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Female Education in Palestine

A Historical Overview

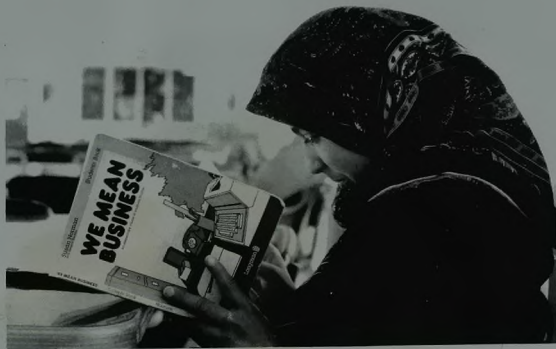
As part of our policy to inform readers on vital issues of Palestinian education, we have, in past newsletters, frequently highlighted neglected areas of concern. One of those areas is that of female school education, all the more pressing for the paucity of information available. Indeed, to this day, there have been no comprehensive analytical or interpretive studies of females in Palestinian education.

In this special issue, the introductory historical article serves to contextualise the subsequent articles -- made up as they are of a mixture of personal testimony, reportage and academic study-- so that at the end, one gains a broad picture of the status of female education.

The Education Network believes that, in the currently volatile political situation, the importance of women's education, and the still underestimated role which women play in the formation of a nation's identity and development, must be fully evaluated and, above all, the opportunity must be seized to place women's education at the forefront of our agenda. It is towards effecting that goal that the current issue devotes itself.

Nineteenth century Palestinian society did not view education for girls as necessary or desirable since the woman's role of housewife and mother required neither literacy nor the other knowledge and skills gained in school. Female education was undesirable to dominant male family members because they saw it as a threat to their family's stability and their unquestioned authority in the family and the social hierarchy.

Under Ottoman rule in the 19th century, formal education was limited to training males for administrative and military positions, with a small sector devoted to religious schooling. In essence, schooling was the domain of well-to-do males. At the end of the century, a small number of secular state schools opened; and while in theory they were open to all, in practice, they were attended only by males. Female education began slowly, and in schools established by Christian missionaries specifically for



girls. The first girls' school in Palestine was founded in Jerusalem in 1837, but later ceased to function. The Friends Girls School opened in Ramallah in 1869, followed by St. Joseph's Girls School in 1873, also in Ramallah. By 1882, in Jerusalem and nearby areas, there were ten girls' schools for Palestinians, all operated by Christian organizations. All of the Muslim schools in this period were open only to males. The expansion of religious

schools, Christian and Muslim, between 1882 and 1914, resulted in a small expansion of the number of girls' schools.

PERIOD OF BRITISH CONTROL

During this period (1917-1948), an increasing number of well-to-do families thought it acceptable to permit their daughters to attend elementary school; a small number were allowed to continue beyond this level. (It must be kept in mind that, from the beginning, schools were not coeducational, but were established as single-sex schools). This loosening of social restrictions, especially in urban areas, coincided with Britain's expansion of the public school system which was intended to train a small force of civil servants to serve the Mandate and to create a material and ideological divi-



Olga Wahbeh, West Bank teacher and educator for 65 years, 1928-present

sion within the Palestinian community, with an educated elite having vested interests in cooperating with the occupying power.

The British increased elementary education, but the school system never served more than 33% of the Palestinian children of school age. Education in the rural areas was neglected until the last five years of the Mandate, when

a small attempt was made to increase the opportunity for village children to attend school.

During this period, the number of females attending elementary schools increased absolutely and relative to the number of boys in elementary schools. Girls, however, never went above 23% of the total Palestinian enrollment in elementary schools. At the secondary level, their percentage was much lower.

The educational opportunities for girls in the rural areas were always minimal. In 1935, for example, girls made up only 6% of the total enrollment in village schools. In 1944/45, the government established 400 schools in the villages. Only 46 (i.e., 11%) of these were for girls, with a total enrollment of 3,392 girls. Rural females, therefore, were hardly affected by this expansion, comprising only 8% of the total increase in enrollment. Official estimates in 1946 show that only 7.5% of rural girls and 60% of urban girls of school-age were attending elementary schools. Corresponding figures for males were 63% and 85% respectively.

The purpose of education for females in this period was to reinforce in them their traditional role in Palestinian society. There is no reliable data--indeed, the very absence of comprehensive statistics on females for the period up to 1948 is perhaps a reflection of the establishment's indifference to female education--but most educators agree that the quantity and quality of facilities in the girls' government schools was inferior to that in the boys' schools. Today, the exceedingly high rate of illiteracy among women (see box on page 7) over 50 years of age, especially women from villages, is a direct result of the combination of restrictive Palestinian social practices, insufficient educational opportunities, and the inferior quality of education offered in girls' government schools.

1948-1967

After 1948, with the major social and popula-

tion dispersions and dislocations, and the establishment of the state of Israel, education became a primary means of economic success for Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The job opportunities opening up in the Arab world at that time were predominantly for males. Thus, the tradition of giving priority to the education of male children was strengthened, albeit in a new



socio-economic and political context. In spite of this, female enrollment, especially in rural areas, increased steadily from 1948-1967 in three ways: 1) in absolute numbers; 2) in the ratio of girls to boys; and 3) in the percentage of school-age females going to school.

The institution most responsible for the

growth in female enrollment was UNRWA. After the 1948 War, neither Egypt nor Jordan were economically prepared to provide services for the huge influx of Palestinian refugees; and everyone anticipated that Israel would allow the refugees to return to their homes in accordance with UN General Assembly Resolution 194. In the meantime, UNRWA was created at the end of 1949 as a temporary organization to provide services, including educational services, to the hundreds of thousands of refugees dispersed throughout the region. UNRWA's policy from the beginning was to provide school education for all refugees, regardless of gender. In reality, however, the ratio of girls to boys attending school remained low (e.g., 31:100 in the Gaza Strip in 1952/53) during the first decade of UNRWA operations. Since 1950, the ratio generally improved every year, and by 1961 in the Gaza Strip and 1967 in the West Bank, one could say that UNRWA had successfully redressed the gender imbalance with female to male ratios of 74:100 and 75:100 respectively, and with the ratios continuing to rise regularly right up to the present.

During this period, the purpose of female education in all school sectors--to prepare girls to be good housewives and mothers--remained unchanged.

1967-PRESENT

Since 1967, the conjunction of the following factors have acted as forces for change in Palestinian education: the changing social conditions, changing patterns of employment in the Occupied Territories, the pressures and insecurities created by the Israeli occupation, the penetration of western liberal and Marxist ideologies, and the character of the political struggle for Palestinian independence.

In spite of the limitations on obtaining accurate and comprehensive statistics, the picture of the period from 1969/70 to 1989/90 is clear: the rate of student enrollment increased more than in any previous 20-year

period--from 273,800 in the West Bank (excluding Jerusalem) and Gaza Strip to 478,050--a 74.6% increase. This was due primarily to an increase in population. Most important, there was a significant rise in: 1) total number of females enrolled; 2) the



percentage of school-age girls who were enrolled; and 3) female enrollment as a percentage of total school enrollment. The number of girls in all educational institutions increased by 95% from 1967/68 to 1979/80, with the greatest increases taking place in the UNRWA school sector.

Today, the ratio of female to male enrollment in the elementary cycle is virtually equal to the estimated ratio of females to males of school age (5-19 years) in the population. In

1990/91, for example, at the elementary cycle, females made up 47.2% of elementary students in government schools in the West Bank (excluding Jerusalem) and 48.3% in UNRWA schools in the Gaza Strip. This corresponds roughly to the percentage of females, aged 5-19 years, in the population of the Occupied Territories in 1989--i.e., 48%. This ratio declines slightly at the preparatory and secondary levels where, for example, females made up 45% and 43% respectively of the enrolled students (see p. 22).

Determining drop-out (i.e., attrition) rates depends on having accurate figures on the following: the number of school-age children at each grade level; and the number of students enrolled at each grade level. This information is not available for the school system as a whole. Most educators believe that, today, close to 100% of elementary school-age children are enrolled in school. They agree further that drop-out rates increase slightly in the upper elementary cycle and more severely (to around 30-40%) during the prep cycle. By secondary school, probably more than 50% of the eligible secondary-age population in the Occupied Territories have dropped out of school. This sharp increase in drop-outs is most drastic for females in the villages.

Similar estimates appear in a UNESCO report (based on research done in 1986/87) and are further corroborated by two small surveys in the West Bank, conducted in 1987, one in villages and the other in refugee camps (see p. 23). These surveys reveal a conspicuous drop in the participation rate of females once they reach age 15. In Hebron area villages, for example, the drop in female participation in secondary schools is shocking--it drops from 90% (for 10-14 year-olds) to 28% (for 15-19 year-olds).

Historically, the reasons for dropping out of school are the same in both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip: 1) for girls, the social pressure to marry or help with younger children at home; and 2) economic pressures,

mostly on boys, to seek employment to help support the family; but with parents giving priority to the education of male children, economic need could lead to pulling the daughter out of school. This is exemplified by the following typical comments made by a young village girl:

"My father was ill, and we had to find money for my brothers to go to the university, so I stayed at home to look after the house while my mother went out to work... I worked to pay for my brother's education, but I don't expect them to pay for mine."

Girls living in villages where no girls' or coed school exists are more likely to drop out than boys in a similar situation. This is due to parental pressure: 1) they worry about the safety of daughters who would walk 2-3 kilometers to and from a school outside the village; 2) they worry about the corruption of the morals of their daughters when they are attending schools away from the village; or 3) a poor parent with several children would likely give priority to the education of sons and therefore might not want to incur any costs for transporting a daughter to and from a school beyond the village.

In spite of the significant increases in female enrollment and female school participation rates in the last 25 years, females continue to lag behind males in the levels of education achieved and, in most instances, in literacy rates (UNRWA's women's programs still give literacy courses as one of their most important activities). Female attrition rates remain conspicuously higher than males at almost all grade levels.

TYPE AND QUALITY OF EDUCATION

Girls and boys study the same basic curriculum and sit for the same exams; but girls are still required to take exclusively female classes under the title, "Home Economics" (including sewing, ironing, cooking, nutrition, food preservation, and more). Courses such as these, because they are for girls

only, condition girls to think that these are female tasks, thus perpetuating the division of labor in society in which women perform almost all household tasks.

Boys are expected to take courses in industrial arts (where they are offered), commerce, and agriculture which are exclusively for males. These courses include: carpentry, metalwork, electricity, plumbing, technical drawing, bookkeeping, banking systems, etc.). These courses are preparing boys for self-reliance in dealing with practical problems around the home while also giving them a foundation for possible employment in these fields.



The Egyptian and Jordanian curricula avoid controversial issues. The occupying authorities prohibit anything in the curriculum that they consider to be political. Thus, schools are prevented from taking up gender issues

or anything that builds gender awareness and sensitivity. In this connection, one West Bank female school teacher criticized the curriculum and the way it is taught:

"There's no time for discussing social questions and issues of importance for women. The Israeli authorities would probably think such subjects were political incitement anyway, and ban them. Even traditional girls' subjects like Home Economics, which can be very important in raising consciousness and promoting self-reliance, are badly taught because of the lack of qualified teachers and facilities."

Today, the overwhelming majority of government and UNRWA schools, as well as a few private schools, are single sex schools. No one has done a comprehensive, in-depth study to determine whether there are differences, and to what degree, between the boys' and girls' schools, or between the single-sex and coed schools around such questions as the quality of education: quality of the academic, athletic, and extra-curricular programs; presence of libraries, science labs, computer labs, and athletic fields and equipment. One undated survey of West Bank schools (probably from the late 1970's), reporting on inadequate facilities, noted that the number of schools without libraries and science labs was significantly higher for girls' schools. UNRWA schools generally provide equal library and science lab facilities for girls and boys.

An examination of school textbooks reveals gender stereotyping, a predominance of male frames-of-reference, and contents that are male-focused. These characteristics perpetuate and reinforce the dominant role of males in the society and the subordinate role of females (see article on page 8).

In the past, females were denied access to education because of the local patriarchal social structure and the preferences of the colonial rulers. This prevented women from gaining literacy and from developing their

personality, confidence, and self-reliance in a growing literate, technological, and politicized world, and reinforced women's subordination to men and lack of socio-economic mobility. In the last 30 years, females have entered the school system in numbers almost equal to males. Equal participation in education, however, is not enough. A major problem facing Palestinian educators today is how to make the quality of education for females commensurate with that of males. This will involve more than just abolishing sex-role stereotyping of educators, reforming textbooks, and establishing a common curriculum across gender lines. The challenge facing Palestinian educators today is to create an educational system that encourages students to examine critically all hierarchical relationships of power with the explicit purpose of transforming the social, political, and economic inequalities of society. The current critical historical period requires that educators step forward and prepare all students to build a society based on non-exploitative and non-oppressive divisions of labor in the home as well as in the work force; a society guided by democratic principles and practices in the economic and social, as well as political, spheres; a society that encourages humane values such as peace with dignity, respect for human differences, and social cooperation. The challenge to the existing socially-constructed gender identities and inequalities in the schools is inextricably bound up with the larger struggles for national liberation and social justice in Palestinian society ♦



Literacy

In 1992:

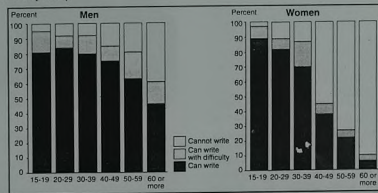
- ♦ In the Occupied Territories, 90% of women over 60 are illiterate
- ♦ In the West Bank, the female literacy rate is 20% lower than the male rate
- ♦ In the Occupied Territories, amongst teenagers, the female literacy rate is 8% higher than the male
- ♦ In the Occupied Territories, women's literacy has increased by a factor of 8 over the last 30 years

Literacy can be regarded as a useful gauge in showing a person's educational level. The above headline statistics tell a double story: how the education system has, historically, failed women; and how there may be reasons for optimism that their situation is improving. But it must be guarded optimism.

Despite the fact that over the past few years, many voluntary groups have started running Adult Literacy classes--in order to repair the damage caused by years of neglect--the Director of the Adult Literacy Unit at Birzeit University reported as recently as 1990 that "many women, especially in rural areas, are apathetic about acquiring literacy skills." Palestinian educators must therefore continue to keep the question of women's literacy in the forefront of their minds.

* G.E. Donnan, *Women's Literacy and Early Childhood Education in the West Bank and Gaza Strip*, UNICEF, (1990), section 3.4.2.

Adult (15 years or more) literacy rates by gender and age in the Occupied Territories (1992)



Source: M. Heiberg and G. Ovansen. *Palestinian Society in Gaza, West Bank and Arab Jerusalem*. FAFO Report 151. (1993). p. 135.

Coming in Second

The editorial board of the Educational Network newsletter continues its policy of encouraging educators to share their views on Palestinian education. The following essay presents the results of extensive research on how males and females are presented in school textbooks. It was submitted by Tafeda Jarbawi, a professor of Chemistry at Birzeit University. Her essay has been translated from Arabic, edited, and substantially abridged.

Sexism can be defined as the ideology and actions which treat women as having lower status and competence than men. Women's movements have coined this term to define systematic discrimination against women--similar in many ways to racism and religious intolerance.

Ethnic groups which have been subjected to racism have fought hard to eradicate this prejudice. Women's movements have fought, and continue to fight, against sexism. Palestinian women, experiencing injustice as a result of sexism, have made achieving equal opportunities a priority. The children of today will be the opinion-makers of society in the future. Bringing them up not to discriminate between the sexes will strengthen the struggle for gender equality and for a more progressive and non-sexist society.

It is more effective to educate for social change through a uniform school curriculum than to rely on this task being accomplished in each individual home. The school is the best place to start any process of societal change, and the textbooks used there are one means in this process. They are a major conditioning agent for children as they develop their personalities. We should be sensitive to the content of textbooks, ensuring that they do not foster discrimination between the sexes, but instead encourage the cultivation of the principle of equal opportunity in order to prepare well-rounded and conscientious individuals who will help to build a better society.

The objectives of my research were as follows:

1. To identify sexism in children's textbooks for the first six grades, in particular, in the following subjects: the Arabic Language, science, and math through quantitative, qualitative, and linguistic analyses.
2. To develop a sense of awareness about sexism.
3. To suggest steps to eliminate sexism.



In analyzing the textbooks quantitatively, I did a statistical comparison of the number of male and female characters in headlines, pictures, and texts and, where necessary, compared the major roles given to males and females (i.e., whoever has the central or the heroic role). I found that, as the grade level

increases, the number of times that females are presented in the textbooks decreases in relation to the number of times that males are shown.

In my qualitative analysis, I dealt with the attributes given to males and females in the following areas:

1. Social, marital, and employment status.

Most textbooks show women as married, while men are not shown as such, despite the fact that the number of married males is equal to that of married females. Women are always shown in the text or pictures in connection with the family (for example, in their role as a mother), while men are rarely shown in that light.

As for women's social role or employment, they are rarely seen doing work outside the house, and even when that happens, they are usually engaged in activities which are of the same character as their housework. They are presented as secretaries, menial laborers, seamstresses, nurses, or teachers.

Males, on the other hand, are rarely seen doing any housework. Outside, males are shown as professionals in important positions. They are principals, doctors, managers, politicians, governors, or judges. In reality, Palestinian women do work in the same professions as men, but the textbooks do not reflect this reality. For example, in the science textbooks for the 2nd grade, women are presented, either in pictures or text, doing the following: washing by the river, doing needlework, and feeding their families. Men are portrayed in major roles: as farmers, bakers, or doctors (i.e., doing socially productive work).

When it comes to employment in political positions, there are many examples of sexism. Men are the mayors or the holders of other top administrative positions, while women are rarely shown as such.



This way of displaying the roles of the sexes instills in children the perception that men are independent and superior to women, while women are dependent on men and inferior to them. In the science textbooks, for example, pictures of men are used to identify parts of the human anatomy; and whenever there is a science experiment, it is always the male who is performing it. In the science textbook for the fifth grade, women appear in four pictures only; they are seen preparing food in the nutrition section, and being pregnant in the reproduction section. Discrimination is strongest in the math book for sixth graders. Here, the female appears in only one math problem--as a typist, typing at a certain speed. In other math textbooks, women appear in problems where they are shopping for clothes or food, while men appear in a

much larger share of the problems, and are shown as merchants or factory owners. This conditions children to believe that men have exciting, socially significant jobs, while women are employed in a limited number of mundane jobs; or that their role is restricted to being only a mother, as in the first-grade textbook.

2. Activities

When analyzing the types of activity in which men and women engage, in textbooks for the first six grades, we find the following:

Housework activities are shown as women's jobs exclusively. In the Arabic language textbooks and the first-grade textbook, for example, there is a concentration on women's domestic activities inside the house. The woman is ironing, cooking, washing clothes, and dusting. In the first-grade textbook, the daughter is folding clothes, and the son is carrying a big load of washing (to show his strength).

When it comes to differing roles in the activity of rearing/teaching children, the female is shown taking an active role in feeding and cleaning them, or calming them down, while men are shown in roles of authority, like answering questions, teaching children new things, and helping them solve difficult problems.

In professional activities, men are depicted in roles of authority, such as giving orders. Their professional activities are creative and devoid of routine. On the other hand, women, if they are outside the house, are shown doing routine work: for example, working in service jobs, executing orders.

In leisure activities--hobbies and games, for example--women's hobbies are portrayed as uncreative and traditional, while men's are creative, showing strength and initiative-taking. In sports, the female is usually a spectator. If she is in a race, she is not a winner, but comes in second.

3. Social and personal traits

Women are described in textbooks as cowardly, confused, dependent, and ill-behaved, while men are brave, determined, independent and stable. Women are emotional, humble, and submissive, while men are dispassionate, powerful, and violent. Portraying women this way instills in females the notion that they are the weaker sex and conditions them away from developing their mental and physical abilities.



Sexism in children's textbooks is a reflection of the sexism that predominates in our society. Textbooks should not be content simply to reflect that reality, but should aim to foster alternative ways of seeing the world, ways which will avoid sexism. As educators, we have to abolish discrimination by working with the different people involved in textbook production and use: school administrators, teaching staffs, supervisors, those in charge of planning the curriculum, as well as those working on the preparation, and publication of educational materials. ♦

To further illustrate our coverage of Palestinian female education, we have compiled the following brief portrait of the Friends Girls School (FGS) in Ramallah which was a model girls' school, providing quality education and a challenging environment for its students. [It is now a coeducational school, having begun the conversion process, for financial reasons, in 1989.]

The Friends Girls School was founded in 1869 by Quakers from the U.S., who visited Ramallah and, seeing a number of schools for boys with none for girls "felt for the girls who had to carry the burden and had no chance." The school opened with twenty girls enrolled.

At that time in Palestine, a tiny minority of women had school education. As for the rest, their education came through experience; they were skilled in tending children, caring for families, and working in the fields. The Friends Girls School gave many girls a chance to improve their own lives and that of the wider community. It gradually grew larger, providing, as years went by, a quality of education that would change the lives of many girls.

The Girls School has always been in the forefront of educational experimentation and innovation. Teachers taught humane values and an international outlook. They encouraged an atmosphere in which controversial issues and female issues were openly discussed. Years ago, it organized a library with a broad collection of books and periodicals. In the mid-1980's, it began teaching computer science and established a science laboratory where students could perform their own experiments. Extra-curricular activities included: 1) a community service program which was designed to make students aware of, and sensitive to, the needs of the community, contributing to their emotional and spiritual growth, building their self-esteem; and 2) a visual arts program for the girls to explore and develop their personal and cultural potential.

Many girls throughout the Occupied Territories have expressed what they found most beneficial about attending an all-girls' school and why they believe girls are better off attending a single-sex school. Not surprisingly, many former FGS students have uttered similar sentiments when speaking about what they gained from their experiences at the FGS. For them FGS, as a girls' school, provided a safe environment, one which allowed them to build self-confidence, to be vocal and assertive, where they could freely discuss feminine issues without being laughed at, and where they were able to discover themselves as females and develop their personalities without fear of intimidation or ridicule from male students or the restrictions they felt within their family or society. It also provided them with role models: female teachers who believed that females are just as smart as males; teachers whom they perceived as sensitive, strong, and independent. At FGS, they felt they could accomplish more as females than they could at a coed school.

The following quotations from a few FGS graduates typify the feelings of many females. Their views may suggest the possible advantages of a single-sex school, given the male-dominant social structures in the Occupied Territories today.

"FGS planted loyalty, understanding, love, and honesty in its students before it taught them reading, writing, and mathematics."

Violet and Laila Zaru (classes of '39 and '43)

"I have been privileged and lucky to have been an FGS student, where with the years my mind opened up to new outlets and creative experiences. My talents were nurtured and strengthened and most of all my sense of commitment and attachment to my community and country was fortified."

Tania Tamari Nasir (class of '58)

"The Friends gave me the foundations of

critical thinking: to ask questions, to search, not to be satisfied with facile half-truths.... It gave us a sense of assurance, of belonging, and a sense of identity....

The school encouraged my thirst for knowledge, a quest for truth, an appreciation of books...but at the same time, it fostered a human dimension to learning... a process in which people...learned how to interact with people as well as with ideas.

There was a sense of openness, a liberal tradition, and a democratic tradition. There were no taboos when it came to intellectual and personal growth. It wasn't a rigid, dogmatic, hierarchical structure; teachers and students treated each other with respect. It was much more personal and human; and that gave us more confidence to deal with others as well as with ourselves.

...[H]aving a girls school was important in the formation of the Palestinian feminist movement in general. The seeds of awareness of one's self as a woman, of our role as women, were planted at the FGS.... It provided us with models of women who were confident, educated and who had skills and ambitions.... The whole curriculum was not geared to modeling women along traditional lines, but rather to shaping women as whole persons and human beings with diverse abilities, with future visions...."

Hanan Ashrawi (class of '64)

"In a society where womyn are discriminated against and considered as the second sex, FGS has made a big difference in our lives.

For many womyn of Friends Girls School, the school has been the only place where we have been allowed to be ourselves without being rejected or judged. We have been allowed to explore, be different, and most importantly,

to freely find ourselves. By the time we have graduated, we will at least have some perspective of who we are.

... We have been educated in a school which put very few restrictions on us due to our



sex. We were people with dreams, with hopes, with ambitions... and nobody made fun of us when we said we wanted to make a difference in the Palestinian future.... Nobody mocked us.

With all confidence and assurance, I say farewell to the day when the kitchen was the farthest a womyn got.... I've learned to be confident, because I was educated in an environment in which confidence came naturally."

Manal Jamal (class of '89)

For more than a hundred years, graduates of the Friends Girls School have made positive contributions to their communities. Many of its graduates have become productive members in their community as teachers, doctors, lawyers, political analysts, college professors, principals, and many other worthwhile occupations. ♦

The Education Network interviewed in August this year, Suha Hindiyeih, Director of the Women's Studies Centre in East Jerusalem. Born in 1948, she attended two private girls' schools in the West Bank from 1952-68.

E.N. Bearing in mind that we are concerned with the female experience of education, what do you remember about your early days at school?

S.H. I'm afraid I don't have very happy memories. The nuns were very strict. And the other teachers were no better, mostly stern older ladies who would shut pupils up in their rooms if they misbehaved. I felt unhappy with that authoritarian atmosphere because I was a quiet pupil. I was afraid.

One incident I remember made me very angry, but I was too shy to do anything about it. In the physics class, the teacher returned my copy book with a mark of 40%, but on adding up the marks, I saw that I really had 70%. But I was too frightened to go up and correct the teacher.

In a strange way, that strictness had a direct bearing on our role as females. The nuns were fanatical about correctness in the wearing of the school uniform, and I'll never forget that, say my underskirt would be showing, a nun would shout at me, "Go and find a husband to teach you how to dress properly!"

E.N. What about the curriculum?

S.H. Very British. Even math and science were taught through English, and as for the English language itself, yes, I do remember that in the material we were given, it would be mom working at home and dad going out to earn money. Our future role was simply to be a good wife. As for our identity as Palestinians, that was learned in the street and in the family.

But even outside in the street, the nuns had a way of monitoring our behavior. I was in a

group of friends, the leader of which was a very outgoing girl who had, shall we say, friendly relations with the boys from a nearby boys' school. One of the sisters approached my mother and told her, "Don't let your daughter mix with that girl, she'll destroy her reputation." You see the nuns employed ploys to keep an eye on the exchange of love letters.

My last memory of that school follows the same lines. During recess I was sitting under a tree reading True Confessions. I was discovered, the magazine was confiscated and my mother was told. Remember, this was the early sixties and I was a teenager. So I simply told my mother that if she kept me there, I would commit suicide.

E.N. What was her reaction?

S.H. My mother looked around and chose another girls' school. Can you imagine, I went to school on a public bus, not the school bus I had had to take before. On my first day at the new school, an incident happened which showed me that I was in a completely different learning environment. When the teacher came into the room, I stood up automatically--but I was alone in doing so. The teacher simply told me that I could sit down.

The whole teaching method was far less rigid. I could ask questions whenever I wanted. One of the teachers even gave me extra coaching in math. "You're not stupid," he told me--yet previously I had really felt that I was. You see, the teachers were younger, and we felt we could talk with them as friends.

Of course, we still had a Home Economics class, where we learned embroidery and cooking; but at the same time we used to discuss amongst ourselves the possibility of coeducation. Boys are no better than us, we'd say, and we thought that we would study harder, and so challenge the boys.

(Continued on page 20)

Student Perceptions: A Summary

Sharon Lapp, who taught at the Friends Girls School in Ramallah from 1985 to 1989 and worked for the Jerusalem Media and Communications Center, has produced a masterful study of gender issues in Palestinian education, especially with regard to drawing up strategies for the development of an education for empowerment.*

Sharon has summarized female students' perceptions of both their education experiences and the role of education during the Intifada. She bases her summary on the following: 1) interviews with female students between the ages of 13 and 18 at the height of the Intifada in 1988 and 1989; 2) essays written by female secondary students between January 1987 and July 1990; and 3) students' comments in classroom. Sharon cautions that her observations are not conclusive and should not be used to form mis-



leading generalizations. We believe that the comments of this small sampling of female students represent an articulate female student perspective that is rarely presented to a broad audience. These particular views might be held by only a minority of socially conscious female students; but progressive views, even if voiced by a minority, must not

be ignored. They can be used, Sharon suggests, as possible areas for further research.

Three of the general themes which Sharon identifies from the girls' comments are:

1) The girls expressed an acute and clearly articulated sense of the relationship between education and the national liberation struggle and their position within it. They perceived themselves as equals to their male peers within the context of the uprising and the liberation struggle.

2) The girls expressed a keen awareness of the unequal treatment they received as girls and the ways in which this affected their educational experience, in terms of access to schooling, their experiences in school, and educational outcomes.

3) They were confident in their capabilities as females and believe that education can be an important and effective means of achieving higher social status, enhancing employment opportunities, and resisting the unequal treatment they feel they received in society because they were girls. ♦

* Sharon's valuable study was submitted to the Center for Women's Studies at the University of York, England as a M.A. dissertation entitled,

Towards a Palestinian Education for Liberation: Gender Issues in the Development of Palestinian Education (September, 1990).

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Palestinian Teachers Visit U.S.

In mid-March, four Palestinian school teachers from the Occupied Territories traveled to Chicago, Illinois and Madison and Milwaukee, Wisconsin in the U.S. as part of an educational tour. The tour was sponsored by the American Friends Service Committee and was organized in the United States by Jennifer Bing-Canar of AFSC and Joan Raducha of the University of Wisconsin. The Educational Network helped plan and organize the tour from the Palestinian side.

The teachers spent two weeks visiting schools, speaking with students, teachers, and school administrators. During their stay, each lived in a teacher's home. This gave them the opportunity to interact informally with their hosts in order to learn more about the United States, its people, and school education there.

The main purpose of the tour was to become acquainted with progressive educational ideas and practices by observing innovative curricula and teaching techniques in the classroom.

The Palestinians visited a teachers' resource center where they used the money given to them by the Educational Network to purchase books and other learning materials for the Network's Teacher Resource Library.

In Milwaukee, the Palestinian teachers shared problems and experiences of pedagogy with the editorial board of **Rethinking Schools**, the largest and one of the most prestigious progressive educational newspapers in the U.S. In Chicago, they visited a children's museum where their thinking was stimulated about the possibilities for opening such a museum in the Occupied Territories. Later, they spoke with members of the Chicago Teachers' Union.

In Madison and Chicago, they spoke about the situation in the Occupied Territories at schools, at Quaker meeting houses, and on

the radio. The two most interesting events were: 1) the visit to the "Center for Peace and Justice" in Waukesha, Wisconsin. "We had an interesting discussion about Palestinian education and political problems. I was surprised at how much the people in such a small town know about us," said a teacher from Ramallah; and 2) exposure to the struggle of



Palestinian science teacher meets with Madison students

the Puerto Ricans during their visit to the Puerto Rican Cultural Center and Pedro Albizu Campos High School in Chicago-- "Their quest for independence is similar to ours."

The educational resources which were brought back to the West Bank will be available for all Palestinian teachers. The Network plans to have these teachers give formal presentations to other Palestinian teachers in Gaza and the West Bank about what they learned in the U.S. We would like to co-sponsor another tour like this one in the coming spring to Europe or the U.S. Any teachers' organizations which are interested in organizing such a venture with us are invited to write to us immediately. ♦

Palestinians Implement New Education Law

In an attempt to improve the quality of the educational system in Jordan, the Jordanian Ministry of Education passed a comprehensive educational law in 1988 (Educational Law No. 27). One of the three sectors of Palestinian education in the occupied West Bank--the UNRWA schools--began applying the new law at the start of the school year, 1992/93. It is reasonable to assume that the other two Palestinian school sectors in the West Bank--the government schools and the private schools--will soon apply Law No. 27. This law will have a major impact on West Bank Palestinian students, teachers, teacher training, curriculum, textbooks, and educational budgets.

There are three basic changes outlined in the new law. **First**, the new law adds one year to the existing nine-year compulsory cycle of



education. Students are now required to attend school for 10 years--from grades 1-10. The elementary stage now includes grades 1-4 and the intermediate stage is composed of grades 5-10. After grade 10, students may go on to attend two years of secondary school.

As in the past, the students going on from the 10th grade will continue their education in one of the following matriculation (tawjih) tracks: the literary, scientific, commercial, agricultural, or vocational track.

Adding another year to the compulsory cycle will not affect the government or private schools because they have always been providing education through grade 12. UNRWA schools, on the other hand, which have been providing schooling only for the old compulsory cycle of nine years, will have to add a 10th grade section at all of its preparatory (intermediate) schools. To accommodate the addition of a new grade level of students, UNRWA will have to hire more teachers and acquire more classroom space at each of their preparatory schools.

The **second** and perhaps the most far-reaching change, in terms of its impact on the entire system in the West Bank, is the stipulation that all teachers from grades 1 through 12, to be qualified to teach in the system, must possess a Bachelor of Arts degree covering both academic and professional training. The date set for meeting this requirement throughout the West Bank is 1998. This will change the basis for the recruitment of new teachers in all school sectors. Teachers holding only two-year teaching diplomas will no longer be hired; only teachers with B.A. degrees will be hired. It also means that the teachers in every sector who don't hold a university degree must upgrade themselves by acquiring a Bachelor's degree by 1998.

Approximately 60% of all teachers in grades 1-12 in the government, UNRWA, and private sectors who are under 50 years of age do not hold a Bachelor of Arts degree. This means that about 6,560 of these teachers (about 790 of which are UNRWA teachers) will be required to upgrade their qualifications by 1998 to meet the conditions of the new Jordanian law. Teachers over 50 years old are excluded from these figures because by 1998 they will have retired or be close to retiring.



The problem of upgrading teachers lies within all three school sectors. To be able to upgrade this large number of non-degree-holding teachers, all of whom are working full-time, in such a short amount of time seems unlikely. It will be difficult for the school teachers to teach all day and then travel to a university to attend classes. Paying for tuition and books will be an added burden on these teachers because they can hardly support their families now on the meager salaries they are receiving.

UNRWA has already started upgrading their 2-year training colleges into 4-year institutions offering a B.A. Degree, producing teachers who have specialized in Arabic, science, math, and "class teachers" (i.e., teachers who are qualified to teach all subjects to students in grades 1-4). The upgrading will start in the 1993/94 school year. UNRWA has arranged to transfer to UNRWA school posts those instructors who have been doing teacher training, but who are not qualified to teach under the existing accredi-

tation guidelines for 4-year college teaching. The Education Sciences Faculty will recruit teachers who meet the accreditation criteria.

In the future, Palestinians who want to become teachers would have to attend one of the three Palestinian universities which offer a Bachelor's degree in education at the present time-- either An-Najah, Birzeit, or Bethlehem universities, or other Palestinian universities which might establish a degree program in the future.

The **third** major stipulation in the new law is the increase in the number of hours students must spend in class each week. This change includes an increase in the number of weekly classroom hours devoted to many subjects, as well as the addition of new subjects to the curriculum. For example, fifth and sixth graders will be required to attend a total of 33 periods per week. This is up from the 28 periods per week that are now required. Until now, the number of weekly teaching hours corresponded closely with the number of hours that students had to be in school. Since the new law has not increased the required number of weekly teaching hours, schools will have to hire more teachers to cover the increase in weekly student hours.

The implementation of the new study plan, with respect to both the increase of study hours and the introduction of new concepts, is being carried out simultaneously with the introduction of new textbooks. Introducing these new editions into the curriculum will create further problems because the revised texts will have to be sent to the Israeli authorities and UNESCO, the former usually taking about one year to sanction textbook use. This means that the revised texts must be submitted to the Civil Administration at least one year prior to the time when a course with increased hours is to be introduced, thus creating at least a one-year delay in implementation of the new regulations. Even the one-year period, in many cases, proved to be not enough for the Israeli Civil Administration to provide a response.

The introduction of new courses such as computers (in grade 10) and music will necessitate obtaining appropriate classroom space and hiring additional teachers, teachers who are qualified to teach in these areas. In addition, to be able to teach these new courses, schools will have to obtain, for example, computer hardware and software and musical instruments. All of these changes will have large budgetary consequences.

IMPLEMENTATION

The Jordanians plan to implement the new curriculum at specific grade levels over a four-year period in the following manner: grades 1, 5, and 9 in the first year; grades 2, 6, and 10 in the second year; grades 3 and 7 in the third year; and grades 4 and 8 in the fourth year. The government of Jordan began implementing the first phase in Jordanian schools in the 1991/92 school year.

Implementation of the new curriculum in the West Bank in the same sequence of phases is occurring one year after its introduction in Jordan in the UNRWA sector because it takes that long for the Israeli censors to authorize the use of new or revised textbooks.

Following previous practice, the government and private sectors will begin the new curriculum two years after its introduction into Jordanian schools.

This school year, 1992/93, UNRWA began a partial implementation at grades 1, 5, and 9. For practical reasons, they were unable to implement the new program fully. In the school year 1993/94, UNRWA is implementing the second phase of the new study plan while the government and private sectors are starting phase one.

The Network believes that two major weaknesses in the new law are: 1) it does not introduce a mandatory two-year pre-school program, thus omitting any required schooling during two years of the most critical period (2-6 years of age) of a child's cognitive, social, motor, and manual development;

and 2) it belittles the importance of social studies education for building a child's international perspective, sensitivity to people who are different, and social morality by requiring that students take only 2 periods per week of social studies in grades 1-4 and 3 periods per week in grades 5-10.

The information above presents the main regulations of the new Jordanian educational law and the Network's view of its consequences for Palestinian school education in the West Bank. Our readers might legitimately ask: "Why should the three sectors of Palestinian school education in the West Bank adopt the stipulations mandated in the new law? After all, Jordan renounced its claim to sovereignty over the West Bank in August



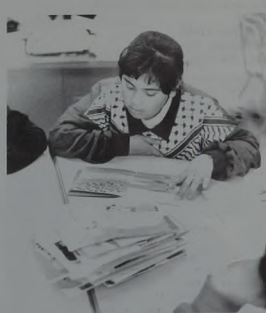
1988; and the Israeli Civil Administration, which administers the government school sector in the West Bank (containing about 80% of all students in schools), has no legal obligation to comply with the new law because international law requires only that an occupying power adopt the laws which existed in an occupied territory at the time it assumed power."

There are several reasons why all three Palestinian school sectors will almost certainly adopt the new regulations. West Bank UNRWA schools are already implementing the new law because UNRWA follows the regulations and the curriculum of the historical host country--Jordan--on the basis of agreements with it and on UNRWA's customary practice of implementing Jordanian educational laws.

Palestinians in the past have never been given the opportunity to establish their own accredited Palestinian study program. Since 1950, the Palestinian education system in the West Bank has been tied to, and has operated under, the authority of the Jordanian Ministry of Education. After the Israeli military occupation of 1967, West Bank Palestinian schools continued to follow the existing Jordanian education laws and any modifications of the laws made subsequent to 1967. The education system in the West Bank has been following the Jordanian curriculum, using Jordanian textbooks, and administering the Jordanian matriculation exam. It is most important that Palestinian schools are accredited institutions. This makes it easier for students who are transferring out of the West Bank to be given credit toward matriculation for the courses they have completed at West Bank schools; and facilitates the admission of matriculating West Bank students into institutions of higher learning. It is the Ministry that has been giving accreditation to the West Bank Palestinian schools and that has been issuing the certificates of matriculation to those who have passed the matriculation (tawjih) exam. All three sectors of West Bank Palestinian education, therefore, will comply with the new Jordanian educational

law in order to maintain their accreditation in the Arab world.

A final note: the West Bank Palestinians had no say in the formulation or passage of this new law, yet they have little choice but to adopt it. This is but one example of the consequences of being denied the right to self-determination and statehood. With a Palestinian state, a Palestinian Ministry of Education would set its own standards and develop its own educational regulations that would answer to the specific social, cultural, and economic needs of the people whom it serves. This is a basic human right which the international community only nominally acknowledges. All changes in the regulations governing the Palestinian system of education, whether they come from the Israeli authorities or the Jordanian Ministry of Education, must be viewed from this perspective as long as Palestinians live under military occupation. ♦



UNDP Workshop

In its attempt to develop and empower Palestinian women, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), in coordination with women's organizations, sponsored three one-day workshops in Jerusalem on women's issues. The second workshop, held on 22 January 1993, was entitled, "Women and Education," and was attended by 120 women from the West Bank and Gaza Strip. It dealt with the status of females in the education system, emphasizing gender biases in the curriculum and in educational opportunities.

The series of workshops gave women from various social backgrounds, geographical areas, and women's organizations the opportunity to meet and hold fruitful discussions. These workshops were a means of ascertaining the needs of women in the Occupied Territories, prioritizing them, and then formulating strategies to meet those needs. UNDP is carefully studying the participants' recommendations in order to guide the formulation of its future projects. ♦

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Dutch Report

In Educational Network No.9 (August 1992), we reported on the visit, in April of that year, of the four-member delegation from ABOP (Netherlands General Union of Educational Employees). Their union has now issued a written report on that visit in which it makes a cogent analysis of the complexities of both the education system and teachers' unions in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. On this latter concern, the report comments that "as long as the majority of the teachers are not allowed to organize themselves into unions, . . . fundamental trade union rights are violated."

It is encouraging to report that the Netherlands General Union plans to follow up its first visit with a series of seminars and workshops to be held in the West Bank aimed specifically at improving trade union effectiveness. The Educational Network is acting as a co-partner in arranging for the seminar series to take place in January and July 1994 in three areas: Nablus, Ramallah, and the Bethlehem area. A proposal has been written and funds are currently being sought to finance the project. ♦

Coming up for Air

(Continued from page 13)

It was a wonderful time of new horizons. We discussed the future. We discussed gender issues. And I felt so much happier that I wasn't discriminated against as a Muslim. At the same time, one of the teachers, an ardent Nasserist, was instigating our sense of Palestinian identity.

It was at this school that I started feeling my identity as a human being. As for our future role, the idea of being a model wife was left behind--I simply wanted to continue my education, so in '68 I enrolled at Birzeit [University]. ♦

Statistics

Total Female Enrollment 1989/1990

	Occupied Territories	West Bank*	Gaza Strip
Elementary (grades 1-6)	147,442	90,613	56,829
Preparatory (grades 7-9)	51,357	31,539	19,818
Secondary (grades 10-12)	27,174	15,826	11,348
	<u>225,973</u>	<u>13,808</u>	<u>87,995</u>

* excluding East Jerusalem

Source: Statistical Abstract of Israel, 1991, pages 286-287.

Registered Refugees enrolled in UNRWA, government, and private schools, grades 1-12, 1991/92.

West Bank		Gaza Strip	
Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
39,731	37,691	68,891	60,024

Source: Statistical Yearbook, 1991/92 (No. 28) UNRWA, Department of Education. Table 7, p.18.



Females as percentage of total number of enrolled students, 1990/91

	West Bank (Government schools)	Gaza Strip (UNRWA schools)
Elementary	47.2%	48.3%
Preparatory	45%	46.8%
Secondary	43%	NA

Source: West Bank: Ministry of Information, Jordan; Gaza Strip: UNRWA.



Percentage of total UNRWA registered refugee children, age 14 years (last year of preparatory cycle--grade 9) who were enrolled in 1989/90

Boys	West Bank	63%
Girls	West Bank	58%
Boys	Gaza Strip	81%
Girls	Gaza Strip	74%

Source: UNRWA.

Enrollment rate in Nablus and Hebron area villages, age 6-19, 1987 (percentage of total school-age population which is enrolled in school)

Age	Nablus		Hebron	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
6-9	98.70	98.01	100.00	96.67
10-14	97.26	96.57	90.39	90.00
15-19	83.76	67.78	42.59	28.26

Source: H. Yousef, *The Demography of Arab Villages of the West Bank*. Doctoral Thesis, University of Durham, England, July 1989, p.330.

Enrollment rate in West Bank refugee camps, age 6-19, 1987 (including Jerusalem)

Age	Total	Males	Females
6-9	96.6	97.3	95.8
10-14	94.0	94.6	93.2
15-19	65.8	67.1	64.4

Source: W. Ennab, *Population Geography of the Refugee Camps in the West Bank*. Doctoral Thesis, University of Durham, England. August 1989, p.300.

UNRWA drop-out rates, October 1990-October 1991

	West Bank		Gaza Strip	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
6th elementary	4.8	7.0	3.8	3.5
1st preparatory	8.2	11.1	5.5	8.3
2nd preparatory	12.8	12.2	6.3	11.7

Source: *Statistical Yearbook*, 1991/92 (No. 28). UNRWA, Department of Education. pp. 47, 71.



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