous year. Perhaps in part because of the criticism to which they had been exposed, in part because of the desire to avoid losing valued faculty members who were beginning to seek posts abroad as academic life in Palestine continued to remain moribund, and partly because of a growing realisation that "things could not remain as they were", serious attempts had been made to expand and develop the framework of underground teaching and assessment.

Given the inadvisability of holding lectures and classes in a single centralised location, which would attract the attention of the military, a radically decentralised mode of teaching had been established. Classes were held for a maximum of six or seven students in different locations. This meant, for instance, that if 36 students were registered for a course, the lecturer would hold the same class up to six times in six different locations. Typically, it would appear that each course was arranged to last between six and eight weeks, during which time the students were assessed and course credits awarded. In the absence of normal library and study facilities, due to the closure of the campuses, maximum use was made of photocopied readings and texts, duplicated lectures notes and other study aids.

In order to preserve some degree of academic quality under such difficult circumstances, the general practice was to restrict students to two courses per session, although those near to graduation were allowed to take three. It has been estimated that if the universities could continue to hold three sessions or semesters each academic year, then it would take students seven years to complete their "underground degree". Although this might seem an abnormally lengthy period, even before the Intifada it was not unusual for undergraduates to take six years to obtain a degree, due to university closures and other interruptions of the educational process.

A major problem was encountered with this decentralised, covert, off-campus mode of teaching. It proved impossible to provide the facilities for the practical, laboratory-based work that is a fundamental part of any course in the pure and applied sciences. The same fate has befallen all forms of research that require university facilities in the way of scientific equipment, computers and the like. The closure of the libraries also meant that even faculty members and researchers in the arts and humanities found it difficult to keep abreast of the latest work in their field. Moreover, despite precautions to avoid attracting attention — a basic rule being that students and staff should not arrive at classes together carrying bags full of incriminating books — there remained the risk of discovery. Thus, in April 1989 it was reported that "a network of illegal classes held by two West Bank universities at private high schools in East Jerusalem" had been uncovered. It was claimed that Birzeit and Bethlehem Universities had been holding classes for some 300 students on the school premises.[19] Furthermore, university students and faculty continued to share with the rest of the population the risk of arrest, detention without trial, injury, deportation and even death.

Whilst the exceptional circumstances of the Intifada forced the universities to restructure their mode and methods of organisation and teaching, the need for a review of the structure, content, and process of higher education in the light of the revealed needs of the Palestinian community during the Intifada became more widely accepted amongst the academic community. A questioning of the relevance of the traditional European and North American models got under way. The direction in which this revaluation will lead is unclear, although it seems likely that if and when all the universities and colleges are allowed to operate openly, there will be a strong demand for academics to direct their energies into channels geared more directly to the needs of the local community than to gaining the academic respect of their professional peers in the international community of scholars.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the struggle that has taken place over education in the West Bank within the context of the wider power struggle of the Intifada. There can be no doubt that through their closure of schools, universities, and other educational institutions, and their attempt to prohibit educational activity in general, the Israeli administration succeeded in imposing a severe collective punishment upon a people who have traditionally placed a high value on educational attainment.

In trying to counter these measures, the Palestinians met with only partial success. During the long period of school closure, despite some initial enthusiasm, the exercise in establishing neighbourhood classes would appear to have achieved only a limited coverage of the school age population, not least because such "schools" could not provide the formal accreditations held in such high esteem by Palestinians. The fact that the universities maintained at least the skeleton of their formal system of assessment might help to explain why the condition of higher education achieved a relatively healthier state than the alternative school system, although even here only about one tenth of the normal number were graduating with their degrees.

For many Palestinians, these short-term costs were of less concern than the longer-term consequences of what they saw as a sustained attempt to destroy the infrastructure of Palestinian education. However, throughout the first six months of 1990 there were repeated rumours that the universities and colleges were about to be reopened. Hebron Polytechnic and the Arab Medical College at al-Bireh were the first to be allowed to open their doors. Israeli officials stated that if classes were resumed normally at these institutions they would be prepared to consider the gradual reopening of the other educational institutions, and at the end of August it was decided that Bethlehem University should be allowed to open once more, after nearly three years of official closure. The re-opening of Birzeit and al-Najar Universities was made dependent upon the "good behaviour" of the students of Bethlehem. Most Palestinians viewed these steps with caution, seeing them as little more than public relations exercises aimed at appeasing world opinion and undermining the Palestinian will to resist. They were fully aware that the institutions of higher education, like the schools, could be closed down again at any time.

It seemed as if the Israelis had learned an important lesson — rather than impose blanket closure orders on schools and colleges and incur the cost of widespread and damaging domestic and international censure, the selective closure of "troublesome" institutions could achieve the same end of collective punishment without attracting the same level of opprobrium. Thus, there still seems little likelihood of the Palestinian educational process being restored to anything like "normal", and generations of young people will continue to be denied their right to learn and develop their potentialities to the full. But how could it be otherwise under conditions of occupation?

In this bleak scenario, some Palestinians have pointed optimistically to the emergence of the new "colleges of education" in the detention camps such as Ansar III in the Negev. Thousands have emerged from detention more politicised, more skilled in the techniques of resistance, and more committed to the continuation of the Intifada. They might also point to the impetus that the Intifada has given to what many feel was a much-needed and long-overdue revaluation of the structure, process and content of education in Palestine. Despite such claims, it would seem clear that a major priority for all those concerned about the future of the Palestinian people must be the development of an adequate alternative educational structure, one that is sufficiently flexible to adapt to the ever-changing conditions in a land under occupation.[20]

And what of Israel? What cost has it had to bear for the actions of its soldiers and citizens in denying the Palestinians the freedom to learn? At the most obvious level they have faced a barrage of international censure.[21] Indeed Israel, proud of its claim as the only democracy in the Middle East, has found it exceedingly difficult to convince world opinion of the legitimacy of its denial of the Palestinians' right to education. At a deeper level, perhaps a greater cost has been incurred by the heightening of divisions within Israeli public opinion itself. It is not easy for those Israelis who are justifiably proud of their liberal values and the great Jewish intellectual, cultural and academic tradition to accept silently, let alone endorse, a policy that seems to have been constructed to deprive a people of the most fundamental of human rights. One of their number compared the situation to George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty Four*, observing:[22]

> In Israel in 1989, a military occupation is organised by the "Civilian Administration" and the main responsibility of the "Office of the Director of Education, Judea and Samaria" is to close down schools and universities.

Perhaps, at the end of the day, it will be the self-interest of all those who have the long-term future of Israel at heart that will bring about a resolution of the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. If this turns out to be the case, it might be due in no small measure to the perceived damage inflicted upon the "moral fibre" of Israel by its attempts to criminalise educational activity in the occupied territories.

Until that distant day arrives, the Palestinians continue to pay the price of resistance. During the Gulf War and the draconian curfew measures imposed upon the whole population, all formal educational activity came to a halt. Since the end of the war, the unprecedented restrictions on travel imposed by the Israeli authorities, which prevent any Palestinian from entering Israel without a special document, has seriously disrupted the covert educational activity within the higher education sector. In effect these restrictions prevent people from the Gaza Strip travelling to the West Bank, and prevent Palestinians in the West Bank making any journey that involves traversing East Jerusalem. It means that students living in the southern area cannot attend classes at Birzeit or Nablus without risk of arrest, unless they have the necessary travel documents.

The educational institutions also suffered from the drastic loss of funding from Kuwait and other Gulf States. Thus, in September 1990 it was reported that Birzeit University, which received $70,000 annually from Kuwait, had also had frozen a $400,000 grant from the Arab Fund for Economic Development.[23] The Palestinians were being punished for their support for Saddam Hussein, and nowhere was this more apparent than in the economic sphere.

Notes

1. For details of school closures in Gaza, where it is estimated that 35-50% of school days were lost during 1988 due to curfews and other interruptions, see *PAN*, p 314.

2. On 24 December 1988, Defence Minister Rabin stated the intention to "close schools which have ceased to fulfil their function as educational institutions and which have been consistent in allowing their children out into the street".

3. Lindsay Field Cooper, *G*, 5 August 1988.

4. "The Lessons of Occupation", *News From Within*, 31 May 1988.

5Ibid., p 7.

6. Quoted in *AF*, 29 May 1988.

7. *Friends Schools Newsletter*, vol 2, no 3,Summer 1988, p 3.

8. *AF*, 29 May 1988.

9. Quoted in *JP*, 5 September 1988.

10. For figures on the closure of schools, see S Cohen, "Education as crime", *JP*, 18 May 1989 and *AF*, 15 January 1990, p 1. According to *B'Tselem* West Bank schools were open for an average of 99 days out of a planned 210 days during the 1989/90 school year. See *Information Sheet: Update September-October 1990*, p 10.

11. This concern was heightened in late August 1988 when, following King Hussein's surrender of his claim to the West Bank, the Jordanian Ministry of Education announced that henceforth Palestinians would be treated in a similar manner to other Arab nationals applying for places at Jordanian universities. This would result in a drastic reduction in the number of places available for Palestinian applicants.

12. Quoted by Reem Nuseibeh in *AF*, 27 March 1988.

13. Daoud Kuttab, *MEI*, 3 August 1990, p 10, and personal communication (al-Najar University, April 1991).

14. Due to East Jerusalem's status as part of Israel, annexed in 1967.

15. See *The Twentieth Year*, Birzeit University, 1988, p 7.

16. See chapter on Israeli peace camp.

17. *Birzeit University Newsletter*, no 18, March 1989.

18. During the first week of March 1988, students and faculty at Bethlehem University attempted to enter

the campus in defiance of the closure order but were stopped by soldiers at the entrance. A similar attempt was made at Birzeit on 7 March with the same result. On 7 November 1988, there was a clash with the military in Nablus when more than a hundred students marched in protest against the continued closure of the university.

19. *JP*, 19 April 1989. In developing a network of underground classes, the universities of Bethlehem and Birzeit benefited from their relative proximity to East Jerusalem, where circumstances are more conducive to holding clandestine classes than elsewhere in the occupied territories.

20. In 1991 a Palestinian "open university" of the airwaves was launched, using programmes transmitted by Jordanian television. It was claimed that it would focus on "non-traditional" subjects not normally found within university curricula, but specially catered to meet the educational needs of Palestinians living under occupation. See *AF*, 7 January 1991, p 3.

21. The decision of the European Community in February 1990 to suspend all scientific cooperation with Israel was in protest against the continued closure of Palestinian universities, amongst other human rights abuses.

22. S. Cohen, *JP*, 18 May 1989.

23. *AF*, 10 September, 1990, p 2.