

# The Palestinian Future: Education and Manpower

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In this paper an attempt will be made to identify and analyse the cultural and educational needs of the Palestinians. Description and analysis of some of the salient features of the Palestinian situation will be presented with emphasis on the notion of a relevant education.

## 1. THE CURRENT SITUATION

In order to define the needs of a socially relevant education, we must take cognizance of the present conditions, achievements and difficulties of the Palestinians.

During the period between 1949 and 1967, the Palestinians remained to a large extent concentrated in the areas in which they found themselves after the dispersal of 1948. Following the June War of 1967, a substantial movement of Palestinians between the West and East Banks of the Jordan took place. Roughly 10 percent of Palestinians migrated out of Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria, where in the early 1970's they were distributed as follows: 45 percent in Palestine, 31 percent in Jordan, 8 percent in Lebanon and 5 percent in Syria. It appears from the existing fragmentary information that the rate of migration of Palestinians to the Gulf and Saudi Arabia since 1967, and especially since 1973, has increased.

During this period the Palestinians did not possess a government of their own or significant public institutions concerned with their social and economic welfare. While the Palestine Liberation Organization provided some of the functions of a government in exile, it concentrated largely on the political and military issues. This institutional vacuum left the individual to his own devices. In Palestine itself, only municipal organization survived. All

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Palestinian activity was therefore essentially grass roots, whether it consisted of guerrilla activities, or the pursuit of education. Naturally, the available resources utilized were support from the Arab states, existing Arab or foreign universities and Israeli "tolerance" for the municipalities. Whatever was undertaken or achieved was the product of intense personal commitment. The achievements of the Palestinians were, nevertheless, many: in the educational field alone their initiative resulted in some 70,000 university graduates. In the political field, they not only kept their cause alive, but also consolidated it in the face of enormous difficulties. An important conclusion that one must draw is that the grass roots resources of the Palestinians have been successfully, though so far modestly tapped.

## 2. MANPOWER AND MIGRATION

Accurate information on the employment of Palestinians is not available. A rough picture may, however, be constructed. The size of the labour force in 1975 was probably 28 percent of the total population of 3.4 million. We have placed the figure slightly above the 25 percent generally estimated for the region. About 50 percent of the population was aged 18 or under, and 25 percent are adult females, both generally outside the labour force. However, it is assumed that 12 percent of the adult females (i. e., 3 percent of the total population) are in the labour force, a situation similar to that in Lebanon. Thus there are around 952,000 people in the labour force. Of these, around 30 percent are employed in oil-producing states — Kuwait, the U. A. E., Saudi Arabia, Libya and Qatar; this group of Palestinians have permanent employment. Fifty percent of the labour force are in Palestine and Jordan (as compared with 76 percent of the population, illustrating the fact that the male migrant worker leaves his family behind). Twelve to fifteen percent are in Lebanon and Syria, 5-8 percent elsewhere. The Palestinian labour force in Lebanon, Syria, Palestine and Jordan is characterized by a high level (50-60 percent) of unemployment and insecure jobs, since many are daily wage earners. Roughly 5 percent of the labour force are fully employed in the Palestinian Resistance Movement.

70,000 Palestinians are university graduates or high level manpower (HLM). These are employed in education (50 percent of the HLM), engineering (17 percent), medical fields (10 percent), and management (15 percent). Thus, Palestinians are an important component of the development of the Arab world, particularly since they constitute 10 percent of Arab high level manpower.

A rapid transformation in the Middle Eastern labour market is presently taking place. Until 1973, there was a labour surplus in the region. But the massive development programmes of the Gulf countries, Iraq and Saudi Arabia and their demand for skilled manpower (truck drivers, construction workers, farmers, university professors), has brought about a new situation in which there will be competition for skilled manpower. The Palestinians have already demonstrated a constellation of skills and values that makes them performance-conscious and goal-oriented. Because of these qualities they are sought after, both by foreign contractors, presently responsible for more than 90 percent of all development projects in the Middle East, and the Arab private sector.

One of the most under-utilized resources in the labour force is the adult female population. Although women have been active in the resistance in small numbers, the role of women in Palestinian society marks no significant improvement on the rest of the Arab world. It is expected, however, that the almost universal access to elementary education in the 1970's will have an impact on the level of female participation in the labour force by 1985. The opportunities for female workers — teachers, technicians — in the highly sex-segregated Saudi society in particular will probably stimulate such a development. It is likely that the percentage of the population in the labour force will slowly increase from the present figure of around 28 percent to 35 percent by the year 2000.

Another important consideration is the continued increase in the rate of completion of secondary and university education. The combination of female emancipation and the increase in university facilities in the Arab world will intensify the pursuit of higher education; by the year 2000 well over 400,000 Palestinians (or 50 percent of the 18-24 age group) may be enrolled in colleges and universities around the world. Palestinians should then be contributing about 3 million workers to the Arab labour force, 20 percent of which will be university graduates.

Thus on the individual level the dynamics of change are well developed. But Palestinian society as a whole faces severe shortcomings. Organizational and institutional development have been very limited. The Palestinians in the West Bank, Gaza and the different refugee camps have not evolved the necessary bureaucracies to cope with normal social and economic problems. The fact that there has never been any substantial Palestinian urban centre, but only small towns with a population of 70,000 or so, has not made development easy. The villages and towns of Palestine were fossilized politically, first under the British, then under Jordanian and Egyptian, and

now under Israeli rule. The obsolete system of management by “notables” has been preserved by all the external rulers as a suitable and malleable instrument of local control.

The evolution of the Palestinian labour force over the past 30 years has resulted in its being adapted to the Middle East labour market rather than to the needs of the Palestinian people. Palestinian workers, technocrats and teachers are agents of development and change everywhere, but when it comes to their own country and communities, their contribution is much less. Furthermore, the Arabian Gulf manpower demands of the 1970’s have led to a rapid drain of Palestinian manpower from Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and above all from Gaza and the West Bank. The absence of a growing, integrated, self-reliant economy in all the areas where Palestinians live has made them dependent on employment *outside* the community. Virtually all economic activities are outwardly directed. Thus there are no adequate economic forces binding the Palestinians to their camps, to Gaza or to the West Bank.

In other words, the Palestinian communities in Palestine, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon are demographically extremely skewed and face massive migration and demographic transformation in a relatively short time. The pattern of demographic change is characterized by two phases:

1. The economically active member migrates outside the community for employment, leaving his dependent family behind.
2. Within 5 to 10 years he can afford to raise a family, or to reunite with his family, at the site of economic activity.

By the late 1960’s, probably one quarter to one third of the Palestinian labour force was in phase one, and the rest was still tied to the family. Since the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza in 1967, but since the early 1970’s elsewhere, the percentage of the labour force in phase one has increased to more than a third. Furthermore, an appreciable fraction of the population is now in phase two. It is to be remembered that the cost of living in the Gulf and Saudi Arabia is extremely high compared with that of Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, and Palestine. Consequently, individuals and young couples tend to migrate. In this manner both members of the household are wage earners, and are thus able to afford the high cost of living in the oil-rich Arab states. This pattern can be seen clearly from the available data on the demographic structure of the expatriate labour force in Kuwait. Wage earners whose wives are not economically active and those who have already raised a family tend to leave their families behind and go alone to these countries.

The erosion of manpower on the West Bank and Gaza Strip can be seen in the following Israeli statistics.<sup>1</sup>

Population: 1.15 million (excluding Arab Jerusalem).

Manpower: 143,000 (approx.) employed in the Arab economy.

65,000 (approx.) employed in the Israeli economy.

If we apply the ratio of 28 percent of the population as the labour force, this means that a further 114,000 Palestinians are working outside the Israeli and the West Bank and Gaza economies; in other words, about 38.5 percent of the estimated labour force of 322,000 is gainfully employed *outside* Palestine. These figures indicate the demographic crisis faced by the Palestinian population.

It has already been pointed out by Hagopian and Zahlan<sup>2</sup> that 1.1 million Palestinians emigrated out of Gaza and the West Bank between 1952-1973 because they could not be absorbed in the prevalent economic system.

Thus the major challenge to Palestinian leadership, as well as to educational planners, is how to bring about a balance between the intrinsic needs of the Palestinian community and the well established tendency to fill the manpower developmental requirements of Arab states. We shall discuss this issue under two topics:

- (a) The socio-economic needs of the Arab population of Palestine.
- (b) The cohesiveness and integrity of the Palestinian community.

#### A. *The socio-economic needs of the Arab population of Palestine*

The social and economic factors that could sustain and develop the Arab population of Palestine should be important to Arab states as well as to Palestinians. The demographic position of the Palestinians can be made to act positively on their status in the future. Today, 45 percent of the Palestinians live in Palestine, including the West Bank and Gaza; this figure stands roughly at 1.6 million people. By the year 2000, they will have grown to about 3.5 million (at 3.5 percent annual growth rate, that recorded for Jordan, which is the most comparable estimate) *if* no emigration takes place. Such a substantial population in Palestine, regardless of the political solutions in the headlines today, would be a major victory in the struggle to maintain a demographic presence in Palestine. Naturally, a conscious policy that will strive to curb emigration and counter the subtle Israeli pressures pushing

<sup>1</sup> Israel, Central Bureau of Statistics, *Administered Territories Statistics Quarterly*, Vol. VI, 4 (1976), p. 32.

<sup>2</sup> E. Hagopian and A.B. Zahlan, "Palestine's Arab Population: the Demography of the Palestinians," *Journal of Palestine Studies*, vol. III, 4 (Summer 1974), p. 66.

Palestinians out is imperative to this possible future. At present, the Arab population in Palestine is emigrating; this pattern will have to be stopped if growth is to continue.<sup>3</sup>

Second, and this point is strongly linked with the first, the rise of urban centres could have a strong impact on the reversal of the present emigration figures. Without a proper city infrastructure no productive integration of a population can take place. One of the greatest historical weaknesses of the Palestinians is the essentially rural character of their society. A conscious policy to develop urban centres in places like Jenin and Nablus could result in at least one major city by the year 2000.

Third, and here again this factor is interdependent with the previous two, the national character of the Palestinians as demonstrated during the diaspora period could flourish on many different levels. We have already noted that one of the most remarkable developments during the past quarter of a century has been the emergence of grass-roots activities. Given the proper climate, i. e., a stable non-migratory population and developed urban centres, these could be developed into *popular* institutions. Local governments could become democratic and self-reliant; they could evolve to provide the essential functions of public health, education and cooperatives for farming and industry. The trend away from the hegemony of the notables has already been demonstrated in the 1976 municipal elections in the West Bank and Gaza, an auspicious beginning. The present cottage industries could grow in such a fashion as to employ the existing under-utilized manpower and to find markets in the expanding needs of the Arab world; the soap, glass and dairy industries, and the fruit and the olive products of today, could witness enormous development and become a major field of exports by the year 2000.

Serious economic development of the Palestinian people can only follow a socio-economic transformation. New economic relationships that combine manpower with resources have to be created in order to strengthen communal structure, improve productivity and meet all needs equitably. Rural, small town and regional development could be planned to optimize agricultural production and absorb the excess manpower in light and food industries. Thus, instead of the export of Palestinian manpower to Saudi Arabia and the Gulf, rural and industrial development could be financed by the export of products and services.

The limited agricultural resources could be intensively developed to

<sup>3</sup> See A.B. Zahlan, "The Economic Viability of a West Bank State," *Middle East International*, No. 66, December 1976.

produce a considerable proportion of the needs of the region for a wide variety of new cheeses, canned jams, fruit juices, frozen vegetables, etc. In the clothing sector, there is an enormous demand for good quality mass-produced clothing and fabrics. Similarly, furniture and equipment for home and office could be manufactured locally. Palestinian handicrafts, small scale mechanical industries, banking and insurance, and consulting and contracting engineering are all activities that Palestinians have been successfully engaged in since the 1950's. Toys, educational materials, small-scale fertilizer and cement plants, could all be developed with a fair chance of success.

Such a developmental policy will of course require considerable research. There is no doubt, however, that the need, the markets and the technologies to transform the Palestinian communities into self-reliant, stable, cohesive, growing, efficient and productive units exist today. Their use for the construction of an appropriate socio-economic environment for the development of the Palestinian people will depend on the attributes and values of the youth of the present generation.

#### B. *The cohesiveness and integrity of the Palestinian community*

The Palestinians as a community have had little control over the formal education system in which their children have been enrolled. This can be seen by the figures on their geographical distribution in Palestine. They are divided into three regions, each one with a different type of education, the product of a peculiar amalgam of cultural, historical and political influences.

(a) *West Bank*

Jordanian/United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA)/  
Israeli educational control

(b) *Gaza*

Egyptian/UNRWA/Israeli educational control

(c) *Israel*

Mandatory Palestinian/Israeli educational control

Although all these areas have private schools, they again offer a form of education that must conform to Israeli educational and cultural policies towards the non-Jewish population.

A third of the Palestinians live in Jordan. Once again, the education they receive there has little to do with their predicament. It is a combination of the UNRWA and Jordanian systems. In Lebanon, the children in the refugee camps receive UNRWA education, and the middle classes send their children

to private schools. For the remaining 10 percent that live in other countries, the situation is no different: young Palestinians are educated in a way that is not consistent with their *Palestinian* situation.

Although the majority of Palestinian children are taught by Palestinian teachers (whether under Israeli occupation, in UNRWA or in Jordanian schools), the curriculum and courses are not planned by Palestinians. For the vast majority of the Palestinians, i. e., those living in Jordan and in occupied Palestine, it is difficult for a Palestinian agency to train and mobilize teachers to transform them into a better instrument for Palestinian education.

There does exist, however, a limited school programme under complete Palestinian control. This consists of the few schools that enrol the children of the “martyrs of the revolution” in Lebanon and the “after school hours” classes for the children of Palestinians working in Kuwait where the government allows its public schools to be utilized by the PLO-run programme. Generally, the teachers in these “after school hours” programmes are employed elsewhere on a full-time basis and are volunteers for the teaching of these extra hours. The PLO has assumed little responsibility for education, and the little it is responsible for suffers from serious faults. Although around one quarter of the Palestinians are so situated that the PLO could intervene effectively in the process of their formal education, no action commensurate with opportunities or needs has yet been taken.

### 3. PROGRAMMES AND POLICIES TO MEET THE EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

The purpose of cultural and educational policies is to assist a community to acquire the appropriate skills, values and knowledge to develop the instruments necessary for survival and progress. The struggle of the Palestinian people for political and social survival cannot be achieved by simple means. The magnitude and sophistication of the forces at work against them impose demanding requirements.

A successful and realistic programme should be based on both the existing individual and grass-roots efforts as well as on whatever PLO and private institutions are currently available, or on those that could be created in the future.

The first consideration is the unification of the Palestinian curriculum at the primary and secondary levels. This of course is subject to a magnitude of political obstacles that somehow must be overcome. Since at present this likelihood seems remote, a number of interim measures could be taken until the ultimate goal is reached. To begin with, the UNRWA-run schools, whether in Gaza, the West Bank, Jordan, Syria or Lebanon, should be subject



to an overall assessment of the curricula used. A joint UNRWA/PLO Education Committee could work out some form of coherent educational system. This system could then form the basis of any schools set up to serve Palestinian children.

Palestinians not only have to develop the qualitative aspects of their primary and secondary education during the coming two decades, they also have to cope with the quantitative aspects. By the year 2000, there will be some 3 million Palestinians of school age. They will need new school buildings, some 150,000 qualified teachers, proper nutrition, toys, textbooks, medical care, etc. It is difficult to see how the PLO will cope with this problem; clearly it must begin dealing with it from now.

A second step could be the establishment of the proposed Palestine Open University (POU) which could become an instrument for the unified curriculum in its education. The POU, which is now in the planning phase, would be a method of educating Palestinians together with other Arabs in a non-traditional educational system. This combines the regular means of instruction, such as teachers, textbooks, laboratories, with a wide variety of new tools such as radio, television, videotapes, newspapers, etc.; its aim is to bring education to the student rather than to bring the student to the centre of learning. Its implications for the education of Palestinians are obvious: it would unify the academic training of students, regardless of their geographical location.

For the POU to fulfil its most fundamental goal it has to educate youth to become effective and productive members of Palestinian society. No university programmes or instructional materials as yet exist and therefore they will have to be prepared and tested. Professors have to be trained not only in the subject matter but also in the methodologies of open learning systems. Civil engineers have to be educated to cope with the civil engineering problems of villages and small farms, to work with available material and human resources, and to design and construct homes for people with a per capita income of \$100 to \$300 a year. The aim of the University will not be to produce an elite, but rather a skilled individual committed to serving the people. In management sciences, the student may be a member of the staff in the municipality of Nablus, or in some administrative position in a refugee camp. The challenge is to teach him the tools that will enable him to learn about his environment so that he will be able to contribute to its improvement. Thus, the object will be to tailor management sciences to the needs of the community rather than to educate people to serve on the staff of a multinational company. This guideline should be applied in all other fields.

Finally, the training and retraining of primary and secondary school teachers would be a major function of thePOU, especially in its early days. If this were to be so, the accrued benefits to Palestinian education would be considerable and its contribution to the national struggle incalculable.