

Education in the Context of Conflict and Instability: The Palestinian Case

Salah Alzaroo and Gillian Lewando Hunt

Abstract

This paper draws on the results of a study carried out in the West Bank, in 1999, to explore the role of education as a coping strategy among the children of Palestinian refugees, and to examine how the state of being refugees affects perceptions of the value and importance of education. The paper first reviews the background to the development of a formal education system in Palestine and considers the different approaches to education in different political contexts, with ensuing particular reference to the West Bank. The findings of the regional study are then reported, with special reference to the various functions of education as a coping strategy—remedial, incentive-mobilizing and identity-building. Education, for those who have lost their property and whose identity is under threat, emerges as a key channel for maintaining consciousness of collective rights.

Keywords

Education; Refugees; Palestine

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to explore the role of education as a coping strategy for the children and young people of Palestinian refugees in the West Bank. It will examine how being refugees for half a century has affected perceptions of the value and importance of education. What significance do Palestinian children and young people attach to obtaining a formal education? And why? To answer these questions, it is essential to understand the educational context in Palestine and to explain how education is a double-edged weapon; it is both an instrument for oppression and a tool for liberation.

Harber (1991) identified three broad ideologies of political education: the conservative, the liberal/democratic and the radical. In the conservative approach, the intention is to use education to reinforce, support and legitimize the existing system of government and even particular regimes and

Address for correspondence: *Salah Alzaroo, PO Box 247, Hebron, Palestinian Autonomous Territories. E-mail: szaroo@hotmail.com; gillian.hunt@warwick.ac.uk*

their policies. It tends to devalue discussion of controversial issues or the possibilities of alternatives or reform.

The liberal approach stresses the ability of the individual to make up his or her own mind after consideration and discussion of relevant evidence, while the radical approach attempts to remodel society in a certain ideological direction via education. The emphasis is generally collective and cooperative. Graham-Brown (1991) also noted that education has often been a tool of repressive regimes and at the same time the vehicle for the oppressed to protest against the oppressors. Therefore the ideology underpinning education and the organization, delivery and content of education is not neutral, and indeed can never be neutral because it always has political intention either for the domination of people or for their liberation.

A regional study was carried out in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon to explore the direct and indirect effects of living with forced migration and prolonged conflict on Palestinian children and young people and their households in Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank from 1999 to 2001. The study teams had a core study protocol which was developed jointly at regional meetings held by the coordinators (Chatty and Lewando Hundt) which consisted of rapid assessment of the local study setting, in-depth intergenerational interviews and focus groups with young people.

The West Bank team conducted 13 semi-structured interviews in two camps: Al Fawar and Al Aroub in the Hebron area of the West Bank. The households were all three-generational households who came from different villages of origin and were located in different neighbourhoods within these camps. The households were visited two to three times and each generation was interviewed separately. The young people were interviewed when possible outside the home, in a community centre. This was in order to elicit their voices without the influence of elders or the presence of male relatives. Each interview took about two hours on average and they were written up in Arabic and then translated into English.

Twenty households were supposed to be selected. However, during the field work, the second Intifada (Intifadet Al Aqsa) started and violence spread. This made access to the camps difficult, so the field team could only complete interviews with 13 households (7 households from Al Fawar refugee camp, and 6 from Al Aroub refugee camp). A total of 40 interviewees were included in the study. Table 1 presents the distribution of the study sample on the two camps according to gender and generations.

The sample was drawn on a purposive basis. The following criteria were taken into consideration for choosing the households. Each household

- should have three generations: first, second and third. The first generation refers to those who witnessed the forced migration in 1948. The second generation are the children of the first generation. The third generation are the children and adolescents aged between 6 and 18 years.
- should be from a different village of origin in Palestine, so the interviewees came from 10 different places of origin.
- should be located in a different neighbourhood inside the camp.

Table 1

Distribution of the study sample on the two camps according to gender and generation

Generation	1 st		2 nd		3 rd		Total		Total
Gender	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	
Alaroub Camp	5	2	1	4	2	4	8	10	18
Alfawar Camp	5	3	6	1	4	3	15	7	22
Total	10	5	7	5	6	7	23	17	40

For each household, a family tree was drawn in order to have a better idea about the relations, order and position of the interviewees. As there were two field interviewers for each interview, one used to ask questions and the second used to write down the answers. After each interview the interviewers used to sit together in order to document details, impressions and observations.

In addition, in the spring of 2001, two group interviews were held to explore the effects of the Intifada Al Aqsa which began in September 2000, on children and young people. One was held in Al Fawar refugee camp and the second was held in Al Aroub camp. We asked those who were interviewed before to attend the meeting and invited new children as well, so the participants in Al Fawar refugee camp were 10 (5 males, 5 females), while the participants in Al Aroub refugee camp were 8 people (5 males, 3 females). Initially, in each group interview both sexes were together, and at the end of the interview the participants were divided into single-sex groups.

The analysis of the interviews was carried out manually, through the process of content analysis, by identifying emergent themes. This paper draws on data gathered from both the household interviews and the focus groups carried out in 2000–1 and focuses on material relating to the role of formal education as a coping strategy to overcome the effects of prolonged conflict and forced migration.

Historical Background

The Arab–Israeli conflict of 1948 and the subsequent establishment of the state of Israel resulted in the dispossession and displacement of two-thirds of the Palestinian people, who became refugees in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and in the surrounding countries (Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and other countries). The Israeli army for alleged security reasons prevented the return of the internally displaced Palestinians to their homes (Morris 1987).

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWAPRNE, UNRWA for short) was founded by the UN General Assembly Resolution 302(IV) of 1949 to replace the earlier emergency aid provided by voluntary agencies and coordinated by the United Nations Relief for Palestine Refugees (UNRPR) (UNRWA 1986).

Following the war of June 1967, the Israeli military occupied the rest of Palestine (West Bank and Gaza Strip). Another wave of refugees occurred when thousands of Palestinians fled from the West Bank and Gaza Strip towards neighbouring countries (UNRWA 1986). According to the 1998 Palestinian national census, the total Palestinian population in Palestine (the West Bank, including East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip) was 2,890,631, of whom 1,869,818 were living in the West Bank, which extends over 6,257 square km, while 1,020,813 were living in the Gaza Strip, which extends over 378 square km (*Al-Quds Al-Arabi* 1998).

Half of the population in Palestine is under 18 years old and about 30 per cent are students in basic and higher education. Some 39 per cent of the population in the West Bank are refugees, of whom 26 per cent still live in 19 refugee camps. In the Gaza Strip 75 per cent are refugees, of whom 55 per cent live in 8 refugee camps. The refugees in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip are part of 2.7 million registered Palestinian refugees living in many countries, especially in Jordan, Lebanon and Syria (Ramsden and Senker 1993).

Generations of refugee children and young people in the West Bank have been deeply affected by forced migration and prolonged conflict as many researchers have reported. This happened mainly because of the conditions that the country passed through, including Israeli occupation and its consequences such as the expropriation of lands, loss of water resources, home demolitions, construction of Israeli settlements and bypass roads, violence, imprisonment, emigration, deportation and the imposed closures of the West Bank towns and villages especially during the first Intifada (1987–94) and the current Intifada. These conditions have affected physical, social, economic and psychological aspects of daily Palestinian life.

More than half a century has passed since most of the refugees in these two camps left their place of origin. Therefore, all the children and young people in these two camps were born in the camps. Most of the young people had witnessed political violence in the camps and most of them were familiar with the first and second Intifadas (the Palestinian uprising of 1988–94 and the one starting in 2001).

The Educational Context

Although the emergence of the Palestinian education system started under Ottoman rule with compulsory elementary education, modern Palestinian education was established during the British Mandate. However, as Tibawi (1956) and Hadad (1980) point out, schools under the Mandate were viewed as instruments for the inculcation of the skills, knowledge and beliefs necessary to the functioning of the government and economic system of the Mandate. Little thought was given to the indigenous knowledge, beliefs and skills relevant to Palestinian society.

By the end of the British Mandate in 1948 and after the annexation of the West Bank to Jordan and the Gaza Strip to Egypt, public schools were established in most cities and many villages and camps. Nowadays, formal education in Palestine consists of school education and tertiary education.

Schools in Palestine are divided into two stages: the basic compulsory stage (10 years) and the secondary (2 years).

Since the 1950s, school education in Palestine has been provided by three sectors: the government, UNRWA and the private sector. The governmental education sector provides basic and secondary levels (grades 1–12) but never existed in the refugee camps. Government schools levy a yearly tuition fee of \$15 at the basic level and \$20 at secondary level. UNRWA has basic schools only (grades 1–9) for refugees inside and outside refugee camps, and they are free of charge. After the last grade UNRWA students join governmental schools which are always located outside the refugee camps.

In terms of tertiary education, Palestinians are credited with having one of the highest proportions of their population completing higher education in the Arab world, with 18 university graduates per thousand (World Bank 1993, vol. 1). By 2001, ten universities, all but one in the private sector, and 16 technical and community colleges existed in the West Bank (including Jerusalem). According to 1999 statistics, 66,000 Palestinian students were studying in these tertiary education institutions (PCBS 1999).

Education: A Tool for Oppression or Liberation

If one reviews the three broad ideologies of education set out in the beginning of this paper, one could argue that from the beginning of the twentieth century, Palestinian education was under the influence of all three approaches—the conservative, the liberal/democratic and the radical. The “oppressors” were represented by the ruler or governmental body of the time (the British during the British Mandate 1918–48, the Jordanian and Egyptian administrations 1948–67, the Israeli civil and military administrations 1967–94). They emphasized the conservative approach, maintaining the status quo by perpetuating economic and social stratification and dehumanizing and taming the Palestinians. On the other side, the oppressed (the Palestinians inside and outside Palestine) focused on the liberal and, to some extent, on the radical approaches in order to promote social change and to liberate themselves and their land.

Therefore, over the years of the Israeli Occupation there were continuous waves of confrontations and tensions about education between the Israeli authorities and the Palestinians, whether in the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip or inside Israel itself. The importance of education for the Palestinians, especially the refugees, was clear to the Israeli authorities and therefore it was not surprising that they not only obstructed education, but also used it as a means of control. In general, the development of an educational infrastructure for Palestinians under Occupation was not a priority. The Israeli Civil Administration provided minimum funding, which was devoted mainly to covering teachers’ salaries. The lack of school buildings, equipment and furniture grew worse every year (Alzaroo 1988).

Regular closure of the Palestinian educational institutions was a common policy of the Israeli authorities in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. For instance, during the first Intifada (1988–94), all Palestinian educational institutions were closed for periods ranging from two years, in the case of the West Bank

schools, to more than four years in the case of some universities. Even the kindergartens were included in the military closure orders. A tenth of the schools were used as military camps and detention centres during the closure period (Alzaroo 1989b; Ramsden and Senker 1993).

Teachers in the West Bank and Gaza Strip were subject to various oppressive measures, such as: compulsory retirement, redundancy on political grounds, arbitrary transfer to remote teaching posts, suspension of teachers' salary grades and professional allowances, deduction of pay following strike days or closure of schools, low salaries, hindering and obstructing the professional development of the teachers and the prohibition of teachers' unions (Alzaroo 1988). Students were subject to oppressive measures as well, such as: expulsion from schools for political reasons, arrest during public examinations, arbitrary transfer of students, prohibition from travelling abroad and detention and imprisonment (Alzaroo 1988).

Curricula of the West Bank and Gaza Strip in the three sectors of education were subject to restrictive Israeli control. The Israeli authority tried in the beginning to impose Israeli curricula as it did with the Palestinians who lived inside Israel as citizens. However, this failed because of Palestinian resistance and so the Jordanian curricula in the West Bank and the Egyptian curricula in the Gaza Strip, which were in use before the Occupation, continued to be used but with strict censorship by the Israeli authority (Alzaroo 1988).

The Israeli authority excluded or changed any text or words related to the land, history, geography, people and literature of Palestine and the Palestinians. Classroom maps were required to show Israel instead of Palestine. Quranic verses, poetry and history on the struggle against the aggressor were deleted. Even texts or sentences mentioning Arab unity or the struggle against imperialism were deleted. In addition, about 4,000 books in different fields were prohibited (Alzaroo 1988). There were no criteria fixed by the authorities, but any book in the colours of the Palestinian flag, published by a Palestinian publishing house or discussing the Palestinian question was prohibited. The rule was that every book should be outlawed until permission was granted for its use (Ramsden and Senker 1993).

As a consequence, school curricula were almost frozen from 1967 onwards. Textbooks were not attuned to the national identity or to the specific socio-economic needs of the Palestinians, but often contained inaccurate and outdated information (Alzaroo 1988). All in all, formal education for Palestinians was always irrelevant, out of date and inequitable, and as a result Palestinians focused on non-formal education to make up the shortage of the formal system's outcome (Alzaroo 1998).¹

The non-formal education (NFE) programmes included:

1. Educational programmes: like adult literacy, pre-school education, vocational education, teachers training, special education, continuing education, distance education, political education, and summer camps.
2. Health programmes: including health policy and awareness, nursing, midwifery, health care, preventive health, environmental awareness, professional update training for doctors, clinical supervisors rehabilitation, school health education and first aid training.

3. Development programmes: such as training the trainers, income generation projects, technical programmes, tourist industry, secretarial training and sewing and design.
4. Arts programmes: including painting, design, flower arrangement, ceramics, music, theatre and photography.
5. Rural development: such as agriculture programmes, farming, food processing.
6. Business: including management, financial management, marketing, accounting, journalism and media, counselling, statistics, executive secretarial, communication.
7. Athletic programmes: sports activities and scouting.
8. Human rights and information.
9. Women's programmes: mainly focusing on gender consciousness.

The providers of NFE were the political parties and movement, the NGOs, the charitable societies, women's institutions, religious institutions and the higher education institutions.

Significance of Education for Palestinian Refugees in the West Bank

The interview data from the West Bank part of this regional study reveal that despite the special context of education in the West Bank, it is still regarded as a "good" thing *per se*. Our data strongly suggest that the experience of displacement and prolonged conflict is a decisive factor in pushing Palestinian refugees towards education. Education has both helped them adapt to the new life of exile and kept alive the prospects of returning home. It is no surprise that refugees attached great significance to obtaining an education, for it was a survival strategy. The quotes below highlight how education constitutes a significant coping strategy:

"I like education: to stay and survive you don't have to eat and drink only, but to study as well. I have 11 brothers and sisters and I am the youngest. Imagine 11 people wanting to eat and sleep: it is difficult. However, my dad tried his best to give us the chance of education and our financial situation did not prevent anybody from having his opportunity in education."(2nd generation woman from Al Aroub)

Q: What is the most important thing you think about?

A: School, finishing my education and graduation.

(3rd generation girl from Al Fawar)

"The importance of education is unlimited. If I was the Minister of Education, I would make education compulsory till university." (1st generation male elder from Al Fawar)

"Education is very important for our life. The first thing people ask is what are your qualifications." (3rd generation girl from Al Aroub)

The following text, which is part of an interview with a refugee girl, shows how education is the main concern of the Palestinians:

Q: What do you like to accomplish?

A: The biggest concern is finishing my law studies and becoming a lawyer. I want to defend people who have been unjustly treated and give them back their rights. I want to be independent.

Q: What distinguishes your family?

A: My grandfather and his brothers were educated. Their father was blind but educated. He used to memorize the Quran. My father was always interested in our education. I must always be the first in my class. My mother failed in the subject of history in her general exam and my grandfather begged her to re-sit the exam but she refused and got married. My mother says that this is the biggest mistake of her life because the certificate is a weapon and without it there is no value for a girl in society. If I got 18 out of 20 in my exam my grandfather felt upset even at Al Tawjihi [matriculation]. My grandfather used to count my marks, he insisted on educating us . . . We are facing a difficult situation and my mother wants to work, her chances would be better if she had her certificate. My mother likes our marks to be in the nineties so she can be proud of us.

(3rd generation girl from Al Aroub)

In the group interviews, which took place in the two camps, the majority of the 18 participants identified education as their first personal priority, building a house came second and then getting married. When they were asked about their future career choices, they suggested education-related careers for themselves (pharmacist, teacher, journalist, engineer, English lecturer, commercial accountant).

“Education is preferable to marriage. Education is an effective weapon. Even if I got married I would insist on continuing my education.” (3rd generation girl from Al Fawar)

The perception of the refugees about education affected their social life. For instance, one could expect that due to the economic difficulties, money would become a priority for them, or looking for a wealthy husband. This, however, was not the case in terms of the data collected. This finding is in line with the findings of Kuroda’s study of 234 youngsters aged 14–17 in Jordanian camps. In answer to the question, “What would you ask for if you had Aladdin’s lamp?” only one said “Money” (Kuroda 1972: 362). The following statements illustrate that education is valued above money.

“We had a rich relative so I once asked my sisters if they would accept him [as a husband] but they said no because he is not educated.” (2nd generation male from Al Fawar)

Q: What do you teach your children?

A: The fear of God, and the value of education. The poor is the poor of mind not money.

(2nd generation male from Al Fawar)

Given such concern, it is no wonder that Palestinians always express worries about their education system, and accuse Israel of undermining the educational achievement of their children, especially during the first uprising (Intifada) and the current uprising (Intifada Al Aqsa).

“The educational achievements of most students have deteriorated because they participated in confrontations with soldiers in daytime and spend the nighttime watching confrontations at other places on TV.” (Focus group participant girl from Al Fawar)

“We have lost more than 25 studying days since the beginning of the Intifada. Although our schools are inside the camp, this happened because sometimes teachers cannot reach the camp or because of confrontations.” (Focus group participant from Al Aroub 2)

“Because of the Intifada we cannot concentrate and study. It is hard for me to follow and give attention to my teachers. We lost interest in studying and we just watch the news.” (Focus group participant from Al Aroub 3)

“Because of the current obstacles we are facing mismanagement in school, once we took five exams in a day.” (Focus group participant from Al Aroub 6)

Education as a Coping Strategy

It is clear that acquiring a formal education is seen as being of great importance by Palestinians of all generations. However, it is unclear how being educated or studying is a coping strategy for Palestinian refugees and their descendants. It is argued here that education for Palestinians in general and for refugees in particular is being used as a unique tool for nation-building in three ways. Firstly, it may be used as a remedy to overcome the consequences of the Palestinian disaster in 1948 and the subsequent displacement. Secondly, it may be a mechanism for political, economic and social mobilization. Thirdly, it may be a tool for identity-building.

Education as a remedy

A consequence of the 1948 displacement has been that educational provision for Palestinians has often been “remedial” or “compensatory”. Sayigh (1995) stressed that having an education was seen by the Palestinians as a temporary replacement for a homeland that had previously supplied prestige and status, and a passport. On the other hand, they realized that building the Palestinian identity and unity, achieving the goal of return and enhancing skills, would require a great focus on education.

This could explain the “Palestinian phenomenon in education”. This refers to the jump from one of the lowest rates of educational attainment before 1948 to one of the highest after 2–3 decades. For instance, the Palestinians nowadays are one of the top five nations in higher education, despite the continuing political and economic instability in the West Bank and Gaza.

The provision of free schooling by UNRWA for refugees and their descendants is clearly of importance but provision and widened access do not adequately explain the scale and levels of achievement nor the commitment or aspirations expressed by these young people and their families.

The interviews revealed that refugees put great emphasis on education after the events of 1948. The older generation still recalled clearly the characteristics of the education system before 1948. Access to education at that time was limited especially for girls and it has improved since then:

"It was shameful for girls to go to school, Sara was the only girl in school, she finished the fourth grade." (1st generation male elder from Al Aroub)

"My father bought me the school uniform and other school supplies but then he ripped the uniform off because a young man told him that if I learnt the alphabet, I would write letters. When I remember this now, I curse this man. I wish I could read so I could read the Quran." (1st generation older woman from Al Fawar)

"Schools were only for the children of Sheikhs." (1st generation male elder from Al Aroub)

Education for Palestinians was used as a remedy, to make up for the loss of land and property, as a way to understand precisely what happened and why, a means to rescue what was left and to rebuild themselves. In other words, and using Freire's famous phrase, they used "the words to understand the world" (1987).

"Education is our shelter. We do not own land, farms, factories or any businesses." (1st generation male elder from Al Fawar)

"I think education is very important. It is our only way out. We don't have land, we only have education." (1st generation male elder from Al Aroub)

"We are nothing without education. Education gives value to humans, especially to us the Palestinians, for we are without money or support and we have no choice but education." (3rd generation girl from Al Fawar)

In addition, many international agencies and NGOs used education as a major tool in their rehabilitation programmes to help Palestinian refugees deal with the suppressed trauma that often affects refugees, and the daily anxieties of an insecure existence.

Education as an incentive for political, economic and social mobilization

After the major population dislocations in 1948, Palestinians in general, as Hadad (1980) stresses, came to regard education as a form of portable commodity that could not be taken away by any party. For many reasons they were unable to build their own infrastructure, so they tried to develop themselves through education. Thus education became a primary means of

economic success, social integration and an avenue of political liberation. It was and remains a way of gaining control over their fate, a chance to build a future and an escape from passivity and dependence. It was, above all, the most decisive factor for change. Therefore, Palestinians tried to gear their use of the education system to contribute directly to an effective national reconstruction process.

Economically speaking, as Abu-Lughod (1973) pointed out, education was valued for the hope it gave of economic security in circumstances where political security was not to be had. It was a way of escaping the hardship of the camps. Mahshi and Bush (1989) noted that the traditional value of education, and especially formal schooling, has strengthened over time. Formal education was perceived by the Palestinians as a means of searching for a white-collar job with a steady income and a means to enhance social status.

"You should learn the history and the geography of your country; you should also learn languages so you can travel, mathematics and how to deal with people." (3rd generation boy from Al Aroub)

"My father considers education very important, he believes that in these days if you do not study, you will die of hunger. A person with no certificate will face hardship." (2nd generation woman from Al Aroub)

"Nothing is better than education. For 38 years I made a mark with my finger when I got my salary. This has made an impression on me. I have lost many work opportunities because I couldn't read." (1st generation male elder from Al Fawar)

"My accomplishment? I educated my children." (1st generation male elder from Al Aroub)

I would argue here that although education is a means to obtain economic revenue, Palestinians have not given great attention to the relationship between education and its economic potential. It is true that they focused on education as a means of employment and a way to make money in the 1960s and the 1970s as a result of the huge demand for employees in the Gulf States, but they also pursued education in the 1980s and the 1990s in spite of the high rate of unemployment in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Obviously, the relationship between education and economics exists in all societies and Palestinian society is no exception, but Palestinians have ignored or overlooked this relationship. They have invested resources in education voluntarily and without expecting any direct economic return. This might happen because, firstly, Palestinians value education highly. Secondly, they had nothing to lose. One explanation is that they realized that keeping their children busy in schools and universities was better than leaving them hanging around in the streets with nothing to do. Another explanation is that Palestinians have never fully funded their own education system. Usually, the contribution of local funds is very little. The dominant authority often funds the governmental education. The United Nations funds the UNRWA

schools, which are free to all descendants of refugees. Even private and higher education depends heavily on external aid.

The social role of education was clear to the Palestinians not only as an important part of changing social attitudes and aspirations, but also as a way of socializing people for particular roles in society. Education—since it aims at producing more competent, better-informed, more understanding people—has implied within its goals the possibility that its activities will indirectly cause social change in the society inhabited by those who undergo it.

“Education develops the mind. It gives value to human beings. My aunt was ranked first of all the students in the West Bank in her General Matriculation Exam but now she is a teacher and got married. I am scared of being like her, getting tired and then marrying . . . My parents encourage education; they feel it is important for girls.” (3rd generation girl from Al Fawar)

One of the social consequences of education in Palestinian society is a lessening of the gender gap. Education even affects the marriageability of girls since those with little or no formal education have less chance of getting married. However, too much education for girls is also an obstacle to marriage.

“Education is very important especially for girls. Girls must have education if even they will end up in the kitchen. Children who are brought up by educated mothers will be in a better position to face the problems of life.” (2nd generation woman from Al Aroub)

Q: What distinguishes your family?

A: Education: all the girls in my family are educated and in that way they are different from other families. In my childhood I did not think about studying but now as I attend the university, I would like to have a Master's Degree. I feel that through education, I will achieve higher self-esteem.

(2nd generation woman from Al Aroub)

The Palestinians used education to raise public awareness in order to enable people to critically understand their reality and liberate themselves economically, socially and politically. However, it is an illusion that education *per se* will create revolutionary change in the awareness of the individual. Education could deepen awareness but it does not necessarily produce it. People must be educated in a particular way before they can stand up for their political rights and appreciate the value of freedom, democracy and human rights.

Through education, in particular non-formal education, Palestinians inside Palestine and in exile tried to create a critical awareness of political phenomena by opening discussion and analysis of a range of evidence and opinions. They realized that education is one of the primary elements without which they cannot liberate their land. For them schools and universities were not educational institutions only, but also political establishments.

“The first Intifada destroyed us, they used to come to school and ask us to go out for demonstrations. We were happy about that because we were able to leave school. The

severe consequence of that is a generation of illiterates for there was high drop-out rate from school. Everyone should have worked to control us in the schools because getting us out of schools is the aim of the Zionists. It was youngsters of the camp who asked us to go out for demonstrations.” (2nd generation woman from Al Aroub)

For some of the interviewees the struggle against occupation and for liberation was not only limited to the armed struggle. It was understood that the good educator can also be a militant whose actions are in line with a political and revolutionary stance.

“I didn’t keep quiet. Participation [in the struggle] is not necessarily with a sword or a bullet or a stone. Fighting can be done with words also.” (2nd generation man from Al Fawar)

Education played a major role in the Palestinian liberation movement. During the occupation era, the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) encouraged initiatives to establish higher education institutions and as a consequence of the PLO financial support of these institutions, tertiary education was almost free for the majority of the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The flowering of a new generation of university graduates had two outcomes for the whole Palestinian people of the area: social and economic mobility and the emergence of a young local leadership.

During the first uprising (Intifada), political education was given priority over non-formal education. The aim was to develop individual and collective awareness so as to achieve emancipation by using educational resources and activities for organizing and mobilizing the population to challenge the occupier and confront its policies.

The providers of non-formal education made a distinction between learning and schooling and argued that learning takes place outside schools as well, and thus they emphasized the importance of popular non-formal education activities such as “Popular Education”, which spread widely when Israel closed all the Palestinian schools for many years during the first Intifada. Providers of this kind of education were the Palestinian Women’s Committees, the political movements and parties.

Another example of these non-formal learning programmes was “Prison Education”. Israeli authorities in the early years of occupation banned Palestinian prisoners from using pencils and paper. Only after very long and hard hunger strikes did the prisoners win the battle and were gradually able to have pens, pencils, papers, books and newspapers as well as to have access to a certain amount of carefully censored radio broadcasting. As a consequence, the prisoners established a library in every prison and used to organize literacy classes, language courses, awareness-raising sessions, political discourse and orientation workshops, as well as classes for the young prisoners to prepare them for Secondary General Examination. Furthermore, the prisoners succeeded in building a manual information system network to exchange information between the rooms, between prisons and between their families and the political leadership outside the prisons and in exile (Qazzaz 1998).

The role of education here was to create the fundamental background necessary for the full participation of every Palestinian in the development of the Palestinian identity and community whether inside Palestine or in exile. In order to maintain traditional songs, sing the national anthem, salute the national flag and say the national pledge regularly to restore pride in their cultural heritage, they have to be literate.

Therefore, many Palestinian educators have argued that Palestinian formal education, due to the fact that it is always controlled by the oppressor, will not contribute to identity-building. Fasheh (1990, 1992, 1995) for instance, has argued for "community education" rather than "formal education" as a way of identity-building. He noted that much of the effort to reform Palestinian education has focused on the visible level (building schools, recruiting teachers) and although all of these efforts are important, they will not work without investing in the more fundamental invisible (human and cultural) level.

In community education, people are the solution and not the problem. Under the present conditions, where Palestinians are denied control over their natural resources and offered only loans for survival from the World Bank, Fasheh believes that the only hope for the Palestinian people lies in investment in the invisible, that is, the human treasure (mainly children and youth) and the cultural treasure:

cultural products and cultural producers should and could be the basis of our economy. We have almost all the ingredients necessary to excel in this type of production: a common language, common history and culture, common land, common needs and realities and a common destiny. Such products and producers are much harder to destroy, they are built on what we have, and they do not produce a spiral increase of debt. Moreover, they are a natural accompaniment of learning environments. (Fasheh 1995: 68)

He stresses that Palestinians have not only to end the occupation of their land, but also the occupation of their minds through their daily practices: in their conversations, dialogues, activities, cultural expressions, and cultural products. If Palestinians do not produce culturally, they will end up being dependants and disintegrated:

Ending the occupation of our minds means rediscovering ourselves, our voices, and the internal strength in our people and our communities. It means seeing the value of our experiences and our culture. It means ending fragmentation, factionalism, culture dependency, and competing with one another over small and symbolic gains. It means to feel happy and proud of being Arabs, disregarding the racist and poisonous messages that the Western TV, journalists, academicians, and experts try to spread around the world against Arabs and Muslims. It also means defining ourselves as Palestinians, as Arabs, and not as underdeveloped or as developing. (Fasheh 1995: 69)

In community education, people are creators and not receivers. Community-building means developing an institution's environment and individuals' capacities. An integral part of community-building at the invisible level is the "cultural product" which serves as a source of economic return and can also inspire feelings of self-worth, at both the individual and national levels (Fasheh 1995).

Conclusion

The rational utilization of human resources affects the socio-economic and living conditions of any country. Education for those who lost their property and whose identity is under threat is the most efficient channel for them to take their own fate into their hands and stand up for their rights.

Since Palestinians, and in particular refugees, have no official and proper agents to act on their behalf to fulfil their expectations and aspirations and have limited material and financial resources, they have no choice but to develop their human resources through education. Therefore, education has been of great significance for Palestinians who have used it as a tool for liberation.

Our data have shown that education has been an important and effective coping strategy to deal with the effects and consequences of forced migration and prolonged conflict that Palestinians experienced since 1948. In addition, education played a crucial role not only in the mobilization of economic, social and political resources for Palestinians as individuals, and as a nation, but also in building and rebuilding the Palestinian identity.

Acknowledgements

This paper is based on data collected as part of a regional study funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation from 1999 to 2001. The study focused on the effects of living with prolonged conflict and forced migration on Palestinian children and young people and their households. There were study teams in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and the Palestinian Autonomous Territories of the West Bank and Gaza. The teams were coordinated by Dawn Chatty at the Refugee Studies Centre, University of Oxford, and Gillian Lewando Hundt, Institute of Health, University of Warwick. The West Bank team was coordinated by Alzaroo and supervised by Hundt. They would like to thank their colleagues in the regional study, the local research team, and most of all the young people and their families who participated in the study in often adverse circumstances. Thanks are also due to the editorial comments and suggestions of Loraine Blaxter.

Note

1. "Non-formal education" refers here to any organized educational activity outside the established formal system, whether operating separately or as an important feature of some broader activity, that is intended to serve identifiable learning clienteles and learning objectives.

References

- Abu-Lughod, I. (1973), Educating a community in exile: the Palestinian experience, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 11, 3: 94–111.
- Al-Quds Al-Arabi* (1998), (Newspaper), no. 2736, London.
- Alzaroo, S. (1988), *Education under Occupation*, Hebron: University Graduates Union, Research Centre, Palestine (in Arabic).
- Alzaroo, S. (1989a), *Higher Education in the Occupied Territories*, Hebron: University Graduates Union, Research Centre, Palestine (in Arabic).
- Alzaroo, S. (1989b), *Education under the Shadow of the Intifada*, Hebron: University Graduates Union, Research Centre, Palestine (in Arabic).
- Alzaroo, S. (1998), Non-formal education in Palestine: a response to school exclusion. PhD thesis, Warwick University.
- Chatty, D. et al. (2001), *Lessons Learned: A Regional Palestinian Study on the Effects of Prolonged Conflict and Forced Migration on Palestinian Children and Youth*. Report, Refugee Studies Centre, University of Oxford.
- Fasheh, M. (1990), Community education: to reclaim and transform what has been made invisible, *Harvard Educational Review*, 60, 1: 19–35.
- Fasheh, M. (1992), West Bank: learning to survive. In C. Poster and J. Zimmer (eds), *Community Education in the Third World*, London and New York: Routledge.
- Fasheh, M. (1995), The reading campaign experience within Palestinian society: innovative strategies for learning and building community, *Harvard Educational Review*, 65, 1: 66–92.
- Freire, P. (1987), *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World*, Hadleigh, MA: Bergin and Garvey.
- Graham-Brown, S. (1984), *Education, Repression and Liberation: Palestinians*, London: World University Service.
- Graham-Brown, S. (1991), *Education in the Developing World: Conflict and crisis*, London and New York: Longman.
- Hadad, Y. (1980), Palestinian women: patterns of legitimisation and domination. In C. Harber (1991), *Schools and political learning in Africa: themes and issues*, *Compare*, 21, 1: 61–71.
- Kuroda, Y. (1972), Young Palestinian commandos in political socialization perspective, *Middle East Journal*, 26, 3: 253–70.
- Mahshi, K. and Bush, K. (1989), The Palestinian uprising and education for the future, *Harvard Educational Review*, 59, 4: 470–83.
- Morris, B. (1987), *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 218.
- Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) (1999), *Education Statistics in the West Bank and Gaza Strip: Current Status*, Report Series no. 5, Ramallah, Palestine.
- Qazzaz, H. (1998), Adult non-formal education in developing countries: the case of Palestinians in Israeli prisons. DEd dissertation, School of Education, University of Leeds.
- Ramsden, S. and Senker, C. (eds) (1993), *Learning the Hard Way: Palestinian Education in West Bank, Gaza Strip and Israel*, London: World University Service (WUS).
- Sayigh, R. (1995), Palestinians in Lebanon: harsh present, uncertain future, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 25, 1: 37–53.
- Tibawi, A. L. (1956), *Arab Education in Mandatory Palestine: A Study of Three Decades of British Administration*, London: Luzac.
- UNRWA (1986), *A Brief History, 1950–1982* (v83-63833), Vienna: UNRWA Headquarters.
- World Bank (1993), *Priorities and Strategies for Education: A World Bank Review*, Washington, DC: World Bank Publications.