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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the dynamics of conflicting role expectations among Palestinian teachers in Israel as these expectations are generated by the broader Israeli-Palestinian conflict and its manifestation in the educational system. To understand the enigma of Palestinian teachers in Israel, the paper briefly reviews the different role patterns among Palestinian teachers in a historical context. It then discusses the changing sociopolitical role for Palestinian teachers and compares this role along historical lines. The conflicting role expectations among Palestinian teachers also is discussed. (Contains a 17-item bibliography.) (BT)

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**MAKING SENSE OF CONFLICTING ROLE EXPECTATIONS
AMONG PALESTINIAN TEACHERS IN ISRAEL**

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Introduction

The only thing the teacher had to say with regard to the national anthem was that it was the national anthem of the Jews and the state of Israel, and that we should respect it. Anybody who moved while the anthem was being sung would be punished. Even before the State of Israel was formed we had stood in line and sung an anthem named 'The Flag', referring of course to the Palestinian flag. Then we were allowed to move while we sang. Of course, with the 'Flag' anthem, I could identify; something I could not do with the Hatekva, toward which I felt only alienation.

*Asmar, Fouzi. To be an Arab in Israel.
London: Frances Pinter, 1975.*

When researchers discuss teachers' role they often limit their scope of analysis to the role teachers play in the classroom or within the school as an organization. This tendency in social research overlooks the relationship between teachers' role and the broader social system, especially in relation to issues of sociopolitical conflict and change (Mazawi, 1994). Teachers' role conflict can not be fully understood by focusing on the classroom behavior only. The discussion of role conflict among Palestinian teachers in Israel is inherently rooted in the sociopolitical context within which they work.

This paper explores the dynamics of conflicting role expectations among Palestinian teachers in Israel as these expectations are generated by the broader Israeli-Palestinian conflict and its manifestation in the educational system. In order to understand the enigma Palestinian teachers in Israel, it is necessary to briefly review the different role patterns among Palestinian teachers in a historical context. The changing sociopolitical role for Palestinian teachers will be discussed and compared along historical lines. Then the conflicting role expectations among Palestinian teachers in Israel will be discussed.

I had initially intended to interview a number of Palestinian teachers in Israel about their perceptions of their roles and the way they understand different expectations conveyed to them by the government on one hand and by their community on the other. However, since this type of research would have to be approved by the Israeli Ministry of Education before entering the schools, and given the critical sociopolitical orientation of the issues being discussed in this project it seemed rather a challenge to receive governmental approval to conduct the study. Trying to utilize the limited amount of time I spent in Israel this past fall, I made several attempts to discuss the topic with teachers whom I know in a rather informal setting. Realizing that I did not have an approval from the government to conduct the study, most of these teachers were very reluctant to delve in any issue that seemed politically charged, let alone agreeing to record our conversation. In a wider research that I was conducting with Palestinian student activists in Israel, I asked them about their perceptions of their teachers and the role of national awareness the teachers and the schools played in their education.

Historical background

Arab Palestinians have never had full control over their own educational system. It has always been subject to political control and manipulation of external rulers. During the British mandate period (1917-1948), and more so during the Turkish rule (1869-1917), education among the native Palestinians was controlled by occupying authorities that represented different cultures and nationalities. The situation involving Palestinian education in Israel since 1948, is even more polarized with conflicting national goals of the Palestinians and the state of Israel. Let's examine the changing patterns of Palestinian teachers' roles in a historical context.

1) The Ottoman rule (1869-1917): During this time public schools in Palestine were very scarce. The most common form of formal education took place in what was called

Kuttab where learned men taught the Quran and math (Tibawi, 1956). Teachers at that time were perceived as religious leaders who also served to pass tradition from generation to generation (Mazawi, 1994). One can speak of no conflict between the Ottoman authorities and the native Palestinian community in particular since the two shared the same religion background of Islam.

2) The British Mandate 1917-1948: During the British mandate over Palestine more government schools were established throughout the country. Post secondary education, as a minimal criteria to hold a teaching position during the Mandate period, was mainly available to the children of the well-to-do families. Hence, Palestinian teachers at that time came from the communities leadership, albeit traditional and conservative leadership as it was. In other words, they were members of the leadership elite in addition to their teachers roles (Nashif, 1977). Despite the fact that the Mandate authorities emphasized the “professional and instrumental aspects in the [Palestinian] teacher’s role” (Mazawi, 1994 p. 502), they were very active in raising Palestinian national awareness. According to Mari (1978), Palestinian teachers and their students have always been active in the political stage, especially during the British mandate era.

3) The establishment of Israel (1948 and beyond): The established of Israel in 1948 resulted in dismantling the Palestinian society. The State of Israel was created only after 850,000 native Palestinians were turned into refugees, scattered across the Middle East, leaving only 160,000 leaderless people under its control. Almost overnight, these Palestinians were transformed from a majority in their own country to a minority who was forced to live, work and study in an alien system (Minns & Hijab, 1990). Subsequently, the West Bank was annexed to Jordan and Gaza fell under Egyptian rule until they both were occupied by Israel in 1967. Palestinian refugees in neighboring Arab countries mainly in Jordan and Lebanon, became the backbone of the revolution lead by the PLO. Under these three different circumstances, Palestinian education became simply a means of survival (Mari, 1978). The educational and sociopolitical role for Palestinian teachers has been shaped by the new context within which they teach. Let’s briefly examined the different realities of various groups of Palestinian teachers since 1948.

Four types of Palestinian teachers

First, Palestinian teachers in the Arab World: Lacking an independent system of their own, exiled educated Palestinians in the Middle East were in high demand of employment especially in the Arab Gulf States. These teachers could be describes as professionals who used their educational achievements and credentials as a channel for occupational mobility and personal progress (Mazawi, 1994).

Second, Palestinian teachers in the West Bank and Gaza, both under the Jordanian control and the Israeli occupation since 1967, are perceived as agents of cultural nationalism and intellectual leadership of the resistance. Rather than fighting for their own professional benefits, these Palestinian teachers have been active through their writings, organizations, strikes and demonstrations to contribute to the Palestinian national cause (Mari, 1978). Since the outbreak of the Palestinian *Intifada* in the West Bank and Gaza in 1987 education has become one of the major area for direct confrontation between the Israeli military authorities and the Palestinian community. With prolonged periods of closure of schools and universities by the military authorities, Palestinian education during the *Intifada* went underground. A key role was plaid by Palestinian teachers in the West Bank and Gaza as they “constituted an assisting force in the organization of uninstitutionalised (and militarily declared illegal) educational activities, in conditions of widespread popular resistance” (Mazawi, 1994 p. 507).

Third, Since its establishment in 1964, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) assumed responsibility for the Palestinian population in the refugee camps in Jordan and Lebanon and provided them with a variety of services such as education, health and welfare. Palestinian teachers working in the PLO run schools are perceived as militant

agents working for national liberation. They perceive education as a “politically empowering factor, axiomatically linked to the pupils’ Palestinian Arab identity, the anti-Zionist struggle and the politico-territorial dimension of the Israeli-Arab conflict” (Mazawi, 1994 p. 507).

Finally, Palestinian education in Israel since 1948 and the conflicting role expectations of Palestinian teachers employed by the Israeli government to teach in all Arab-Palestinian schools, is the main concern of this paper.

Palestinian education and teachers in Israel

In the current conflict situation, Palestinian education in Israel cannot be anything but political. While the Palestinians try to use their educational process in order to preserve their collective identity and instill national pride in their youth, the Israeli authorities retain antithetical goals. By maintaining control over education, the government seeks to inflict further control and domination over the Palestinian population. The importance of the educational system in shaping the Palestinian consciousness cannot be ignored. Hence, the Israeli authorities insist on maintaining tight control over its content (Graham-Brown, 1984).

While Israel declares itself an egalitarian society, its concealed policy towards the education of its Palestinian population is characterized by systematic discrimination, oppression and cultural impoverishment. Al-Haj (1987), describes the condition of the Palestinian education in this way :

Lack of construction is the most painful problem. The average number of students per class in the Arab sector is 31.2, compared to 26.3 in the Jewish sector. Psychological services are extremely primitive. Only 20 per cent of Arab high school students are in vocational courses of study as opposed to 60 per cent on the Jewish sector (p. 14).

Almost one decade later, Al-Haj (1995) describes a similar picture of the situation of Arab-Palestinian education in Israel in comparison to the Jewish sector. Neglect of Palestinian education is a well known practice of the Israeli Ministry of Education. When there is any attempt to improve the situation it is always “past- rather than future oriented” (Mari, 1985). In this manner, the system will respond to a severe situation caused by accumulated negligence rather than develop a strategic plan to improve the many deficiencies of the Palestinian educational system.

Until the late 1970s celebrations of Israel’s independence day were ironically observed in all Palestinian schools in Israel where students and their teachers reluctantly spent days preparing for the event. Needless to say that Palestinian teachers “felt humiliated by these ceremonies, not because they had them imposed on them, but because they hardly reflected their feelings” (Al-Haj, 1995 p. 180). Palestinians generally refer to the day in which Israel was established as “*Al-Nakbah*” or the disaster, simply because it is the day in which they lost their homeland and freedom.

In describing the conflict over the Palestinian education in Israel, Nakhleh (1979), argues that “like any other system of values, the educational system is a highly manipulatable tool which can be used by those in control to instill the desirable goals” (p. 10). This situation is potentially conflictive. As Nakhleh further maintains, the “dominated minorities also tend to manipulate the educational system for their own goals. But to have control over it, that is to have it guided by the consciousness of the dominated minority, demands revolutionary action” (p. 11). Mari (1987), identifies a “deep conflict of interests between the state educational system and the cultural, economic, and national needs of the Arab minority as these needs are met by education” (p. 35). Moreover, the conflict relationship is between powerful and powerless groups, with the state of Israel having the upper hand. Graham-Brown (1984), asserts that: “In so asymmetrical power structure it was evident that the priorities of the Zionist state would determine how Palestinians should be educated” (p. 41).

In the early years of the state’s existence, Israeli curriculum planners for the

Palestinian schools had to deal with a critical dilemma regarding the goals of Palestinian education. As quoted in Peres, Erlich & Yuval-Davis (1970), Mr. Y. L. Benor, one of the planners, posed a critical question in this regard: "How can we encourage loyalty to Israel among Israeli Arabs without demanding a negation of Arab yearning on the one hand, and without permitting the development of hostile Arab nationalism on the other?" (p. 148). Based on this dilemma is the logical question, "to what extent does it help the young Israeli of Arab origin to see his path clearly and mold his own identity in a way which maintains a reasonable balance in his Arab nationalism and loyalty to the state in which he lives?" (Nakhleh, 1977 p. 30). This particular aspect of the Palestinian education resembles the essence of their political status in the state of Israel, especially the status of their collective national identity. In a critical assessment of these educational goals, Nakhleh (1977), argues that "however ambiguous these criteria are, explicitly they are very political in nature. 'Arab nationalism,' 'identity,' etc. were to be defined by Jewish Israeli planners, whose existence was in negation to these concepts!" (p. 30). Because of the conflictive nature of Palestinian education in Israel and the difficulty to define educational goals that will satisfy both the community and the state, official policy in this regard seems to have been to suspend making decisions (Landau, 1993).

Failing to declare formal goals for the Palestinian education did not prevent the Israeli system from striving to empty it from its cultural and national content. According to Mari, the de facto goals of Palestinian education in Israel set by the government are threefold: "to instill feelings of self-disparagement and inferiority in Arab youth; to denationalize them, and particularly to de-Palestinize them, and to teach them to glorify the history, culture, and achievements of the Jewish majority" (Mari, 1987 p. 37). Given the choice, the Palestinians would assign the exact opposite goals for their educational system. They would expect the system to

Preserve and reinforce Arab national identity - particularly their Palestinian identity - and to instill pride in their own culture, heritage, and nationality; and if were up to them, the education of their youth would engage in condemning Zionism, rather than praising and glorifying it (Mari, 1987 p. 37).

Palestinian teachers in Israel are caught between these two inherently conflicting expectations from the educational system. While Palestinian teachers in the West Bank and Gaza still sustain their community leadership roles, their counterparts in Israel became politically ineffective. Because of the high level of their "job dependency", especially as government employees, Palestinian teachers in Israel refrain from political activism. In describing this quiescent Palestinian intellectual elite, Mari (1978) writes: "Although they are politically aware and sensitive, especially to matters related to education and politics, teachers have lost much of their traditional role as community leaders and are not involved in political activism, at least not as a group" (p. 27). This is indeed one of the major compromises made by the Palestinian teachers in exchange for accepting teaching as a career. In this sense, the whole Israeli educational system for the Palestinians, is used as a means for political manipulation, control and co-optation of the Palestinian educated elite (Nakhleh, 1979; Lustick, 1980).

The Israeli educational system, as a government institution is well aware of the political impact that the Palestinian teachers may have on their students. Given the choice, they will educate for Palestinian nationalism and nurture Palestinian national identity of their students rather than blur it. Therefore, as far as the Palestinian teachers are concerned, "in most cases, political rather than pedagogic criteria are considered paramount in hiring and firing" (Nakhleh, 1977 p. 33). This entire process becomes evident in the sense that "Arab collaborators and 'yes men' are shown preference by the educational authorities" (Mari, 1987 p. 37). Consequently, the students, parents and the community at large became distrustful towards the teachers, at least as far as the nationalistic component of their role is considered. They are perceived by the parents as government agents. According to Mari (1978), this attitude is influenced by a number of

factors: "the teachers are employees of an official state institution, [they] are among the principal agents of modernization, [and] many teachers are politically active in the various parties, particularly the majority Israeli parties" (p. 33). Ironically, while the involvement of the Palestinian teachers in the Israeli Zionist parties is acceptable and even encouraged by the government, their mere association with the Palestinian nationalist parties may damage their career.

Two types of institutions are open to the Palestinian students seeking higher education in Israel. The universities, where integration between Palestinians and Jews prevails; and all-Palestinian Teachers' Training Institutions. Mari (1979), maintains that in the university "Arab students enjoy a democratic atmosphere and observe a freedom of expression." On the other hand, in Teachers' Training Institutions "the democratic atmosphere does not exist." Apparently, since the main goal of the latter is to train Palestinian teachers, the authorities find this situation more conducive to maintain political control and prepare the future Palestinian teachers for a system serving role. In the university, on the other hand, it is more difficult to apply double standards of democracy for the Jewish and the Palestinian students.

In high school, where the students are identity hungry and more receptive to the political and nationalistic content of the subject matter, the majority of the Palestinian teachers are university graduates. These teachers presumably were more politically active during their higher education. On the average, they are more politically aware than their counterparts graduating from the Teachers' Training Institutions. In fact, university students are assumed to be more politically aware and nationally conscious than the rest of the population. On the other hand, the teacher's role is tied to the status quo. We have a situation in which the most nationally aware segment of the Palestinian population is expected to educate their students for loyalty to the state of Israel and the denial of their own national identity.

There are only two roles in the classroom; one is the teacher's role and the other is the students'. The interaction between the students and the teacher is essential in order for the educational process to be productive. Johnson (1970), states that "in order for the students to function effectively in their roles, the teacher's expectations must be clearly communicated, the students must be motivated to accept the expectations as legitimate and as something they wish to conform to" (p. 49). The teachers must be clear about their role expectations before they come into interaction with their students. Lack of consistency in the teacher's role expectations is not without its negative impact on the students' motivation and achievement. But how can Palestinian teachers be clear in their communication with their students when they themselves are not convinced about what cultural and social identifications are allowed for their students.

This plight is specific to the role of the Palestinian teacher employed by the Israeli government. In fact all teachers in Israel, both Jewish and Palestinians, are government employees and, therefore, are expected to legitimize and maintain the status quo. In the case of the Jewish teacher, the expectations of his or her employer and community are compatible with each other: to educate for loyalty to the state of Israel and Jewish identity. In contrast, the role of the Palestinian teacher, employed by the same government, is exposed to conflicting expectations. Mari (1978), argues that the Palestinian teacher continuously deals with role-conflict in his or her job, especially with the political-national aspects of the teacher's role.

A nationalist force attracts them and assumes that they will emphasize the nationalist aspects in teaching the young generation, and a second force emphasizes good and loyal citizenship towards the state in which they live as citizens (p. 37).

At first glance it seems as if these two tendencies are mutually attractive, hence the teacher is in conflict of choosing between one or the other. However, we must keep in mind that Palestinians in Israel belong to the state only in the instrumental sense whereas sentimentally and emotionally they are attached to the rest of the Palestinian people. A young Palestinian teacher was quoted by Grossman (1992), illustrates the heart of the

conflicting role expectations in particularly in relations to the Palestinian flag as a national symbol.

I belong to the state of Israel only in the geographical sense. According to an agreement they imposed on me. I am an employee of the Ministry of Education. Receive a salary. Live here. But in the spirit, in the soul, I belong to the Palestinian people. So you tell me how I can educate children in these circumstances. A simple example - I've run into a lot of students here who draw, let's say, a Palestinian flag. Now I've got to tell the student that this is forbidden. But the student will consider me a traitor. And maybe I'll also feel that I'm a traitor. But if I show any approval of his [or her] drawing maybe they'll fire me, or summon me for an investigation. So what do I do? I don't tell him [or her] anything. I pretend that I don't notice (Grossman, 1992 p. 50).

To pretend that they did not notice their students' work does not release the Palestinian teachers from dealing with their role conflict. Their frustration continues to determine the ambiguous messages they convey to their students. Consequently, the students lose trust in their teachers as social models with whom they can identify.

The Palestinian flag by itself in this scenario means nothing -- it is simply pieces of cloth put together. Without context and culture, the flag, as a bunch of fibers, has very little meaning. The flag, here, is simply an object -- not a sign. Making meaning of the flag depends on something other than the flag itself. Culture, national experience, and context then come into play which give the flag meaning beyond itself-- it becomes a symbolic sign. Lets remember that all signs are relative, which implies an act of interpretation and giving meaning to something. The flag is now an icon of something more than itself - it stands to represent a nation and a homeland (Palestine), or a sense of national identity and pride. Raising an object (i.e., a flag) to a symbolic level (level of thirdness) is mediated through context and culture. Again, the principle of relativity -- Israeli's view the Palestinian flag as something to be feared, as a threatening icon, while the Palestinians see the oppsite side. It is the same piece of cloth, fiber, material. The fear and resentment do not lie in the flag itself, but in what the flag represents for Palestinian students. The teachers, having to display an outward act of "disapproval" toward their students, who are aligning themselves with the flag, are caught in an act of cognitive dissonance.

Student activists' view of formal educational

Participants student activists in a larger study who graduated from public high school (the majority) were very critical of their formal educational system for alienating them from their national and cultural identity. Being controlled by the Israeli government, the Palestinian formal educational system was perceived as an instrument of domination and control. The teacher as a role model and as someone who represents the school and its social, educational and political goals to the students was perceived as a "system servant". Private schools being the exception rather than the rule, provided more nationalistic education for their students. Nonformal education throughout community organizations and the family (for some) were perceived as the main agents of political education before coming to college.

Amal, a third year student of social work in Ben-Gurion University and active in several community and women organizations in addition to her student involvement, has this to say about her "testing" the political limitations of her public high school English teacher:

I realized that our teachers were politically limited but was not willing to accept that. I used to challenge them and point out their fears about their job. In tenth grade we had a new English teacher. I wanted to test his limitations so I asked him what the acronym PLO means. He ordered me to leave the class. I told him "if you don't know what it means I will write it on the board." He forced me out of the class. I went back and told my classmates "why are you still setting in his class if he does not know what PLO means?" They all came out with me. Then I was dismissed from school for that.

Jamil's high school education was different from that of Amal. He graduated from the Orthodox College in Haifa, a private high school and very well known for its liberal education. He recalls his experience:

What usually prevailed in my school was that we were allowed to think and debate issues. As part of the discussions we were exposed to more information that was not part of the formal curriculum. We used to receive this information as a part of the social awareness classes. For example, there was an activity in which we had to read about the history of Palestine which was not in the history books. Our school believed in this role in order to bridge the gap that existed in the formal curriculum from which we suffered and still suffering.

Political awareness and national consciousness for Amal, as a public high school graduate, was systematically de-emphasized throughout her formal education. The failure of such an "educational process" was evident in Amal's awareness of the positive experience of political socialization she received in a local club in her community.

I used to spend most of my time in the club. Let me use the word "used"-- they "used" us to work for the club. We were a group 12 young girls who were selling T-shirt and raise funds for the club. We spent a lot of time around the people in the club and used to hear how they run meetings. I was looking forward to the time when I get older to be able to set with them in these meetings. After they leave the meeting, me and my friends used to set on the same chairs and imitate the meeting and talk like them. They were for me, especially Abu Jubran, he was my spiritual father. I got most of my ideology from him. Until today, I can argue and challenge anybody but him.

Conclusion

Role conflict among Palestinian teachers in Israel is political and can not be understood out of the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Only when a comprehensive and just settlement to the conflict which will also take into account the national and political needs of the Palestinian national minority in Israel can be reached we can began understanding the enigma of Palestinian teachers caught between the rock and hard place.

However, there is an indication that the Palestinian teachers have developed unique techniques to attend to the cultural and national expectations of their community and students. The students, more so than their teachers, bring Palestinian nationalistic context to the classroom. Since their role prevents them from openly dealing with such a content, "via hints, smiles, gestures, intonations, and other means, teachers make clear their real attitude toward the imposed content of the courses they teach" (Mari, 1987 p. 38).

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